

CHECK THESE OUT...



Free Management Library

Web site that includes all aspects of nonprofit board operations including board

<http://managementhelp.org/boards/index.htm>

Blue Avacado

Web site that has practical, provocative and fun food-for-thought for nonprofits.

<http://www.blueavocado.org/content/>

Youth Governance: How and Why it Can Help Out-Of-School Time Programs Involve At-Risk Youth. Includes youth-adult partnerships.

http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-

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TOPIC WATCH

Each month we will feature a different topic; expanding the knowledge, resources, and peer networking in targeted areas. These target areas will include workforce development, transition, supported education, leadership, organizational development, sustainability, and others as they are identified.

Emerging Adults: Getting on Board

All nonprofit organizations are required to have a Board of Directors, and many Boards are expanding to include emerging adults.

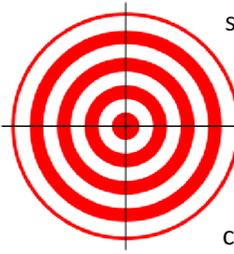
All nonprofit organizations are required to have a Board of Directors, and many Boards are expanding to include emerging adults. With all of the responsibilities and the high level of knowledge required of Board members, it is typical for organizations to search for members that come with the skills and experience that will improve their Board's overall functioning. Organizations used to search for representatives of certain professions to assist them in meeting these responsibilities and to assist them in performing necessary tasks. Often, organizations sought lawyers, accountants, bankers, and others that could perform a service for the organization, presumably free of charge. More recently, many organizations have made efforts to expand and include more individuals that represent the populations they serve, in order to ensure genuine stakeholder input in their planning and operations. This change has brought about new challenges in recruiting a Board with the necessary balance and expertise to help create organizational sustainability.

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TARGETED MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Organizations serving particular targeted populations often have established membership requirements. For example, a “consumer” (although some users of mental health services may identify themselves with other terminology) is considered an individual, 18 years of age or older, with severe mental illness. A “consumer supporter” is an individual involved with the support of a consumer (age 18 or older), including parents, siblings, spouses and significant others, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, who provide support in a nonprofessional capacity. A “consumer organization” is considered an organization that is controlled and managed by consumers and is dedicated to the transformation of mental health service systems so they



become consumer and family driven. These organizations must have a Board of Directors comprised of more than 50 percent consumers. And, a “consumer supporter organization” is an organization, including volunteer mental health organizations, which is controlled and managed by consumer supporters and mental health consumers. It, too, must be dedicated to the transformation of mental health service systems so they become consumer and family driven, and have a Board of Directors comprised of more than 50 percent consumer supporters. We consider “emerging adults” as those users of mental health services who are between the ages of 18 and 26 years of age.

Tips for Building Board Strength and Capacity through Membership

The following tips can help you build the capacity of your Board of Directors, with a careful eye on increasing the representation of emerging adults.

- Know what you are looking for. List the qualities you need that will help the Board function better. Use this list throughout the recruiting process.
- Recruit a pool of candidates that fit the profiles on your list. Maybe they do not have every quality, but the more they have the better.
- Develop a recruiting plan. Have a process in place that you use for each vacancy. This will allow you to examine the results of your process and make changes as necessary.
- Use an application process. Think of this as you would think of hiring an employee. Board members are needed to fill certain roles and responsibilities. You need as much information as possible to determine if they have the skills and qualities you need. Make sure you include an interview as a part of this process.
- Bring them on board. Once an individual is on the Board, do an orientation and make sure they understand their job. Have them sign an agreement that indicates they accept the responsibilities afforded them by serving on your Board.
- Put them to work. One of the worst things for a Board member who is dedicated to the cause and has passion for their work is to feel that they are not valued. Make sure that Board members are utilized and allowed to perform their duties.

REALITY?

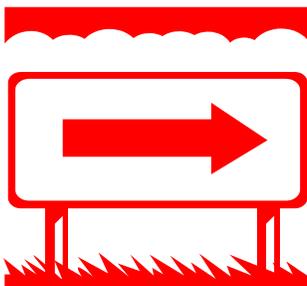
The reality is that most Boards struggle to get Board members who have a passion for the work, a shared belief in the mission, and the time to commit to required activities, let alone the expertise to offer free services. By the time an organization recruits majority population representation, it is often difficult to balance with other members that can contribute in a productive manner to the mission and vision of the organization, including emerging adults who may never have served on a Board or who may have limited experience as adult consumer advocates.



Engaging Emerging Adults as a Part of Consumer Run Organization Boards

Many programs are working diligently to include emerging adults as a part of their organizational direction, development, and governance. They can serve integral roles as advisors, offer information on the needs of emerging youth, and provide assistance on how to bridge the gap between the pediatric and adult mental health systems. Below are some considerations for consumer and consumer supporter run organizations to keep in mind when recruiting and utilizing emerging adults.

- Make sure you know the legal age limit for Board members in your state. Some states do not allow individuals under the age of 21 to participate as voting members on corporate Boards, be they for profit or nonprofit.
- It is a good idea to have more than one position for emerging adults, so they do not feel alone or like a token.
- Prepare the emerging adults for their role and assist them in understanding the “culture” of the Board. Ensure that they understand how meetings are run, when and how to provide feedback, and when and how to participate in discussions.
- Make sure the entire Board understands how and why emerging adults are needed on the Board. Have open conversations, answer existing Board members’ questions and address concerns before adding emerging adults.
- Build trust and rapport with emerging adults. Maintain and develop discussions that are not Board business related that can enhance your ability to better understand their skills and potential as a Board member.



Watch for upcoming editions of Focus to learn more about how to address challenges related to emerging adult participation with consumer and consumer supporter run organizations.

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