

BOARD ORIENTATION: A TOOLKIT FOR FHTs and NPLCs

A. OVERVIEW

Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed for use by Family Health Teams (FHT) and Nurse Practitioner Led Clinics (NPLC) as a guide to support their ongoing efforts to design and conduct orientation for new Board members.

Toolkit Contents

The toolkit is based on leading practice thinking about what a new Board member needs to know in order to fulfill their governance role, as well as on the orientation materials and processes provided by several AFHTO members. The toolkit includes the following:

- Suggested topics to include when orienting new Board members;
- Other information and topics to include for future reference as needed;
- Links to sample documents and other online resources that can be used in your own orientation package; and,
- Advice on creating your own approach to Board orientation, including tips on managing the amount of information and how to stage the information and learning process.

How to Use the Toolkit

The following are suggested steps for using this toolkit:

1. Review the complete toolkit contents in the context of your own FHT/NPLC's approach to date in orienting new Board members.
2. Create or update your own Table of Contents or list of orientation materials to be provided to a new Board member.
3. Create or update your own process for Board orientation including when and how information is provided to Board member candidates as well as new Board members once confirmed.
4. Consider documenting your final approach to Board orientation in a Board policy on the topic. The Table of Contents for your Board orientation package could be included as an appendix to the policy.
5. If you have any feedback on this toolkit, including suggestions to improve its contents, contact:

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B. WHY FOCUS ON BOARD ORIENTATION?

Board Orientation is Essential to Good Governance

The quality and effectiveness of a Board is directly affected by how well the Board orients new members and supports their ongoing education on matters of importance to the Board and the FHT/NPLC. After successfully recruiting skilled and qualified individuals to the Board, it is the Board's governance responsibility to ensure that proper support is in place to help new Board members fulfill their responsibilities and to maximize their contribution to the best interests of the FHT/NPLC. As the following excerpt from the *AFHTO Fundamentals of Governance* explains, orienting new Board members is essential for both the new member and the Board:

"Each year your Board may need to bring on new Board members. Providing a comprehensive orientation is an important component to ensuring successful participation of these new recruits....and to these new Board members becoming full contributing members of the Board. Orientation gives new Board members valuable information about the organization, the Board's roles and responsibilities, and the Board's processes for how work is carried out. Orientation begins to build a working relationship among Board members and helps new Board members begin to feel integrated into the work of the Board." (*AFHTO Fundamentals of Governance*, p. 49)

Principles for Board Orientation Design

Each organization's approach to orientation, and the information it includes, will be specific to the situation and goals of that particular organization. There are, however, a set of best practice principles to keep in mind when developing a Board orientation program for your FHT/NPLC:

- **The Board is responsible for the quality of governance.** As such, it is the Board's responsibility to ensure that orientation materials are prepared, an orientation process is in place, and each new Board member receives an orientation.
- **Orientation should take place before the new member attends their first Board meeting.** If the orientation is held over several separate sessions, then at least the first session should be completed before the Board meeting and focus on those topics key to the Board member's effective participation in that meeting (e.g., Board member role and responsibilities, code of conduct and managing conflicts of interest, Board meeting processes).
- **Orientation should be mandatory for all new Board members.** This includes a new Board member who is, or has been, involved with the FHT/NPLC in a non-Board capacity. While that person may know the organization well, orientation is essential to ensure they understand their new role and begin to see the organization through a Board lens.
- **Prospective Board members should be informed in advance that orientation is mandatory** and that, if they accept a position on the Board, they will be required to complete a formal orientation following whatever approach has been established by for the FHT/NPLC.
- **Existing Board members should be invited to attend an orientation session** if they wish to "brush up" on their role and the FHT/NPLC's governance practices.

- **The Board should review its orientation program** periodically for quality, relevance and effectiveness and make adjustments as needed.

C. ORIENTATION TOPICS AND MATERIALS

Standard Board Orientation Topics

The information that a Board member needs to begin their new role can be divided into six main categories:

1. **Information about the organization** – this includes your FHT/NPLC's vision and purpose, its strategic priorities, its current financial situation and how the FHT/NPLC is funded, the difference between the FHT and FHO(s) and their relationship, and the FHT/NPLC's key accountabilities including to funders.
2. **The Board's role and approach to governance** – this includes statements or policies on your FHT/NPLC's governance approach and processes and the expectations of the Board and individual Board members.
3. **Key organizational documents** – this includes plans/strategies for the FHT/NPLC that are approved by the Board and executed by management (e.g., quality, risk, budget and financial management).
4. **Information about the broader system or sector** that your organization (and others like it) are part of. For FHT/NPLCs, this includes information about Ontario's healthcare system, primary care, the difference between FHTs and FHOs.
5. **The local community within which the organization operates** – for FHTs/NPLCs, this includes information about your local community and the local health care system of which the FHT/NPLC is a part.
6. **Other general reference material** – this includes background documents that may be useful for future reference or in a specific situation but are not required for understanding the ongoing functioning of a Board.

The information included under Categories 4 and 6 is external to an individual FHT/NPLC and therefore the documents can be shared amongst FHT/NPLCs and resources created that are useful for all FHT/NPLCs. The four other categories require information that is specific to an individual FHT/NPLC and so documents will need to be created or sourced by each organization. That said, sample documents from other FHTs/NPLCs can be useful in identifying what information to include and possible formats.

Sample Table of Contents for a FHT/NPLC Orientation Manual

Appendix A provides a sample Table of Contents for a FHT/NPLC Board orientation manual based on the six categories described above. The Table of Contents lists suggested documents to include under each heading and, where available, includes hyperlinks to sample documents from the *AFHTO Fundamentals of Governance* handbook or provided by other FHT/NPLCs.

The Table of Contents is intended as a guide and its contents can be adapted as needed to suit your own FHT/NPLC.

Tips for Managing the Volume of Information

One of the biggest challenges in Board orientation, for both organizations and new Board members alike, is managing the large amount of information that a person needs to prepare for their new role. For FHT/NPLCs, the challenge is identifying and compiling the necessary information, and keeping it up to date. For new Board members, the challenge is getting through and retaining the amount of information on a wide range of new topics and processes.

The following are tips to help manage the volume of orientation information:

- **Provide orientation documents in electronic pdf format** and use hyperlinks to online materials wherever possible so documents can be updated once at their original location.
- **Include version codes and “last updated on (date)”** on all documents so it is clear how recent the material is. This is particularly important for those Boards that provide orientation documents in hard copy.
- **Store orientation documents electronically in a location that is easily accessible** to all Board members, both for review prior to their orientation and for ongoing reference as needed.
- **Review Board orientation materials annually for relevance and accuracy** by assigning the task to one person (i.e. the Board Secretary) or a committee. The review, and any necessary updates, should take little time if done annually.
- **Wherever possible, use readily available material and/or share with others the resources you have created.** For those topics common to multiple FHT/NPLCs, make best use of information and samples available on the members-only section of the AFHTO website. If you have created your own document that you think would be useful to other FHTs/NPLCs, please send it to AFHTO so it may be added.
- **Explicitly state the purpose of each document or group of documents** so a new Board member knows why they are important and how they relate to their role, the Board and the FHT/NPLC. For example, explain what Bylaws are, what they do, and how they relate to other documents such as the Letters Patent and Board policies.

D. THE ORIENTATION PROCESS

Conducting Orientation in Stages

While some Boards still think of new member orientation as a one-time event, many are moving to a multi-step approach that breaks the information into smaller groupings or themes and delivers it over several sessions.

- One approach is to hold a series of three sessions (about 1 to 1.5 hours each) with each focused on a specific part of the orientation material. For example, session 1 focuses on information about the FHT/NPLC; session 2 on governance roles and processes; and session 3 on the healthcare system and local community.
- Another approach is to offer an initial orientation session to cover the majority of information and then one or more shorter follow-up sessions to provide additional information and allow for the Board member to ask questions since they have had a chance to reflect on earlier discussions and perhaps attend their first Board meeting.

Example: Peterborough FHT Board Orientation Process

Board members are elected at the June AGM. The incoming Board member receives a Board orientation manual that includes organizational background, Mission, Vision and Values, By-laws etc. They also are provided a copy of ["The Board, A Winning Team"](#) booklet which we purchase.

The new Board member meets with the ED in July (approx. 2.5 hours) to discuss documents such as: Annual Report, Strategic Plan, MOHLTC funding agreement, FHT organizational Chart, Committee meeting and structure, Board Committee flow chart, Financial Statements and financial process.

A follow-up meeting (about 1.5 hours) is held in late August/early September, before the new Board member's first Board meeting, to answer any questions about the materials provided.

- A third approach is to tailor the orientation to what a person needs to know at each stage as a Board candidate/new Board member so as to directly connect information provided with their experience at the time. For example:
 - **Prior to an interview** – The first package is intended to assist a candidate in learning about the FHT/NPLC prior to an interview about joining the Board. Information would include publicly available Information about the FHT/NPLC (such as an annual report and strategic plan) as well as role descriptions for the Board and Board members so they understand what the position requires. Information could be provided via email for discussion at the interview.
 - **Prior to a first Board meeting** – As noted earlier, it is essential that new Board members are familiar with the organization and their Board role before attending their first Board meeting. Orientation materials covered at this stage could focus on what the new Board member needs to know to be prepared for the topics to be discussed at the meeting as well as any relevant background.
 - **After the first Board meeting** – The timing of this third session is flexible and provides an opportunity to complete the orientation and information you want to cover, as well as to discuss any questions or reflections the new Board member may have.

Example: Tilbury FHT Board Orientation Process

Prior to being accepted, Board candidates receive a FHT package with information about our team, board, strategic priorities etc. The Board President and ED meet with the candidate to review this package and answer any questions. even though their position isn't confirmed, this is the first step in our orientation process.

Once a new Board member is confirmed, they receive a Board manual (including Board contact list, Board meeting schedule and org structure, By-laws, Board policies, Accountability contracts and Agreements, leadership position descriptions and several organizational documents (Risk Management, QIP etc.).

Documents are on an online portal through our website. Based on feedback that Board members were overwhelmed by the amount of information, our Board orientation session is now less formal without PowerPoint presentations. We also encourage new board members to participate in AFHTO governance webinars and attend the AFHTO conference to help their learning process.

Tips for Designing Your Orientation Approach

- **There is no one “right” way to orient new Board members** so develop an approach tailored to what your FHT/NPLC and the Board feels is most appropriate. Feel free to try different approaches depending on the number of new Board members in a given year and everyone’s availability, as long as all the necessary information is properly covered.
- **Unless distance is a major barrier, conduct orientation sessions in person.** This helps to build relationships between the new Board member and their Board colleagues, as well as with executive leaders in the FHT/NPLC.
- **Consider setting up a mentoring arrangement** by pairing a new and an experienced Board member. This is particularly helpful for a new Board member who has no prior Board experience. Mentoring can be as formal or informal as the two decide. For example, they may want to connect for one hour before the first three Board meetings to help the new member prepare such as reviewing the meeting agenda and materials and discussing what a Board-level discussion of each topic might include.
- **Have the Board Chair check in with new Board members** periodically in their first year to ask how it is going and whether they have any questions, concerns or suggestions. This could be done by phone a short meeting before or after a Board meeting.

APPENDIX A – BOARD ORIENTATION SAMPLE TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOPIC	(Note: Where a sample or online resource is available, the document is included below as a hyperlink. Just click on the underlined topic.)	Include in Orientation	Optional/ For Future Reference
A. OVERVIEW OF THE FHT/NPLC			
1. Vision, Mission and Values		✓	
2. History of the FHT/NPLC		✓	
3. Corporate Structure/Organizational Chart		✓	
4. By-laws		✓	
5. Letters Patent		✓	
6. Strategic Plan		✓	
7. MOHLTC Funding Agreement		✓	
8. Attestation to MOHLTC (most recent)		✓	
9. Other Funder Contracts, Memoranda of Understanding, and/or Accountability Agreements		✓	
10. Annual Report (most recent)		✓	
11. Description of Difference between the FHT and FHO, and relationship		✓	
12. Overview of FHT/NPLC Programs and Services		✓	
13. Financial Statements (latest version)		✓	
B. BOARD AND GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS (* Note: Link will be added in final version to each sample in the existing Fundamentals of Governance templates document)			
1. Position Description/policy on the role of the Board*		✓	
2. Description of the Board membership including any <i>ex officio</i> positions, community members etc.		✓	
3. Position descriptions for individual Board Officers or Roles (i.e. individual Directors, Board Chair, Treasurer etc.)*		✓	
4. Executive Director/CEO Role Description*		✓	
5. Clinical Leadership Role Description(s)*		✓	
6. Other Board Policies (include any other Board policies not mentioned individually here)		✓	
7. Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct*		✓	
8. Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedure*		✓	
9. Statement of Board Member Compliance with code of conduct/conflict of interest (to be signed annually)		✓	
10. Board Meeting Schedule		✓	
11. Board Annual Workplan*		✓	
12. Board Committee Structure		✓	
13. Sample Board Meeting Agenda and/or Policy on Board meetings		✓	
14. Description of the Board decision-making process (including role of		✓	

TOPIC	Include in Orientation	Optional/ For Future Reference
(Note: Where a sample or online resource is available, the document is included below as a hyperlink. Just click on the underlined topic.)		
committees if applicable)		
15. List of Board members and contact information	✓	
16. Board Evaluation Survey Tool or Template*		✓
17. CEO/ED Evaluation Template or Annual Process overview* (do not include actual past evaluation)		✓
18. Annual Compliance Checklist Completed by CEO/ED (most recent)	✓	
19. Overview of Directors and Officers Liability Insurance		✓
C. KEY ORGANIZATIONAL DOCUMENTS		
1. Annual Operating/Business Plan (Board approved)	✓	
2. Annual Budget (Board approved)	✓	
3. Quality Improvement Plan (most recent)		✓
4. Risk Management Plan and/or matrix		✓
5. Patient/Family/Community Engagement Plan		✓
D. OVERVIEW OF ONTARIO's HEALTH SYSTEM		
1. List of Acronyms	✓	
2. A Primer on FHTs and FHOs	✓	
3. About Local Health Integration Networks		✓
E. OVERVIEW OF OUR COMMUNITY/AREA SERVED		
1. Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) website and/or specific LHIN documents that provide relevant context for the Board		✓
2. Map/description of the area served by the FHT/NPLC	✓	
F. OTHER REFERENCE MATERIAL		
1. AFHTO Fundamentals of Governance Handbook		✓
2. AFHTO Fundamental of Governance Tools and Templates		✓
3. AFHTO Website – Governance Webcasts and Case Studies		✓
4. AFHTO Toolkit for Building a Skills-Based Board		✓
5. AFHTO Board Role Checklist for FHTs/NPLCs		✓
6. AFHTO Lead Executive Performance Assessment Guide		✓
7. Statutory Compliance Toolkit for FHT & NPLC Boards		✓
8. Guide to the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act		✓
9. Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General Not-For-Profit Incorporators Handbook		✓