

The Director's Link

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Recruiting and Nurturing an Effective Board

Kathleen Sheridan



You have a board meeting scheduled in two months and you need to find a replacement for a board member who recently moved. What do you do? If you are like most early childhood program directors, you've spent more time recruiting your teachers and support staff than you have recruiting board members for your program. When directors are asked how knowledgeable they are about their role as board recruiter and nurturer, they usually confess "not very." Most expect that they will deal with recruiting board members and nurturing board membership only when confronted with an impending meeting or pressed to solve a problem that requires board intervention and assistance.

Creating an effective board means carefully selecting and fostering knowledgeable and passionate personalities—individuals who are often very busy managing and leading their own organizations. But the process of recruiting and nurturing a high-performing board can be very rewarding when you understand the importance of the board, and the possibilities that a highly effective board can offer.

Selecting New Board Members

For the administrative, teaching, and support staff positions in your program, you already know how

important it is to formulate specific job criteria when an opening occurs. These criteria relate to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support outstanding performance. The same thing applies when an opening occurs on your board. Know what to look for. What are your criteria—knowledge, skills, and dispositions—for choosing board members? Establishing clear criteria will help ensure that the individuals you select are the right fit for your organization.

A good place to start is by conducting an assessment of the background and specialty areas of your current board members. This data will help you discern if there are any gaps relating to background and expertise that you should look for in new members. The goal is to create a diverse board whose members' backgrounds, areas of expertise, and passions complement each other.

Here are a few thoughts about how to select new board members:

- Find out who the "movers and shakers" are in your community. Approach them to see if they might be interested in joining your board.
- Read the business magazines and newspapers in your community. Watch for information about the special interests of leaders of local organizations.
- Look for the qualities that are important for your organization—individuals who understand your community's needs, are passionate about young children, have the time and willingness to attend meetings and events, are good listeners, and are powerful advocates for your cause.

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- Make sure you note any special expertise that is needed for certain duties and include that expertise as a quality when searching for new members. For example, if you need someone who understands the finances of the organization, add that quality to your criteria.
- Recruit separately for each open position. Make sure you treat each open board position as you would a search for a paid position. Potential board members should compete for positions just as a paid job candidate competes with other candidates for their position.
- Publicize to the local and professional community that you are searching! Advertise the positions in public forums, speeches, and newsletters.
- Provide potential candidates with pertinent information about your organization. Let them know about any current issues and needs.
- Have the potential board member fill out an application form. This might appear onerous because you are asking the person to serve without remuneration. But, treating the position as if it is a sought after and important one will raise the level of the potential board member's perceptions of the position as well as the perception of the importance of the board as a whole.

Create a grid listing the qualities and categories that are important to assess during the selection process. Your grid might look something like this:

Name	John Doe
Age Range 20-35, 36-50, 51-65, 66+	36-50
Ethnicity	Latino
Demographic (Urban, rural, suburban)	Urban
Constituency (Community leader, nonprofit organization, government, business)	Business
Advocacy strengths	Involved in Latino community and policymaking boards
Expertise	Editor for local newspaper

- Welcome potential candidates to your center for a tour. Have them view a classroom when children are present.
- Meet with potential board members one-on-one, perhaps for breakfast or lunch, so that you can talk to them and get to know more about their background, passions, and specialty areas of interest.
- Involve other board members in the selection process. Your goal is to achieve consensus on the selection of new members.

You Have Them, Now What?

Screening, interviewing, and selecting viable candidates is just the beginning. Once on board, you'll want to ensure that new board members have a full orientation to their new role. Here are some things to think about:

- Have new members sign a contract. This contract can be broad ("I have read the board manual and understand my role as a member of the board"), or specific ("I understand that I will be required to attend four meetings annually and that my total annual commitment is 50 hours served through participation in events, and other board related duties"). This contract will provide a strong message to the board member that you are expecting a commitment from them. Also, in the unfortunate event that a board member does not fulfill his or her obligation, you have grounds for removal.
- Have new members disclose any potential conflicts of interest. For example, if the new member owns a paper supply company where your center regularly does business, this is important information that other board members need to know.
- Orient the board member to your organization. Provide them with additional reading materials detailing information about your center's history, mission, and strategic goals.
- Have new members review important items in the board manual for your early childhood program.
- Share the calendar and meeting schedule for the year.

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Address corrections should be directed to:

McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership

6310 Capitol Drive
Wheeling, Illinois 60090

Phone

(800) 443-5522, ext. 5056

Fax

(847) 465-5910

E-mail

cecl@nl.edu

Web Site

http://cecl.nl.edu

Michael W. Louis Endowed Chair

Paula Jorde Bloom
paula.bloom@nl.edu

Faculty and Staff

Jill Bella	Donna Jonas
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Eileen Eisenberg	Kara Lehnhardt
Shirley Flath	Lilium Perez
Lila Goldston	Teri Talan
Ann Hentschel	Debra Trude-Suter
Renita Johnson	Tim Walker

Director's Link

Editor	Douglas Clark douglas.clark@nl.edu
Layout	Burkat Design

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Our Mission

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training, technical assistance, research, and public awareness.

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The Director's Toolbox

The Board Effectiveness Quiz

This quiz is a great way to jumpstart your thinking about what board members need to know to do the job. After you have responded to the questions, check below for answers.

Ask yourself the following:

- Q What percentage of time at each board meeting is spent talking about things that have already happened (e.g., staff reports, financial reports)?
- Q When you talk about past issues, is it to quantitatively monitor progress, or just report activity?
- Q What percentage of time is spent talking about the impact the organization will make on the community?
- Q Can you clearly articulate your board's priorities for what the organization should accomplish this year? What portion of those goals has to do with strengthening your organization vs. impacting the community?
- Q True or false: Our board discusses such important matters for guiding the organization that the organization would have no overall direction without those discussions.
- Q When you review the budget, how do you know whether or not you should approve it?
- Q Of the total budget for your organization, which items are discussed at length? Do any of those items comprise less than 1% of your budget (on a \$1 million budget, that would be \$10,000 or less)? What percentage of the budget is passed without comment? Why?
- Q Does your board spend most of its time reacting and responding to events or setting the stage and creating potential scenarios for the future?
- Q Two-part question:
Part 1: Fill in the blank: When our board has tough decisions to make, we always base those decisions on _____.
Part 2: Would you want your answer to Part 1 posted in the entrance to your center?
- Q True or false: Our board discusses such important matters impacting the future of our center and community that members almost never miss a meeting.

How many of the following statements would your board members agree with?

- Q The board spends a great deal of time on trivial items.
- Q Board members receive many handouts prior to each meeting, but most people don't really read them.
- Q The information board members receive at meetings relates to issues the board has determined that it wants to monitor.
- Q The information board members receive at meetings relates to issues the staff deems is important.
- Q Many staff members believe the board micromanages.
- Q The board discusses issues, but in the end they usually approve whatever the staff request.
- Q The board has a single member authorized to relate board information to the staff.
- Q A performance review of the executive director hasn't been conducted in the past two years.
- Q A review of the executive director is conducted every year, but there are no quantifiable criteria by which to measure performance.
- Q It takes a good year before new board members begin to contribute actively.
- Q Board members don't know one another very well.

Answers: You don't need an answer key to know how you did on this quiz. If your board talks more about the past than the future, rubber stamps or duplicates staff's work, focuses on small budget items instead of the big ones, and isn't sure what they should be doing, then there has to be a better way.

Adapted with permission from the work of Hildy Gottlieb, president of the Community-Driven Institute at Help 4 NonProfits. Learn more from the Institute's free library at www.Help4NonProfits.com.

Planning Ahead

Professional Development Opportunities

Taking Charge of Change

July 30 – August 4, 2007

Follow-up Retreats: November 15-17, 2007 and May 7-10, 2008

This early childhood leadership training focuses on individual, organizational, and systemic change as well as the director's role as change agent. A comprehensive, integrated model for improving the quality of early childhood programs will be presented. Through interactive learning, group discussions, guided reflection, reading, and writing, participants explore the components of quality programming and how to implement change to achieve program goals.

The training begins with an intensive six-day residential summer institute. Two follow-up retreats will be held to report on progress in implementing a program improvement plan. Mentors will be available for consultation during the year to assist participants in pursuing center accreditation.

Space is limited to 28 participants. Priority is given to directors whose programs serve IDHS-funded children.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership
NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$400, includes housing, meals, and materials

Participants may receive undergraduate or graduate credit (ECE525, *Strategies for Supervision and Staff Development* and EPS526, *Organizational Theory, Group Dynamics, and Leadership Applications*) by paying an additional fee. Application deadline is May 31, 2007.

Program Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

August 20-22, 2007

The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor reliability training includes an overview of reliability of the instrument, interview protocol for collecting data, and how to score indicators and items. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors.

This three-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices and help center directors improve the quality of their programs.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership
NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$650, includes all texts, handouts, and meals

Participants may receive 2 semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, *Workshop/Early Childhood Program Evaluation*) by paying an additional fee.

For more information, contact Debra Trude-Suter at
debra.trudesuter@nl.edu
or (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056.

NLU Courses for Directors

Summer term begins June 25, 2007

Online Courses for Early Childhood Administrators

ECE510: (3 sh)
Child, Family, and Community

ECE512: (2 sh)
Early Childhood Curriculum

For more information about the Early Childhood Administration degree program, contact Douglas Clark at
douglas.clark@nl.edu
or (800) 443-5522, ext. 5062.

New This Year!

Special Train-the-Trainer Seminar Highlights Preconference Agenda

Are you using or interested in adopting *Innovations—The Comprehensive Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Curriculum*? Join author Dr. Kay Albrecht to learn how the *Innovations* series helps teachers fully incorporate all components of the curricula. Designed for directors, trainers, technical assistance consultants, and college instructors familiar with the *Innovations* curriculum series, this 6-hour session will provide you with all of the information you need to use *Innovations* materials to meet your training, assessment, and professional goals. Participants should bring their copies of the *Innovations* curricula or may purchase the books at the seminar.

Fee is \$150 and pre-registration is required. Lunch is included.

For more information, contact
Donna Jonas at
(800) 443-5522, ext. 5058 or
donna.jonas@nl.edu.



Register on line <http://cecl.nl.edu>



High Touch...

Convenient on-campus residencies connect you face-to-face with a community of professional practice

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Online technology makes learning possible anytime from anywhere.

NLU's **Early Childhood Administration (ECA)** program is a comprehensive study of the management and leadership skills needed to effectively administer early learning and care programs. ECA students attend a limited number of residencies in the Chicago area at critical mileposts along the degree sequence. Through online coursework, students stay connected with each other and with early childhood leaders from around the world.

Contact Mary Zerega at 800-443-5522, ext. 5619, or mzerega@nl.edu.

Apply now: Next cohort begins June 18, 2007

Take Time Out to Chat with the Experts Online in 2007!

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership hosts nationally renowned early childhood experts on its Web site. Join the discussion to chat with the people who have written the books and helped shape early childhood policy and practice. Each expert will be the featured guest for a week-long open discussion on issues of interest to early childhood professionals.



Monday, April 16 – Saturday, April 21

Guest expert: Chip Donohue
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education
Effective Practices for Teaching and Learning Online

Monday, May 21 – Saturday, May 26

Guest expert: Holly Bruno
Partner, Bruno Duraturo Keynotes and Consulting
Legal and Ethical Issues in Early Childhood



Check out the Center's Web site (<http://cecl.nl.edu>) for information about how to log on and updates about future online guests.



NLU to Pilot Core and Infant Toddler Credentials for Early Care and Education Practitioners

National-Louis University is among fourteen 2- and 4-year institutions in Illinois that have been awarded a mini-grant and approval to pilot the requirements of the Core and/or Infant Toddler Credentials for Gateways to Opportunity. Gateways is the statewide professional development network designed to support and recognize practitioners in early care and education.

The Gateways model is based on a career lattice that identifies the core knowledge, skills, and prerequisite qualifications for the roles and levels in the early care and education field. An integral part includes credentials that recognize the knowledge and skills required at various levels of an early childhood practitioner's career. These voluntary credentials validate individual's specialized knowledge, skills, and experience in early care and education. The credentials are earned through accomplishments in general education, early childhood knowledge & skills, and field experience.

The Infant Toddler Credential validates the specialized knowledge and skills and experience of practitioners who work with infants and toddlers. Research has shown that the most rapid brain development occurs from age 0-3. Increased education levels of practitioners who work with children at those ages have better outcomes for the children in their care.

This recent work represents further steps to standardize qualifications, education and training requirements, and regulations for various program funding sources and workplace settings in Illinois. It will streamline access for current practitioners and those entering the field to earn increased education and better pay and to move within Illinois education and training system. It is anticipated that these programs will also help decrease turnover among the early childhood workforce by finding the right path for practitioners through mentoring, career guidance, credentials, and financial support. For more information on courses and programs offered through National-Louis University related to this pilot program, contact Kathleen Sheridan at (224) 233-2311 or e-mail kathleen.sheridan@nl.edu.

LEADERSHIP Connections

May 10-12, 2007 • Chicago Marriott O'Hare



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Luis Hernandez



Sue Baldwin



Holly Elissa Bruno



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Ed Greene



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Still Time to Register!

Conference Package Includes:

Thursday

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Public Policy Forum
Networking Reception
Spotlight on Best Practices
Pamper Yourself Activities

Friday

Continental Breakfast
Skill-Building Clinics
Box Lunch
Marketplace
Meet the Authors
Afternoon Ice Cream Treat

Saturday

Continental Breakfast
Seminars
Closing Luncheon and Keynote

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pre-conference activities!

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Consultation. Preregistration required.

Register online at
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- Make sure new members are informed about Robert's Rules of Order or other procedural issues relating to how your board meetings are run.
- Assign an experienced board member to serve as a mentor to each new member. Their role is to help orient the new person, answering questions as they arise.
- Get new members involved in subcommittees or projects as soon as possible.
- Make sure all board members wear name tags at meetings to facilitate name recognition and ease in interpersonal communication.

Once new members have been fully oriented, make sure you put them to work. Avoid having a board in name only. Keep members informed and provide them with ample opportunities to be involved in making decisions, participating in special events, advocating for support, and spreading the word about all the terrific things you are doing.

Helpful references

- eHow, Inc. (2006). *How to choose a board of directors*. Retrieved on October 26, 2006, from http://www.ehow.com/how_17193_choose-board-directors.html

- Gottlieb, H. (2000). *Recruiting for board members: Process? what process?* Retrieved on October 26, 2006, from http://www.help4nonprofits.com/NP_Bd_Recruit_Article.htm
- McNamara, C. (1999). *Guidelines to form an advisory group*. Retrieved on October 26, 2006, from <http://www.management-help.org/boards/advisory.htm>

Kathleen Sheridan, Ph.D. is the Chairperson for the Department of Early Childhood Education at National-Louis University.