

# Ask Our Consultants

# BOARD ORIENTATION

SHOULD WE INCLUDE ALL BOARD MEMBERS IN EVERY ORIENTATION?  
MANY LONG-TERM MEMBERS ARE RELUCTANT TO PARTICIPATE YEAR  
AFTER YEAR.

Yes, definitely! Board orientation is never truly over because it is a strategy in the ongoing process of board education and training. Orientation provides the board with an opportunity to deepen the engagement and strengthen the performance of its members — all of its members. As new members join the board, orientation allows the board to energize itself as a new “body” and, most importantly, to bring each and every board member together around the mission of the organization.

Your long-term board members’ reluctance to participate in orientation year after year might reflect the design of your orientation process. It’s not necessary for all board members to be involved in all parts of the process. For example, long-term members do not need to review the board manual, tour the organization’s facilities, learn how to read a financial statement, or go over the organizational chart every time new members join the board.

Long-standing members should attend those orientation sessions that address the board’s roles and responsibilities. The world of nonprofit governance is evolving. If board members are to be effective, they must have information on the latest trends in nonprofit governance. A thorough grounding in important matters currently facing nonprofit boards will help both new and long-term members to more effectively deal with issues they will face and to participate more productively. Board orientation sessions are a perfect vehicle to share and discuss this information.

These sessions should be interactive and thought-provoking. Returning board members can be engaged as facilitators and discussion leaders. This gives them an opportunity to share their expertise and experience and allows the board to start building a working relationship among its members that promotes ongoing support, learning, and team building. This shared experience cultivates the development of the emerging culture of the board in its new makeup — a culture that honors and reflects the expertise, experience, and competencies of new as well as returning members.

It also may be beneficial to extend the orientation strategy for as long as a year by pairing up a new board member with a long-term member as a mentor. A mentor can be a new member’s go-to person, answering questions that come up and encouraging participation. A mentoring relationship can be particularly helpful in explaining the history behind controversial board issues or past leadership changes.

Long-term board members play a critical role in the transfer of knowledge and in setting a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for new board members. And engaging seasoned board members in the orientation process effectively ensures that they appreciate it as an “all board” activity, not merely a didactic information session for new trustees. An effective board orientation educates and motivates both new and long-term members.

**[Resources: The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members](#)**  
**[Getting On Board with Effective Orientation: A BoardSource Toolkit](#)**