



SEPTEMBER 2005 – FEATURE ARTICLE

Board Orientation

Excerpts from Board Orientation article from www.ioq.ca/governance and **Barb's Bytes**, July/August issue.

A good orientation session is essential to ensuring good board participation and decision-making.

An orientation ensures all board members come to the table with the same knowledge and expectations. This will prevent problems later on, such as poor attendance at board meetings or board preoccupation with details outside their responsibilities.

What to include:

Every orientation session should cover:

- Organization goals and mission
- Bylaws
- Board role and responsibilities
- Job descriptions for executive, board members, and committees
- Policies and current issues
- Board relationship to the CEO, staff, funders and other stakeholders
- Accountability and evaluation practices
- Financial structure of the organization, and the board's role in reviewing reports from management and auditors
- Meeting procedures
- Organizational chart & contact lists

Orientations should be done in person, either individually or in a group. Developing a board member training kit that can be handed out or placed on your web site is also a good idea.

How to make it effective:

The most important thing to remember is that "people learn best when they are involved and having fun". You need to concentrate on creating and sustaining an active learning environment.

Barb Gemmell, one of our facilitators, suggests the following:

- Collect quotations relevant to your topic and key messages
- Use icebreakers that introduce the content and build participant interest
- Structure the content into short segments.
- Incorporate participant involvement with the materials by having them write in them, fill in the blanks, complete a graph, or add a caption to a cartoon.
- Use post-it page markers and highlighters to highlight important pages/information
- Try games, puzzles, quizzes, or word searches to add interest and fun to the session.

- Initiatives that involve activities, such as facility tours or visits to program delivery sites, can be good ways of getting board members' attention.
- Include existing board members so they are seen as resource people for the new members.

Board members need an opportunity to become familiar with the organization and the expectations of being on the board. A great orientation will ensure Board members understand the goals and objectives of the organization, the role of the board within the organization, and what their specific responsibilities will be.