



VOLUNTEER BOARDS

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SEQUUS HELPS VOLUNTEER BOARDS DEVELOP ...

The Directors of SEQUUS get to work with volunteer boards almost every working day. Sometimes we are helping deal with an important issue facing the organization. Sometimes we are leading a strategic planning session. And sometimes we are totally focussed on the performance of the board itself. We want to tell you a little about how we go about assisting boards to deal with their own performance.

THE CHALLENGE: For board members, having overall responsibility and accountability for the success of an organization, while depending upon paid staff to operate it on a day-to-day basis, is often a source of conflict and frustration. For paid, full-time managers in non-profits, learning to work with a volunteer board is often the most difficult challenge. In any jurisdiction there are literally thousands of non-profit organizations each with a multi-person board. There are simply not enough competent and committed volunteers to fill all of the available positions. For those who do volunteer it often means that they have to give up a great deal of free time in return for very few tangible rewards and increasingly greater risks. There is very little training available for new board members and far too little time is spent even orienting new board members to their role and responsibilities. Most learn from watching others. Many simply transfer behaviours that they learned in other settings in other roles (even when those roles are totally incompatible with that of a board member).

BENCHMARKS & STANDARDS?: Much has been written about what boards *ought* to do in an ideal world where everyone understands their roles and responsibilities (see the nearby list) and there are enough competent and committed people to fill all of the available seats. We have encountered many outstanding boards and countless exemplary board members. However, we have also discovered that Boards and board members vary dramatically in their capacity to meet the ideal and far too many feel unaware or unsure as to what that 'ideal' is. How does a board measure its own performance? How do we know if we are measuring up? What does 'measuring up' mean in this context? What are the standards? What are the benchmarks? Who do we compare ourselves to? Can we set our own standards and measure ourselves against own expectations of ourselves? While we don't have all of the answers, we have developed some tools that seem to help.

THE 'OFFICIAL ROLE OF

What is the role of the Board? While 'experts' vary on their answer, this list is often used as a starting point...

- 1 Formulate and approve the long range goals and objectives;
- 2 Formulate and approve policies;
- 3 Select, employ, periodically assess and if necessary dismiss the CEO;
- 4 Develop financial resources for achieving goals;
- 5 Adopt and monitor the organization's operating budget, financial development plan and insurance program;
- 6 Monitor the achievement of goals and objectives;
- 7 Perform its legal responsibilities;
- 8 Protect the assets of the organization;
- 9 Form linkages with other community organizations;
- 10 Interpret the organization to the community; and
- 11 Maintain affiliation and participation in the agency's larger organization and support structure.

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A BOARD DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

We regularly get asked to help boards deal with problems and develop the skills and processes needed to serve the organization.

Typically we follow a four step process.

1. **DIAGNOSE THE SITUATION**, including identifying strengths, areas that need improvement, areas for innovation and experimentation and practices that should be dropped or reduced. We often use the **BOARD DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONNAIRE** described in the next panel. We use other tools when they are more appropriate. Sometimes the Board knows exactly what's wrong/ They just don't know what to do about it.
2. **DEVELOP GOALS AND ACTION PLANS FOR CHANGE** including deciding who will do what, when, where and with what resources.
3. **IMPLEMENT THE CHANGES**, with focus, leadership, persistence and patience.
4. **EVALUATE THE OUTCOMES**, celebrate successes and recycle through the process for areas that still need attention if necessary.

Our role is usually to facilitate the process. The Board

SITUATIONAL GOVERNANCE

If you are paying attention to the literature on Boards, you may be confused about how boards ought to operate. At one extreme, Boards are asked to remove themselves entirely from operational matters and focus entirely on policy. At the other is advice that "...new boards and management discover issues that matter, mutually determine the agenda, and solve problems together. Board and management both set policy and implement it. Lines are blurred, borders open. Domains are decided by the issue at hand." At SEQUUS we have responded with a new model called Situational Governance in which the role of the board depends on the issue at hand.

THE BOARD DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

We have been much influenced by the work of Dr. James Hardy who wrote "Developing Dynamic Boards" published by Essex Press in 1990. At that time, Hardy's book was considered to be one of the most up-to-date and authoritative sources on developing boards for non-profit organizations. His work still stands the test of time. Hardy addresses many of the questions that we all have about boards. We have used his advice and ideas to develop an instrument to measure board performance. The instrument covers 14 dimensions of board performance each of which is addressed by 5 questions. Respondents are asked to rate their boards in terms of how important each item is to their board's success and how well the board is performing on each item. Boards that make use of the instrument receive a full report on the results along with advice and suggestions based upon Hardy's work and our own experience.

THE ANALYSIS: The items from the questionnaire are organized into clusters including such things as...

- recruitment and selection of board members
- orienting and training new board members,
- board decision-making
- financial management,
- fund raising,
- relationships with paid staff,
- recognition and rewards,
- work climate,
- Board structure,
- structure of committees,
- planning
- Meetings
- Member recognition and rewards

We also provide board development workshops for boards that wish to have assistance with follow-up.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Our clients tell us that we take the mystery out of strategic planning. We make the process simple, straightforward and accessible to everyone. This allows the complex work of setting strategic directions proceed without getting lost in complex, expert-driven approaches. They also tell us that one of the keys to making it that way are the tools that we use such as those that follow selected from our most popular ...

- **The Strategic Planning Process:** an four-panel reading describes the planning process for those who are new to it.
- **The Strategic Planning Worksheet:** this four-panel worksheet guides a group through the first phases of planning and helps build a permanent record of outcomes.
- **Plan, Act, Learn:** this worksheet picks up where the previous one leaves off and helps with the final phases of strategic planning.
- **The New Vision Worksheet:** this six-panel worksheet helps organizations rethink the fundamental direction of the organization and establish a new vision.
- **Stakeholder Input Worksheet:** focus group input to planning is often gathered following the processes mapped out in this worksheet.
- **The Rise, Fall and Renewal of Organizations:** to help a group determine where it is in the organizational lifecycle, this four-panel reading is essential.
- **Strategic Thinking:** using some of the latest works of strategic gurus such as Gary Hamel and Michael Porter this collection will stimulate a group to think beyond the ordinary.
- **Planning at the Work Group Level:** this worksheet takes the whole process down a level into a part of the organization.
- **The Board-Management Worksheet:** This worksheet is used to decide where the work of the Board stops and Management takes over on any particular issue.

And there are others. Some clients prefer to work on their own but use our tools. Some want customized versions adapted to their special needs and terminology.

FACILITATION SERVICES

Respect and tolerance for divergent opinions is essential for sound decision-making and creative problem solving. If every board member thought the same way on important issues, why would we need a board of more than one person?

Yet diversity brings conflict and conflict can either be productive or destructive. When issues get hot and the chair holds strong views on an important issue, outside facilitators are often engaged to assist with the meeting and to help ensure that conflict is handled productively. Productive conflict is the kind of conflict that deals with substantive issues and leads to better decisions, more commitment to action, increased cohesiveness among board members and greater empathy between members and more understanding of differences. Destructive conflict is the kind of conflict that is personalized and deals with emotions, likes and dislikes, power, and feelings. It can lead to hostility, distrust, apathy and cynicism among board members and if left unchecked it can destroy the effectiveness of a board and even an entire organization.

Facilitators help Boards make effective use of the positive power of constructive conflict and avoid the destructive power of emotional conflict by using some or all of the following tools and techniques...

- *They plan their meetings well in advance and focus on both content and process;*
- *They get agendas out early with a full explanation of what will be dealt with and how;*
- *If there is background to be considered, it is provided in advance to all;*
- *Groundrules for dealing with conflict should be established and understood by all;*
- *The meeting setting should promote discussions and equality, assigned seating can help;*
- *Agendas should be tightly-focussed and time limits for discussion established, agreed to and controlled;*
- *Flipcharts should be used to list options and record 'pros' and 'cons' when decisions are being made;*
- *Encourage everyone to contribute by taking turns speaking to key issues.*

All SEQUUS directors are trained facilitators. We also train other facilitators. We believe that facilitators are most effective when they act as neutral servants of the group, focus on process rather than content, manage the agenda, keep track of time and control the traffic.



MANAGING AND LEADING THE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

This intensive 5 to 10 day program was originally developed for delivery to leaders in the international development field. It is still targeted at that audience but is also offered to leaders and managers in our domestic non-profits in the arts, culture, recreation and sports, social service, associations and related fields. It is also offered in many different countries in many different languages.

DURATION: In Canada, the program is typically offered in a 5-day workshop. Outside of Canada it is often a two-week program to maximize travel and living costs.

INSTRUCTOR: Typically this is delivered by SEQUUS directors or close associates.

LEARNING GOALS: To acquire the basic skills to manage and lead a non-profit organization.

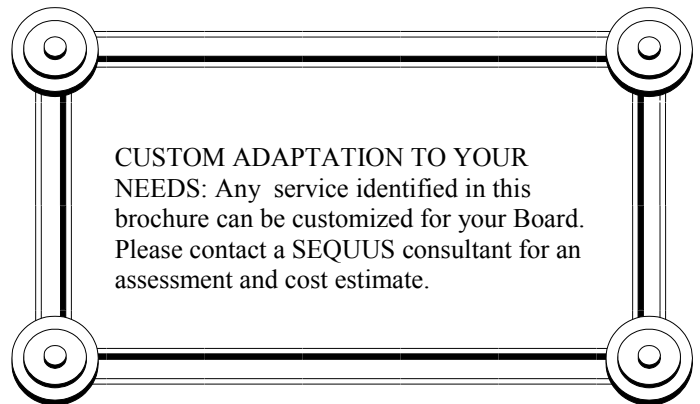
CONTENTS: Typically, this program covers topics selected from the following ...

- Introduction to management in the non-profit sector,
- Leadership and Management
- Strategic Planning and Implementation,
- Managing Projects,
- Situational Leadership,
- Financial Management,
- Managing Volunteers,
- Fund Raising,
- Social Marketing,
- Teams and team development,
- Needs assessment,
- Managing change and renewal, etc.

Participants in these workshops usually complete a needs assessment questionnaire in advance to help us to select which modules are most needed.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT & EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Senior managers and executives are difficult to get into the classroom yet they often need many of the skills that we have covered in this document. In addition, we have often been asked to design and deliver special programs in strategic management, building high performance cultures, working with boards, policy-making, change and conflict management, managing professionals, managing managers, organizational structure and design and so on. Call us to learn more about getting your senior staff trained.



For more information or to have someone visit your organization, send your contact information to..

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