

## ARCA Standard – Regional Center Leadership

### Focus Area and Scope of this Standard

- This standard addresses the Executive Director and board member competencies necessary to administer and oversee the operations of regional centers to maximize the benefit each center provides to its community.
- This standard does not address the specific competencies required by other members of regional center executive teams.

### Definitions of Words Used in this Standard

1. **Regional Center Leadership:** Members of the regional center's board of directors and the Executive Director working together to support the work of the regional center
2. **Responsibilities:** The prescribed roles of either regional center board members or the Executive Director to support the operations of the regional center
3. **Competencies:** The knowledge and skills needed by board members or the regional center's Executive Director in order to carry out their responsibilities

### Background/Why this is Important

- Since their inception, regional centers have played a significant role in connecting Californians with developmental disabilities and their families to local and statewide sources of support. Given the uniqueness of regional centers as nonprofit corporations reliant on state and federal funding rather than fundraising, their leaders must make decisions based on a complex array of factors, including state and federal law, regulations, and budgetary processes that govern their operations. In recent years, the regional center system has grown rapidly in population served, volume of funds managed, the complexity of operations required through both statute and regulations, and the scope of community expectations. These changes require an intentional focus on the knowledge and skills regional center leadership must possess to lead and guide the developmental services system of the future.

### Standard

- Collectively, regional center leadership serves as the public face of the organization in its interactions with the general community, organizational partners, policymakers, and the media.
- For regional center leadership to effectively accomplish the mission of the Regional Center, it is imperative that the board of directors and Executive Director work collaboratively together while also maintaining their distinct areas of authority and responsibility.
- Regional center boards and Executive Directors have distinct functions, responsibilities, and authority. This separation of roles is necessary to ensure the regional center board of directors includes the local community's unique needs and expectations in the mission, vision and

foundations of the agency, while the Executive Director carries out the business of operating and leading the staff of the agency consistent with that mission.

- During the onboarding process, and within the first two years of a regional center leadership member assuming their role, the leader will acquire the necessary competencies as follows, including through the completion of the prescribed course of training adopted by ARCA for their specific role within the organization:
  - Regional Center Board of Directors Membership
    - Primary role: Contract with the California Department of Developmental Services for the operation of the regional center
    - Responsibilities: Establishing policy, assuring no conflicts of interest exist, acting in the best interest of the regional center and its consumers, approving contracts as described in [Welfare and Institutions Code §§4622-4627](#), hiring and evaluating the performance of the Executive Director, supporting leadership transitions that promote organizational health and stability, and providing oversight of the regional center's strategic operations and long-term vision that is informed by statewide and national trends and developments
    - Competencies: Knowledge of the mission of the organization, board practices, financial and operational responsibilities of the regional center including basic understanding of the legislation impacting regional center operations and purpose, and public engagement
  - Regional Center Executive Directors
    - Primary role: As the single employee of the board of directors, provide leadership and guidance overseeing the implementation of agency policy, strategy, and overall operations intended to accomplish the mission of the agency
    - Responsibilities: Administration of the regional center in a manner that allows it to meet its expectations as outlined in statutes, regulations, its contract with the state, and the policies set forth by its board
    - Competencies: Knowledge of organizational administration, operational responsibilities and fiscal considerations, the Lanterman Act and associated state statutes, federal regulations, funding provisions within the Social Security Act, other federal statute that may be required, and corporate business requirements and public outreach, education, and advocacy on behalf of the community represented
- The boundaries between the responsibilities of the board of directors and Executive Director of the regional center must be well-understood and observed by all members of regional center leadership. Members of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director must carry forth a shared vision of the organization and act cooperatively in the best interest of the individuals served.
- It is not anticipated those joining regional center leadership will come to their positions with all necessary competencies, but each has a responsibility to acquire these competencies by actively pursuing the resources available.
- Organizationally, each regional center has the responsibility to make available to its leadership trainings to support each leader's specific duties and to establish skilled mentors with experience leading a regional center to support regional center leaders in their first 12-24 months in their leadership position.
- After the initial onboarding process, it is critical that regional center leaders maintain current, relevant and up to date information related to their roles within a large scale administrative and

case management agency for people with developmental disabilities. As best practice, expected practice, technology and methods of supporting people, laws, rules, and regulations, are constantly evolving, it is imperative that all regional center leaders maintain current skills and knowledge applicable to the agency.

- As learning and skill-development is an ongoing process, each member of regional center leadership is also expected to participate in continuing training, including that required by law or contract, or on emerging topics in a volume and intensity appropriate to their roles within the organization. Training schedules and materials should be balanced to ensure training courses are adequately comprehensive but do not serve as a significant barrier to board membership.

#### Related Legal Requirements

[Welfare and Institutions Code §4622](#) outlines the major requirements of regional center governing boards. Much of the rest of the Lanterman Act establishes responsibilities for the operation of regional centers under the administration of the Executive Director.

In addition to day-to-day operational requirements to be carried out by regional center staff, the regional center [contract with the Department of Developmental Services](#) establishes the training and Medicaid enrollment requirements for regional center board members. The contract also makes clear the distinct roles of board members and Executive Directors.

#### Indicators of Performance

- Regional centers will maintain training logs to document trainings and other skill-development opportunities members of regional center leadership participate in.
- The Department of Developmental Services monitors the fulfillment of regional center leadership expected responsibilities through a variety of monitoring activities.

#### Range

- It is expected all members of regional center leadership will complete all trainings and carry out other responsibilities mandated by statute or contract.
- High performance in this area is indicated by fulfillment of required leadership responsibilities complemented by completion of skill-development activities (*e.g.*, supplemental training opportunities) to support enhanced leadership competencies (*e.g.*, strategic planning).
- Annual reporting to the department of successful training for board of directors shall indicate the accomplishment of these standards.

#### Resources Available

- DDS offers an orientation to its operations for new regional center Executive Directors.
- ARCA makes available ARCA Academy live ([2020](#) and [2023](#)) and [web-based](#) trainings and resources to support the unique roles of regional center board members.
- Through ARCA membership, regional centers can access training resources at no additional cost through [BoardSource](#), which provides materials to support non-profit governance.
- The ARCA Board Delegates and Directors Groups connect regional center leaders from across the state to facilitate mentorship and the sharing of best and promising practices. Upon request ARCA will assist its board members with the selection of appropriate mentors to support their role.

- ARCA will establish board-approved training and competency standards to support regional center board members and Executive Directors that will serve as detailed guides for understanding the required competencies and potential resources to meet the identified training needs.
- ARCA will develop and make available to regional centers materials and opportunities for group sessions to meet the consistent statewide training needs of regional center leadership.
- ARCA will compile a list of subject matter experts on various strategic and operational issues and make it available to regional centers upon request.

Example

- While not universal, some regional centers place a heavy emphasis on supporting board members with training opportunities to support their roles, including the legal principles and best practices associated with non-profit board governance. This practice supports strong board operations and the fulfillment of legal and statutory responsibilities.

**Date Adopted by ARCA Board of Directors: June 27, 2025**