



*Strengthening Oklahoma's Safety Net,  
One Community At A Time*

## **Board Bulletin**

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### **Engaging Board Members to Effectively Govern CHCs**

The Section 330 Community Health Center (CHC) program began over 40 years ago as a means to involve communities in improving health care for all residents. It began at a time in history where many in our nation felt the only answer to the growing chasm between the affluent and the impoverished was community action. One of the core tenets of the 330 program is a consumer majority board – at least 51% of board members must use CHC services. Not only is this the CHC cornerstone, it is a program requirement for entities receiving 330 funding. CHCs must have active, consumer-majority boards to remain eligible for grant funding. In this sense, CHC boards become much more than an ideal way of guaranteeing consumer feedback - they are a lifeline to the grant dollars and health center benefits used to sustain operations. Non-compliant CHCs, those without an active board of at least 9 members, jeopardize continued funding and health care for their community.

#### ***How to Ensure Active Engagement of Board Members***

◆ **Recruitment Strategies** – The first line of defense against board apathy is to make sure only committed individuals are recruited for service. Many times the focus may be on ‘filling seats’ rather than purposefully securing individuals who are right for the job. Potential board members should be interviewed to determine if they have the passion, the time, and the energy required before agreeing to serve on a community board. A great disservice is done to all when recruits are not made aware of requirements beforehand.

◆ **Combat ‘Missing in Action’ by Exposing the Enemy** – If your board has quorum challenges, open communication is required to find out why members are not attending meetings. Difficult questions must be asked, most likely by the board chair, to get to the heart of the problem: *Why are you not able to attend meetings? Is there something that could be changed (e.g., schedule, format, location), if possible, that would make it easier for you to attend? Is this board a priority of yours? What do you like most about board meetings? What do you like the least?* If only a handful of board members attend every meeting, something is wrong that must be exposed so resolution can occur. Lack of time seems to be a pat answer for negligence of all types. Since nothing can be done to increase another person’s time, recognize this as a clear indicator that change has to happen. Organizational bylaws should have board attendance clauses that include procedures to remove members who routinely fail to attend meetings. Boards must proactively address attendance problems before violations occur and be ready to implement the procedures if necessary.

◆ **Work in Regiments** – Committee work is crucial for boards to run like well-oiled machines. If the entirety of the work is done by the whole board, meetings will be long and frustrating resulting in member burnout. Use committees to divide up the work so the board meeting volume can be reduced. Board packets sent in advance of meetings - that include committee reports - help identify priorities and facilitate meaningful board discussion focused on strategies rather than detail. Board decision-making is made easier and meetings are more efficient.

◆ **Trust the Leader** – While boards are stewards of the organization, they must have a leader on the front line to implement approved strategies. Mutual trust is crucial to the board-chief executive officer (CEO) relationship. Both the board and the CEO must be willing to actively communicate with each other. The board should outline specific performance expectations required from the CEO. The CEO must respect the board as the governing body and provide transparent reports that enable effective decision-making. Successful CHCs have a synergized board and CEO working together to achieve established goals and strategic vision.

◆ **Rally the Troops** – Routine celebrations of organizational victories remind volunteers why they became a part of the health center governing board in the first place and why their work is so important for the community served. Honoring exceptional board and staff performance boosts morale and fosters mission-minded service. Instill a corporate culture that settles for no less than excellence – from board members, the CHC management team and staff. It will transform your CHC into a community action beacon bringing pride to all involved.

To review OPCA’s entire *Board Bulletin* series, visit the ‘CHC Boards’ section of [www.okpca.org](http://www.okpca.org).

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