

ATHLETE DIRECTOR GUIDE





THE CASE FOR ESTABLISHING AN ATHLETE DIRECTOR ROLE

A Tactical Approach for Athletes



AthletesCAN strongly believes that having athlete representation at all levels of decision making within a National Sport Organization (NSO) is vital and strengthens the organization. First, an NSO must create an athlete-centered culture and wide-spread representation for athletes within the NSO. This document was designed to help athletes support this culture and establish an Athlete Director (AD) role at their NSO by providing a strong rationale for the position, as well as steps to take in creating the role.



COMMON QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following questions will often come up in the early stages of dialogue around Athlete Representation. We have provided points below that can be used to help athletes prepare for these questions and to lobby for the establishment of an AD position.

- How does formalized Athlete Representation benefit our sport overall?
- Does it align with our organization's purpose and our core values?
- Who is going to lead the discussion from the athlete side of the organization? Is there a formal Athletes' Council (AC)? If so, is there a chair that can act as the primary liaison?
- Who are the key decision-makers & influencers within the organization?
 - Where do they stand on having designated athlete representation on the board?
 - What are their concerns and what do they see as the benefits?
 - What information do they need to know about the pros and cons of an athlete representative on the board? What are some lessons from other NSOs/Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs) that have already established this as a board position?
 - Who are some external individuals that could speak to the experience of Athlete Representation?
- What resources exist to address the mechanics of formalizing Athlete Representation?
- How do you get it on the agenda of a board meeting?
- Do we have access to copies of existing bylaws from other NSOs that can be repurposed for the organization?

WHY IS AN ATHLETE-CENTRED CULTURE IMPORTANT?

- Athletes can provide direct and important communication to recipients of sport programs and services.



- Athletes have a vested interest in the efficient and successful operations of NSOs.
- Athletes have a direct impact on NSOs' success and funding through performance.
- Athletes influence the future of sport by inspiring the base membership and by transitioning into roles of leadership within all areas of sport.
- Athletes will benefit from fully understanding the system of which they are a part.
- Athletes need to be treated holistically and afforded basic rights.

HOW TO CREATE AN ATHLETE-CENTRED CULTURE?



WHY IS THE ATHLETE DIRECTOR ESSENTIAL?

- They provide the most relevant and up-to-date perspective of the key stakeholders of the organization.
- They act as a more direct and effective conduit between the active athletes and decision makers of the sport organization.
- They help to build a closer relationship and trust between athletes and the organization.
- They ensure the rights of athletes are properly represented at the highest level of decision making and policy creation.
- They are more empowered to hold the NSO accountable for decisions and responsibilities, which is a good governance practice.
- They develop into experienced and effective sport leaders.
- They help to shape the future of the sport organization and opportunities for improvement.
- They often have more intimate knowledge of the success of the organization's operations at ground level.
- They provide insight into the current sport culture which often influences the business of the NSO.



WHAT ARE COMMON ASSUMPTIONS WITH THE ATHLETE DIRECTOR POSITION AND HOW CAN THEY BE RESOLVED?

- Athletes lack the skills or experience to be effective board members.

Response:

As active participants in their sport, athletes bring a unique and important experiential perspective to decision-making tables.

- Athletes do not have the desire to be involved in governance.

Response:

Athletes are passionate about their sport and want to have a say in the decisions that will directly affect them.

- Athletes are not able to focus on the best interests of the organization.

Response:

Through proper governance training, athletes will understand the “big picture” issues that face the NSO while providing better access to its stakeholders.

- Athletes do not have the time to commit to governance positions as it will interfere with their training and competition focus.

Response:

As a necessity, athlete leaders are skilled at time management and understanding the workings of their NSO and the sport system often contributes to stronger performances for all athlete members.

- Athletes pose too high a risk for conflicts of interest and biased decision making.

Response:

Conflicts of interest and individual biases can be mitigated through proper governance training, a strong Conflict of Interest Policy, and thorough onboarding, all of which should be provided to each new board member.

- Athletes will bring too much negative attention to themselves by getting involved with organization politics and in speaking up for athletes.

Response:

An athlete-centered culture which encourages, rather than punishes, the athlete voice at all levels of decision-making, fosters an environment in which the NSO and athletes both thrive.

WHAT STEPS TO TAKE IN ESTABLISHING AD POSITION?

- Add ‘Establishing an AD’ as an item on Board of Directors (BOD) and Annual General Meeting (AGM) agenda.
- Identify athlete representatives for the discussion and prepare to defend the cause.
- Determine lessons learned from other NSO/MSOs who have completed the process.
- Obtain Bylaws and other governance documents from organizations with strong AD positions for reference.



- Update Bylaws and Board and Committee Terms of Reference (TOR) as required to include AD position.
- Obtain approval by BOD and Members at AGM if required for Bylaw amendments.

BE PREPARED TO:

- Recognize that this will require patience.
- Acknowledge the possible bias' that you will need to mitigate.
- Initiate a dialogue with potential supporters, influencers, and detractors.
- Approach the task strategically.

 **DO NOT** insist it is 'simply the right thing to do' or make demands.

 **DO** think about the long-term game of influence.

 **DO** think of future athlete leaders who will champion the cause.

 **DO** think of long-term gains and actions that will gain universal support.

WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN CHANGE TO BYLAWS AND TOR?

- Number of positions
- Equal representation across athlete groups (ie. gender, discipline, para vs able-bodied, etc.)
- Length and Limit of Terms
- Eligibility of Athlete Participants
- Election Process

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES?

- ADs should be elected by their peers or the general athlete body.
- All directors should be provided with an NSO orientation upon election, including an organizational chart, NSO committee TORs, Bylaws, and board and key staff contact information.
- NSO should provide a contact to support/liaise with the AD.
- NSO should provide the names and contact information for previous ADs, if consent is given.
- NSO should provide an allocated budget or the necessary resources for the AD to conduct their responsibilities.
- AD should be provided with clearly defined roles and responsibilities (ie. Job Description).
- AD should provide an annual report to the BOD and at the AGM.
- NSO should provide opportunities and support for leadership skills development for AD.
- There should be a succession plan in place to maintain effective representation in the AD role – having an AC can help with establishing this.



In addition to the BOD, Athlete Representation should be integrated into several NSO processes. This can be an overwhelming commitment for one (1) Athlete Representative or AD to undertake alone. It is therefore useful to have several athletes educated and prepared to act as representatives to support the AD or act as a proxy if needed. An AC can provide this support to the AD in his or her duties.

WHERE ELSE IS ATHLETE REPRESENTATION NEEDED?

- Team Selection
- Competition Schedules
- Training conditions and expectations
- Funding/Carding
- Coaching and NSO staffing
- Athlete Agreements
- Code of Conduct and other policies
- Standing and Ad-hoc Committees/Working Groups
- Athlete/Team Meetings



ROLE OF THE ATHLETE DIRECTOR



The role of the Athlete Director (AD) is to sit on and speak to the Board of Directors (BOD) on behalf of the athletes, to ensure that their concerns are heard and acted upon, and to ensure that your sport is focused on the needs and interests of the athletes. You will also be expected to connect regularly with the other Athlete Representatives (ARs) to maintain regular flow of communication to and from the athletes.



Similarly, there will also be an expectation from your National Sport Organization (NSO), that you have some knowledge about the organization and that you can focus on the best interests of the overall organization. As an active athlete focused on training and competition, it is understandable that as you start your role you may not yet have this level of knowledge. AthletesCAN, your NSO, and past ADs will be able to help get you up to speed. It is important to note that your role will be different depending on the capacity of your NSO.

To be an effective AD, you will need to:

- Become familiar with the policies and issues of your NSO, especially those that affect the high-performance and coaching programs and personnel.
- Work to ensure that organizational decisions keep athletes' best interests in mind.
- Communicate regularly with fellow athletes, other board and committee members, and with NSO staff or volunteers. You will be keeping fellow athletes informed on what is going on in the organization, presenting the athletes' perspectives to the organization (usually after seeking their input), as well as explaining organizational policies and decisions to fellow athletes.
- Learn about all sides of an issue by asking questions, discussing the situation, and listening.
- Learn about all levels of the Canadian sport system and its key organizations.
- Understand and believe that you can make a difference.

It is equally important for your NSO to support you as an AD. It should do this by:

- Supporting the AD and his/her peers. He or she should be elected or selected by the athletes, not appointed by the organization.
- Providing on-boarding or an orientation for new ADs elected to the board.



- The AD role must be clearly defined and communicated to all parties within the NSO, including coaches.
- Fostering continuous communication among and between the AD and ARs/Athletes' Council, with a budget to facilitate that process.

It is not enough for NSOs to simply have an AD on committees or on the BOD. Your NSO must treat you as a full and vital part of the board or committee(s) on which you serve. Within the NSO, representation from athletes should be included in certain key areas, and in addition to the BOD, you may find yourself included on:

- The High-Performance or National Team Committee(s).
- The Planning or Futures Committee.
- Additional “ad hoc” opportunities, e.g., planning for the development of facilities, marketing of national teams, major fund development or hiring committees for coaches and staff.

Brent Langbakk is from a small NSO – Orienteering Canada – with only one half-time paid staff member:

“The biggest thing that I have found is that instead of learning about my role as Athletes’ Rep and the workings of the organization, as I presume you would have to do in a larger NSO, you have to figure out what your role will/should be, which can be a little bit daunting at first. On the positive side though, to some extent, I have been able to choose my role, and what projects to work on.”

**“ATHLETES CAN HAVE AN IMPACT
BY GETTING INVOLVED NO MATTER
WHAT THE SIZE OF THE NSO”**

*Megan Wing and Aaron Lowe,
Skate Canada*



BOARD OF DIRECTORS 101

WHAT IS A BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BOARD)?

The word “board” or “board of directors” (BOD) describes the group of people who supervise, manage or govern an organization. All incorporated non-profit organizations must have a board of volunteers to oversee operations.

WHAT DOES THE BOD DO?

The main role of the BOD is to provide purpose, leadership, direction and overall strategy for the organization they are presiding over. The BOD must ensure that the finances are sound, operations are legal, procedures work, assets are safeguarded and all tasks are carried out in the best interest of everyone affected by its decisions. To that end, the BOD for National Sport Organizations (NSOs) represent several key constituency or stakeholder groups, such as: athletes, coaches, staff members, associated national and regional government groups, and sponsors. The overriding objectives of NSO boards are to develop high-performance, athlete-focused programs based on both the international competitive environment and the needs of athletes.

THE RULES

NSOs are governed by rules in the form of Bylaws. These rules dictate the parameters of membership, the board, board committees, general meetings and decision making levels. The Bylaws are created and approved by the members and can only be changed by the members. By familiarizing yourself with your organization’s Bylaws, you will have a thorough understanding of your role in terms of where and how decisions are made on issues that affect you.

WHAT DO BOARD MEMBERS DO?

There can be a wide variation among boards in the level of board member involvement. In large, well-funded organizations, board members focus on high-level issues while leaving operational issues to staff. In contrast, there are many smaller NSOs that operate with no paid staff at all. In this case, board members will often take on many or all staff responsibilities as well as their own.





THE BOARD

- Authorizes all major decisions.
- Sets long-term goals.
- Finalizes budgets and allocates funds.
- Approves any changes or additions outside the budget.
- Takes responsibility for financial records.
- Selects and monitors the performance of the Executive Director (ED) (who may or may not be a paid employee).
- Takes responsibility for legal and compliance matters.

THE STAFF

- Carry out day-to-day management.
- Implement board decisions.
- Provide the board with any relevant or requested information.
- Employ, dismiss and manage staff and volunteers.
- Operate programs and organize events.
- Look after day-to-day finances.

In addition to overseeing and assessing an organization's performance, board members have several key responsibilities that focus on the big picture:



Strategic Vision and Planning: The board's strategic planning initiatives enables it to think through and document what it is doing, for whom, and why. With a constant eye to the future, the board ensures that its long-term goals, often from three (3) to five (5) years, are being acted upon. You, as an athlete representative, ensure that the voices of your fellow athletes are heard in light of ever-changing funding considerations and the dynamic nature of athletes' needs.



Creating Policies and Best Practices: To govern the organization on a more immediate basis, the board puts in place policies so that it and the NSO have a consistent approach to making decisions and carrying out day-to-day business. Athlete representatives are an essential addition to the table when it comes to developing policies around competitive schedules, training conditions and expectations, assistance with time off work to travel, team coaches or support personnel, and so on.



Leadership/Advocacy Role: Your role makes you a primary link between the organization and its key stakeholders—the athletes. You will often be called upon to filter the diversity of stakeholder views back to the organization. For instance, you could play an instrumental part in initiating, managing and communicating the change involved in choosing regional over centralized training programs at the national level. Due to the nature of your position, you may at times feel conflicted by the needs of your sport and the needs of your board. You should never feel that your position is an adversarial one.



By communicating often and effectively with your fellow members and board committees, everyone will have an understanding of your point of view and the issues that affect you.

- **Board Meetings** – All boards must hold meetings as often as dictated by its Bylaws or rules. Board members are obliged to attend most (if not all) of those meetings, as outlined in the Bylaws.
- **Evaluating its Own Effectiveness** – A board needs to regularly evaluate itself to ensure it remains representative, responsive and effective. Evaluation might be carried out informally or could involve holding a board retreat or setting up a sub-committee specifically for this purpose. You, as an engaged board member, are free to request or suggest an appropriate evaluation process.
- Many boards provide orientation programs for new members. Athlete Directors (ADs) who are stepping down from their board duties as well as any retired athletes who sit on the board are invaluable resources as you learn about your new role.

WHO'S WHO ON THE BOARD?

Most boards have a group of office holders. These will most likely include a chair and vice or assistant chair (or a president and vice president). Those boards with committees or sub-committees may also have committee chairs. Appointment procedures for the different office holders should be outlined in the NSO's Bylaws.

THE BOARD CHAIR

The chair serves as the board's figurehead and spokesperson and takes a leading role in the functioning of the board. The chair is also responsible for managing board meetings, including the following duties:

- Facilitating discussion
- Ensuring that the discussion does not stray too far from the prepared agenda
- Ensuring members stay within the meeting rules
- Ensuring that the meeting is efficient and on time
- Following the end of discussion, summarizing points and putting it to a vote

Strictly speaking, chairs cannot vote. However, some chairs have an additional casting vote, which can give them important directional power. On larger boards, they will also act as a link between the board and the ED, who in turn acts as a link to staff and volunteers.

THE VICE / ASSISTANT CHAIR

Many boards appoint a vice-chair to support the chair in his or her many tasks and to fill in when the chair is absent. The vice-chair is also expected to play a major role in board leadership.

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Larger boards often establish committees or sub-committees to concentrate on specific areas – governance, budget and finance, public relations, etc. Committee chairs are



responsible for overseeing the committee, managing its meetings and reporting and making recommendations to the board chair or full board.

SECRETARY AND TREASURER

In general, the secretary will be responsible for tasks such as preparing and distributing meeting agendas, ensuring that meeting minutes are taken, and for ensuring legal compliance. The treasurer is responsible for monitoring the financial position of the organization and for keeping other board members abreast of financial matters.

BOARD MEETINGS OVERVIEW:

PURPOSE OF MEETINGS

The primary reason for holding meetings is to allow the board to make decisions. All major decisions are made at board meetings so it is impossible to be an effective member if you are not a regular attendee.

MEETING FUNCTION:

- Board members are regularly brought together to focus on their roles and responsibilities, identify problems, and plan for the future.
- Ideas are shared and discussed and then discarded, improved or implemented.
- Tasks are allocated and reported on.
- Regular updates about relevant issues are provided.
- Members are encouraged to get to know each other.

FREQUENCY:

Typically, the board will likely meet two or more times per year. The ways in which members can meet (face-to-face, teleconference, or electronically) must be outlined in the Bylaws (board rules). Meetings vary from board to board in terms of its formality. If you are traveling with the team at the time of a meeting, you may be able to join in through a speakerphone or videoconference.

TYPES OF MEETINGS:

- **Annual General Meetings:** Used to recap the year's progress, chart a direction for the future and elect new members or office holders.
- **Extraordinary Meetings:** Held between ordinary meetings when urgent decisions need to be made.
- **Committee Meetings:** Held regularly or as the need arises to consider particular issues, depending on the focus of the committee.
- **Retreats:** Held away from the boardroom, often for a full day or weekend, and designed to allow board members to take part in deeper discussions about directions and future plans.



MEETING STRUCTURE:

Flow: The best meetings are those that flow logically, keep members engaged and energized, elicit a range of useful ideas and information, and leave members feeling they have made a valued contribution.

Formality: Meetings can vary markedly from board to board. Some are quite formal, following strictly defined rules and ensuring that all members are addressed by their correct titles; others are far less formal.

Location: Meetings can be held in a boardroom or in a more social setting such as a member's house or at a restaurant. Meetings can also be held through web conferencing, by teleconference, and by videoconference. In fact, some boards conduct most if not all of its meetings by teleconference.

Open vs. Closed: Some meetings are held behind closed doors and are subject to strict rules of confidentiality; others are fully open to the public. Even open meetings may sometimes move into confidential mode (referred to as "in-camera"), asking observers to leave the room while certain sensitive issues like salary reviews and staff evaluations are discussed.

Voting: Decisions may be made in a variety of ways, by formal voting or a more informal show of hands or verbal agreement. Some boards follow procedures based on Robert's Rules of Order, a guide to running meetings that specifies common rules and procedures for deliberation, debate and decision making.

EXAMPLE MEETING

Although meetings will vary greatly from board to board, the following is a rough guide to how a typical board meeting might proceed:

1. Board members arrive and the Chair (leader) declares the meeting open.
2. Attendances, absences and apologies are noted (throughout the meeting the minute taker will note when people leave or re-join the meeting).
3. The minutes of the last meeting are amended or accepted (it is usually assumed that all members will have read the minutes beforehand).
4. Members are asked if there are any matters arising from the minutes – this offers members the opportunity to speak briefly about developments since the last meeting.
5. Some boards will receive reports at this point in the meeting. Often, the reports are presented for information only with no action required other than an acknowledgement that they have been read and accepted.



6. Committee reports come next, if applicable. As with the Chair and ED's reports, committee reports are generally accepted without the need for lengthy discussions. Issues that require decision making by the full board will usually appear under a separate item.
7. Some boards will have a "consent agenda", which will include routine items, such as to accept committee reports or approve normal expenditures. These items are carried automatically unless someone asks the chair to move any of them to the regular agenda.
8. Consideration of the agenda items begins. Usually, each item will be considered separately in the order in which they appear in the agenda. Board members discuss or debate issues surrounding the item before a motion is put forward and a vote taken. Once the board has made a resolution, the meeting moves on to the next item. Sometimes an item will be deferred until later in the meeting (say, to allow for a particular member to arrive) or until a later meeting (to allow for more information to be prepared, for example). Other items may be delegated to a committee for more detailed investigation and consideration.
9. Any urgent or general business that was not included on the circulated agenda is discussed next. Because details about these items have not been circulated earlier, and board members therefore may not be "up to speed" on the issues, decisions may need to be deferred to the next meeting to allow time for more in-depth consideration.
10. Confidential business, which is usually subject to a separate, private agenda, is often dealt with last. If it is an open meeting, observers are asked to leave to allow the board to consider these items privately. These sessions are called "in-camera".
11. The meeting is formally closed.

MEETING ETIQUETTE

- Arrive on time (or early) and leave only when the meeting is finished.
- Carefully read all items well before the meeting.
- Accept board decisions graciously, even if your view has been overruled. Avoid personal attacks or rehashing things that have already been decided.
- Stick to the agenda. Avoid launching into discussions about irrelevant information.
- Ask questions and insist on answers when you need clarification. Do not agree to decisions or actions you don't understand.
- Take appropriate action to ensure that you and your board are protected from any potential or real conflicts of interest you feel may arise.
- Ensure you give the views of each board member respect and consideration; avoid speaking without listening or interrupting people when they are talking.
- Your contribution is important: Make an active contribution to debates and discussions whenever possible.
- Answer any questions meeting participants ask, even if they appear naïve.
- Do not discuss confidential information outside the boardroom.



KEY MEETING PREPARATION DOCUMENTS

Meeting Agenda

A meeting agenda is a list or outline of items to be considered during the meeting. Every meeting should have an agenda and meeting materials sent to all participants ahead of time. For major meetings such as a BOD meeting, these should be in your hands at least 10 – 14 days prior to the meeting. For smaller meetings such as committees, 7 – 10 days should be sufficient.

A typical agenda includes:

- A point form list or index showing the main items to be discussed during the meeting.
- A copy of the minutes of the last meeting.
- A president's report.
- A financial report.
- An ED's report (for those NSOs that have staff).
- Committee reports (for those boards that have committees).
- General business, i.e. items for discussion or action during that meeting. Each is listed separately, sometimes with a summary of the issue and relevant supporting documents. Sometimes these items will be accompanied by a recommendation for action with the name of the person(s) responsible for the discussion or report and the approximate time to be allocated to the item. Directors or committee members should not be asked to make decisions on major items for which sufficient pre-meeting notice and information have not been provided.
- An item allowing for introduction of "urgent business", which will include issues not on the agenda that cannot wait until the next meeting.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes are the official record of the actions and decisions of the board. They are taken every meeting and approved the next time the board meets.

Generally, meeting minutes will include:

- The date and time of the meeting (including start and finishing times).
- Attendees (including absences and apologies – and noting when people have left and re-entered the meeting).
- A summary of the main points made during the discussion of each item.
- The result of each item discussed (decisions made or deferred, sometimes also including the number of votes for and against).

Meeting minutes are valuable as an orientation tool for new board members; they provide a history of the organization and its operations. Minutes are sometimes approved without much thought, or even without having been read by board members. This is a dangerous practice. The minutes show who voted for what and what action the board has committed to – and they may be referred to as the official record days, weeks, and even years after a decision has been made. They should therefore not be treated lightly.

**Financial Papers**

The board's financial documents should allow members to have on hand at any given moment what is owned, how much money is on hand and what needs to be paid. Boards that receive government funding will often be required, as part of a funding agreement, to provide reports to the government with details as to how the funds are being used. Board members should become familiar with all financial documents, as financial accountability is one of the board's most important areas of supervision.

Financial Plan / Strategic Plan

While a budget serves a short-term (12-month) function, a longer-range financial plan is designed to allow boards to plan for the future, anticipating spending and income for the next four (4) years. Typically, these long-range plans are created as part of a Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan identifies the organization's vision, mission and objectives, and specifies items to be accomplished during the upcoming years.

In order that you keep on top of the information you need to know, the following guidelines will help you prepare for each meeting:

At least two weeks before each board meeting, the following should be reviewed:

- Agenda;
- Information about issues for discussion, when appropriate;
- Financial information; and
- Committee reports.

At least two weeks before the meeting at which it is discussed, the following should be reviewed:

- Annual budget;
- Audit report; and
- Strategic Plan.

After each board meeting, the following should be reviewed:

- Minutes; and
- Notice of next meeting.

BETWEEN MEETINGS:**Review the minutes**

After a meeting, review the minutes as soon as they are circulated, while the meeting is fresh in your mind, and make note of any amendments you think are needed if a decision recorded in the minutes does not seem to correspond with your recollection of what happened at the meeting.

**Fulfill your commitment(s)**

If the meeting resulted in you being assigned a task, plan how you will accomplish the task and begin work as soon as you are able. Keep track of your progress so you can give an update or submit a report for the next meeting.

Communication and Liaison

One of your most important roles as an AD is to act as a link between your NSO's decision makers and your fellow athletes. After each board meeting you will need to inform the athletes about the issues that were discussed and the decisions that were made. Keep in mind, however, that as a board member, you must adhere to your NSO's confidentiality policies and there may be items discussed by the board that you are not free to share with others. If you are in doubt, check with an experienced board member.

You should choose a method of communicating that works for you and the athletes you represent. If your sport has an Athletes' Council, it will be your conduit back to all athletes. Perhaps you will forward the meeting minutes as an email attachment (as long as they contain no confidential information), with a cover note highlighting the issues most important to the athletes. Perhaps your NSO has a website where you can post an update, and then you would just need to send a reminder to athletes that new information has been posted. Speak to the outgoing AD to find out what she/he did and to see if she/he has advice for you.

If you know that an issue of interest to athletes is going to be discussed at an upcoming board or committee meeting, use the time between meetings to inform athletes of the issue and to seek feedback. This will allow you to confidently provide the athletes' views and be an effective advocate when the issue is next discussed.

Writing up 'official answers' from NSO decision makers in a factual way, steering clear of emotional or accusatory language, and posting the information for all athletes to see, ensures openness and transparency and discourages rumours. Even more importantly, it provides a process for athletes to have their concerns heard and responded to by their NSO.

It is also important to stay in touch with your board or committee colleagues between meetings. For example:

- Remind them about concerns from the athletes.
- Keep them up-to-date about team events by keeping an online journal and filing brief updates with team news. Help them to feel like part of the team. This may create more empathy and understanding.
- Encourage board members to cheer on the athletes with e-mails or cards to the team when at competitions.
- Lobby the appropriate people to keep your athlete vision front and center. Develop key messages and use these messages continually.

**Board Committees**

Many boards set up committees or sub-committees to help streamline its decision making process. Committees concentrate on and develop expertise in specific areas. Usually its role will involve examining and debating an issue and then making a recommendation to the full board. It may also be set up to take on a major project or task – hosting a tournament, for example. In some organizations, committees consist only of board members. Others involve outside people with particular knowledge or expertise. Not all boards have committees and not all boards have the same committees.

TYPES OF COMMITTEES:**Standing Committees**

A Standing Committee is one that is always a part of the organization's operations. It is included in the Bylaws along with specific information about how people get elected or appointed and duties of the committee members. High Performance or National Team Committees are usually Standing Committees.

Ad-Hoc Committees

The board may also create "Ad Hoc" Committees from time to time. By definition, these are short-term committees pulled together to perform a specific function or take on a particular task. One example is an Ad Hoc Committee to hire an executive level staff member.



ATHLETE DIRECTOR BEST PRACTICES



The following is a list of tips for athlete leaders to help them become more knowledgeable, effective Directors and indispensable members of the Board of Directors (BOD). Many of these tips can also be applied to Athlete Representative (AR) positions at any level. Following this advice can help to strengthen your reputation as a leader within the organization and build the organization's trust in the importance of athlete representation, ensuring these roles become integral to the entire Canadian sport system.



First, it is vital to understand the governance structure of National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and your role within it as a representative of the athletes and as an Athlete Director (AD). This general information can be found in our other resources titled "Board of Directors 101" and "Role of the Athlete Director".

Once you have the background knowledge to navigate your specific organization, you can work toward becoming an invaluable resource and esteemed member of the BOD.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Is the BOD operational or governance oriented? How are decisions made?
- Is there an NSO Orientation Manual/Package for new Directors?
- Where do I obtain previous BOD meeting minutes and financial records to get up to date with the organization's operations?
- How is the NSO funded?
- What are the responsibilities of the different committees? Do these committees have/require athlete representation?
- Who is/are the designated staff contact(s)/liaison(s) to the AD or AR?
- Is there an allocated budget for the AD/AR to fulfill their responsibilities?
- Is there an outline of the AD/AR roles and responsibilities (i.e. Job Description)?
- What are the expectations of the AD for reporting to the Board? Athletes? At the Annual General Meeting or other meetings?
- Who were the previous ADs and their contact information?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ATHLETE REPRESENTATION

- Know your sport (and all disciplines within it) and know who you represent
- Understand what the athletes want and need – ask questions and listen with an open mind



- Learn how your NSO and the sport system in Canada works
- Educate your fellow athletes on the workings of your NSO and the sport system
- Establish strong and consistent communication lines between yourself and the athletes – be available during key dates (e.g. Major competitions, team selections, criteria development and release, etc.)
- Ask for help when you need it – from staff, board members, other athlete leaders, or AthletesCAN

GENERAL BEST PRACTICES FOR DIRECTORS

- Educate yourself on the jargon and rules of a board meeting (i.e. Robert's Rules)
- Prepare for meetings – review all meeting materials and have questions ready
- Get to know the other board members and identify any potential allies around the table
- Work on creating new allies who can support you on different initiatives or issues
- Be on time for all meetings – or even early to engage with other members outside the confines of the meeting time
- Keep in mind that discussions about important matters often occur or continue outside of the boardroom
- Listen and be attentive throughout meetings
- Allow yourself to learn from others – try to find a more experienced board member who would be willing to act as a mentor
- Take advantage of opportunities to develop your leadership and board skill set and reach out to your NSO for support to access these kinds of opportunities that interest you
- Ask questions and don't be afraid to make mistakes as you learn
- Keep an open mind and remember you need to focus on the best interests of the organization while representing the athletes
- Strive for collaboration and solutions, not confrontation
- Work to understand Conflict of Interest (COI) and the best practices to mitigate it - see if your NSO has a COI Policy
- Maintain continuous communication with the athletes
- Try to help develop and educate other athlete leaders within your organization – this will ensure there is some continuation in your work at the board level and a strong succession plan
- Don't be afraid to push back – remember you are an equal to the others around the board table
- Don't get discouraged if you find yourself fighting for the same things and don't let the organization fall back into the same old patterns or become complacent if you know something needs to change – people often need constant reminders for changes to become the new normal, so don't let off the gas pedal
- Reach out to AthletesCAN for help whenever you need it and attend Forum whenever you have the opportunity

BOARD OF DIRECTORS AGENDA TEMPLATE



[Download Template](#)

[NAME OF ORGANIZATION]
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

AGENDA

December 6, 20xx, 17h00 – 18h00 PDT / 20h00-21h0 EDT

Conference call-in number: 1.xxx.xxx.xxxx / conference: XXXX# / passcode XXXX#

Present:

Directors who have confirmed participation

Regrets:

Directors who have confirmed they are not available

Absent:

Directors who have not confirmed participation or availability.

Guests:

Individuals invited to participate at the 'pleasure of the chairperson / board' but are not Directors. Board Meetings are considered 'closed meetings' as in generally no members or public are present. Guests are to be invited in advance of meeting & some may have a standing invitation, e.g., Athletes' Council Chair.

Staff:

Staff invited to participate given items on the Agenda, typically Management level and always includes the Executive Director.

Agenda Items	Time	Intent of Agenda Item	References and Documentation
<p>1. Call to Order</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p> <p><i>Individual primarily responsible for the Agenda item should listed for every item.</i></p>	<p>00:00</p> <p><i>Rough times of items help to keep the meeting on track.</i></p>	<p>Welcome, call-to-order, record of attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Led by the Chairperson</i> • <i>Standard procedure for determining quorum</i> • <i>Secretary to take Minutes of the meeting</i> 	<p><i>Any items in italics listed in this column have associated documents in the meeting package materials.</i></p>
<p>2. Approval of Agenda</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p>Approval of Agenda</p> <p><i>Chairperson to ask, “Is there any other business to be added to the agenda?”</i></p> <p><i>TYPICAL WORDING OF MOTION:</i> <i>BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Agenda for the [date] Board of Directors meeting be adopted as presented.</i></p> <p><i>The Chair asks for a mover, and seconder, then a vote.</i></p> <p><i>In the Minutes, this is shown as “IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED THAT...” If no vote number shown, then taken as unanimous. If not unanimous, then FOR/AGAINST vote totals (and optionally, names) listed.</i></p>	
<p>3. Conflict of Interests</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p>2.0 Declaration of Conflict of Interest</p> <p><i>Standard Procedure for declaring conflicts.</i></p> <p><i>“Any conflicts to declare at this time?” (Chairperson)</i></p>	<p><i>Conflict of Interest Policy</i></p>
<p>4. 1st In-Camera (Optional)</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Executive Director]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p>In-Camera - Board with Executive Director and Key Staff</p> <p><i>Optional in-camera session to deal with confidential matters that exclude guests.</i></p> <p><i>The Secretary can continue to take Minutes, but these minutes will be kept separate from the Board minutes. If <u>key decisions</u> are made in-camera, they will be recorded in the main Minutes of the Board meeting.</i></p> <p><i>In-camera sessions are still legal sessions of the Board. It is best not to vote on resolutions during in-camera sessions but to come back into full session to vote and record the vote in the main minutes.</i></p>	
<p><i>Invite guests to join call/in-person meeting</i></p>			

<p>4. Approval of Board of Directors Minutes from meeting of [date].</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p><i>The Minutes are a legal and public record of proceedings, as well as a record to help track and action the outcomes of decisions at meetings.</i></p> <p><i>This item is an opportunity for Board members to review the draft Minutes and comment on them for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Errors or omissions, and</i> • <i>That they accurately capture the business of the last meeting.</i> <p>TYPICAL WORDING OF MOTION: BE IT RESOLVED THAT the minutes of [date] Board of Directors meeting be approved as circulated (or amended).</p>	<p><i>Minutes from previous meeting to be provided with other meeting documents and Agenda.</i></p>
<p>5.0 Consent Agenda (Optional)</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p><i>Items listed under the consent agenda will be adopted by ‘general consent’, i.e., by passing a simple motion to approve all listed actions, recommendations and resolutions. There will be no discussion on these items.</i></p> <p><i>If debate is requested, then the item will be removed from the consent agenda. This can be done on the simple request of any Board member.</i></p> <p><i>Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the motion is passed to adopt the remaining items on the ‘consent agenda’, or may be placed later on the normal business agenda. This decision is at the discretion of the Board.</i></p> <p>Typical items included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Final approval of proposals or reports that the board has been dealing with for some time and all members are familiar with the implications;</i> • <i>Routine matters such as appointments to committees;</i> • <i>Staff appointments requiring board confirmation;</i> • <i>Reports provided for information only;</i> • <i>Correspondence requiring no action.</i> <p>(TYPICAL WORDING OF MOTION: BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Directors approves the consent agenda as provided, including receiving the information presented in the reports and other documents listed within the consent agenda, as well as specifically approving any recommendations detailed in the consent agenda.</p>	

<p>6. Management Report</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Executive Director or senior staff person]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p><i>Opportunity for management to provide summary of key activities and decisions since the last Board meeting.</i></p>	<p><i>Summary from Executive Director or staff to be provided as part of meeting package.</i></p>
<p>7. Business Items</p> <p><i>[Name – typically relevant staff member, board members or other person in charge of specific items]</i></p>		<p>7.1 Item</p> <p>7.2 Item</p> <p>7.3 Item</p>	<p><i>Where appropriate, each item to have supporting documents, numbered to correspond to the agenda item, and provided in advance.</i></p>
<p>8. Other Business</p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p><i>Items added at request of Board or staff, if circumstances (timing, criticality, etc.) warrants addition.</i></p>	<p><i>Typically no documents provided in advance, given nature of item.</i></p>
<p>9. 2nd In-Camera</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p>Board Only In-Camera</p> <p><i>Directors can bring forward any comments or concerns regarding operations and management that they prefer not to raise directly with the Executive Director. This also ensures anonymity of the source.</i></p> <p><i>This is a placeholder that is always on the Agenda as a leading practice and even if nothing is raised, by having it as a standard agenda item, the “awkwardness” of a director requesting a Board only in-camera is removed.</i></p>	
<p>10. Closing</p> <p><i>[Name – typically Chair]</i></p>	<p>00:00</p>	<p>10.1 Next Meetings <i>Previously scheduled meetings and potential changes to such confirmed with Board.</i></p> <p>10.2 Meeting Evaluation <i>Link or document to be provided. Can be done after meeting, but serves as a reminder.</i></p> <p>10.3 Adjournment <i>Chair says “Any further business? Hearing no further business, I declare the meeting adjourned.”</i></p> <p><i>A formal motion is not required to adjourn a meeting as long as question is asked about “any further business” and participants have opportunity to respond.</i></p>	



ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER:

A Brief Guide To Effective Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order is a book that was first published in 1876 by US Army General Henry Martyn Robert that provides a structure of how to run effective meetings. Some of the main aspects of Robert's Rules are set out below:

Agenda – Meetings should follow a strict agenda, which ensures structure and consistency.

Minutes – Meeting minutes are a documented summary of the meeting. Typically, the Secretary takes minutes throughout the meeting, and will later distribute them to both the attendees and absent invited members. Robert's Rules requires that only the main motions are documented in the minutes, though some organizations will go into more detail. The minutes of a particular meeting are approved at the next meeting as part of the formal agenda.

Motion – Motions are used to discuss a new item of business, such as an action to be taken or a decision that should be made by the organization. For example, "Can I get a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting?" Motions are introduced on the agenda or can be introduced at the meeting. Motions must be made ("put forward") by one person, and seconded ("supported") by a different person. Thereafter, the entire group can debate or discuss the motion, and then vote on it. If there is no second (i.e. no support for the motion), then the matter is dropped.

Postpone Indefinitely – This move is taken if a motion will not be discussed further during the current meeting, though it may be reintroduced at a later meeting. The decision to postpone indefinitely must be seconded and voted on.

Table – This action is used to postpone discussion of an item until later in the meeting or at a later date. Again, the decision must be seconded, and voted on.

Question – This can be used to stop a debate, so that a motion can be voted on. As with all of the other actions, it needs to be seconded by a different person. Directly after a question is posed, a vote is held, and a two-thirds majority is needed for it to pass. In the case of the vote passing, the motion is then voted on directly.





Amend – Sometimes, an action or item needs to be changed after it has been debated on. A member might suggest an amendment, and in this case, it must be seconded to be voted on. If accepted, the amendment stays. For example, a debate might lead to a change in the minutes (noticing of a discrepancy, or a simple spelling error). In this case, the motion would be changed to say, “Motion to approve the minutes subject to the amendments proposed.”

Commit – One step that can be taken with motions is to have them researched further by a separate committee, who will then file a report at the next meeting. This job might be assigned to an existing or a newly organized committee. It must be seconded and be passed by majority vote for this action to occur.

Adjourn – At the end of the meeting, someone will typically make a motion to end the meeting, or “adjourn” it. Once again, this motion must be seconded and followed by a vote to adjourn the meeting. The agenda helps to set a time and schedule and usually the chairperson will call to end the meeting. If applicable, a follow-up meeting should be scheduled.



AthletesCAN

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