



Board Transitions – Community Boards

Challenges:

- Level of commitment; unexpected attrition
- Recruitment/building relationships
- Financial involvement vs. time involvement
- Essential vs. non-essential committees – finance, audit, nominating, development, special events
- Competitive landscape with other arts organizations in NYC
- Time (“plankton effect”)

Solutions/tools:

- Board Assist (professional board recruitment company)
- LinkedIn (one posting can yield hundreds of responses)
- Events to introduce potential Board members into the culture of the organization (e.g., open rehearsal with social component)
- Focus on Mission Statement and zero in on community members aligned with it; consider revising Mission Statement if needed; put it on place cards at meetings
- Self managing committee structures
- Relationship based vs. process based



Board Transitions – (Predominantly) Singer Boards

The board and its leadership:

- Executive director and conductor work for the board
- Executive director and conductor have input, but cannot vote and do not always attend
- The professional executive director:
 - Assigns tasks; serves as “point person” to direct questions and problems to the proper people
 - Does not opine on matters that are the responsibility of subcommittees or task forces

Growing the board’s membership:

- Seek out new members among new members of the chorus and audiences
- Identify specific talents of volunteers
- Begin with small tasks and task forces
 - Assign volunteers specific tasks with clear time limits (“This will take just one hour and can be done any time this week...”)
 - Be aware that this creates a problem of scaling up the size of assignments: while many hands make light work, too many hands sets the expectation among all volunteers that no one will have to take on larger tasks
- Reward volunteers who are not on the board for completion of tasks
- Build community among singers first!

Long-term sustainability of a board:

- Many people join an organization because of someone they know
- Transfer board and organization fidelity away from that person to the institution of the ensemble itself



Strategic Planning Transitions – Groups With Current Plan

- Keep meeting objectives clear in every meeting
- The strategic plan should drive (or be) the agenda
- The vision should guide the strategic plan
- The strategic plan may be several plans
- Decisions should be made pro/con based on mission statement and strategic plan
- An effective strategic plan needs regular renewal, regular consulting of the plan, a healthy board, and board “buy-in”
- Next steps:
 - Review status of current plan
 - Establish structure to allow for all of the above
 - For example: review function of nominating committee to re-frame board obligations



Strategic Planning Transitions – Groups Without Strategic Plan (or Plan Not Current)

- Need a task force (suggested limit c. 8 people) – identify resources within group, e.g. marketing expertise; get outside help to organize/educate (there are free services)
- Mission statement needs to come first
- Board members involved
- Subcommittees/functions need to be clearly described
- Assign out tasks to get input from constituencies
- Strategic plan is not the same as a transition plan
- Value and importance of long-term planning – focus on future, larger goals, “big whopping idea” can be part of the discussion
- Can be an issue to get active involvement from larger segment of the group
- Some goals of a strategic plan:
 - Financial sustainability
 - Furthering mission (statement) and artistic goals
 - Audience identification and development
 - Membership identification and development
- Goal-orientation: how to achieve? how to measure? on what timeline? who is responsible?
- Consider generating a process that can be replicated in the future (like the budget process)



Music Director Transition – Groups Led by Founding Director

Questions to begin the process:

- Has the founding director signaled that he or she is ready to retire?
- Is the ensemble's vision sustainable beyond the founding director?
- Can the transition be finally stable?
- Is the board ready to make the transition?

Procedure:

- Plan for retirement of founding director three to five years out
- Director and board should speak about retirement
 - “Bring governance forward, and visibly”
 - Part of an annual review discussion, which should begin in the organization's first year
 - Discussion should be non-threatening, so director does not feel pushed out
 - Consider the sudden death scenario: if founding director died (or won the lottery) tomorrow, how would the organization move forward?
- Search for new director
 - Audience input is not required, though some organizations have a trial season under the baton of directorship finalists
 - Assess how each candidate relates to the audience
 - Assess how each candidate helps put together the program — how does the candidate interact with the board and staff as the group prepares for a concert?

Loyalty of singers:

- Loyalty of singers to ensemble is paramount
- Though this begins with the director, the board or advisory committee can help



Music Director Transition – Groups Not Led by Founding Director

- Is the Music Director a Board member or not?
- Importance of Mission Statement
- Assistant Conductor as candidate or not? If using an interim conductor, is he or she allowed to be a candidate or not?
- Official selection process is important
- Search committee – evaluation and interview
- Communication early in the tenure of the current MD of what he or she wants to see in a successor
- Engage with Board, membership, other constituencies – transparency is crucial for legitimacy
- Importance of outgoing MD not being involved in deciding on the incoming MD – an issue of the integrity of the organization
- If need to replace MD is unplanned/unforeseen, importance of interim(s) for sufficient vetting of new candidate – don't rush
- Founder vs. Institutional Music Director – for institutional integrity, important to define key metrics, and Board support crucial
- Expect bumpy transitions membership-wise
- Primacy of the institution
- The longer the exposure to candidates, the better – in both performance and non-performance (informal as well as rehearsal) settings



Executive Director Transition – Paid Executive Director

What is the reason?

- Retirement → succession plan
- Fatigue or burn-out
- Move-aways
- Term limited
- Growth/change of organization – is there a need for the board to re-focus or re-evaluate the role?

What is the job description?

- Organize/manage subcommittees (gigs, venue, membership, social media, gatherings)
- Vetting and maintaining Chorus Connection
- Thinking about everything – pushing a timetable – knowing everyone else’s job – connecting the dots
- Two kinds – position with functioning board oversight vs. “one man band”
- Operations – Development – Marketing
- Salary c. 10% of budget as a good rule of thumb

How will the transition align with the governance of the organization?

- Identify what your financial plan allows you to pay, and consider raising and/or reserving 3 years of salary in advance
- Are you recruiting from within or outside?
- How will you resolve conflicts of interest?
- How much do you need the person vs. having volunteers/board members fill the gaps?

Where do you find the replacement?

- Ask within the organization – seek people who are the most engaged, work well with others, is experienced
- MBA or MPA in arts management or similar
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) – pairs volunteers with non-profits organizations who need their services
- Non-profit management programs – interns – e.g. New School, other local schools
- Careful about training new staff



Executive Director Transition – Volunteer Executive Director

- Consider the reasons for the transition
- Search process – board, singers, artistic director – consider value of an outside advisor to bring objectivity, honesty, work against organizational hubris
- Detailed and robust job description
- Part of a larger plan for everyone to be replaced as the need arises
- Need to document institutional knowledge – back-ups, passwords, cloud storage; consider also external patron management systems, database tools
- Transparency aids continuity and lowers anxiety
- The Board needs to be in a place to do it
- Need clarity of Board, Artistic Director, and Executive Director roles and responsibilities
- Need Board buy-in to write rational, prioritized job description
- Develop an on-boarding plan; define ramping up goals