This guide was created in collaboration between Sunflower Facilitation & Counselling Co-op, Collective Interchange, Women's Economic Council and BC Co-op Association.

Inclusive Board Orientation Guide for Co-ops

This resource is inspired by and adapted from DeEtta Jones' Inclusive Onboarding Checklist.
This guide is developed to assist the team providing the orientation for a new board director, identify resources that can help guide the process or provide relevant information to the new director. The guide is meant to be used in tandem with the Orientation Guide for New Co-op Board Directors - a version of the same guide but designed for the new board director instead of the team responsible for their orientation. Please note that this resource is intended to be customized to reflect specific aspects important to your co-op. Feel free to adjust this list as you wish!



Orientation is a crucial step in nurturing an inclusive workplace and a critical element for board engagement. This is a two-way process and should promote learning both ways. Successful board orientation ensures a pathway for the new director's unique skillset, perspectives and ideas to be shared and received.

Who is the Orientation Partner? _____

(e.g., Board Chair/other Board Director with support from staff)

Guidelines for inclusive orientation:

- **Orientation should support diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the organization:** A key goal is to ensure a new board director feels valued, welcomed and supported regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and other social identities.
    - To begin a DEI journey, a co-op must first be transparent about where they currently are on this journey and identify what areas they need to strengthen
    - Part of this transparency includes reflection about:
        - where power is held in the co-op (e.g., who decides who makes decisions about what),
        - what power dynamics exist (e.g, who communicates with whom; is there a hierarchy present; how does information flow within the organization – one-way or two-way), and
        - whether any power differences exist between the new director and the Orientation Partner they are paired with and find ways to eliminate or mitigate these differences. See *Sample Resources* on page 7 for further learning.

- **Orientation is a two-way process:** Orientation doesn't just mean integrating a new director into existing systems, but also integrating their unique perspectives and ideas. See it as an opportunity to transform and improve how the board does things.
- **Orientation starts even before the first board meeting**: Some of the information included in the Orientation package should ideally already be included in the board nomination package and/or shared with all co-op members. Reflect on what could benefit from being shared at an earlier stage and/or with a broader audience.
- **Don't rush it**: Orientation is more effective if it happens slowly and not in a marathon session - ideally over a couple of months to allow the new director to absorb the information, reflect, ask questions and come with input.
    - Items of this orientation checklist can be delivered to follow the rhythms and flow of what is taking place now or in the near future. For example, if the performance appraisal for the Executive Director is due, the new director may be asked to sit in and observe the process.

Co-created Expectations for Orientation

What are your goals, expectations and needs related to this orientation process? Jot them down here considering what information is needed, what processes need to be understood, and how relationships are tended to.

Expectations	Notes
Goals - What goals or measurable objectives will orientation accomplish for the new director?	
Content & Information - What key information does the new director need to understand to fulfill this role?	
Process - How is information best shared and new director learning encouraged? What mode of communication is preferred?	
Relationships - How can orientation be structured to create a safe learning environment that builds trust?	

Inclusive Orientation Checklist

1. Before Your Board Director Starts

Aligned with the ethical values of openness and honesty that co-ops hold, providing access to the following information is necessary.

Assemble Documents & Resources for New Directors

- Orienting a new director involves locating documents in your organization's files and deciding how to best use them in the orientation process. Think about how resources, which may include sensitive and confidential information, will be shared.
- Consider accessibility in font size, layout & language. These two resources may be helpful: Digital Accessibility Guide and Inclusive Comms Guide.

Role-related information:

- Director's Agreement
- Role Description, including Duty of Care and Duty of Loyalty
- Board Structure, including committee descriptions
- Decision-making process

Organization-related information:

- Information about co-ops; internationally recognized principles & values
- Bylaws
- Vision, Mission & Values
- Annual Budget
- Annual Report & Financial Statements
- Annual Calendar
- Board structure including committees and their responsibilities
- Process for election of officers
- Recent meeting minutes and reports
- Organizational chart/list with names, roles, pronouns & contact info
- Organization's DEI commitment
- Policies: Conflict of Interest; Complaint/Conflict Resolution; Employment Equity Act; Anti-discrimination & Anti-harassment; other relevant policies
- Accountability Process
- Performance Measures
- Feedback Processes

Optional/if applicable:

- Parking & transportation information
- Employee Handbook / HR policies
- Affinity or employee resource groups/guide
- Keys
- Business cards
- Email account
- Technology equipment (computer/phone/software..)

- Ask about any equipment needs or requests
- Online communication and security protocols

Opportunities to Foster Inclusion and Belonging Before Board Orientation

Review common spaces, both physical and online, for visual indicators of the co-op's values and expectations:

- Do posters, images and other materials reflect an array of diversity?
- Are there gender-inclusive bathrooms? Accessible bathrooms?
    - If yes, are they clearly labelled?
- Are the following designated spaces available?
    - Nursing space?
    - Prayer or meditation room?
- Do online meeting and communication tools, visuals and protocols foster inclusion, safety and belonging?

Prepare the Existing Board Directors, Management and Operational Team:

- Invite the existing board to share ideas about what can be done to welcome the new Board Director. Ask people to make a commitment to actively welcome the new person, show care, and help with questions and resources, as needed.
    - Ask the new director how they want to be introduced, including sharing a bio, with name and pronouns.

Make Connections & Reach Out:

- Assign an Orientation Partner - someone who checks in with the new director on how they are understanding the orientation material, helping them feel prepared for meetings, and answering any questions they might have.
    - Add New Director Orientation on the board's agenda and explore/select who on the board will serve as their Orientation Partner. This person should embody cultural humility, understand the co-op's values, operations, culture and processes and have time to devote to working with the new director.
- Call the new director to let them know that you look forward to working together. Share information that will be useful and ask if they have any questions. Follow up with an email that includes what was shared verbally. Communicating verbally and in writing takes different learning styles into consideration.
- Check in on access needs and set up a plan to accommodate them.
  Access needs: "*Anything a person requires in order to fully participate in their environment or community can be considered access needs. They can be physical or emotional and may require changes to the standard practices of your organization."*[1] It is your duty as an employer to accommodate access needs. (Review human rights requirements applicable to your region, e.g.: Alberta Human Rights Commission, BC Human Rights Code, Canadian Human Rights Commission)
- Orientation Partner to set up an online meeting, telephone call, coffee break, lunch or other way to introduce themselves and their role as the Orientation Partner to the new

[1] How To Meet Access Needs Through Outreach, Youth Friendly

director, creating a supportive relationship on the board. It is helpful if the initial meeting/conversation happens before the first board meeting.
- Add the new director to relevant email lists & meeting invitations.
- Arrange for access to common drives and other internal systems.

2. First Board Meeting

In the first few board meetings, be mindful of sharing contextual details for what is being discussed. This will help the new director build an understanding of what has already happened and how it informs current activities, which ultimately supports the due diligence of the new director.

- The Orientation Partner has checked in with the new director to answer any questions they might have about agenda items or the process to expect in the meeting.
- Be there to greet the new director before the meeting starts, whether that's virtually or in person.
- Introduce the Board. Encourage everyone to share their name, pronouns and role. Perhaps add in an icebreaker question such as "What do you like the most about being connected to this co-op?"
- Show the new director the working space (including a tour of digital workspaces) as well as bathrooms and other relevant facilities.
- Confirm that it's ok for the new director to take on more of an observer role in the initial meeting to deepen their understanding of the process, if they wish.
- Go over the decision-making process and make sure it's understood by the new director.

3. First Month

- Have the new director attend a formal orientation session.
    - You may choose to invite current board directors to attend this orientation as a refresher and to support a culture of continuous learning.
- Introduce the new board director to people in senior leadership, ideally by setting up meetings with critical people during the first month.
- Explain and answer any questions the new board director might have on articles of incorporation, mission and vision, bylaws, values and principles, board roles and responsibilities and how it interacts with members, management and the general public.
- Explain and answer any questions related to the co-op's board governance structures.
- Have an in-depth conversation about the co-op's policies. Make it two-way learning where the new director gets to ask questions, share their thoughts and come with input.
- Share information about and/or arrange for training, conferences and/or professional development opportunities relevant to the new director's role on the board.
- Continue introducing the new director to key people and bring them to relevant events.

4. Feedback/Reflections & Looking Ahead

- Schedule time for debriefing of meetings to help the new director make connections between actions, decisions, practices and the organization's culture. Encourage regular follow-up meetings to provide guidance and answer any questions.

        - In these meetings, make sure to not only check in on questions but also ask for the new board director's thoughts and ideas. It's a great time to gather the person's unique viewpoints and experiences, and it also shows that their viewpoints are valued and that they are welcome to think critically about how things are done.
- Invite observations and questions about the organization's culture, governance structures, practices and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. For example;
    - "Now that you've had some experience with this organization, what are your observations and reflections on our practices and culture?"
    - "What has been working well for you, and why?"
    - "What has been challenging, and why?"
    - "What questions do you have about the 'under the waterline'; elements of our culture that I might be able to help describe?"
- Invite feedback on the orientation process. This could be done in informal (e.g., chat over coffee) and formal ways (e.g., structured interview, standardized questions).
    - "What was helpful or worked well?"
    - "What could have been different or more helpful?"
    - "Were there any gaps remaining after the orientation process was complete?"
- Reflect on your role in orienting this new director and document your learning. Invite and review the feedback from the new director.
    - What worked well? How do you know?
    - How will you share what worked well within your organization?
    - What could have been done differently?
    - What resources do you need to have a more effective orientation practice in the future?
    - What do you need to do to secure needed resources?

Sample Resources

- Meeting agendas for the first two meetings after the AGM
- Board of Directors Job Description Template
- Committee Description's Term of Reference samples
    - Executive Committee - Terms of Reference
    - Finance Committee - Terms of Reference
    - Ad Hoc Committees - Terms of Reference
- Power and privilege; power dynamics: Julie Diamond (infographic and video).