



## Board Coaching Program

The Non-Profit Sector Leadership Program at Dalhousie University is offering board coaching support to voluntary non-profit organizations throughout Nova Scotia. Coaching is proving to be of great value in advance of a board development session, as follow-up to a board development workshop, or as a stand alone approach to improving organizational governance. Board coaching works!

While board development workshops can be helpful to volunteer organizations, often when a board is exposed to all it could be doing, the road ahead seems daunting and the first steps for any new initiative are uncertain. Forming a committee to research and discuss what exactly to do often further delays the process of making improvements. Despite good intentions, many boards are unable to follow through. New issues arise and boards fall back on established patterns; the adoption of improved governance practices returns to the back burner.

Board coaching can enable non-profit organizations to make significant improvements to their governance practices by providing a personal guide or navigator to help the board take manageable steps. It works because it is focused on specific “high return” performance practices, takes less time, is experiential and is tailored to needs of different organizations. It can produce results that can be experienced in the span of two board meetings!

Our approach to board coaching requires:

- A commitment of a few hours by one or two board members and the executive director.
- An idea about what the board would be interested in improving.

- Confidence that their board is open to experimenting even if they may not be willing to adopt or approve a new practice as a permanent feature.

Board coaching normally starts with a few telephone conversations, two or three e-mail exchanges and one or two face-to-face meetings with the coach. An investment of three hours and a commitment to act is often sufficient to bring about some noticeable and sustainable improvement; double this amount of time investment and a board’s effectiveness in one or two key performance areas can be significant.

We have found that the following kinds of improvements are ideal vehicles for board coaching assistance:

- Board recruitment
- Board member and board-staff communication
- Developing and approving a policy
- Reviewing by-laws
- Board evaluation
- Executive director evaluation
- Board orientation planning
- Improving board meetings
- Managing conflict

### Questions about the board coaching program:

- *How do we access the coaching assistance?*

It starts with a phone call (**902-494-7137**) or e-mail (**npsl@dal.ca**) to us inquiring about the availability of coaching assistance and what is involved. We will

contact you by telephone and/or e-mail to set up an initial conversation.

- *Is a meeting with the whole board part of the process?*

It certainly can be but does not have to be. A short presentation at a regular board meeting is often easier than trying to arrange a special session.

- *Do we need a board governance committee?*

We recommend that the board put its trust in one or two board members and the executive director to take the lead. The more people involved the more difficult it is to meet with the coach.

- *Does the board get to decide on the changes?*

Yes, but not before trying them out. Our approach is experiential. We encourage boards to modify their meeting agenda and their conversations to get a feel for the changes first. The board certainly gets to choose up front what it wants to work on.

- *How much volunteer time is required of the board members involved?*

We suggest that the board members taking the lead make an initial commitment of **five hours over two months**. This typically includes two teleconferences or face-to-face meetings with the coach. If this produces results the board can choose to continue.

**Board coaching is an ideal means of supporting and developing board chairs**

- *Are there any limitations on the kind of assistance the coach can provide?*

The main limitation is that a board member must have a lead role in the process. The board chair is often the best candidate. We will not coach executive

directors alone. Also, we do not provide coaching on fund raising.

- *How much does the coaching assistance cost?*

The initial conversation or consultation costs your organization nothing. Once your organization invites us to be your board coach our assistance costs \$150 an hour of meeting time. You will be invoiced only for the hours you use the coach. Most organizations can expect to pay between \$600 and \$1800 for the help they need. We will negotiate the amount with you so there are no surprises. **We guarantee you will experience positive results.**

- *Do we favour a particular model of governance*

No. Our coaching is informed by several governance approaches and we generally favour a blended model. Every organization has different governance requirements depending on its size and where it is in its development.

- *What does the Dalhousie program offer that consultants do not?*

Our coaching assistance is informed by our experience working with boards of large and small organizations all across Nova Scotia. This includes boards of disability groups, literacy networks and economic development agencies. Our assistance is also informed by the latest research on board effectiveness – no one is better informed about the field of non-profit governance than us.

- *Who provides the coaching?*

Our primary coach is Grant MacDonald, Director of the Non-Profit Sector Leadership Program. Grant is one of Canada's leading experts on non-profit governance. He has a lot of experience with volunteer boards as an adult educator and facilitator, and as a volunteer himself.

As the board coaching program grows in popularity additional coaches may need to be recruited.

The Non-Profit Sector Leadership Program (NPSL) is provided by the Dalhousie University College of Continuing Education. Visit us on line at [www.dal.ca/cce](http://www.dal.ca/cce) Click on Continuing Management Education and then on NPSL.