



Competency Development for Board Members in Public Park and Recreation Agencies

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Executive Summary: This study sought to identify the competencies that board members in public parks and recreation agencies perceived as necessary to perform their duties. Competencies were defined as skills, knowledge, and characteristics needed to perform the duties of a board member. A systems theoretical framework guided the development of competencies. Systems theory has been used extensively in organizational development for many years and asserts that organizations are interdependent systems that rely on subsystems to achieve stability. When one part of the system is weak, it weakens the entire system. In public parks and recreation, board members are a major part of the organization, and their performance is pivotal to the effectiveness of the agency. The board influences all policies, services, and practices within an agency. Given this power and potential impact, a high performing board is imperative. Competencies may be the key to improving the performance of boards in public parks and recreation agencies.

A Delphi technique was used to collect data, and potential jurors were randomly selected from the National Recreation and Park Association's Citizen Board Member Branch. A total of 23 jurors completed three rounds of data collection. They were asked to list the competencies they perceived as important for board members, rank the importance of the generated competencies to board members, determine if the developed competency categories were accurate, and determine if the competencies were assigned to the appropriate category. Based on the results of the Delphi process, the Board Member Competency Framework was developed. It consists of eight general competency categories and 56 specific competencies. The eight general competency categories included (a) advocacy, (b) board effectiveness, (c) community relations, (d) decision making, (e) education and experience, (f) finance and planning, (g) interpersonal characteristics, and (h) staff relations. There were nine competencies rated as extremely important. The highest rated competencies included (a) study issues before making decisions, (b) participate in committee and board meetings, (c) understand the purpose of the board, and (d) have the ability to make decisions. Given systems theory, the determined competencies serve as a framework for the development of training and procedures to aid board members in improving their performance which will ultimately impact the overall agency.

KEYWORDS: Boards, competencies, delphi, jurors, public parks and recreation, nonprofits.

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Introduction

Public parks and recreation agencies may have varied governing structures, including special districts, having mayoral governance, or city manager operated systems. Each has its own strengths, weaknesses, differences, and commonalities. One of the major commonalities lies in the presence of a governing board. Because of the importance of boards to park and recreation agencies, and the lack of empirical research in this area, this study focuses on the development of competencies needed by board members in public parks and recreation agencies.

The Role of Systems Theory

The question has been asked “why study competencies?” The answer lies in systems theory. Although this study did not attempt to test systems theory, it was used as a guiding principle and a way of understanding the significance and impact board competencies have on an entire organization. Based on systems theory, competencies need to be developed to keep the organization stable and functioning effectively. The competencies generated cannot be exclusive to the board, but will impact the entire organization, including the public.

Simply generating a list of competencies misses the larger theoretical importance of developing skills, knowledge, and characteristics of board members. It is essential to understand why competencies are an integral part of an organization and how skilled board members impact the agency as a whole. A systems theoretical framework can be used to gain a clearer understanding of the contributions competencies make to the entire organization. Systems theory has three basic premises that include (a) systems function interdependently, (b) they are made of interdependent parts that together make a whole, and (c) systems are interdependent with their external environment (Jacobs, 1989).

Systems theory has been used in organizational development for years (i.e. Gradous, 1989; Boyatzis, 1982), with self-stabilization being a guiding principle of organizational systems. Systems need to be as stable as possible in order to deal with internal and external disturbances. White (1959) argued in his seminal work on competencies that skilled and knowledgeable employees are more able to adapt to environmental changes within the organization that leads to a more effective organization. Dubois (1996) concurred by arguing that a systems approach to competency building was a viable method to manage performance and guide individual development. A systems approach to competencies suggests that building the skills of the individual makes the entire organization more efficient and effective and that individual weaknesses make the system less stable, less able to adapt to environmental influences, and less effective as a whole.

How Boards are Structured

Before beginning to understand the impact, function, and responsibilities of boards, it is necessary to understand the differences and similarities of board structures. According to Moiseichik and Bodey (1999) boards



have three basic structures including (a) independent boards, (b) semi-independent boards, and (c) advisory boards. An independent board is the strongest type of board and has the authority to set policy, hold title to property, assess taxes, and exercise the ultimate fiscal authority. Members of independent boards are elected by the citizens if they are public agencies or by their members or stockholders if they are nonprofit or private sector boards. These boards typically oversee separate taxing districts and are autonomous groups that have final authority over the district. Flickinger (1992) estimated that 18% of all parks and recreation boards are independent.

Semi-independent boards have members who are generally appointed, and they are given limited authority over policy making and administrative practices. This board is reliant upon an independent board for final approval. This type of board is commonly found within city or county government where the board has some decision-making power, but the ultimate authority lies with the city/county council. Most park and recreation boards are considered semi-independent.

The final type of board, the advisory board, can have members who are either elected or appointed. The board is given authority over certain areas but does not have the final authority on policy setting or administrative tasks. The advisory board serves as a liaison with the community, as well as a sounding board to the governing body (Flickinger, 1992). Bannon (1984) posited that the advisory board is the least desired type of board because they have no real authority.

What Boards Do

Boards have three primary responsibilities, including establishing policies to guide management, hiring effective chief executive officers, and advising management (Moiseichik & Bodey, 1999). These three responsibilities can be classified as governance. Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (2001) described governance as “regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services” (p. 7).

Although there are three primary board responsibilities, there are also a number of board functions. The board provides an opportunity for an agency to take advantage of the collective skills, resources, and contacts of its members, as these people serve as ambassadors to the public by garnering public opinion and support. Board members also serve a leadership role and either directly or indirectly influence every policy, service, and practice within an agency. Board members further have a fiduciary duty to do what is in the best interest of the organization. This means that self-interests must be put aside, that board members must act with honesty and integrity, and that they must avoid conflicts of interest (Moiseichik & Bodey, 1999).

Sometimes problems arise when board members lack an understanding of the concept of governance and lose sight of the differences between governance, which they should be doing, and administration, which is the role of professional staff. When this happens micro-management and



special interests become prevalent among board members (Holland, Ritvo, & Kovner, 1998). Carver (1997) suggested that when these problems occur the board will not spend enough time exploring issues, discussing and debating alternatives, and defining the future of the organization. Ultimately their effectiveness is compromised. Boards should correct these and other problems in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness. However, many boards either do not, or correct them.

Holland (1991) suggested several reasons boards do not correct the functional problems that they face. First, few boards formally monitor their productivity and performance and are incapable of an accurate assessment. They do not conduct internal or external evaluation, even though their operation can have an enormous impact on the agency. Few administrators ask the board to evaluate their own development, job design, structure, and performance. Yet these are issues that can make the board more effective. Second, there have not been very many instruments that are valid and reliable that can confidently assess board performance. In order for a board to evaluate itself, the evaluation criteria need to be outlined and encompass the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals and the collective board. These criteria can guide board members in their professional development and set a course for achieving high performance. Currently, criteria have not been developed to guide the behaviors of board members in parks and recreation. This essentially prohibits any board performance evaluation. Third, there is no clearly defined set of competencies and job tasks for the board member position within an agency. Individuals seeking membership on a board may not have a lucid picture of their responsibilities and functions in governance and administration. Without clearly defined competencies, there is no direction for board members once they are elected or appointed. Finally, board development may not be a priority in many agencies. With shrinking budgets, professional development for board members may be ignored. It is left to the board member to assess their own skills and seek training opportunities when and where available.

Although each of these problem areas can be the focus of research on public parks and recreation boards, competency development is an underlying guide for many of them. Competencies have been defined by Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) as “essential skills, knowledge and personal characteristics needed for successful performance in a job” (p. 1). Pynes (1997) outlined knowledge as “the information required for the position; skills as the specific observable competencies required to perform particular tasks of a position and characteristics as attitudes, personality factors, or physical or mental traits needed to perform the job” (p. 77-78). Competencies, then can range from behaviors that are very concrete, such as having the ability to set goals and objectives, to interpersonal characteristics, such as being innovative and fair.

Having knowledge of competencies can assist a board to become more effective. Competencies can provide the structure and criteria for an evaluation instrument. They can serve as a benchmark for professional



development and determine where board members need training. They can outline the roles and responsibilities of board members so they know what they are supposed to do, while minimizing micro-managing and self-interest. The purpose of this study was to determine an overall competency framework that can be used for boards regardless of whether they are independent, semi-independent, or advisory in nature. While each structure will bring special needs and skills, an overarching framework can be used as a starting point for boards in the profession, as well as researchers with an interest in board development and effectiveness.

Literature Review

Board development, capabilities, and competencies have been limited in the park and recreation literature. The most relevant literature on the topic of boards is in the nonprofit sector, yet there are numerous differences in these two sectors. It is essential to outline the differences between the two sectors to illustrate why adopting the nonprofit sector model is inadequate. Although there are several similarities between the public and nonprofit sectors, such as limited funding sources, use of volunteers, having tax exempt status, and having a board of directors, there are also several differences between them. Herman (1994) posited that the nonprofit sector relies extensively on volunteers to provide services and raise money, utilizes donors to provide resources for those in need of services, and provides services that would not otherwise be available through the public or private sectors. Hummel (1996) suggested that nonprofit board members are not elected by the community as a whole but are most likely self-perpetuated. Firstenberg (1996) further asserted that there is an antigovernment fervor in the nonprofit sector because many of the political aspects of the public sector do not exist in the nonprofit sector. For example, there is no general election for board seats, there are no politically divided board members, and there is no fear of staff losing jobs when the political party changes power. He further argues that nonprofit organizations place a heavy emphasis on fundraising since there is no taxing body for operating money for the organization. Nonprofit organizations rely on grants, governmental contracts, and fundraising as income sources.

Berkley (1975) outlined a few unique features of public agencies. First, public agencies have a greater reliance on, and vulnerability to, the law. The law outlines what private and nonprofit organizations cannot do whereas it outlines what public agencies can do. Secondly, he argues that public organizations operate in “a fishbowl,” where they are constantly under scrutiny by the public, politicians, and the media. There is a constant accountability, and much of it is due to funding sources since taxes fund all or part of the services provided. In addition, there is not pressure from stockholders (private sector) to make money, and there is not a need to break-even to remain in existence (nonprofit sector). Public agencies have the ability to make money on some services, break even on some, and subsidize others. Lastly, public agencies have limited flexibility in their



mission, procedures, and operations. It is difficult to modify any of these quickly, and most units of government were established for a specific purpose that may be unchangeable. Due to these differences, competency standards for nonprofit boards may serve as a starting point for public parks and recreation boards but are insufficient without refinement.

Nonprofit Sector Literature

Given the limited study of board member effectiveness in parks and recreation, it is necessary to look outside the profession for guidance on board competencies. There is a broad base of literature in the nonprofit sector that may lend itself to a better understanding of the topic. The nonprofit sector has developed several models of effectiveness, as well as instruments to measure board performance. Some of the more prominent ones include Conrad and Glen (1983), Slesinger (1991), Szanton (1992), Zander (1993), Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1996), Maron (1997) and Tropman and Tropman (1999). There are several similarities and differences that can be found in each. When these major studies were synthesized, 15 competencies emerged (Table 1).

Table 1
Fifteen Competencies Synthesized from
Major Studies in the Nonprofit Sector

Competency

1. Long range and short range planning
 2. Fiscal management
 3. Ability to enhance the public image of the organization
 4. Determine mission, vision, goals, & objectives of the organization
 5. Efficient operation of the board
 6. Ability to make decisions
 7. Ability to problem solve
 8. Ability to gain constituent support
 9. Have an understanding of board functions
 10. Select and orient new board members
 11. Influence non-members including the community and other stakeholders
 12. Ability to evaluate board functions
 13. Select the CEO
 14. Ability to raise money
 15. Ability to manage risk
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Understanding the nonprofit literature on boards is important simply because it is much more advanced than the public parks and recreation literature. There are enough similarities between the two sectors that knowledge can be gained from the nonprofit sector literature, but there are also important differences that research from parks and recreation needs to be examined and developed.



Public Parks & Recreation Literature

There are basically three sources in the parks and recreation literature that have looked at board competencies and effectiveness. Flickinger (1992) outlined 10 key skills that parks and recreation board members need. They are presented in Table 2. Although they were drawn from the literature, they were not developed from empirical research. They have served as a training mechanism for board members in the field. Galloway (1999) focused on the competencies of board members in Texas and utilized a Delphi process to establish the competencies. The jury for this study was comprised of chief executive officers (CEO), rather than the board members themselves. He found 42 different competencies (Table 2). Almost half of the competencies could be classified as characteristics with the other half being skills and knowledge. CEO's in this study placed as much value on personality, as they did skills and knowledge.

Fokken (2003) tested an established instrument (Jackson & Holland, 1998) that had been used to evaluate the effectiveness of nonprofit boards. Fokken's study examined competencies that were totally skill and knowledge based, and did not include or consider any that were characteristic based. True competency models consist of all three (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999). A further weakness of this study is that the statements used in the instrument were not written as competency statements, but as evaluative statements. For example, "there are occasions where the board acts inconsistently with the organization's values" and "the board has made a key decision inconsistent with the mission". The wording of the statements

Table 2
Nonprofit and Parks & Recreation
Literature Comparison Competency NPO

Competency	Flickinger Galloway Fokken			Totals	
	NPO	(1992)	(1999)		(2003)
Planning	x	-	x	x	3
Fiscal management	x	-	x	x	3
Enhance public image	x	x	-	x	3
Determine mission, vision, goals & objectives	x	-	-	x	2
Efficient operation of the board	x	-	-	x	2
Ability to make decisions	x	-	-	x	2
Ability to solve problems	x	-	-	x	2
Ability to gain constituent support	x	-	-	x	2
Select & orient new members	x	-	-	x	2
Ability to evaluate board functions	x	-	-	x	2
Ability to work as a team with board & staff	-	x	x	-	2
Interest in parks & recreation department	-	x	x	-	2
Ability to utilize information provided	-	x	x	-	2



makes them very difficult to compare with standard competencies. Fokken did find that 5 of the 6 competency areas, as they are labeled, showed a statistically significant fit with public parks and recreation boards and could be used to evaluate their effectiveness.

Fokken used an established nonprofit evaluation tool to build 6 separate competency models. Building competencies from an established instrument may be a reverse approach to competency research. The literature indicates that competencies can serve as guides to developing evaluation instruments (Lucia & Lepsinger) rather than the instrument guiding competency development.

When comparing the nonprofit literature and the parks and recreation literature pertaining to boards, there were several similarities and differences. Although there was not complete consensus, three competencies were listed by 3 out of 4 sources. Those competencies that had at least 2 sources of agreement are listed in Table 2.

Methodology

This study utilized a Delphi technique in order to reach a consensus on the desired competencies of board members in public parks and recreation agencies. Parker (1972) suggested that the Delphi technique be used to gain knowledge based on group judgments when exact knowledge was unavailable. It allows a panel of experts to debate a topic anonymously by having their opinions monitored by an intermediary researcher (Dalkey, 1969). Although the Delphi technique has a multitude of uses, it has been infrequently used as a methodology within parks and recreation. Getz (2000) did a complete review of literature on the Delphi technique and its use in the profession. She found that 17 studies had been published using this methodology. Since then 3 more studies have been reported, and 2 of the 3 were used in competency development.

The panel of jurors was derived from a random sample of members of the Citizen Board Member Branch (CBM) of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). One hundred and thirty nine people were selected from the membership to participate. Twenty-three of those agreed to be jurors. Although this appears to be a low response rate (16.5%) a Delphi process does not require a large number of participants. There is a lack of consensus among researchers on the size of the panel. Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1975) suggested that a small number, such as 10 to 15 people, can be used if the group is homogenous. In addition Delbecq et. al. argued that if more than 30 people are used, few new ideas emerge and little is gained by the additional people. Parente' and Anderson-Parente' (1987) contend that the final panel should be comprised of at least 10 people. Brooks (1979) maintained that little improvement resulted once the panel size reached 25. As such 23 jurors were deemed an adequate number for the study.

The jurors in this study participated in three rounds of the Delphi process. In Round 1 jurors were asked, in an open ended question format,



what competencies they felt were important to board members in public parks and recreation agencies. In addition, demographic data were collected in order to ascertain the composition of the panel. The responses received in Round 1 were coded and duplicate competencies were removed. Round 2 was a compilation of the competencies generated in Round 1. After the completion of results, jurors were asked again to rate the importance of the competencies on a five point Likert scale. The scale asked jurors to rank the statements as having (1) no importance, (2) slight importance, (3) moderate importance, (4) significant importance, and (5) extreme importance. Jurors were also given the opportunity to add competencies that they felt were omitted in Round 1. Once means were determined from the responses in Round 2, Round 3 was initiated. This round listed the individual competencies, as well as the Round 2 means and standard deviations of each statement. In addition, the researcher developed categories of competencies by coding the qualitative data based on methodologies suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). In this round jurors were asked (a) if they agreed with the means, (b) their level of agreement with the categories, and (c) the appropriateness of the category in which each statement was placed. Once the results of the third round were obtained and analyzed, the Board Member Competency Framework (BMCF) was created.

Results

Although all 23 jurors were asked to provide demographic data, only 11 jurors responded to the demographics section of the instrument. All jurors were either 46-54 (18.2%) or 55+ years of age (81.8%). They represented communities under 20,000 (9.0%), 20,000-49,999 (54.5%), and 50,000-100,000 (36.4%). Jurors were also asked to indicate the organizational structure of the departments that they represented. The representation was: 18.2% from park districts (independent boards), 9.0% from strong mayor form of government (semi-independent boards), 63.6% from city manager form of government (semi-independent boards), and 9.0% from a board of supervisors (semi-independent boards). This breakdown is similar to Flickinger's (1992) estimates on the numbers of each type of board previously discussed. When examining longevity of board service, the average tenure on the board was 10.18 years. This time of service ranged from 2-29 years.

Since the selected methodology was a Delphi study, each of the three rounds built upon the previous ones. Round 1 utilized an open ended question format that ultimately resulted in 71 unique competencies once the duplicates were removed. These statements were then used to create Round 2 where jurors rated each statement on the five point Likert scale. The mean ratings ranged from a low of 2.88 to a high of 4.71 with four new competencies being added to the study. In this round, the highest rated competency was having a willingness to study issues before making decisions. The lowest rated competency was having the ability to raise funds.



In Round 3, jurors examined the group established means and standard deviations and indicated their level of agreement/disagreement with the means of the competencies. If jurors disagreed with the group rating, they were asked to re-rate the statement and provide an explanation of their reason for disagreeing in the dissent section of the instrument. In addition, 11 competency categories were created and the competency statements were grouped according to these categories. The categories included (a) advocacy, (b) board effectiveness, (c) communication and networking, (d) community relations, (e) decision making, (f) education and experience, (g) interpersonal characteristics, (h) planning, (i) political acumen, (j) staff relations, and (k) technical skills. Jurors were asked to assess the appropriateness of the categories and the competencies within each. Based on the data these 11 categories were merged, renamed, and reduced to eight categories as the basis for the Board Member Competency Framework.

Along with establishing categories, Round 3 was critical in determining the level of importance of the created competencies. The mean interpretations of importance levels were modeled after Knapp's (2000) Delphi study that focused on marker experiences that impacted the careers of public park and recreation CEOs and Hurd and McLean's (2004) study on public park and recreation CEO competencies. The scale was interpreted as having (a) no importance as a competency to CEOs ($M=1.00-1.49$), (b) slight importance as a competency ($M=1.50-2.49$), (c) moderate importance as a competency ($M=2.50-3.49$), (d) significant importance as a competency ($M=3.50-4.49$), and (e) extreme importance as a competency for CEOs ($M=4.50-5.00$). In a Delphi process a benchmark is set where statements are removed from the study if they are deemed less important. For the purpose of this study that mean was set at 3.49. Only those competencies with a higher mean were regarded as important and retained. Given this benchmark, 19 competencies were removed from the list because they were rated as only slightly important. Another 47 were rated as having significant importance, and 9 that were rated as extremely important. There were no competencies that were considered to be of no importance or slight importance.

From the final results in Round 3, the Board Member Competency Framework (BMCF) was created (Table 3). The BMCF has two levels of specificity with 8 general competency categories and 56 specific competencies across the categories. The categories include (a) advocacy, (b) board effectiveness, (c) community relations, (d) decision making, (e) education and experience, (f) finance and planning, (g) interpersonal characteristics, and (h) staff relations.

The Advocacy general competency category has three specific competencies, but there were also three competencies that had a mean below 3.50 indicating they were of minor importance and were eliminated from the study. They included developing political contacts, having experience working with other political units, and having an understanding of the law, legislative process, and governance.



Table 3
Board Member Competency Framework with Eight Competency
Categories and Fifty-six Specific competencies

Category #1: Advocacy

- Be able to discuss parks & recreation with all community and government agencies
- Advocate groups and service organizations
- Always be a parks and recreation champion

Category #2: Board Effectiveness

- Ability to accept other board members' opinions
- Have a working relationship with other commission members
- Have the ability to work in committees
- Read and understand supplied information prior to board meetings
- Be willing to participate in committee and board meetings
- Understand the purpose of the board
- Be prepared to give time to the board and agency
- Have a willingness to serve a non-political cause within the framework of government

Category #3: Community Relations

- Be accessible to the public
- Have the ability to listen to the public
- Serve as a bridge between the community and staff
- Serve in the best interest of the agency
- Be actively involved in the community
- Have the ability to assess the needs of the community
- Serve as a representative of all constituents
- Be a team player for the entire community
- Be accountable to the public
- Have the ability to work with community groups
- Possess an understanding of the community represented
- Have knowledge of community demographics

Category #4: Decision Making

- Be willing to study issues before making decisions
- Have the ability to build consensus
- Have the ability to be a moderator
- Have the ability to make decisions
- Have the ability to resolve conflicts and solve problems

Category #5: Education and Experience

- Have knowledge of the history of the agency and its programs
- Continually develop knowledge about parks and recreation through education opportunities
- Read publications on parks and recreation
- Be willing to investigate & study new/different programs and facilities
- Be willing to visit new/different programs and facilities
- Have experience as a parks and recreation user

Category #6: Finance & Planning

- Have the ability to set goals and objectives
- Have effective long range planning skills
- Have the ability to create a vision or direction for the agency
- Have an understanding of the budgeting process

Category #7: Interpersonal Characteristics

- Be diplomatic with the board, the agency & the community
- Have an interest in parks and recreation
- Be enthusiastic about parks and recreation
- Be innovative
- Be objective and fair
- Have an interest in serving others
- Have self respect
- Ability to work hard & smart
- Have patience in working with the public, board, and the community
- Demonstrate positive leadership abilities
- Respect other points of view
- Be open minded
- Have the ability to handle criticism
- Have the ability to think outside the box

Continued



Table 3 (continued)
Board Member Competency Framework with Eight Competency
Categories and Fifty-six Specific competencies

Category #8: Staff Relations
Be supportive of staff
Effectively work with staff
Understand staff job functions
Understand the roll of the executive relative to the board

The second general competency category was Board Effectiveness. This category contained five of the top ten overall highest rated competencies including (a) participating in committee and board meetings, (b) understanding the purpose of the board, (c) accepting other board members' opinions, (d) reading and understanding supplied information prior to board meetings, and (e) being prepared to give time to the board and agency. Community Relations encompassed a wide variety of skills. Eliminated from this group were competencies that focused on communication, including having effective public speaking and verbal and written communication skills.

Decision Making had only five specific competencies contained within it. However, being willing to study issues before making decisions and having the ability to make decisions were the two most important competencies determined by the jurors. Under Education and Experience, jurors indicated a need for board members to continually develop knowledge about parks and recreation through education opportunities, have a knowledge of the history of the agency, to investigate and study new and different programs and facilities.

The sixth general competency category, Finance and Planning, had four specific competencies within it. Eliminated from this category were the ability to raise funds and having sound financial management skills. It was important that the board members understand the budget process, but not that they have technical budgeting and financial skills. Interpersonal Characteristics was the largest competency category and contained four of the top ten highest rated specific competencies. They included (a) having an interest in parks and recreation, (b) being objective and fair, (c) being enthusiastic, and (d) being open minded. The last general competency category, Staff Relations, had four specific competencies including (a) being supportive of staff, (b) having the ability to work effectively with staff, (c) understanding staff job functions, and (d) understanding the roll of the chief executive officer in relation to the board.

Discussion

The Board Member Competency Framework is a first step in establishing a line of research focusing on a group of people who have considerable influence within a park and recreation agency. In an organizational system, all parts must be functioning at a top level in order for effectiveness to occur.



Public park and recreation agencies are no exception. The board is an integral part of the system and needs competency development to stabilize the system. Given the limited research in this area in parks and recreation, much can be done to expand and refine the skills of board members. At this point, it is beneficial to compare findings of this study to the nonprofit literature and existing park and recreation literature. Although there are differences in the nonprofit and public sectors, there are striking similarities between board member competencies for nonprofit boards and the Board Member Competency Framework. Of the 15 competency areas listed in the nonprofit literature, nine of them emerged from this study (Table 4).

Those six nonprofit competencies not included in the BMCF were (a) determining the mission of the organization, (b) knowing the culture of the organization, (c) setting policy, (d) evaluating the CEO, (e) having political influence, and (f) financial/fundraising management. It was not particularly surprising that fundraising, evaluating the CEO, and setting policy were not a part of the framework. Funding sources in nonprofit management require fundraising simply to operate the organization, whereas public agencies receive funds from taxes. Some public agencies have restrictions on fundraising activity. Of the jurors completing the demographics profile, 66.7% did not have the responsibility of evaluating the CEO, and there was an even split on the number who actually had the power to set policy. These are issues that need to be further studied to determine their relationship to park and recreation boards based on structure.

Of the five competencies that received the highest consensus within the nonprofit literature, only determining the mission of the organization was not included in the BMCF. This may be due to the fact that mission statements are not changed on a regular basis in public agencies and are not on the forefront of the minds of the board members when asked about their responsibilities to the agency. These issues in particular are indicative of the differences between nonprofit and public boards. The results of this study were very consistent with Galloway's (1992) research, as there was agreement on 28 of the competencies. Research by Fokken (2003) that used non-profit competency measures was far more in concordance with other nonprofit sector results than the results of the studies specific to the public sector.

Implications for Practice and Research

The BMCF has a number of uses for practitioners and board members. The framework sets the stage for five major uses including (a) setting clear performance standards for board members, (b) monitoring board member performance, (c) establishing a job description for current and future board members, (d) creating orientation guidelines for board members, and (e) determining training and development plans based on benchmarks. Although all five uses of the BMCF are closely related to each other, establishing standards, monitoring performance, and establishing job descriptions are inextricable. Each relies on the other in order to strengthen



Table 4
Comparison of Competencies from Nonprofit, Parks and Recreation Literature and this study's Board Member Competency Framework

Competency	Flickinger Galloway Fokken				BMCF	Totals
	NPO	(1992)	(1999)	(2003)		
Planning	x	-	x	x	x	4
Fiscal management	x	-	x	x	x	4
Enhance public image	x	x		x	x	4
Determine mission, vision, goals & objectives	x			x	x	3
Efficient operation of the board	x	-	-	x	x	3
Ability to make decisions	x	-	-	x	x	3
Ability to solve problems	x	-	-	x	x	3
Ability to gain constituent support	x			x	x	3
Ability to work as a team with board & staff		x	x		x	3
Interest in parks & recreation department		x	x		x	3
Ability to utilize information provided		x	x		x	3
Have an understanding of board functions	x				x	2
Select & orient new members	x	-	-	x	-	2
Ability to evaluate board functions	x	-	-	x	-	2
Ability to listen			x		x	2
Avoid micro-management of staff			x		x	2
Advocate for parks & recreation			x		x	2
Commitment & have sufficient time to devote to the position			x		x	2
Desire to improve facilities & programs			x		x	2
Commitment to excellence			x		x	2
Consistency			x		x	2
Professionalism			x		x	2
Desire to serve the public			x		x	2
Sense of fairness			x		x	2
Flexibility			x		x	2
Ability to address the needs of the community			x		x	2
Inform council, board members & staff of community concerns			x		x	2
Communication skills			x		x	2
Provide thoughtful feedback on staff ideas			x		x	2
Community involvement			x		x	2
Desire to learn			x		x	2
Patience			x		x	2
Understand difference between policy and admin.			x		x	2
Ability to make a difference			x		x	2
Assertive nature to defend beliefs			x		x	2
Innovative			x		x	2
Knowledge of the dept			x		x	2
Attend meetings		x			x	2
Ability to work with the public		x			x	2



board performance. The remaining two establish protocols for developing the board members.

To look at each of these uses more closely, the board has an incredible amount of influence over the organization as a whole, yet very little performance measurement is implemented. Only the board can monitor its own performance and improve its ability to govern. CEOs would most likely be reluctant to establish performance standards for a board. However, this research is a first step in doing just that. In order to monitor performance, clear standards must be implemented, and these standards can be derived from the 56 specific competencies. Furthermore, standards need to be set in order for board members to understand what is expected of them by the agency and their fellow board members. It is difficult to achieve a standard level of performance if the standard is unknown. These standards can be adapted and implemented by the board or an outside party in order to guide the board and the agency. Once standards are set, it is imperative that the board formally adopts them in order to increase board member accountability. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the BMCF is a broad competency model that may need further refinement based on board structure.

A second use of the Board Member Competency Framework is to monitor board performance. Monitoring board performance is a difficult task at best. The CEO cannot monitor a board's performance and, politically, some board members would be hesitant to criticize each other's work. Once the performance standards are established, details on performance enforcement need to be addressed by the entire board and outlined as a policy. It is insufficient to merely establish performance standards if there is no accountability by board members. As such, the BMCF establishes skills, knowledge, and characteristics that board members can measure themselves against in order to assess their own effectiveness. Monitoring performance can be as simple or elaborate as an agency chooses. Once the standards are set, the board, CEO, or outside entity can measure whether each member was deficient, met, or exceeded the established standard.

Being in an organization where job descriptions are nonexistent is unthinkable. Job descriptions detail duties and responsibilities of the position. Being a board member can be likened to a job in many respects. As such, a job description should be developed so board members know what is expected of them. The job description should be aligned with the established standards and used when monitoring performance. A generic job description is insufficient, as it needs to be tailored to the board position. For example, a job description should be established for the chair/president of the board, general board members, and committee chairs and members. These three positions have different responsibilities and expectations that need to be addressed in the job description. In addition to helping those on the board, the job description serves as a good resource for those considering becoming a board member. Some potential board members may feel they have specific issues that can best be solved by their



own active involvement on a board, but they must also understand that there are numerous responsibilities that go along with the position. Being a board member is a commitment, and it is necessary to understand what that commitment entails before accepting it. In addition to duties and responsibilities, it is important to outline a specific chain of command in the organization including such things as contact with individual staff members and how board member concerns should be addressed with staff.

Establishing an orientation program is important for new board members, just as it is for new employees. Allowing members to learn as they go is inefficient and a waste of valuable time and talents. An orientation session can bring the person to a point where they are able to contribute immediately. The orientation process needs to be formalized and comprehensive. Eadie (1994) suggested orientation should focus on expectations, performance standards, agency information, board function, and processes. In addition, an understanding of the role of the CEO, the role of the staff, the culture of the organization and the board, and the function and process of decision making are pertinent orientation topics. The orientation should allow the board member to gain enough knowledge to be able to contribute to the organization immediately. A further step in the orientation process could be establishing a board mentorship program where a new board member is paired with a veteran member. The mentor works with the mentee to build competencies outlined in the performance standards.

A final use of the BMCF is for training and development. Training for board members cannot stop with the initial orientation. Board members must remain current on issues in the field, as well as continually improve overall board effectiveness and operations. Furthermore, not all board members will be as skilled and knowledgeable as desired. Using competencies as a benchmark can indicate strengths and growth areas for the individual. Based on this information board members can develop skills through training and development opportunities and, in turn, improve their individual contributions, as well as the abilities of the board as a whole. It is this area, in particular, where the idea of systems theory is vital to improving the complete organization. The board is a subsystem of the agency and each individual serves as its part of the subsystem. When one part is weak, it weakens the overall agency. A way to improve the overall operation of the board, and ultimately the agency, is through training and development of individual board members. Board members should take advantage of conferences, workshops, and board retreats in order to improve his/her ability to govern. Improved governance should result in improved agency operation.

With the severe limitation of the literature on public park and recreation board members, there are several areas for further research. In focusing on the framework, there are four areas that require attention. First, there is a need to further test the BMCF. The framework was developed through a Delphi process and needs to be further tested and refined. Furthermore, it will require periodic testing because of the changing nature of society in general. The principles behind systems theory indicate that as



internal and external forces change, the organization needs to be able to adapt in order to remain stable. As these adaptations occur, there may be changes in the competencies needed by the board members in order for them to remain a viable part of the organization. In order to do this, testing of the competencies is an ongoing process.

A second area of further study is the development and psychometric testing of an instrument based on performance standards. By using the competencies identified in this research, an instrument can be developed. Once the instrument is developed, the validity and reliability of the instrument can be assessed.

Third, board performance impacts agency performance. Further research needs to be conducted to determine the impact that boards have on public parks and recreation agencies and how the use of competencies impacts the performance of the board and the agency, as a whole. It is necessary to determine how board improvement impacts overall agency performance. Fourth, this study developed a broad framework of competencies. As such it would be beneficial to further test the BMCF with each of the three types of boards to ascertain if there are different needs based on structure.

Finally, competencies have been a driving force in the business sector for a number of years and, more recently, in the nonprofit sector. The business sector has demonstrated the need to become completely competency driven (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999), at all levels of the organization, including the board. However, the public sector has been slow to adopt this approach. In relation to parks and recreation, one reason may be the lack of competency development for all aspects of the agency. The profession has the capacity to move toward being competency driven with the establishment of the BMCF, as well as competencies established for chief executive officers (CEOs) (Hurd & McLean, 2004). The piece that is missing is the competencies for middle and entry level management positions. Further research needs to be conducted to establish competences for these levels and then to determine the impact of a competency driven organization on performance. Only when there are competencies for the board, CEO, middle managers, and entry level positions, can the impact of being competency driven be examined.

Competencies in an organization provide a benchmark for performance. Whether it is entry level supervisors, CEOs, or board members, each person has a job to do to the utmost of their abilities. When the skills, knowledge, and characteristics to be effective are lacking, the entire system suffers. The BMCF is a step in strengthening the ability of the individual board member, the board, and the agency as a whole.

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