

CLUBHOUSE BOARDS AND ADVISORY BOARDS

There are two kinds of clubhouses: those that are independent free standing, and those that are a part of an auspice agency (usually a Community Mental Health Center). Under the "Funding, Governance, and Administration" section of The International Clubhouse Standards, Standard #32 states...

The clubhouse has an independent board of Directors, or if it is affiliated with a sponsoring agency, has a separate Advisory Board comprised of individuals uniquely positioned to provide fiscal, legislative, consumer and community support and advocacy for the clubhouse.

FREE STANDING CLUBHOUSE BOARDS

A free-standing clubhouse is a not for profit entity and has an independent Board of Directors. The Board has legal and fiscal responsibility for the clubhouse. Many free-standing clubhouses were first set into motion by a small group of interested people who formed a "Steering Committee." This committee typically does the initial work of securing adequate funding, finding appropriate space for the new clubhouse, and hiring a Director for the Clubhouse. It is this group that then transitions into the nucleus of the Board of Directors.

Once the clubhouse is established, *"responsibility for the operation of the clubhouse lies with the members and staff and ultimately with the clubhouse director. Central to this responsibility is the engagement of members and staff in all aspect of clubhouse operation."*(Standard #11)

Functions of an Independent Board of Directors

The functions of an Independent Board of Directors include:

Leadership, Accountability and Vision

- Long range planning
- Establishing clubhouse policy
- Participation in various subcommittees of the Board
- Supporting the director in implementing policy and procedures
- Providing expertise and skills in areas such as: finance, law, and real estate
- Promoting and ensuring compliance with the International Clubhouse Standards

Development and Advocacy

Liaison between the clubhouse and the larger community and advocating for the clubhouse

Assisting the clubhouse to negotiate political issues which affect the clubhouse community

Assisting the clubhouse develop transitional employment placements

Recruitment of new board members

Promoting productive working relationships between members, staff, and board

Tangible, Concrete Contributions to the Clubhouse and/or Membership

Finding equipment and furnishings for the clubhouse and members' apartments

Raising funds for the clubhouse

Reviewing and approving the budget

Finding opportunities to immerse oneself in the clubhouse culture (for example: attending seminars, meetings, trainings, unit experience)

Assisting the clubhouse in securing housing opportunities for the membership

ADVISORY BOARDS

Clubhouses that are part of a larger agency, such as a Community Mental Health Center (it is estimated that 80% of clubhouses are under an auspice agency), have a Board of Directors that govern the entire agency. Such a board is charged with being responsible for all operations of the agency, as well as its overall mission and vision. There are generally many programs and services (in addition to the clubhouse) that require the Board's attention, often including children's services, medication clinics, counseling and psychotherapy, substance abuse services etc.

Our experience has been that it is imperative that there be an arm of the board whose focus is exclusively the clubhouse. This new "advisory board" needs to be in a complementary relationship with the larger agency board, with each group assisting the other in accomplishing its mission. At least two members of the agency board should participate in this Advisory Board, in order to ensure communication and continuity. Some groups choose names such as "Friends of..." the clubhouse, and others choose to call themselves Advisory Councils.

If a clubhouse eventually chooses to develop into an independent entity, then this Advisory Board would become the nucleus of a free-standing Board of Directors.

Functions of an Advisory Board (including, but not limited to...)

- Providing community support for the clubhouse program
- Working with the clubhouse to combat stigma related to having a mental illness
- Developing transitional employment placements
- Raising funds to diversify the funding base
- Assisting with special projects
- Attending educational sessions on the Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation
- Developing partnership opportunities with the Board, staff, and members

BOARD CHARACTERISTICS (Independent Boards or Advisory Boards)

A Board that is informed and enthusiastic tends to attract other effective Board Members. The health of the Board needs to be nurtured and cherished. It is important to note that Board Members are volunteers. Board Members have the same needs as the rest of the clubhouse community; to be wanted, needed, and expected. Each individual needs to have a meaningful role. It is vital that the clubhouse finds ways to acknowledge and appreciate the Board.

Size and Composition

The Board size needs to be large enough to have Board committees and small enough to have manageable meetings. We have found that around twenty Board members lends itself to the functions and diversity desired.

Terms

Some Boards have fixed terms to try to prevent stagnation of leadership. Infusions of "new blood" are essential, but experience is also invaluable. Some way of retaining "wise elders" needs to be considered.

Leadership

Rotation of leadership on the Board and its committees is a useful way of sharing responsibilities and of training newer Board members. One way of creating more opportunities for the staff and members is to have them assist with the Board committee work. This also keeps the Board leadership creative and in touch with the day to day operations of the clubhouse.

Skills, Assets, Qualities to Look for in Board Members

The Board needs members who have a specific skills and qualities. Most importantly, they need to have the time and willingness to share these skills. In order to attract strong Board members, the clubhouse needs to make it as easy

as possible to be on the Board. Be clear about expectations and meeting times; distribute minutes in a timely fashion, etc.

Some particular skills to look for in perspective Board members include:

- Financial/Banking/Accounting
- Legal
- Real-estate
- Newspaper and other public relation contacts
- Political leader contacts
- Contacts within the neighborhood of the clubhouse
- Fundraising capabilities and contacts

The Board needs to reflect the clubhouse community. Other areas of expertise to bring into your Board might include family members of people with mental illness, who bring a particular experience that is quite useful. Consumer representation is also very important, but needs to be carefully discussed. Some Boards have had 'token' member roles on the Board. Anyone who is a member of the Board of Directors or an Advisory Board needs to be *fully* integrated, and the Board needs to have high expectations of each and every Board member.

It is also important for the Board to find ways of engaging the clubhouse staff.

The Board should be constantly reflecting and brainstorming ways to increase its diversity of representation.

BOARD EDUCATION

We have found that new Board members need an orientation, similar to that given to new members in a clubhouse. A sample of an orientation checklist is provided, indicating all of the essential clubhouse experiences a Board member should be exposed to.

We recommend that each new Board member should have a 'home base' unit within the clubhouse. This will give the unit members and staff a sense of ownership and pride, as well as giving the Board member a true understanding of the life of the clubhouse. The experience of "adopting a board member" provides wonderful opportunities for building strong, lasting clubhouse relationships which benefit the members, staff, and Board members. An educated and involved Board works on behalf of the clubhouse with greater insight and passion, and strives to create the strongest clubhouse possible.

This document is authored by the Fountain House Council for Education, Training, & Research. The Council is a subcommittee of the Board of Directors with community members, Fountain House Members and Staff. (September, 1998)