



NATIONAL
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Charter School Governing Board Recruitment Tools



The National Charter School Resource Center (www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov) is dedicated to supporting the development of high-quality charter schools. The NCSRC provides technical assistance to sector stakeholders and has a comprehensive collection of online resources addressing the challenges charter schools face. The NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led by education consulting firm Safal Partners.

Prepared By:



Safal Partners (www.safalpartners.com) is a mission-driven strategy consulting firm that supports education reform efforts at the federal, state, district, and school levels.

CharterBoardPartners

great boards for great schools

Charter Board Partners (www.charterboards.org), a national nonprofit that works to ensure that the boards governing public charter schools are focused on quality, equity, and accountability.

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ASSESSING YOUR BOARD — WHAT GAPS ARE YOU LOOKING TO FILL?

To recruit strategically, boards must know the qualities and skills that already exist around the table and what they are seeking. This tool provides assessments and sample board matrices for boards to understand their needs.

Before launching into the search for new board members, boards need to set up a system that can be followed for every search. This allows for consistency and fairness, and ensures you get the right people around the table. Following are steps to get your board on its way.

1. Determine the board composition needed to achieve the board's goal over next three years.

Board member recruitment should directly align with the school's strategic plan and goals. Your board will need different kinds of people depending on what you are trying to achieve.

For example, if your school needs to acquire a new building in three years because the strategic plan articulates plans for expansion, incorporate that goal into your recruiting plan. Consider what kind of real estate expertise you need on the board (e.g., finance, law, construction, commercial leasing, etc.) so you build the membership needed to open the school's new doors on time.

Also, ask the committee chairs to inform the governance committee of their upcoming needs. Encourage your board to be as specific as possible in documenting what they might like the new member to accomplish. For example, building on the real estate example above, the facilities committee may request recruiting someone with construction expertise. Adding a board member with specific, relevant knowledge will provide needed leadership and guidance throughout the school's upcoming construction project. Specifying construction expertise helps the governance committee identify which real estate expertise would be most valuable.

As you look forward, also consider board member succession:

- What are the dates that each officer will complete board service?
- Which board members' terms expire in the next few years?
- How should the board consider proactively filling these vacancies?

While every school has different specific recruiting needs depending on its lifecycle, goals, and current status, there are key categories of skills that are essential for any board, including:

-
- Finance
 - Fundraising
 - Real estate
 - Leadership
 - Governance
 - Communications/Marketing
 - Education

- Human Resources
- Legal
- Strategic planning
- Experience relevant to the organization's mission

2. Assess current board composition.

Now that you know where your board composition needs to go, assess the skills, demographics, and characteristics your current board members bring to the table. Consider the following:

- Do you have enough people on each committee to manage the committee's workload? Do not underestimate the committee hours needed to deliver on the work promised. Charter Board Partners (CBP) recommends at least three members serve on each committee.
- Do you have the right mix of skills to accomplish the board's long-term goals?
- Do you have the right mix of working styles, available time, networks, and personalities for fruitful discussion, delivery of work, and overall leadership? Boards need members who will:
 - Believe that all kids can succeed at the highest level regardless of income.
 - Rise to the high stakes nature of the board membership role.
 - Make the time, with a "no excuses" commitment.
 - Ask hard questions, even when they do not know the answers.
 - Make hard decisions.
 - Keep a sense of humor.

Create a thorough board inventory to track current board members' strengths and the characteristics needed for future members to maintain a healthy and effective board.

3. Compare current composition to future needs, and create recruiting priorities.

Once you know what skills your board needs, you can hone in on recruiting. Remember, these recruiting priorities are your guideposts—no one individual will have all of your priority skills, experience, demographics, and perspectives. Articulate your recruiting priorities in writing and share them with the full board so they can be prepared to help where needed and contribute to recruiting these amazing people.

STEPS OF AN EFFECTIVE RECRUITING PROCESS

1. Build a strong governance committee

Governance committees are responsible for designing and running a board member recruiting process. Governance committees drive the process, assess board needs in relation to goals, inventory current composition, and recruit and interview new members to the board. Make sure this committee knows its duties and is fully "staffed" with board members. Recruiting talented board members is a process that requires a significant investment of time and should not be left to a committee of one individual.

Governance committees should document the board's recruiting process and share it with the full board so that they are prepared to play their role in securing high-performing board members.

2. Create/review key recruiting documents and interview processes.

Before the board launches the recruiting process, it is critical to prepare. Boards need to share key information with candidates such as a Board Member Agreement and bylaws in the interview process. Approaching candidates prepared with this information demonstrates that the board is organized, efficient, and transparent.

3. Determine the board composition needed to achieve the board's goals over next three years.

Board member recruitment should directly align with the school's strategic plan and goals. Your board will need people with different skill sets depending on what you are trying to achieve.

For example, if your school needs to acquire a new building in three years because the strategic plan articulates plans for expansion, incorporate that goal into your recruiting plan. Consider what kind of real estate expertise you need on the board (e.g., finance, law, construction, commercial leasing, etc.) so you build the membership needed to open the school's new doors on time.

Also, ask the committee chairs to inform the governance committee of their upcoming needs. Encourage your board to be as specific as possible in documenting what they might like the new member to accomplish. For example, building on the real estate example above, the facilities committee may request recruiting someone with construction expertise. Adding a board member with specific, relevant knowledge will provide needed leadership and guidance throughout the school's upcoming construction project. Specifying construction expertise helps the governance committee identify which real estate expertise would be most valuable.

4. Start recruiting!

Now that you have clarity on who you are trying to recruit, start brainstorming on how you are going to find these people. Here's an example of how one board defined its priorities and began a plan to find the people who are the right fit:

Recruiting Priorities	Ideas for Where to Start	Timeline
Finance expertise, especially around creating budgets and presenting financial projections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Jan's PWC neighbor -- Business school alumni groups (Sam can talk to his cousin) --McKinsey, etc. (get intro to local office through Mike) 	Initial contact with 5 people by September 1; Interview set with 2 people by September 15
Emerging leaders who have all-around strong strategy skills who can work with committees to complete their parts for strategic plan and any grant applications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Business school alumni groups (Sam can talk to his cousin) --McKinsey, etc. (get intro to local office through Mike) 	Initial contact with 3 people by September 1; Interview set with 2 people by September 15
Individual who might bring the perspective of our target parent community to ensure our school meets community needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Local parent advocacy groups (find that guy who spoke at the conference) --Contact local elected officials/campaign organizers (Jan knows people) 	Initial contact with 6 people by September 1; Group lunch with 8 people by September 15; Interviews set with 3 people by October 1

Once your governance committee has identified prospects, they should develop and articulate a recruiting and interview plan with deadlines and assign tasks to board members and school leadership as appropriate.

RECRUITING A DIVERSE BOARD

Having the right skills and experience around the board table is essential to effective governance. This tool provides some tips to help you recruit a diverse board. Also, it is essential to ensure the board represents the population it serves.

Boards comprised of directors with diverse skills and backgrounds tend to outperform boards lacking a varied composition. ¹ Diversity encompasses identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, socio-economic background, age, physical ability, religious beliefs, political beliefs, ideologies, and other attributes that make each of us unique. When we talk about board diversity, we mean all of that plus a complex set of professional skills, experience level, community clout, and personality traits that make a governing body effective. Consider the following recommendations for engaging in a purposeful process to diversify your board:

Become comfortable speaking about racial and ethnic diversity or the lack thereof.

The reality in our country is that race, class, and academic achievement intersect in meaningful and important ways. All of us who work in education must be comfortable naming and discussing this if we hope to close the racial and socio-economic achievement gap. Part of that is being able to articulate why diversity is important at all levels of your organization.

Boards that are committed to truly diversifying their membership should consider reading *Reinventing Diversity: Transforming Organizational Community to Strengthen People, Purpose, and Performance*, by Howard Ross and Julianne Malveaux. Boards should also consider reading Howard Ross' newer book, *Everyday Bias: Identifying and Navigating Unconscious Judgments in Our Daily Lives*, which provides not only the rationale for why diversity is important but will also help you and your board develop a toolkit for discussions and action.

Some charter schools are already leading the way. [E.L. Haynes Public Charter School](#) in Washington, DC, is doing work on diversity and inclusion in its Professional Learning Communities and inspired former middle school principal Michelle Molitor to found [FREE](#) (Fellowship for Race and Equity in Education). The school built FREE in response to the urgency for culturally-responsive systemic change for our most vulnerable students—not just in Washington, DC, but nationwide. FREE has the mission of creating equitable educational settings for all students through honest and open dialogue across differences, and collective anti-racist action.

Mine current board members' networks.

At its core, board building is development work. Your school's development team should include someone skilled at individual donor prospect research for fundraising. If this person is not in place yet, consider hiring a consultant who knows how to use [Wealth Engine](#), [Muckety](#), and other industry research tools. This person should do prospecting of all board members and present an individualized relationship map to each board member. Often, people are unaware of the connections within their own network. Personal networks are the low-hanging fruit of board recruiting.

Get LinkedIn savvy.

[LinkedIn Board Member Connect](#) allows non-profit organizations to post volunteer board opportunities and to search users who have indicated interest in board service. Take a tour, and research the benefits of an upgraded account like [Business Premium](#), which provides access to advanced search options and InMail credits that allow users to send direct messages to people outside one's personal network.

Connect with local professional associations and organizations.

Most cities and states have local chapters of national convening organizations for professionals, people of color, and women. Do not be afraid to do cold outreach—although before you do that, comb the list of staff members and board members and check them out on LinkedIn and social media to see if you know someone in common. Many organizations, networks, affinity groups, associations, etc. are looking for opportunities for their members to get involved in the community—you could be helping them achieve these goals. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but can provide you with a start:

- Accounting and Finance
 - [Association for Financial Professionals](#)
 - [The Association of Accountants and Financial Professionals in Business](#)
- Business Leaders
 - [Local Chambers of Commerce](#)
- Human Resources
 - [National Human Resources Association](#)
 - [Society for Human Resource Management](#)
- Law
 - [American Bar Association](#)
 - [The National Bar Association](#)
- Public Relations
 - [Public Relations Society of America](#)
- People of Color
 - Monster.com's list of [Top 21 African American Professional Associations](#)
 - Monster.com's list of [Top 15 Hispanic/Latino Professional Associations](#)

SELECTION OF NEW MEMBERS — SUGGESTIONS FOR A STRATEGIC INTERVIEW PROCESS

This tool offers guidance for strategically interviewing board candidates and selecting new board members.

Interviewing and Selecting New Board Members

Selecting new board members is one of the most important functions of a board. While there will always be room for “gut feeling,” a strategic and effective interview process is critical to help you maximize the chances that the fit between the board and the candidate is a good one. Through this process, board members get to know each candidate and his/her background, experience, skills, and personality, and the candidate gains a clear understanding of the board’s needs, the role he/she can play, and the board’s expectations of its members. Best practice supports the following steps:

1. Create or review the road map.

The governance committee is responsible for developing a clear candidate interview and selection process, along with ensuring that all board members are familiar with the process. The governance chair or board chair should also share the process with each board candidate so he/she is clear about the process from the beginning. While the specifics of the process will vary from board to board, CBP recommends that the interview process lay out a process and assign roles for the following steps:

- Initial contact.
- Meeting with the school leader and school tour.

- Interview with the board members.
- Observation of a board meeting.

Do not let busy schedules derail the process! Instead, push to carry out the interview process in as timely a manner as possible. A process that drags out for months can sap the board's enthusiasm for a candidate and drains the candidate's motivation and excitement. Maintain communication with the candidate throughout, even just to touch base and explain next steps, asking if he/she has any questions.

2. Contact the candidate.

The board's initial contact with a prospective board member makes an important first impression. The board chair or governance committee chair should reach out as soon as possible to a board candidate, introduce him/herself, thank the candidate for his/her interest in the board, explain the interview and selection process, and establish a timeframe for the whole process, including:

- How many weeks the interview process is expected to take.
- When the board anticipates deciding whether or not to elect the candidate.
- When the new board member's service would begin.

During this initial conversation or email exchange, we recommend scheduling the school tour and the interviews; matching up calendars can be very challenging and can delay and drag out the whole process. We find that many excellent board candidates decide not to join boards simply because the process takes so long and the board falls out of touch with the candidate.

3. School tour, board meeting observation, and interviews.

This is the meat of the process and should be thoughtful and methodical. Make sure everyone understands his/her role and responsibilities. We recommend sharing information about the school and the board with candidates prior to the interviews, equipping them with enough knowledge and context to answer your questions thoughtfully and ask questions of their own. Suggestions for what information to give to the candidate up front include:

- Board Member Agreement (which will spell out the expectations for a board member's commitment level).
- Board meeting schedule for the year.
- Committee meeting schedules, if possible.
- Policy governing financial contributions to the school.
- Board Manual.
- Board Bylaws.
- School Leader meeting/school tour: It is critical that the school leader and each serious candidate meet. Every potential board member should feel a connection to the leader and have the chance to ask him/her questions about the school, its mission, and his/her goals and vision. Likewise, the school leader should have an opportunity to share feedback and insights about each candidate with the governance committee. Consider combining this meeting with a tour of the school, which is typically hosted by the school leader. The tour should include:

- Reviewing the school's history (including recent successes and hurdles), mission, programs, etc.
- Seeing the facilities and walking the halls.
- Observing teaching and visiting classrooms.
- Getting a sense of the student population and school culture.
- Board meeting observation: Observing a board meeting in person gives a candidate a clear picture of board service and can offer additional insight to the governance committee by seeking feedback and reflections from the candidate following the meeting.
- Interviews: These interviews do not have to be lengthy, but they offer the best opportunity for all parties to gain critical insight into whether the fit between the candidate and the board is a good one. Be sure to explicitly tell each candidate what the expectations are for time and financial contributions, if any. While it should be stated in the board member agreement, being upfront about commitment levels can greatly reduce the chance of a poor match. Each serious candidate must have an opportunity to meet:
 - The school leader.
 - The board chair.
 - The governance committee chair.
 - At least two other board members.
 - Chair of the committee the candidate would likely serve on.

Finally, every board member should have the candidate's resume and bio and any other available background information before the interviews. Without advance planning, educating the candidate, and informing board members about the candidate, the interviews can easily be a wasted opportunity and fail to generate the kind of information and discussion that will help board members make strategic decisions about each candidate.

- Suggested interview questions:
 - Why are you interested in serving on a charter school board?
 - Have you served on other boards before? If so, what are a few aspects of your board service that were notably positive or negative for you?
 - Why does this particular school board appeal to you?
 - What skills, networks, experiences, and other assets will you bring to this board? How will this school benefit from your participation on the board?
 - Can you meet the requirements stated in our Board Member Agreement? In particular, how much time do you anticipate being able to devote to board service?
 - Do you have any initial preference in terms of committee participation?
 - Are you willing to make a financial commitment to the school that is personally meaningful to you? We ask our members to make the school a personal philanthropic priority.
 - What questions do you have about this board, our expectations for board members, or anything else regarding becoming a member of this board?

It is helpful for all board members who interview the candidate to take notes using a rubric based on the interview questions. This allows the governance committee to easily collect and consolidate the feedback from all the interviewers, ultimately facilitating an informed discussion and comparison of impressions of the candidate.

4. To join or not to join.

Once a candidate completes all these steps, the governance committee needs to prepare a recommendation for the full board about whether to elect him or her to the board. We recommend the following steps:

- **Discuss:** The governance committee meets as soon as possible after all interviews are complete to discuss each candidate in depth, including the school leader in the discussions to the extent possible and desired.
- **Decide:** The governance committee decides whether to present to the full board its recommendation for the candidate or not. The committee should release its recommendation at least one week prior to a board meeting to allow board members time to review and ask questions.
- **Vote:** The board needs to discuss each candidate the governance committee recommends and take a formal vote on each one. It is important for the board to vote on each candidate separately—not as a group—and record the votes by candidate. Boards must also follow their bylaws; for example, there may need to be three quarters board approval versus just a majority for a new trustee.
- **Strategize:** Once the board votes to elect a new member, consider the best representative to invite the candidate to join the board position. Choose a board member with a personal connection, other friends of the school, or the school leader, whoever might best encourage the candidate to accept the offer to join the board.
- **Notify:** Immediately after the vote, let each candidate know the decision as follows:
 - **Candidates elected to the board:**
 - Consider who should contact a candidate to ask him/her to join the board.
 - The designated person contacts the elected candidate to officially ask him/her to join the board, offering congratulations and welcome.
 - Provide key dates at this time—upcoming board meetings, an upcoming retreat, significant school events, etc.
 - Explain the onboarding process.
 - **Candidates not elected to the board:**
 - Consider the candidate for other opportunities at the school or with the board (for example, could the person join a board committee?).
 - Consider who should contact the candidate. This is most likely the governance committee chair. Thank him/her for interest in the board, indicate that there were a number of compelling candidates, and, if appropriate, ask if you can stay in touch in the event of future board openings.

- Ensure board compliance: Once the candidate accepts, the governance committee should update the board roster and the authorizer. New board members should complete a board agreement, conflict of interest, and any disclosure documents.
- Onboard: The governance committee is responsible for selecting, and with the school leader, onboarding new members. The committee must capitalize on this important opportunity to cultivate and fully utilize new members, strategically engaging them in the work of the board.

ONBOARDING NEW MEMBERS

Onboarding is an essential part of cultivating a truly effective board. Learn the essential components every onboarding process should have.

Onboarding is the process of orienting newly-selected members to the board with the end goal that every new board member feels engaged, ready to effectively contribute his/her skills, and rewarded by the board experience. Boards that underestimate the importance of onboarding new members end up with new members that are often confused about what their role entails, how they fit into the work, and how they can make an impact. The board's governance committee is responsible for selecting and onboarding new members (ideally involving the school leader).

A strategic onboarding process achieves the following:

- Educates new board members on the mission, history, results, successes, and challenges of the school and its board
- Motivates and inspires new members to fully commit to being active and productive
- Identifies specific ways each board member can have a positive impact on the board and school
- Shares the norms, policies, and practices of the board

Every onboarding process should have an Orientation Training, and each new member should receive a Board of Directors Manual.

Orientation Training

The governance committee typically plans and executes orientation for new board members immediately after the individual is voted onto the board. This orientation gives new (and old) board members information they need to be successful and provides the opportunity to begin relationships with other board members, a critical feature of highly effective boards.

There are many ways to orient new board members, for example, a session during the school day that combines board discussion with classroom visits; a dinner at a board member's home or local restaurant; or a downtown lunch that includes onboarding objectives.

When developing the agenda for board orientation, poll current board members and ask, "What do you know now that wish you had known when you first joined the board?" Use the responses as a guide for your agenda.

A sample onboarding training session could include:

- Introductions and time for socializing: Take time to introduce those around the table and provide name cards so new members can quickly learn names. Each current board member can share his/her own length of board service and personal story (interest in education, professional interests, etc.), including how he/she came to serve on the board.
- Overview of the mission, vision, and educational goals of the charter school: The school leader should talk about the school's founding, programs, and success; students and families; and key stakeholders.
- Responsibilities of board members and committees: Clearly state the board's policy on attendance at meetings, whether attending by phone/video is permitted or discouraged, and requirements for board member committee participation.
- Long-term school goals, organizational priorities, and strategic plans: Include background information on recent key board decisions and those on the horizon.
- Finances and fundraising: Be explicit about the overall financial situation of the school and fundraising expectations, including whether the board has a "give/get" policy, requiring board members to either contribute or fundraise a specified amount of money, or expectations for each board member to give at a personally meaningful level.
- Cultural aspects of the board: Discuss logistics for meetings (e.g., attire, whether food is provided), behavioral norms, and expected responsiveness to email communication.
- Data collection: Orientation is a good time to make sure you have all contact information for new and current members and availability for meetings.
- Compliance: Forms and documents that may need to be completed and submitted to the school's authorizer.

Board Mentor

Assign each new board member a mentor or "buddy" who has served on the board long enough to offer support. This person can be the first point of contact to answer questions after orientation and can help the new member navigate any issues that may arise. Assigning this role to a different board member for each new board member reduces the burden on the board and governance chairs, helps build relationships across the board, and highlights the importance of onboarding new members.

Board of Directors Manual

The Board of Directors manual gives new board members the critical documents they need to build their knowledge of the school and familiarity with the board. It does not matter whether the manual is printed in a binder or loaded into a password-protected online board portal as long as there is one place where board members can have access to all relevant documents and materials at any time. This manual should serve as the backbone for all orientation trainings, the archive for all critical documents, and a recruiting tool for future board members.

The governance committee must keep this manual and all board documentation current for both compliance and convenience. It is immensely helpful for busy board members to have one place to find all board materials and information that is clearly organized and up-to-date. Charter school boards are often surprised when the authorizer or funder requests certain materials (e.g., minutes, contracts, records), and collecting these documents retroactively is time-consuming and likely

frustrating (not to mention out of compliance). The governance committee chair should provide each new board member with the board manual a week before orientation begins to serve as the foundation for onboarding. The manual should include:

BOARD MEMBERS

- Names, contact information, offices held (treasurer, secretary, etc.), term lengths, and short bios for each current board member.
- Contact information and short bio for the school leader.
- Lists of committees and the chair for each, including contact information for any non-board members.

CALENDAR

- Board and committee meetings.
- School events board members can or should attend, such as performances, demonstrations, or portfolio evaluations.
- Key dates and milestones of all board and committee goals.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- The full board.
- Officers.
- Individual board members.
- Committees.
- School leader and leadership team.

SCHOOL INFORMATION

- School charter.
- Mission, vision, and values.
- Short history of the school—how, why, and when it was founded; results to date; and any events of significance.
- Short description of the school's program.
- Description of the students served: demographic information on poverty and English Language Learners; residential information; and other descriptive information about the student population.
- Summary of student performance data: high-stakes test scores over the last several years, authorizer performance reports/ratings, relevant academic reports to the board.
- School's strategic plan.
- Organizational chart.
- Most recent annual report.

- News articles about the school, the city's and state's charter sector, and relevant political events.

FINANCE AND FUNDRAISING INFORMATION

- Financial reports, including most current and previous six months.
- Most recent independent audit report.
- Budget for the current year and previous one to three years.
- Long-range financial plan.
- Names and contact information for current funders.

MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTS

- Documents that detail relationship with a charter management organization (CMO) or education management organization (EMO), if your school contracts with one.
- Contracts, reports, milestones, and any other documents relevant to the CMO/EMO or significant outside vendors.

LEGAL AND POLICY DOCUMENTS

- Articles of incorporation, bylaws, policies (conflict of interest, confidentiality, student discipline, etc.), and Internal Revenue Service Form 990: Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax.
- All legally required documents, including meeting minutes. ²
- Insurance information that includes a copy of the school's certificate for the Directors' and Officers' Liability insurance.

GOVERNANCE RESOURCES

- The NCSRC and CBP provide myriad resources, including tools and templates to support boards in reaching the standards that you can keep in your manual for reference.

Onboarding is an essential part of cultivating a truly effective board. By taking the time to develop a comprehensive manual, thoughtfully design a training process, and purposefully match newcomers with mentors, you are setting your board up for success. Boards function most effectively when everyone feels prepared and inspired to contribute in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling.

INTEGRATING NEW MEMBERS ONTO THE BOARD

Whether it is through a mentor/buddy program or a retreat, this too will help boards ensure there is ample attention given to getting to know new board members and getting them up to speed to be effective team members around the table.

A boat doesn't go forward if each one is rowing their own way. – Swahili Proverb

Have you ever started a new job and walked in on day one knowing everyone, completely understanding the culture, and instinctively knowing all the workplace norms? Did not think so. Do not expect new board members to fully grasp all the nuances of the board without a little help. Even if your recruitment process thoroughly explained expectations and your onboarding was stellar, the board is a community in itself, and new members must be welcomed and oriented to its norms and culture.

Before the first board meeting, ensure that the new board member is added to the email list for notification, has access to any online system for document sharing, and has all the logistics for the meeting, including parking, where to enter, if food will be provided, and how long the meeting should expect to last. Share the full board calendar, including meetings and events, and provide expectations for attendance.

During the first meeting, make sure there is ample time for introductions. Have everyone share a little about themselves and the reason they joined the board. A short ice-breaker like having everyone share their favorite book, food, or vacation spot provides a great opportunity to get to know fellow board members in a different way.

If your board does not already have one, consider developing a “buddy” or mentor program. This can be as simple as pairing a more seasoned board member with a new member to provide additional context to discussions. The new board member should feel comfortable asking questions during the meeting, but also suggest that they jot down notes when they feel they need additional information, background details, or context. This can be reviewed with their buddy after the first meeting and whenever necessary.

If there are a few new board members beginning around the same time, a board retreat can help everyone get to know one another and start on the same page. The retreat can focus on team building and communication styles to establish good working relationships. With everyone together, the board has an opportunity to reflect on board dynamics, review roles and responsibilities, and consider how effective current processes are and if any changes need to be made.

And after those new board members are not so new anymore, do not forget to ask what worked in helping them integrate onto the board and what they wished they would have known. Great boards continue to tweak their practices and learning.

CREATING RAMPS TO SERVICE

All good things must come to an end, and board service is no different. This tool ensures your board has the right processes in place for when it is appropriate for board members to roll off.

Term /tɜrm/ noun: a fixed or limited period for which something lasts or is intended to last.

Notice the definition for “term” includes the words fixed or limited. Board members should not serve unlimited terms. Even if the board is high functioning and effective, schools evolve, and boards must evolve with them. As with any situation in life, there will be times when the board will be sad to see board members go and there will be times when the departure of a board member will actually benefit the board as a whole. There are a few policies and procedures boards should have in place to make sure expectations of service are set and to also ensure smooth transition of members.

Board member agreements: A board member agreement outlines each board member's commitment to uphold The governance committee, in collaboration with the school leader, should create the board member agreement, which the full board should then review, discuss, and approve. All board candidates should review the agreement as part of their interview process to confirm they understand the nature of the commitment. New board members should sign the agreement upon joining the board, existing board members should renew it annually, and the full board should make a habit of discussing the expectations in the agreement. A great time to do this is at the first meeting of each new school year. Review printed copies of the board member agreement during the Governance Committee's report and sign it together.

While your board member agreement should be specific to your board and reference the applicable legal requirements in your state, we recommend that your agreement cover the topics outlined below.

Board Member Responsibilities

The board member agreement should explicitly list the overarching duties of a board member. This can be done by putting your board member job description in the agreement or creating a summary list. We recommend using the CBP standards to frame these responsibilities:

- Standard #1 Focus Relentlessly on Student Achievement
- Standard #2 Ensure Exceptional School Leadership
- Standard #3 Commit to Exemplary Governance
- Standard #4 Act Strategically
- Standard #5 Raise and Use Resources Wisely
- Standard #6 Maintain Legal and Regulatory Compliance

Additionally, board members should agree to sign and abide by all board policies.

Belief in Mission & Familiarity with Key Guiding Documents

Every board member must know, believe in, and commit to the mission of the school. The introduction of the board member agreement should clearly state the mission. Running a charter school—as with running any nonprofit—is mission-driven work: board members should be the most knowledgeable and indefatigable advocates for the school's mission and its importance in providing a top-quality education to its students. The agreement should also outline the main goals of the charter. Every board member must agree to read the school charter and board's bylaws prior to beginning board service.

Expectations for Meeting & Event Attendance

The agreement must detail expectations for board member attendance at board meetings, committee meetings, and school events. The board member agreement should align with the bylaws and allow board members the opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of the bylaws and agreement to abide by them.³ Make sure to articulate expectations for each of the categories detailed below.

Meeting Attendance & Absences

It should be clear that board members are expected, absent a compelling reason, to attend all meetings of the full board, all meetings of their assigned committee, and board retreats. Set a policy for virtual meeting participation (e.g., conference call, Skype, videoconference, etc.) in the bylaws, and then state the expectations in the agreement. Board members should commit to reading all board materials sent in preparation for the meeting, assuming they are sent with enough advance notice.⁴

Members should be required to notify the board in advance in the event of an unavoidable absence: “If you are unable to attend a board meeting, you must notify the board chair by email/text/phone at least 24 hours before the meeting begins.” Be explicit about how many absences are considered reasonable, and articulate consequences of a failure to meet this expectation: “After two consecutive missed meetings, the board member will meet with the board chair and/or governance chair to discuss. After three missed meetings in one year, the governance committee will discuss whether the board member is still a good fit for the board.”

Event Attendance

Many boards request that board members visit the school and attend a school event at least once each year. Make these expectations clear, and—if possible—provide a school calendar with the agreement. Spending some time in the school allows board members to deepen their understanding of the charter school’s model, students, faculty, and results. Similarly, familiarity makes board members more credible and effective advocates for the schools. Each board should set its own expectation for how much time board members should spend in the school and provide board members with a calendar of events, daily schedule, and ideas for opportunities to interact with students and teachers (e.g., lunch with teachers).

Board Member Behavioral Norms

The governance committee should describe expectations regarding board member behavior in the agreement. Norms may include:

- Treating fellow board members, school staff, and school families with respect.
- Displaying humility, avoiding arrogance, and remaining open-minded to the viewpoints of others.
- Acting with integrity at all times.
- Acting in accordance with a genuine belief that all children can learn at high levels and that it is the school’s responsibility to educate all students equitably.
- Responding to board-related communications within a specified and reasonable time frame.
- Limiting the use of emails addressed to the entire board and “reply-all” responses to only important matters, showing respect for other people’s time.

Board Member Training & Education

The agreement should detail training opportunities for board members and indicate that it is expected that board members will participate in trainings, read relevant background material, connect with board members at other schools, and attend education-related events to become knowledgeable about charter schools, effective charter school board governance, and academic performance metrics.

Financial Commitment

Be upfront about the expectations for personal philanthropic giving by board members. Some schools have a “give/get” policy and require board members to either personally donate or raise a certain amount of money. Other schools ask that board members give an amount each year that is personally meaningful. We believe that every charter school board should ask that 100 percent of board members contribute financially and include this expectation in the board member agreement. Part of board service for almost all nonprofits includes a philanthropic commitment, and charter schools are no exception.

Annual board assessment: Just like the head of school, teachers, and students are evaluated each year, the board should assess itself annually. This is a time to review the board member agreements and determine if all board members have fulfilled their responsibilities and/or are willing to continue to fulfill their responsibilities.

Board norms and meeting ground rules: Establishing a set of operational norms will create a framework for how board members communicate and interact with one another. These should be included in the board agreement, discussed when new members join the board, and reviewed annually. No amount of written policy statements or role descriptions can substitute for regular attention to good communication practices in board meetings and e-mail communication. Boards need to have a conversation about such practices on a regular basis. Meeting “ground rules” can help. Boards should devote some time, at least once a year—perhaps at a retreat or when new board members come on—to reflect on and discuss good communication practices.

Diverse boards come at problems and situations from all different angles and have healthy conflict that leads to inclusion of various viewpoints. Unhealthy conflict occurs when board members refuse to see each other’s points of view, are at an impasse more often than not, and have ineffective communication strategies. This behavior needs to be addressed and the root of the problem discussed.

Exit Strategies for When a Good Thing Comes to an End

- There are many reasons why great board members leave. Whether they have limited time to give or their skills are no longer the focus of the board, there are ways to harness their contributions:
- Advisory board members: Perhaps the board member rolling off has great expertise, but not the time to devote to full board membership. Ask if the board can use them as a sounding board or in an advisory capacity.

- Ad hoc committees: Similar to an advisory board member, someone with expertise and knowledge can help with ad hoc projects and committees, bringing their deep knowledge and context of the board to the project at hand.
- Document history of decisions or projects: Boards are required to keep meeting minutes, but sometimes the evolution of policies, procedures, decisions, or projects gets lost along the way. If the exiting board member had a big role in developing any of these, have them document the who, what, where, when, and how to ensure that history is preserved.

If possible, allow great board members who are rolling off the board the opportunity to orient and transition new board members to fill their place.

Exit Strategies for When Things Just Are Not Working

Like all relationships, sometimes things just do not work out with board members. Before giving a board member the “it’s not you, it’s me” speech, make sure the governance committee or board chair have had at least one conversation about the egregious behavior. If expectations are not being met, try to discover if there is a reason. Refer back to the board agreement and let the member know that they are not meeting expectations. If things continue to be problematic for that person or the board, it is time to have that person exit the board. A strong board chair should remove disengaged or disruptive board members if they are not fulfilling their duties. These conversations are difficult, but necessary. Having someone on the board who is not pulling his/her weight or is not the right fit takes up a valuable spot—imagine if it was filled with someone who would help move things forward. That is the why it is important to set expectations, assess the board regularly, and remove members who are not working out.

EXIT SURVEYS

Boards are always evolving, and lessons can be learned from each exiting board member. This tool will help boards design effective exit surveys and learn what to do with the information gained.

While exit interviews are common for employees leaving an organization, they are far less common for exiting board members. The opportunity to learn and improve is just as important when interviewing an outgoing board member as it is for an employee, with an additional added benefit—the chance to keep this individual connected to the school as a supporter and donor. The exit interview is a graceful way to thank an outgoing board member, recognize his/her accomplishments, and end involvement on a positive note.

Who conducts the exit interview for board members?

The Board Chair should decide who and how the exit interview process is handled. The Board Chair and Head of School may conduct the exit interview, or perhaps the task is assigned to the Governance Committee. Some boards take the outgoing board member to lunch, thank them, and get their advice on improving board service. What matters most is that the organization establishes a process to routinely thank its board volunteers and learn from their experiences.

Examples of questions to ask in a survey or in person.

- How would you describe your board experience? How would you describe its culture? What did you like about being on the board? What things about the board could use improvement?
- Were board and committee meetings productive? Was your time used effectively? If you were Board Chair, what would you do differently?
- Did you feel like your contributions to the board were fully appreciated? Did you feel you were listened to and respected in meetings?
- Did a long-range planning process occur during your time on the board? What did you think of it?
- Did you feel prepared for your board responsibility? Were board expectations made clear? Were you surprised by anything?
- What do you think about how decisions were made by the board? Any suggestions for improvement?
- What are some things that would be important to tell board candidates about the board?
- What is the single most important project or process the board has accomplished in the last year?
- Overall, how would you suggest improving the working of this board?
- If a friend asked you, would you recommend that they join this board?
- If you could change anything about how the board operates, what would it be?
- How do you feel the board work addressed the fiduciary, strategic, and generative aspects of its work for the school? Which of these, if any, did the board spend too little or too much time on?
- What upcoming projects or challenges do you see for the school most clearly? What are projects or other areas that are receiving too much board attention?
- Is there anything else that we should know about your time on the board, with the school, or anything else related to your valuable service?
- How would you like to stay involved with the board/school?

Finally, put the input you get from the interviews into action. Nothing would be worse than to go through the motions of exit interviews and not learn from the input. Make sure that you put the input into actionable items that will help your future board and school.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Is there a payoff from top-team diversity?* Thomas Barta, Markus Kleiner, and Tilo Neumann. McKinsey Quarterly. April 2012. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/organization/is_there_a_payoff_from_top-team_diversity

The Secret of Top Performing Companies: More Women On The Board. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidprosser/2014/09/25/the-secret-of-top-performing-companies-more-women-on-the-board/>

² We recommend including minutes from the previous six meetings.

³ Note that the board's bylaws should have a clear policy about expectations for attending meetings including whether attending by phone is acceptable.

⁴ We recommend sending board packets at least four business days in advance of the meeting.