



## **Regional Center Board Onboarding and Competencies Report**

---

AUGUST 22, 2025 (APPROVED BY THE ARCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS)

**Authors:** Association of Regional Center Agencies Board Delegates Group Ad Hoc  
**Committee:** Kelly Pennington, Chair, Lisa Lopez, Vice-Chair, Tracey Miller, Vice-Chair, Mike Sawyer, Cynthia Torres, Larry DeBoer (advisory), and  
**Staff:** Amy Westling, Executive Director and Tony Anderson, Associate Director

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	3
<b>Mission, Strategy, and Evaluation</b> .....	4
<b>History</b> .....	4
<b>California and the Politics of Disability</b> .....	4
<b>We're Here to Speak for Justice</b> .....	5
<b>Strengthening the Commitment... Reinvesting in the System: A Journey of Community Partnership, History of the Regional Centers in California 50th Anniversary Edition 2019.</b> ....	5
<b>The Lanterman Act</b> .....	5
<b>Mission, Vision, and Values</b> .....	6
<b>Overview of the Association of Regional Center Agencies</b> .....	6
<b>Leadership</b> .....	6
<b>The Competencies and Skill Development for Board Presidents and Vice-Presidents</b> .....	6
<b>Board Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Other Officer Leadership</b> .....	7
<i>Passion for the Cause:</i> .....	7
<i>Elected Leaders Leadership:</i> .....	7
<i>Communication Skills:</i> .....	8
<i>Advocacy and Networking:</i> .....	8
<i>Conflict Resolution:</i> .....	8
<i>Decision-Making Ability:</i> .....	8
<i>Strategic Planning:</i> .....	9
<i>Board Development and Sustainability:</i> .....	9
<b>Meeting Management</b> .....	9
<b>Creating A Safe Space to Enhance Board Engagement</b> .....	10
<b>Lanterman Act Requirements for Board Meeting and Composition Requirements</b> .....	11
<b>Conducting Official Board Business in Private</b> .....	12
<b>Cultural Competency</b> .....	13
<b>Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members and Executive Directors</b> .....	14
<b>Conflict of Interest Duty of Loyalty (Lanterman Act Section 4626 – 4627):</b> .....	15
<b>Organizational Structure</b> .....	16
<b>Board Member Mentorship</b> .....	17
<b>Lanterman Act Board composition and DDS requirements in the contract</b> .....	17

<b>General Boardmanship</b> .....	18
<b><i>Three Legal Duties of Board Members</i></b> .....	18
<b><i>Board Conduct</i></b> .....	19
<b><i>How to Make Positive Changes for Your Regional Center</i></b> .....	19
<b><i>Evaluating the Executive Director</i></b> .....	20
<b>Legal Compliance and Ethics</b> .....	21
<b>Articles of Incorporation</b> .....	21
<b>Regional Center Bylaws</b> .....	21
<b>Other Essential Elements and Considerations:</b> .....	21
<b>Public Records Act</b> .....	22
<b>Board Policies (Non-POS)</b> .....	22
<b>Managing Public Comments</b> .....	23
<b>Finance, Operations, and Resource Development</b> .....	24
<b>Your Regional Center Perspective Locally and Statewide</b> .....	24
<b>Caseload Ratios and Other Core Staffing Issues</b> .....	24
<b>Finance</b> .....	25
<b>State to Local Budget</b> .....	26
<b>Public Awareness, Engagement, and Advocacy</b> .....	27
<b>Ambassadorship</b> .....	27
<b>Engagement</b> .....	27
<b>Advocacy</b> .....	28
<b>Conclusion and Responses</b> .....	28
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	30
<b>What is the most challenging part of serving on your regional center board?</b> .....	30
<b>What are the biggest challenges your board faces and how would training and skill development help?</b> .....	32
<b>What is the most significant thing you wish you knew before joining the board and did we cover it in our report?</b> .....	35
<b>Is there anything else we should know?</b> .....	37

## Executive Summary

During the Board Delegates Group meeting in San Diego, on Thursday October 16, 2024, chair Pennington proposed organizing an ad hoc committee to work on designing an outline for board onboarding and general competencies. The group voted to implement the proposal, and the chair committed to selecting a work group and reporting back their thoughts on an outline of the plan and potential recommendations for implementation.

The ad hoc committee came up with a list through a brainstorming process then reviewed the materials of similar work conducted in the past and added them to the list. The Delegates group reviewed and added to the list and received additional feedback from the executive directors' groups which culminated in a large list of about 25 core competencies for regional center boards. The ad hoc committee then worked on consolidating the topics into the following five major themes which we have organized into chapters for the report:

1. Mission, Strategy, and Evaluation
2. Leadership
3. Legal Compliance and Ethics
4. Finance, Operations, and Resource Development
5. Public Awareness, Engagement, and Advocacy

The board delegates engaged in a thorough and thoughtful process where we reviewed best practice literature, articles, and websites to study the current perspectives and, in some cases, legal writings related to the competencies we identified. The design of the report describes each of the competencies and our findings as well as our own original perspectives based on several decades of executive director and board of director experience. The report includes references and guidance for presenters and trainers to bring clarity to what about each competency we recommend for regional center board members. This report has undergone 19 revisions in draft form, and this version of our report is the first non-draft edition.

The committee recognizes that this report in its entirety may feel overwhelming for some, especially for new board members just starting their tenure on a regional center board. However, we have created a document that we intend will stand up over time as a guide for board presidents, officers and other leaders, board mentors, and executive directors to strengthen the board experience and effectiveness in their service. Finally, we recognize that this report is not written in a plain language format, however, we strongly recommend to any trainer that all training be easily understood using plain language and other methodologies to maximize understanding by the most diverse audience.

# Mission, Strategy, and Evaluation

## History

Our state has a long history in supporting people with developmental disabilities. Some of this history today would be considered shameful or embarrassing and other moments are a sense of pride in the California Developmental Services system. Understanding the origins of this history in the nation and throughout time in civilization can help our board members to develop a deep understanding of the origins, purpose and context of their charge in today's modern regional center community system. The most comprehensive self-paced learning resource is the online course, Partners in Time. The following is a description of the course:

*“The history of people with developmental disabilities is a powerful story of discrimination, segregation, abuse, ignorance, silence and, sometimes, good intentions that brought bad results. For the most part, it is the story of people with no power, no choices, no voices, and no champions. Fortunately, that is changing, but it is up to each generation and each person to learn from the past and decide what to do with this information. In Partners in Time, you will travel through time to explore how people with developmental disabilities lived, learned, and worked from ancient times to the present and discover how history continues to repeat itself. You’ll also learn about important changes that are helping to create to a more inclusive society and new opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.”*

Partners in Time is one of five courses in the Partners in Policymaking online curriculum. While it is the longest course, consisting of five modules, over 100 short units, and ranging from 5 to 8 hours of instruction, it is free and well worth the investment of time. We recommend this course be started by the beginning of the second year of service.

- **Resource:** Board members can register for free and access the course online on their own time. The course can be accessed at: <https://partersonlinecourses.com/>

## California and the Politics of Disability

The history of California's state hospital and developmental centers system, while impacted and influenced by the global and national trends, the clinical treatments and philosophies were also unique in significant ways. Board members of a California regional center should understand that our systems were designed for specific reasons that matched the priorities of our state and regions and the origins of how we got here. One of the most comprehensive reports on the California system of institutionalization is reported in the book, California and the Politics of Disability, by Eileen Willis in 2023. While the history in the book traces back to the mid-1800s, chapters seven through nine contain the most insight into our creation of the regional centers.

- **Resource:** (Wallis, Eileen V. [California and the Politics of Disability](#), 1850-1970 / Eileen V. Wallis. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, an imprint of Springer, 2023. Print.)

## **We're Here to Speak for Justice**

The film “We’re Here to Speak for Justice” is required orientation for many new staff at regional centers. This film is described as a “provocative and moving documentary on the founding of the regional center system for people with developmental disabilities and their families in the State of California.” The film was previewed in Sacramento, at the California Secretary of State building just prior to airing on television on February 27, 2000 on KCET. The film was directed by award winning filmmaker Theodore Braun and was viewed across the country.

- **Resource:** [We're Here to Speak for Justice](#) (Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center YouTube)

## **Strengthening the Commitment... Reinvesting in the System: A Journey of Community Partnership, History of the Regional Centers in California 50th Anniversary Edition 2019.**

In 2019 the Frank D Lanterman Regional Center published this 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of the history of the Lanterman Act from 1955 through 2016. This book is a must read for every board member and will complete the board’s foundational knowledge of beginnings, intentions, and purpose for the existence of the regional centers and the California community-based system.

- **Resource:** This book can be reprinted and handed out to each board member and/or a copy of the book can be found online: [Strengthening the Commitment... Reinvesting in the System: A Journey of Community Partnership, History of the Regional Centers in California 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition 2019](#).

## **The Lanterman Act**

Board members should receive a copy of the Lanterman Act and be taught how to use it as a reference manual (DDS may decide to stop printing hard copies of the Lanterman Act books but electronic copies will still be made available). Training should include an overview of the sections of the law and the intersection with landmark legal cases that tested the law (ARC v DDS, 1985; Coffelt v DDS, 1993; Capitol People First v DDS, and The Arc CA and UCP San Diego v Lightbourne and Delgadillo).

- **Resource:** Links for Rights Under the Lanterman Act ([RULA](#)) by Disability Rights California, [the Lanterman Act](#), [ARC v DDS](#), 1985; [Coffelt v DDS](#), 1993; [Capitol People](#)

[First v DDS](#), and [The Arc CA and UCP San Diego v Douglas and Delgadillo](#). (While the RULA is an excellent resource it is not completely objective, like the other resources listed above.)

## **Mission, Vision, and Values**

Board members should have an in-depth review of the Mission, Vision, and Values of their local regional center (including strategic plan if applicable). While memorizing the words of their mission, vision, and values is not important, it is important for board members to know the general meaning behind these statements. The regional center exists to achieve the mission, strive towards their vision for the future, and act in a way that is compatible with their values. The competence demonstrated for this training would be that the board members could describe in their own words the mission, vision, and values of their regional center. The principle for this competency is that “it’s not what the mission is, it’s what the mission does”.

- **Resource:** Each regional center has their own Mission, Vision, and Values Statements. The resource in this case would be the center’s published statement.

## **Overview of the Association of Regional Center Agencies**

It is important for the board members of a local regional center to understand their regional center is a member of the association of all the regional centers in California. In this association various disciplines within the centers convene to work on policies and procedures that are more appropriate for statewide consistency. Some variability may be warranted and appropriate given the geographic and demographic differences, so it is also important to respect and understand local differences based on community needs and interests.

- **Resource:** The association publishes and regularly updates a “Redbook” that includes ARCA’s meeting schedules, members names, map of the catchment areas, elected officers, lists of committee descriptions and rosters, organization chart, mission and strategic plan, educational documents, and bylaws. The Redbook is updates are emailed to the ARCA Board members throughout the year.

## **Leadership**

### **The Competencies and Skill Development for Board Presidents and Vice-Presidents**

The committee received feedback from delegates about needing some type of specialized targeted training to help these two officers in their leadership development. These leaders

are expected to maintain a safe and productive environment to accomplish the regional center's public obligations to inform the community of their activities and progress in meeting their mission. Board members generally want the leaders to be successful and will defer to their direction and leadership as long as they understand there is mission-oriented intention behind their actions. A lot is expected of these individuals who have volunteered to lead their boards, this section is focused on helping them meet these expectations.

## **Board Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Other Officer Leadership**

The position of board president is a very important position for nonprofit boards of directors and depending on the authority granted in the corporation's bylaws they may hold a limited to outsized position of power and influence. At the very least the president serves as the primary facilitator of the board's public business and chief volunteer ambassador of the regional center's mission and position in their community. Board members rely on the president to keep order and decorum in the meetings, ensure the free exchange of diverse perspectives and opinions, and facilitation of thoughtful decision-making and policymaking. Finally, the president is relied upon as being a chief keeper and communicator of the vision, mission, and core values and the connections of these broad strategic principles to the actions and initiatives of the regional center. In order to help the leadership of regional center boards to meet these important obligations we recommend targeted training to strengthen the following competencies and skills:

### *Passion for the Cause:*

Training should include some type of self-reflection process that helps the board members link their personal passions and self-interest with the purpose of the regional center. This can range from obvious needs of clients and families to have a stable responsive system to more general passions like inclusive communities for all people, etc. Genuine enthusiasm and deep commitment to the regional center's mission are essential to inspire the board and stakeholders.

### *Elected Leaders Leadership:*

Training in this area needs to emphasize the principle that no individual, regardless of elected position, has unilateral power and authority over the board or the regional center. Therefore, professional development needs to stress the importance of consistency and integrity of governance and the obligation to ensure all board members receive everything they need to make informed decisions. This ability to lead the board in fulfilling governance responsibilities, including policy setting, fiduciary duties, and strategic goal establishment are the key characteristics and competencies required of elected leaders.



### *Communication Skills:*

Leaders should receive a training session in speaking and writing in plain language, active listening, and how to foster collaboration among diverse board members. Training on this topic should include culturally based communication styles, preferences, and implicit rules.

### *Advocacy and Networking:*

Regional centers' missions are based in public policy commitments and laws that have evolved over decades to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities. These laws were created in response to advocacy efforts of parents and other family members of people with disabilities and over time the advocacy network included self-advocates, service providers, regional centers, and other systems advocates and policymakers. The board members should receive training to understand this tradition of advocacy and how they can play a role in supporting their clients and their communities. This training should also cover the center's legal limitations in advocacy related to the laws related to nonprofits and political activity. Skill in championing the organization's mission, building relationships, mobilizing support, and navigating external partnerships.

### *Conflict Resolution:*

Most work in resolving policy conflicts should be worked on in committee sessions. This gives the committee the most jurisdiction on the topic to gather background information and engage in a facilitated problem-solving session. If the issue is cross-sessional the president could direct a joint session of committees. If the issue is urgent and time sensitive requiring a decision in the meeting then the leader needs to know how to maintain decorum, provide equal time for discussion, assess whether a discussion has been fully informed and to respond to a "call for question" or some other procedure to end discussion. This training should include group problem solving rules and technics, so the leaders know what they are directing a facilitator to do or to even develop the skills necessary to facilitate a problem-solving session for a committee they do not sit on currently. Competence in managing disputes will enhance the leader's understanding diverse perspectives, guide the members toward mutually beneficial outcomes, and build trust with the members and the community.

### *Decision-Making Ability:*

Since board members never perform any of the operational duties or functions of the organization nor do they make decisions that are the purview of management The leaders need to be very clear about the jurisdiction of their decision-making. One tool regional centers use in person-centered planning is called the donut model. This model helps people decide proactively what type of decisions are in their domain. There are several decision-making models that business and governments use in making sure all factors

have been considered and that the final decisions are based on some agreed upon standard.

#### *Strategic Planning:*

Regional centers have required reports that involve various levels of strategic planning such as the performance contract report, service access reports, National Core Indicator reports. Some centers choose to add a more formal additional strategic planning process to focus on items not covered in the state's required reports that have a long-term systemic focus rather than the situation nature inherent in the current mandatory reports. This training session needs to describe the components of engagement, action planning and following up, measurement of goals, and ways to assess whether the actions are showing improvement on the goals.

#### *Board Development and Sustainability:*

Leaders must be able to make honest assessments about the strengths of the board and the skill gaps. The Lanterman Act requires a few representation requirements, highlighted below in the composition section, but based on the goals and priorities of the local regional center there will be other skills the board is seeking. The training should include the reasons for using self-assessment tools, a review of various tools, and a component to assess the board's performance. The Nominating Committee chair, often served by the past president in their last year of their board term, is the key member who facilitates the recruitment of members with the missing skill sets of the current board.

- **Resource:** Bella Williams. (2025). *Top 7 Board of Directors Evaluation Tools - Insight7*. <https://insight7.io/top-7-board-of-directors-evaluation-tools/>
- **Resource:** Emily Priddy. (2023). *How to Find Your Purpose: Simon Sinek's Simple Exercise*. <https://simonsinek.com/stories/learn-simons-simple-exercise-for-finding-your-why/>

## **Meeting Management**

The most common activity of board members is to attend and participate in meetings of the nonprofit corporation. Some meetings are smaller, and task oriented, such as the Finance Committee, Nominating Committee, Executive Committee, Legislative Committee, Events Planning Committee, etc. to name a few examples. However, the full board of directors' meetings are usually larger meetings primarily focused on information sharing, committee reports on their activities, public feedback, public notices, and decision-making on recommendations. The bylaws of each regional center most likely include a description of the rules each center uses to manage their meetings. These "parliamentary procedures" are simply the stated rules the board agrees to follow in

managing their meetings, often called rules of order. The most common rules of order are Robert's Rules of Order. While Robert's Rules may feel too complex for some boards there are alternative methods such as modified versions of Robert's Rules, the Carver Method, Sturges, Cannon's Rules, Martha's Rules, and a variety of consensus models. Another option for creating dynamic meetings is to follow the roles and responsibilities described in the 1976 book, "How to Make Meetings Work" by Michael Doyle and David Straus. While probably best suited for committee meetings of the board, it could still be useful for portions of board meetings that are more dynamic and engaging and focused on problem solving, solutions, and strategy decisions. The model includes a chair, a facilitator, a recorder, and a timekeeper as examples of the core roles in this model. The main take away here is that we recommend boards be intentional about their rules of order and receive early and periodic training on their parliamentary procedures.

- **Resource:** We recommend that each board identifies a resource that is well-versed in parliamentary procedures and meeting management for an annual refresher class. To find your [local parliamentarian, click here](#).
- **Resource:** Michael Mouritsen, RP. (2023). *Some Alternatives to Robert's Rules of Order*. <https://medium.com/@mmouritsen/some-alternatives-to-roberts-rules-of-order-279491f03fe0>
- **Resource:** How to Make Meetings Work! by Michael Doyle (Author), David Straus (Author), [Amazon Books link](#).

## Creating A Safe Space to Enhance Board Engagement

We received several comments on the competency for creating a safe space for board members, specifically for the board members in leadership positions. Board members who feel their input is welcome are more likely to engage during discussions and therefore have a more satisfying experience in their role and be more productive overall. Board members have a Duty of Care that they cannot uphold if they don't feel welcome or safe to contribute. We recommend board members receive training that highlights the benefits and importance of having a meeting environment that makes everyone feel welcome and safe. We recommend that the training covers the following topics:

1. Active Listening
2. Clear Conflict Guidelines
3. Embrace Diversity (diversity, equity, and inclusion to deepen understanding and awareness)
4. Understand Board Dynamics
5. Promote Member-to-Member Communication
6. Team Building
7. Ongoing Education
8. Clear Objectives

9. Welcoming Atmosphere
10. Acknowledge contributions
11. Address Toxic Behaviors

- **Resource:** Nicole Heimann. (2024). *Why safe spaces and being real are vital for healthy boardrooms.* <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2024/04/15/why-safe-spaces-and-being-real-are-vital-for-healthy-boardroom-relations/>
- **Resource:** Jennifer Rose Hale. (2024). *Transforming board engagement: Expert insights for mission-driven ...* <https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/experts-share-tips-board-engagement/>
- **Resource:** By: Josh Palmer. (2024). *How to Improve Board Member Engagement: 5 Tips - OnBoard.* <https://www.onboardmeetings.com/blog/board-member-engagement/>
- **Resource:** Felicity Menzies. (2025). *How Leaders Can Foster Psychological Safety in Their Teams.* <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-leaders-can-foster-psychological-safety-teams-felicity-menzies-hleze>

## Lanterman Act Requirements for Board Meeting and Composition Requirements

The Lanterman Act law describes the requirements for board meetings. While regional centers are not subject to the Brown Act (schools) or the Bagley Keene Act (government) the regional centers follow open meeting requirements as directed by the Lanterman Act. Every board member must receive a copy of Article 3 and we recommend training that explains in plain language the requirements in this article as well as Article 1 4622 - 4625. This training on the boards obligations under the Act should include a description of the board policy around approving contracts over \$250,000 a year as referenced in Article 1 4625.5 (a) and (b).

We recommend the training regarding the board composition explain the methodology the department uses, what boards are supposed to do if they are not in compliance with the composition, and an explanation of how the board is meeting subdivisions (a) to (f), inclusive, of Section 4622 to include people:

1. with a demonstrated interest,
2. who have legal, management or board governance, financial, and developmental disability program expertise,
3. who have a lived experience with various categories of disability served by the regional center,
4. from a geographic and ethnic characteristics connection in the centers area; and

5. who have not served more than seven consecutive years within eight-year period.

In addition, the training should include assurances that at least 25% of their board is a person with a developmental disability and that 50% of the board is a person with a developmental disability or a family member or legal guardians.

- **Resource:** Article 3 Section 4660 of the Lanterman Act the law to cover the board meeting requirements and Article 1 Section 4622 – 4625 to cover Board Composition and related requirements: [The Lanterman Act](#).
- **Resource:** Article 3 Section 4660 of the Lanterman Act the law to cover the board meeting requirements and Article 1 Section 4625.5. (a) and (b).

## Conducting Official Board Business in Private

While almost all board conversations and activities are conducted in a public forum and format, the Lanterman Act does recognize that there are some occasions when it is allowable and appropriate for the board to meet in private. One example of an appropriate private gathering of the board would be to conduct board training. It is allowable to meet privately to learn the many topics involved in boardmanship and the regional center and the community system. Board members should not discuss topics that are potential board meeting agenda items for action. For example, a board might want training on the Home and Community Based Services rules which is permissible, however, they cannot discuss the pros and cons of a board policy to limit the capacity of licensed homes as a way of staying consistent with the HCBS rules. This would be a violation because the intention for closed session was stated as training, but the board actually conducted business that should have been public. You do not want to act or create an impression that the board has met privately to discuss and act on an agenda item or in any way make a policy decision. In addition to board development, there are several specific reasons outlined in the Lanterman Act, Article 3 Section 4663 through Section 4665, that allow for privacy for the board members. The following are the conditions and allowances for meeting in closed session:

- 1) Real estate negotiations,
- 2) The appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, or dismissal of a regional center employee,
- 3) Employee salaries and benefits,
- 4) Labor contract negotiations,
- 5) Pending litigation.

The purpose of allowing for a closed session is to address sensitive matters that have a personnel or other legal nature to them. This provision allows the board members to discuss a sensitive topic in a format that encourages open dialogue, but it requires strict

confidence among the members and typically only involves the board members. Exceptions to this limit of involvement could be the inclusion of an administrative staff to take notes, or support staff for board members to ensure understanding and participation. What's important here is that the board members must receive the support necessary and sufficient to be most effective in their role as a director of the board.

Confidentiality is a critical requirement for all those participating in the closed session and the presiding officer of the meeting should ensure everyone understands their obligation to maintain confidentiality and the consequences and risks of violating this obligation. Board members share a fiduciary duty to uphold confidentiality (duty of care is a type of fiduciary duty) and they cannot share any information discussed in closed sessions with unauthorized parties. Assurances of understanding their obligations could take the form of reviewing their fiduciary duty and signing an agreement to create a record of the board member's understanding. Non board members should be held to this assurance as well. Any participant who breaches this confidentiality should understand that this breach could lead to disciplinary actions, removal from the board, civil liability and criminal legal consequences. This allows the board to freely conduct this highly sensitive function while building trust with each other and securing the organization's interests and complying with legal and ethical standards of a closed session.

- **Resource:** Article 3 Section 4663 through Section 4665 of the Lanterman Act.
- **Resource:** Executive Sessions for Nonprofit Boards - BoardSource. (2023). <https://boardsource.org/resources/executive-sessions/>

## Cultural Competency

The Lanterman Act requires each regional center to provide necessary training and support to board members so that they will understand the language and cultural issues that various people with disabilities and families are experiencing. This training helps to meet the board's obligation to know how well their center provides services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate. To assess this standard effectively, we think it is important for the board members to receive training on cultural humility, cultural competence, and the impact of implicit bias. Board members are providing leadership for their regional centers which are comprised of a diverse workforce of individuals who come from backgrounds and experiences different than their own. It is important for people with disabilities and their families to experience their regional center leadership as respectful and open to diverse needs and ways of expressing themselves.

- **Resource:** We recommend the board have access to an annual one-hour training session by the same trainer who provides the annual implicit bias training to the regional center staff.

## Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members and Executive Directors

	Board Members	Executive Directors
<b>Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic direction for the regional center and the connection between the center's actions and its vision.</li> <li>• Ensure the existence of policy and procedures for sound governance, and oversight of the center's assurance of governance.</li> <li>• Ratification and oversight of the contract with the Department of Developmental Services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for the day-to-day operations, the organizational structure and assignment of delegated authorities.</li> <li>• The implementation of the management of systems and personnel.</li> <li>• Implementation and execution of the terms in the contract with the Department of Developmental Services.</li> </ul>
<b>Responsibilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty of Care: a legal responsibility to participate actively in making decisions on behalf of the organization.</li> <li>• Duty of Loyalty: The organization's needs come before personal and professional interests.</li> <li>• Duty of Obedience: the legal responsibility that the regional center complies with the federal, state, and local laws and adheres to its mission.</li> <li>• Approving budgets and monitoring financial health.</li> <li>• Selecting and evaluating the executive director.</li> <li>• Ensuring legal and ethical integrity</li> <li>• Enhancing public standing in the region, through ambassadorship,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing leadership for all staff and mentorship of senior leaders.</li> <li>• Managing an appropriate span of control for all levels of management for strategic and operational purposes.</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate staff development to achieve the competencies necessary to advance the mission and vision of the regional center.</li> <li>• Inform the state of the funding needs of the center and advocate with other regional center directors.</li> <li>• Uphold the responsibility of stewardship of the use of public funds. Operate within the allocation for operations and mandate of the Lanterman Act and the contract.</li> <li>• Implementing strategies</li> </ul>

	<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Executive Directors</b>
	transparency, and opportunities for input and public engagement.	
<b>Decision-Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative, no one person has authority, the authority is in the collective body.</li> <li>• Decisions are made through dialogue and exchange in mostly public meetings.</li> <li>• Informed by using information from public input and data provided by the organization's professionals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent decisions based on professional judgement are often confidential, such as personnel decisions, or protected information about clients.</li> <li>• May be made participatively with diverse input, the accountability for the final decision is rested on the Executive Director.</li> <li>• Boards may establish the framework for decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Key Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular communication and collaboration with the executive director</li> <li>• Providing counsel and guidance</li> <li>• Setting clear expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing necessary information to the board</li> <li>• Keeping the board chair informed</li> <li>• Working with the board on strategic planning</li> </ul>
<b>Qualities for Success</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of mission and purpose</li> <li>• Active participation</li> <li>• Ethical conduct</li> <li>• Curiosity about the scope of services and initiatives of the center.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and communication skills</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Focus</li> <li>• Knowledge of industry legal framework (Lanterman Act, Education, and labor laws)</li> </ul>

### **Conflict of Interest Duty of Loyalty** (Lanterman Act Section 4626 – 4627):

Board members should have no ambiguity about their role to protect the integrity of the regional center as it is essential in earning the trust of the community. The duty of loyalty is met through your assurance that you cannot benefit personally from any level of discussion on an issue or topic. Some conflicts are obvious, but others are subtle, unknown, or just perceived conflicts. The regional center and the board member have a joint responsibility to identify potential conflicts on agenda items for board actions. When



the item comes up for discussion in the board meeting the board member needs to excuse themselves from the room to avoid any influence or perceived participation in the deliberation. The slightest facial expression or movement may be perceived as an expression of an opinion. Anytime you have a real or perceived conflict it is best to remove yourself completely from the room and to be completely out of the sight line of any board member. When the action is complete the chair should request the staff to bring you back to the meeting. In addition to meeting logistics, each board member shall submit a conflict of interest form every year.

- **Resource:** *Board Member Roles and Responsibilities* | BoardSource. (2016). <https://boardsource.org/fundamental-topics-of-nonprofit-board-service/roles-responsibilities/>
- **Resource:** Board Roles and Responsibilities | National Council of Nonprofits. (2024). <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/running-nonprofit/governance-leadership/board-roles-and-responsibilities>
- **Resource:** Toni Hoy. (2023). *What Are the Basic Board Member Responsibilities?* - BoardEffect. <https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/10-basic-responsibilities-board-members/>
- **Resource:** By: Gina Guy. (2024). *Board Member Positions: Titles, Roles, and Responsibilities*. <https://www.onboardmeetings.com/blog/board-member-positions/>

## Organizational Structure

While forming the bureaucratic and organizational structure of the regional center is not a board function, the board should understand the logic behind the structure as it is the way the executive director designs the structure to achieve the mission and vision of the center and the obligations of the contract with DDS. The board should understand the organization chart, the purpose of each section, and who has the delegated authority. We also recommend an overview of the organization of the state government, the Department of Developmental Services, and the legislative processes.

- **Resource:** The most important resource would be the regional center's organizational chart. A presentation from the Executive Director on the organizational chart would meet this competency.
- **Resource:** As an informational resource here is an article describing organizational structure in a generic sense. Moinul Alam. (2024). *What is Organizational Structure? Definition, Types, Hierarchy, and ...* <https://ideascale.com/blog/what-is-organizational-structure/>

## Board Member Mentorship

Many have talked about the tremendous benefits of mentorship people have received in their journey to an enjoyable and effective experience as a board member. Most of these experiences have been informal, either sought after or offered by experienced board members. We believe an intentional mentorship program is part of the successful onboarding process. This does not mean the “program” should be ridged or that there is only one best way to implement it. The mentor and the new board member should collaborate to determine the arrangement that will work best for them to ensure successful mentorship. Some of the key elements of a successful mentoring program should include:

1. Clear Objectives and Goals
2. Strong Support and Commitment
3. Careful Matching of Mentors and Mentees
4. Structured Meetings and Check-Ins (be flexible with this and don't let the structure prevent meaningful engagement)
5. Defined Expectations: Set clear expectations for mentors and mentees, including the number of meetings, communication frequency, and measurable goals. Expectations should include demonstrated understanding of procedures and increased knowledge.

In addition to these principles above, the mentorship program may include the following steps in implementing a successful program: (1) Setting Ground Rules, (2) Understanding Mentee Priorities, (3) Establishing a Contact Schedule, (4) Active Listening and Questioning, (5) Accountability, and (6) Reporting outcomes to the board president or their designee. Mentorship, while described as extremely helpful by many, is also a recognized additional time commitment on the part of the person being mentored and the mentor, and for some boards may not be a viable option. It may be helpful to have previous board members in good standing provide the mentorship that way only one active board member is participating in plus the board may decide to allow this board member to not be obligated to a board committee during the time of their mentorship.

- **Resource:** *Mentor Your Way to Board Development* - BoardSource. (2024). <https://boardsource.org/resources/mentor-to-board-development/>
- **Resource:** Chutisa Bowman. (2020). *Mentoring guidelines for new Directors* - *Conscious Governance*. <https://consciousgovernance.com/blog-archives/mentoring-guidelines-for-new-directors>

## Lanterman Act Board composition and DDS requirements in the contract

While Article 1 of the Lanterman Act covers the contract elements, we think it would be more effective to work through the actual contract with DDS. We recommend including a

description of the contract language changes and the reason and process for agreeing with the changes described by the ARCA Contract committee chair. We believe it's helpful to understand the difference between the department's required training topics and those chosen by the local regional center.

- **Resource:** The Regional Center and Department of Developmental Services Contract and the training requirements letter from DDS.

## **General Boardmanship**

This section is meant to capture the general intentions, perspectives and purpose that must be present for boards to meet their professional obligations to the regional center, to the contract with the state, and to the community it serves as stated in the Lanterman Act.

### ***Three Legal Duties of Board Members***

Board members do not have to all think alike nor do they need consensus to operate, however all board members are legally obligated to uphold the following three duties: (1) the Duty of Care (be engaged, do your homework, and make thoughtful decisions), (2) the Duty of Loyalty (the benefit of the organization above your own self-interests), and (3) the Duty of Obedience (ensure the regional center follows its bylaws, Lanterman Act, contract, tax filings, and all applicable laws) as described in nonprofit public benefit corporations law under the California Corporations Code Section 5231. While the board has a legal obligation to uphold the conditions of the contract with the state and the rules that govern the board in the Lanterman Act it also has an equal obligation to uphold the statutes of the California Corporations Code for governing public good nonprofit corporation. We recommend a training course focused on the three duties in the context of serving on a regional center board and we recommend these duties be infused into other training courses to be used as a foundation for board service. Finally, training on what constitutes a breach of duty and what are the likely consequences for these breaches.

- **Resource:** *3 legal duties every board member must follow* | Grant Thornton. (2023). <https://www.grantthornton.com/insights/articles/nfp/2023/three-legal-duties-every-board-member-must-follow>
- Jonathan Grissom Henderson, Caverly, Pum & Charney LLP. (2025). Nonprofit Corporations: Board Authority and Fiduciary Duties. <https://www.sdcba.org/?pg=FTR-Feb-2017-5>

## ***Board Conduct***

To help us keep our board on track and responsive to our community charge, it is important for boards to develop a collective understanding that their focus must be broad and strategic in nature. They should consider the board's activities, respect the opinions of other members, especially dissenting opinions, and act in the organization's best interest. Efforts should be made by the leadership of the board and the executive director to develop good working relationships, fellowship, congeniality, and professional decorum. Board conduct can be in various levels of informality depending on the context or occasion of the meeting and the comfort level of its members, but consistency and order will help board members feel safe and promote engagement. We recommend board members who serve as chairperson of any committee receive individualized training on conducting effective meetings and additionally there should be skill development for a board member to serve as parliamentarian or “sergeant of arms” to serve as a meeting “monitor” to provide procedural assistance to the chairs as needed.

## ***How to Make Positive Changes for Your Regional Center***

We have observed that some people join their regional center boards because they want to make a difference but are often not encouraged or know how to work on meaningful change that will better serve the community. “To become a changemaker while serving on a board, you can focus on inspiring change, offering solutions, and building relationships. Changemakers in any setting are connected, involved, and dedicated to the greater good. Within a board, focus on strategic thinking, take on leadership roles, and deeply understand the organization's mission and goals.” When your Executive Director presents systemic struggles with historic origins, it most likely means the problems are entrenched and the solutions are multilayered and require a strategic collaborative approach. Volunteering to head up an exploratory committee or study group to analyze the problem and report back recommended paths to solutions will help board members as leaders stay focused on long range strategic solutions. Being fully informed and fully engaged in deliberate planning as one of the core functions of a board member, puts you in a position of leadership and makes you a change agent in a most thoughtful way. We recommend all boards participate in some form of planning for addressing systemic issues and that board members receive training in group problem solving to be prepared for a productive planning process.

- **Resource:** Jennifer Osborne. (2021). *How to Be a Changemaker at Work* - Medium. <https://medium.com/connections-pub/how-to-be-a-changemaker-at-work-6a6e148f1d05>

## ***Evaluating the Executive Director***

Evaluating the Executive Director is the most common significant activity of the board of directors for a regional center. It is an important responsibility that leads to tenured stable leadership in the regional center, builds trust among all levels of stakeholders, and keeps the regional center aligned with mission, vision, and values. It is extremely important for the viability of the regional center and the regional center system of services and support for people with disabilities. The Lanterman Act illustrates this importance through the requirement that “the governing board shall annually review the performance of the director of the regional center” (4622 (j) (1)). Keeping in mind the duties of boardsmanship, Care, Loyalty, and Obedience the annual evaluation is the action the president or chair, and perhaps the executive committee, engages in to represent the board in meeting these obligations and duties. This training should consider:

1. A description of models of executive director performance assessment tools and the pros and cons of each model.
  2. How to Create an Evaluation Team (if it is completed solely by the president then decide where input will come from)
  3. How to use the “Job Description” as the foundation for the evaluation.
  4. How to develop concrete annual goals with the executive director and evaluate them and include guidance for Executive Directors to submit their annual goals.
  5. How to conduct regular schedule of self-evaluation and feedback – the idea here is the annual evaluation should not bring up anything new that hasn’t been discussed during the year.
  6. A process for evaluating the difference of the Self-Evaluation with Board Evaluation.
  7. Dos and Don’ts of writing a professionally written summary of the evaluation.
  8. Best practices for having the in-person evaluation: walk through the document, discuss feedback, and identify areas of focus for the coming year.
  9. What needs to be reviewed when discussing matters of compensation? While typically the duty of the executive committee, some boards elect to have a full board conversation and other delegate to the president. The training should present the benefits and weaknesses with each approach.
  10. Best practice for meeting with the executive director to discuss compensation in all possible scenarios.
- **Resource:** *Here’s a Simple Executive Director Performance Review Example.* (2022). <https://joangarry.com/video/simple-executive-director-performance-review/>
  - **Resource:** *Executive Evaluation and Compensation - BoardSource.* (2016). <https://boardsource.org/fundamental-topics-of-nonprofit-board-service/executive-evaluation-compensation/>

## Legal Compliance and Ethics

### Articles of Incorporation

The Articles of Incorporation are important because they form the basis of the nonprofit corporation, as described in your regional center's filing to the Secretary of State. They also serve as proof that you can legally operate in California. While this is important for meeting the duty of obedience, it is sufficient to see it exist, review its purpose, and observe that it was approved and received the state seal of approval.

### Regional Center Bylaws

While the Articles of Incorporation layout the purpose for the company and its legal structure as a nonprofit, the basic operational details are broad and general in scope. The real framework for the governance of the regional center board of directors and its officers is described in the Bylaws of the corporation. The Bylaws, which are created and ratified by the board of directors, are the legal guidelines for the organization and declare the (1) purpose and name of the regional center, (2) the officers and their responsibilities in their roles, terms, etc., and (3) meeting frequency and procedural rules for the meetings.

We recommend that the board members receive overview training of their bylaws, at least once in their term, and be given sufficient time to ask questions. Because of the legal nature of the Bylaws a board member may ask questions outside of the professional scope of practice of their executive director and may need legal counsel. In addition to an overview of their regional center's Bylaws, we recommend training on Bylaws best practices to include:

1. **Board Members:** Roles and Terms, Term Limits, Board Structure, Officers, Positions, Election and Termination.
2. **Meetings:** Frequency and Annual Meetings, Special Meetings and Notices, Quorum, Voting Procedures, Record Keeping.
3. **Committees:** Standing Committees, Creation and Authority, Committee Composition,
4. **Conflict of Interest Policy:** Reporting Requirements, Mitigation of Conflicts
5. **Bylaws Development:** Amendment of Bylaws, Amendment Process:

### Other Essential Elements and Considerations:

1. **Chief Executive Role:** Specify the board's authority to hire and terminate the executive director, including the number of votes needed for such decisions.

2. **Regular Review:** Bylaws should be reviewed approximately every two years to ensure they accurately reflect the organization's operations and remain relevant.
  3. **Public Availability:** Making the Bylaws public can increase the organization's accountability and transparency, fostering trust among donors, supporters, advocates, the community, and beneficiaries.
  4. **Professional Review:** It is advisable to have a qualified professional with experience in nonprofit matters assist in drafting or amending the bylaws and ensuring compliance with state laws.
  5. **Avoid Overly Specific Details:** The Bylaws give a global direction for the operations of the organization but should not include personnel items or operational policy and procedures.
- **Resource:** Ilma Ibrisevic. (2021). *Nonprofit Bylaws: Complete Guide With Tips & Best Practices*. <https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/nonprofit-bylaws-made-easy>
  - **Resource:** Ellis Carter. (2022). *Nonprofit Bylaws - What to Include and What to Leave Out*. <https://charitylawyerblog.com/2022/02/07/nonprofit-bylaws/>

## Public Records Act

The California Public Records Act (CPRA) is required of the regional centers and it's important to ensure we protect the safety of information of the people we serve and that we maintain our Duty of Obedience in our role of board members. While board members should only communicate on business matters in the public eye, it will be important to train board members to be discreet in all their communications with each other because the line between business and personal may easily be blurred and it may all be discoverable under the CPRA law.

We recommend that board members receive training on what your regional center has put in place to secure this private information, the board's responsibilities and legal requirements, best practices for board members to ensure they are not receiving nor deliberating on personal information, and how to protect the personal privacy rights of people with disabilities especially in the context of public comments and informal written correspondence, and what communications are subject to the public records requests.

## Board Policies (Non-POS)

Some board policy topics are required of every regional center across the state, so having consistent policies and procedures in these topic areas would be helpful for all board members. Having a consistent and sufficient body of policies that have been developed by scanning the existing available policies of other centers, written with expert counsel, regularly reviewed and updated as needed, and ratified by the board is important for good governance, transparency, and accountability. We recommend training and education to

ensure that everyone understands the procedures, rules, and their responsibilities for each policy and that these written policies and training courses be easily accessible to all board members, staff, and the public. The board trainings for these board policies could be delivered regionally with a small group of regional centers or even statewide with all regional centers in the following policies areas:

1. Zero Tolerance
  2. Approval of Contracts Over \$250,000
  3. Conflict-of-Interest
  4. Whistleblower
  5. Transparency
- **Resource:** Recommended Board Practices - BoardSource. (2023). <https://boardsource.org/resources/recommended-board-practices/>
  - **Resource:** Lena Eisenstein. (2021). *Basics and Best Practices for Nonprofit Board Governance*. <https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/basics-and-best-practices-for-nonprofit-board-governance/>

## Managing Public Comments

The public comments process for regional centers are often a difficult process to manage and can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable for board members. It is important for the public trust and transparency to conduct public comment sessions that ensure the commenters feel heard and at the same time the board is informed and that the process is productive and orderly. When public comment becomes chaotic and out of control the public loses its confidence in the regional center and the board members can feel unsafe and confused. Training, including practice managing public comments, is important for all board members and especially those in elected positions. This training course should include the following:

1. Establish Clear Guidelines: Have a comment policy and clearly outline what kinds of comments are acceptable and what are not. Include rules about spam, offensive language, harassment, and irrelevant content.
2. Be Proactive and Responsive: Be sure to collect comments to be reported on or followed up with later.
3. Handle Negative Comments Professionally: Stay Calm and Objective: Respond to negative comments with a professional tone and avoid getting defensive.
4. Manage Spam and Irrelevant Content Through Filters (online meetings): Implement automated filters to catch common spam or irrelevant comments. (have the board Sergeant of Arms, Parliamentarian, or other officer Moderate) Regularly review and moderate comments to ensure compliance with your guidelines.
5. Unbiased and Courteous: Be courteous and thank people for their public comments and maintain an impartial demeanor.



6. Assign a monitor: The chair could assign a designee to monitor the meeting tone and temperament to ensure the protection of privacy and recommend de-escalation procedures.
  7. Remove Personal Information: Avoid sharing or allowing the sharing of personal information in comments.
  8. Monitor for Abuse: Be vigilant about comments that may include threats, harassment, or other abusive behavior.
  9. Analyze and Improve: Review Feedback: Regularly analyze comment trends and feedback to improve your policies and practices.
  10. Adjust Strategies: Be willing to update your approach based on what works and what doesn't.
- **Resource:** Jeremy Pollack. (2024). 7 De-Escalation Skills Essential for Defusing Conflict. <https://pollackpeacebuilding.com/blog/de-escalation-skills/>

## **Finance, Operations, and Resource Development**

### **Your Regional Center Perspective Locally and Statewide**

We think it is important for board members to have a working knowledge of the scope of their center and the full system as well. Having a map that shows the 21 regional centers with the numbers of people served will provide them with perspective and may help them put things into proportional viewpoints when compared to other centers. It would be helpful if they understood how many employees' other centers employ and other common traits.

### **Caseload Ratios and Other Core Staffing Issues**

We feel board members should have an understanding of how the state determines the budget allocations for regional center Operations and Purchase of Services (POS) as well as how their regional center calculates the caseload ratios, have an understanding of the history and reasons for each category of caseload ratios, and other parts of the core staffing formula (administration supports for case management, intake, clinical personnel, specialty personnel, etc.). The training should be clear that board members are not making staffing decisions, but they should understand how the staffing decisions relate to the core purpose and goals of the regional center. The center must live within their operations allocations and if the funds are insufficient to match the ratios, and other elements of the core staffing formula they should understand the intention behind the management decision and how that intention impacts their focus in strategic leadership.

## Finance

Understanding financial reports feels intimidating for some board members so training to demystify this competency would help them to have the confidence to ask questions related to the board fiscal reports. The training should cover how the regional center budget was made, what is the regional center thinking of as potential new costs and are there areas where costs might come down? Telling a narrative story that gives the board global insight into how your center might be impacted by trends common in the state and or unique to your region will orient the board member to associate this information with their longer-range leadership perspective. Understanding what tools, POS Expenditure Projections (PEP) or Sufficiency of Allocation Report (SOAR), etc., the regional center uses to project spending would also provide the members with insight into the fiscal health of the regional center. Also, knowing how the center is detecting changes in their environment that might impact the center's budget provides the board member assurances that they will not be confronted with an unexpected financial crisis. We recommend the following for the board member's financial literacy and competency:

<b>Use Plain Language</b>	First and foremost, plain language is essential because if a board member does not understand the financial report, then they are not able to honor their duty of care. While the board members should ask questions about things they do not understand, it is primarily the responsibility of the Executive Director and their Chief Financial Officer. Actual terms may be necessary in some instances such as submission of financial reports to professional institutions, but they are not necessary in assuring understanding by board members. For example, liabilities could be called "what we owe" or prepaid assets could be called "expenses paid in advance", etc. Using pictures (graphs and charts) are also recommended for helping all board members understand the financial status of the center.
<b>Avoid Data Overload</b>	Too much information on too many topics prevents the board from asking questions and they may wait on questions thinking they will eventually get their questions answered during the long presentation. The regional center's annual report may be the best format for covering all areas of financial health and tying into the mission activities, but the audit presents the biggest challenge. Consider breaking this report into smaller sessions, be clear to focus the board members on bigger pictures and away from buying pencils and staples.

<b>Connect Board Decisions to Financials</b>	We recommend the training use examples of how board decisions have an impact on the budget. Knowing decisions are related to the finances of the organization helps make the financial report more relevant. While the traditional nonprofit mantra for boards, “No Money No Mission”, is not as prevalent for regional centers it still holds true because the center is expected to operate within their operations allocation. If the budget is tight these board decisions may need balancing decisions.
<b>Ongoing “Mini-Trainings” on a Regular Schedule</b>	We recommend the introductory board orientation include an overview of common fiscal reports and their purpose. Quick reviews of the “what and why” of the annual audit, annual report, executive summary, standard financial reports, statement of financial position (in the regional center context and why we don’t have assets), statement of activities, budget vs. actuals statement, and statement of functional expenses and trends. The more these mini trainings become habit, the more natural and less intimidating the finances will be for all board members.

- **Resource:** Forge Team. (2018). *5 Ways to Help Your Board Understand Financial Reports*. <https://www.forgeahead.com/5-ways-to-help-your-board-understand-financial-reports/>
- **Resource:** amandag. (2024). *Building a Financially Literate Board | DWDCPA*. <https://dwdcpa.com/building-a-financially-literate-board/>

## State to Local Budget

The state budget is usually referred to in its political or public policy context. However, it is important for board members to know the state is proposing to spend a certain amount of money every year aligned with its priorities. The board members should receive training to help them understand how the governor comes up with their proposed budget, what are the developmental services priorities reflected by the budget, and how the final budget with the trailer bills impacts the spending in certain areas. On the local level, members should receive a basic understanding of the Purchase of Services budget and the Operations budgets and how the two relate to one another and how incentive payments impact each budget in unique ways. Finally, the board members should have an understanding and insight into the regional center’s State budget and regional center budget process (both OPS and POS) – being clear that these are distinct budgets that don’t cross from one to the other.

## Public Awareness, Engagement, and Advocacy

### Ambassadorship

The board's fundamental approach to community awareness is through its community outreach, where each board member plays the role of ambassador for the regional center and its overall mission and purpose in the community. As an applicant to become a board member, each candidate brings with them professional and or personal experiences, diverse perspectives, and a network of connections either professional or personal. This is often referred to as the individual's social capital. Many board members do not realize how much social capital they have or even how to leverage this in meeting the duty of loyalty. We feel it is important for board members to get training on the importance of ambassadorship, community outreach, and the parameters to speak for the regional center. Keeping in mind that the scope of influence of the board rests in the collective itself and not within one individual director or officer. Positions that do not pass cannot be advanced as a board position. Only approved board action can be attributed to the board, though other opinions may have been considered, positions not ratified cannot be associated with the board. These principles should be covered early in the board member's tenure.

- **Resource:** Matt Kamin, Co-Founder, Envision Consulting, *Ambassadorship: What is it & Why is it Important*, ARCA Academy, Saturday September 7, 2024.
- **Resource:** Nonprofit Advocacy and Ambassadorship - Board Source. (2016). <https://boardsource.org/fundamental-topics-of-nonprofit-board-service/advocacy-ambassadorship/>

### Engagement

Understanding and feeling safe and encouraged to participate are two themes that have already come up in different sections of this report but as they are critically important to us in our board experience, we feel it is necessary to bring these up in the context of Engagement. We feel one of the ways to ensure engagement is to deliver messages in easy-to-understand formats both written and oral and visually if possible. We recommend a single training course for the board on why plain language is important and how to create messages using the plain language model. While we don't recommend calling out board members who have not spoken in the meeting, there are other way to ensure board members are prepared to engage. We do think board chairs and committee chairs should get training on preparing members ahead of time that they will be referring to the member

or asking them for their opinion on an agenda item because you know it is important to them, or they have a particular opinion important for the discussion.

- **Resource:** The Team at Boardable. (2025). *Innovative Board Engagement Strategies & Best Practices - Boardable*. <https://boardable.com/resources/board-engagement-strategies/>

## Advocacy

Many people may feel that advocacy is politics, and that politics is outside of the domain of polite decorum. They may also feel that politics is private, and they are uncomfortable sharing or engaging in politics on the board. However, as noted in many of the sections above, the existence of the developmental services system and the regional center approach are both public policy decisions arrived at through advocacy. To be clear, regional centers are nonprofit agencies and under their 501 c3 status they are not allowed to engage in the endorsement or encouragement of political candidates. Individual board members may be involved in promoting or supporting candidates or elected officials but that cannot occur under the umbrella of the regional center or be connected to the board in any way.

Advocacy, in this context, is purely non-partisan, and it means expressing to community leaders, policymakers, the media, and others why certain ideas and proposals are helpful or harmful to the people served by your regional center. Appealing to people to support an idea or action that supports an idea is the advocacy we feel board members should understand and develop skills for being effective. We feel board members should know the legislative and administrative process in California, how to be effective in advocacy, and how to develop ongoing relationships with your elected representatives. This understanding of the advocacy process will serve people with disabilities and their families and help board members meet their duties of care, loyalty, and obedience.

- **Resource:** Vervocity. (2023). *The Importance of Disability Advocacy | NEILS*. <https://www.neils.org/the-importance-of-disability-advocacy/>
- **Resource:** Shannon Des Roches Rosa. (2016). *Successful Community Living for People with Developmental ...* <https://thinkingautismguide.com/2016/02/successful-community-living-for-people.html>

## Conclusion and Responses

After completing the 17<sup>th</sup> draft the board delegates conducted a feedback process to assess the level of acceptance and viability of using this report as a guide for board development. Throughout April and May 2025, the board delegates conducted a survey of

the regional center local boards to get feedback on the full report and a self-assessment of their level of familiarity and knowledge of each area of the report. We received 54 complete surveys and while the results are not meant to be statistically significant, as no real statistical measure was used nor were there any research controls, the survey was intended to generate as many unedited and confidential responses about our report and the identified competencies. The responses came from either individual board members from each regional center, one board member completing the survey based on a board review, or a board development committee.

The self-assessment survey revealed that board members had the least familiarity and knowledge about their legal duties of Care, Loyalty, and Obedience under the California Corporations Code. The remaining competencies in the lower half of the assessment indicating the most immediate need for training include: (1) Disability History, (2) Leadership Competencies, (3) Meeting and Board Composition Laws, (4) Regional Center By-Laws, (5) State Reports Approved by the Board, and (6) Ambassadorship and Engagement with their communities. In total 61% of the respondents ranked their knowledge in this range.

Regarding the competencies the board members felt more capable and familiar with was the management of public comments with 50% of the respondents reporting they were either advanced or expert in this competency, 48% felt very confident in their skill in evaluating the executive director and in their overall ability in meeting management. While some competencies board members reported having high confidence and others very low confidence, the responses varied with every competency receiving a response at every level.

In addition to a Likert Scale on their self-assessment of the regional center's board competency levels from "Beginner" to "Expert", the delegates also asked for open-ended comments on the following questions:

- What is the most challenging part of serving on your regional center board?
- What are the biggest challenges your board faces and how would training and skill development help?
- What is the most significant thing you wish you knew before joining the board and did we cover it in our report?
- Is there anything else we should know?

To review the detailed open-ended comments, see Appendix A.

## Appendix A

### Survey Results: Open-Ended Responses

Below are the unedited open-ended answers provided by board members:

#### What is the most challenging part of serving on your regional center board?

1. Being a secretary and voting
2. Lots of information to read and understand
3. Working with significant differentials in familiarity with the above items and differentials in capacity to meaningfully improve familiarity.
4. nothing
5. None
6. Some things will be tough for everyone to discuss.
7. Understanding some parts of the financial/executive report
8. Understanding the possible disparities early identification in a regional center for African Americans
9. ensuring that I've reviewed all the documents
10. Hard to understand the organizational structure of our local regional centers and what each of the directors are responsible for. Who does what in which department? It's hard to follow when there are changes.
11. Thankfully, I really do not feel there are any barriers or challenges to serving on this board.
12. Understanding responsibility and role and having time to fulfill
13. As a working single mother, it is hard for me to make the 5 pm closed session meetings.
14. Learning complexities of the system.
15. I don't feel there are too many areas that a challenging. It has been my experience that when I have a question I am able to ask and get answers
16. Getting everyone trained and having a good understanding of their roles as experienced members term out and you have members at various stages of overall development.
17. Time commitment
18. Feeling like I am contributing
19. I AM A NEW MEMBER.IT WILL BE CHALLENGING TO LEARN ALL NEW METHODS TO BELONG TO THIS ORGANIZATION
20. Learning curve and getting up to speed
21. not knowing what I was doing until about my third year on the board

22. Getting a good executive board to guide the board.
23. Having a voice with limited opportunity to be heard or make a difference
24. It is being an active listener during the meeting as the information comes out a little quick for me.
25. Learning the complexity of the system
26. My most challenging part of serving on my regional center board is to provide the understanding for my disability.
27. Understanding our role in oversight, accountability, and transparency of the regional center from each regional center's local board members.
28. Making sure the budget is balanced to cover our clients.
29. Sometimes knowing the legal definition
30. No board member training
31. Making sure that the board is run by the board member. That the board understands their role and power. Not lean so much on the ex
32. The time commitment, and securing stakeholder feedback
33. Trying to understand everything
34. That of having my Voices Heard, as a Client.
35. Having enough time.
36. Ensuring the ED is effectively guiding staff to meet the needs of their regional center clients. Our regional center has a diverse community and supporting the issues presented by the loudest voices have been or are addressed. However, this prevents other clients from feeling heard because they are not the loudest voices or are not taken seriously (even if there is a supported decision maker present). While high caseloads has been the most common explanation provided to the board, this issue is ongoing and will continue to deteriorate RC client trust if not addressed from the inside out.
37. Reading & understanding financial reports.
38. Recruiting
39. Limited knowledge on ARCA directives, speaking up while being one of the few RC participants on the board, and limited guidance on how to serve on the board.
40. Lack of meeting governance
41. The time commitment.
42. The most challenging part of serving on my regional center board is trying to make decisions for the community.
43. Having to fill board positions based off of ethnicity or race
44. Lack of candor and courage
45. Making sure I'm making the right decisions when voting.
46. Learning everything
47. board members who do not grasp this is not a personal service but a service to all who are served. Because they represent a category, some feel that the category is their only representational duties rather than representing the entire population. I cannot stress enough.... They must look at overall picture and not from their own biased perspective



48. The changing cultural of our agency, lack of quality leadership, not enough funding to provide services to our individuals we serve, programs to help our aging population
49. Ongoing concern of consumers not being served well and how to help change that.
50. Using your voice

**What are the biggest challenges your board faces and how would training and skill development help?**

1. When we don't have enough people to vote
2. Training would provide a baseline understanding for the entire board
3. Conflict of interest considerations limit the board from recruiting some of the most knowledgeable and skilled potential candidates. Training and skill development will help. An optional pre-application academy for board membership with the same curriculum would help even more.
4. having a ed who does not listen.
5. none
6. Our biggest challenge is agreeing with everything. Skill training really helps us with team leadership.
7. I think you should give beginning board members and extensive list of acronyms with definitions. That would make the board packet a lot easier to read.
8. I would like to know more about how regional centers balance funding needs in face of State cuts.
9. Understanding state level changes and budget cuts that impact local regional centers. Training on what board members can do to contribute to solutions.
10. Board recruitment.
11. Divisive community had caused board concern and difficulty with employees. Board needs to work together with new ED.
12. Staying up to date with the new ARCA policies.
13. Engagement with our diversity community to ensure they all feel heard and represented.
14. Getting some board members more invested (both time and involvement) maybe more in-depth training regarding expectations
15. Understanding a very complex system and how the many pieces fit together and how we can impact and improve a system where we don't have control over a number of pieces but where we do and how we can contribute to better outcomes for the people we serve.
16. Meeting in person and knowing the issues
17. Getting the board out in the community more to educate, advocate and share about the regional center.

18. THE BOARD FACES A LOT OF CHALLENGES THE TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WILL HELP TO MAINTAIN BALANCE AND BE PREPARE FOR ALL THE CHANGES IN THE FUTURE. What the board represents
19. Recruitment is one of the biggest challenges, training always helps.
20. A big challenge is presidents not being supported with more information about their job duties and how to handle their ED
21. We need to re-engage as a board. This is a build back year.
22. Getting and retaining board members that are involved; training ideas from the report might help
23. Finding new board applicants in the more areas where we serve. Training and skill development would help by helping us identify new potential board members.
24. Understanding the Lanterman Act and the scope in which we deliver services. We survey our board for all training topics to make sure their needs are being met. If a board member has questions, explanations are provided by ED and/or leadership team.
25. Providing leadership and educating factors are the biggest challenges I am really facing.
26. Leadership Training, Outcome based solutions, Strategic Planning, and Policy Making
27. Budget! Ever decreasing budget.
28. Learning the legal language, taking training courses with regional center
29. Many on the board are new, including our executive director. Training would be a great help
30. The biggest challenge is the lack of development. That every time there is a change of the executive committee the process of training is applied differently or not at all
31. Time management and maintaining a clear agenda. Training and skill would help with efficiency and efficacy of meetings.
32. Training would help out a lot to be able to give more input
33. That of hiring more Board Members, Training and Skill Development will help to get the best Board Members, aboard.
34. When training is needed, have competent presenters.
35. Board Onboarding - we don't have one. While we do leverage knowledge from those with professional backgrounds who have served on other boards (e.g. legal, operations, and finance), it can be an overwhelming for new board members with little or no experience with non-profit boards. While new members have a passion to serve and represent their regional center's clients and families, an onboarding guide for incoming board members will be tremendously helpful.
36. Continue to mentor new members.
37. Educating & Empowerment of Board members to speak up
38. Recruiting BOD candidates that include more RC participants/self-advocates, closing racial gaps, and unclear guidance on submitting ED evaluations.
39. One of the biggest challenges our board faces is aligning diverse perspectives while making timely, informed decisions. Training and skill development would strengthen communication, deepen understanding of our governance

responsibilities, and build confidence in handling complex issues—ultimately leading to more effective collaboration and accountability.

40. Understanding the basics of funding. It would be helpful for the board and the public if there was a plainly worded one-page document that shows Ops and POS are entirely different. It's a simple concept, but the public often doesn't understand and their questions confuse some of the board members.
41. public comments
42. Learning all of the particular roles and finding people who best fit them.
43. Consensus building
44. Recruiting board members.
45. Hard to say exactly... I'm learning the process and thoroughness of everything
46. The capacity to actually remember what they hear and learn from it. Many aren't truly engaged in active listening in order to learn. They hear, then forget.
47. We need training on how to better serve our growing number of individuals served.
48. How to work in a positive manner, together to help the executive director. Engaging with the community in a positive manner. Understanding what the board is allowed to say and do with the community.
49. Not using your mind
50. Making sure the budget is balanced to cover our clients.
51. Sometimes knowing the legal definition
52. No board member training
53. Making sure that the board is run by the board member. That the board understands their role and power. Not lean so much on the ex
54. The time commitment, and securing stakeholder feedback
55. Trying to understand everything
56. That of having my Voices Heard, as a Client.
57. Having enough time.
58. Ensuring the ED is effectively guiding staff to meet the needs of their regional center clients. Our regional center has a diverse community and supporting the issues presented by the loudest voices have been or are addressed. However, this prevents other clients from feeling heard because they are not the loudest voices or are not taken seriously (even if there is a supported decision maker present). While high caseloads has been the most common explanation provided to the board, this issue is ongoing and will continue to deteriorate RC client trust if not addressed from the inside out.
59. Reading & understanding financial reports.
60. Recruiting
61. Limited knowledge on ARCA directives, speaking up while being one of the few RC participants on the board, and limited guidance on how to serve on the board.
62. Lack of meeting governance
63. The time commitment.
64. The most challenging part of serving on my regional center board is trying to make decisions for the community.
65. Having to fill board positions based off of ethnicity or race

- 66. Lack of candor and courage
- 67. Making sure I'm making the right decisions when voting.
- 68. Learning everything
- 69. board members who do not grasp this is not a personal service but a service to all who are served. Because they represent a category, some feel that the category is their only representational duties rather than to represent the entire population. Cannot be stressed enough....they must look at overall picture and not from their own biased perspective
- 70. The changing cultural of our agency, lack of quality leadership, not enough funding to provide services to our individuals we serve, programs to help our aging population
- 71. Ongoing concern of consumers not being served well and how to help change that.
- 72. Using your voice

**What is the most significant thing you wish you knew before joining the board and did we cover it in our report?**

- 1. About the rate study and the budget
- 2. All things legal compliance. Yes, the report covers these areas.
- 3. none
- 4. Everything was fully disclosed
- 5. I wish I knew when I got off the board first round how different things are now. We are in ruff times. I think you covered everything just fine. :)
- 6. The extent of restrictions the executive board is placed under when it comes to serving our particular demographic
- 7. How disparities among African American enrollment, fund, and supportive services receive significantly less per capita spending on their services compared to white individuals.
- 8. That there is a lot of time commitment for trainings, annual retreat, subcommittee involvement, review of materials and updates the exec director provides in between meetings. I think these were covered in orientation and interviews by the exec director before I started but it's a lot of information that one has to review on your own to better understand and do a competent job as a board member. With that said my regional center exec director and leadership team does an excellent job to prepare the board and provide info and are very supportive if more clarification or info is needed.
- 9. The report is pretty inclusive.
- 10. How to review contracts and what I should be looking at and concerned by.
- 11. "You Covered it all"
- 12. My role and responsibilities were explained to me in detail, so I felt prepared for joining the HRC board.
- 13. More training around recruitment and engagement which I pursued on my own.
- 14. Time commitment

15. GGRC Onboarding was very good and thorough. I felt prepared. The Draft is very good.
16. Understanding what the board represents and understanding the full diversity of the people served .
17. Learning roles and responsibilities, which is addressed in this report. Details are always presented by the staff at TCRC. Always surprised by the size and volume of the things that are handled at the regional center but never left lost or unsupported.
18. That officer jobs/responsibilities/expectations were more fully explained in writing and that boards are taught that the ED is not in charge of them
19. Yes, and a strong leadership and board are very important.
20. The report was so helpful! I wish I would have had access to it prior to today! My knowledge was pretty limited when I became a board member.
21. How much training was involved in being a board member. You talked about all the requirements.
22. Understanding the impact legislation has on the system.
23. I wish we should have more vendors to provide the clients what they need.
24. Legislation.
25. There is nothing I can think of at this time.
26. The time it requires due to meetings
27. The power and responsibilities the board holds. And sometimes I feel like not all board members understand the responsibility held.
28. A bit more about the purpose and responsibilities of the board.
29. I wish that there was more hands on with the board & the people who run the departments similar to what goes with the boards positions
30. That of knowing how we can recruit new Board Members. This must be covered in future Reports, going Forward.
31. The amount of time.
32. Board mentorship and legal duties, which is covered in the report.
33. Your report covers most important elements.
34. It would have been nice to have an assigned admin staff person to help the BOD function more efficiently
35. I wish I knew more about the governance structure of BOD, how to hold ED accountable whenever they're not meeting certain standards, and proposing any ideas for improvement.
36. "I wish I had fully understood how much behind-the-scenes preparation is needed reviewing materials, understanding policies, and staying current on regional and state-level developments. Knowing this earlier would've helped me contribute more effectively from the start."
37. I don't have your report so I can't answer this.
38. I wish I had known the history of the role and the board's responsibilities before joining.
39. Learning an understanding, the bylaws
40. The length of the service term

41. I would have liked to have known what the limits are regarding the authority over the Executive Director.
42. I wanted to know how I could help and how my being a board member could impact change that was needed for consumers. The report covers everything I wish I had known before joining.
43. I wish I knew that you can become very assertive

**Is there anything else we should know?**

1. Including the rate increase
2. Nothing else comes to mind
3. no
4. Serving on the SARC Board has been rewarding, and an honor
5. Everything is good.
6. I think you should connect a new board member with an experienced board member. Especially if the new board member is a client . The size of my first board packet was somewhat overwhelming. The acronym list would've been quite helpful. I would send out an acronym list to all new board members who are clients just so they can familiarize themselves with all the terminology.
7. Not at this time.
8. It's very rewarding being a board member and it takes a couple years to really get into the role of a board member so it's good to stick it out.
9. I believe more community awareness about our population is needed
10. Kern Regional does a marvelous job educating their board members.
11. Our board is comprised of mostly family members of persons served, persons served and few others with varied life experiences. I would like to see guidance on the most important things to understand within the first six months and then incrementally beyond
12. As a parent of a child with disabilities, I deeply understand the personal impact these services have but translating that personal knowledge into effective board governance is still something I'm navigating.
13. The report is great with full of information. The resources are cited, and the links are helpful. The first draft is long, and the format is difficult to follow. It could be reformatted with a table of contents. Breaking it into multiple training sessions is a must. It's obvious that a great amount of work went into putting this report together. Thank you.
14. The report was helpful. I intend to follow up on many of the resources mentioned.
15. There is nothing I can think of.
16. There is one suggestion.