NICWA
National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

NATIONAL INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ASSOCIATION
YOUTH BOARD MEMBER JOB DESCRIPTION

Overview

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) values the insight, guidance, and perspectives of Native youth and has created an opportunity for American Indian, Alaska Native, and First Nations (Native) youth aged 18–25 to serve on the NICWA Board of Directors. By intentionally including Native youth in its governance structure, NICWA aims to expose these leaders to child welfare and related issues and improve its coordination with Native youth organizations. Native youth perspectives are a critical aspect of the NICWA board's efforts surrounding policy positions and potential courses of action. Youth are introduced to board service and play a key role in NICWA's board of directors' decision-making.

This document provides an overview of the NICWA board and details responsibilities of youth board members. While the youth roles mirror those of adult board members in most regards, including full voting rights, youth board members are not required to meet the same fundraising goals as adult board members. Board service provides an opportunity to contribute to an organization's development and vision as well as gain insight into its structure and field; it carries with it certain responsibilities and standards.

General Responsibilities

The board of directors for NICWA is a working, 100% contributing board that is responsible for policymaking, fiscal oversight, and ensuring the funding of the organization.

The board members are expected to support the goals and purposes of NICWA as set forth in the bylaws through their membership and actions. The board typically meets at least four times per year. Funding is available to support travel to any in-person meetings for board members who are unable to cover the cost themselves.

Board members are expected to attend meetings regularly, and youth board members are encouraged to serve on all committees, with the exception of the Executive Committee, which is composed of board officers, in order to gain experience with the varied subject matter and areas of responsibility. Board members who miss three quarterly meetings in the period of one year will be asked to relinquish their seat. Members who cannot attend a meeting must notify NICWA staff allowing at least five days for cancellation of accommodations and/or travel. Board members who incur costs to NICWA due to failure to

cancel travel or accommodations shall be held responsible for reimbursing NICWA such costs. Board members who are concerned about meeting this obligation should address those concerns in writing to the board president for consideration. Members who anticipate not being able to comply with the NICWA board meeting attendance policy for an extended period of time may request, in writing, a leave of absence from the Governance Committee.

In addition to their regular responsibilities as members of the board, youth board members will act as liaisons and advisors to the NICWA board of directors on issues related to youth perspectives on national Indian child welfare, children's mental health, juvenile justice, and other related issues.

Goal Setting

The board of directors sets overall goals for the organization with input provided by staff and from outside sources. Together with the executive director, the board sets and tracks goals for the best use of resources through a regular review of the five-year strategic plan goals.

Fiscal Oversight

The board approves the budget for the fiscal year based on the recommendations of the executive director and the Executive Committee. The board ensures that fiscal policies and procedures are in place, maintained, and followed and that the organization's finances are audited annually for compliance with generally accepted accounting practices. Board members review financial statements and authorize grant proposals if required by the funder. If the board-approved budget changes by 10% or greater during the fiscal year, the executive director will present a revised budget to the board for approval.

Fundraising

The board is responsible for helping support the organization financially through both giving and soliciting resources. Specifically, board members:

- Are required to pay membership dues at least at the basic membership level annually to maintain current NICWA membership;
- Contribute an individual donation to the best of their ability in addition to their membership dues;
- Solicit or contribute goods and services;
- Pay their own travel expenses to board meetings and the annual conference if possible;
- Demonstrate their contributions to meeting the board's collective annual fundraising goal; and
- Provide oversight to the board of trustees and their activities.

Youth board members, while encouraged to participate in fundraising efforts, are exempt from contributing to the board's overall annual fundraising goal. Youth board members may pay the student rate for NICWA membership, and if this poses a financial hardship, should notify the executive director, who will provide a membership to them free of charge.

Policy

Board members are responsible for making and following policies governing their own conduct of the organization's business (e.g., bylaws, fundraising, attendance, etc.). Board members maintain a working knowledge of the bylaws.

The board approves and maintains fiscal policies governing the organization's finances and financial practices.

The board determines public policy positions of the organization and participation in coalitions with other organizations. This sometimes occurs through formal resolutions and also occurs through the approval of annual policy priorities generated by staff. Board members are responsible for being well-informed about Indian child welfare and other issues affecting Indian children.

The board also establishes the executive director's job description and provides for the annual review of the executive's job performance.

Code of Ethics

The board of directors approves, maintains, and adheres to a code of ethics, which all board members are required to sign annually. Board members who have been found to have violated the code of ethics shall be asked to resign from the board.

Committees

Board members are expected to serve on at least one committee and are discouraged from serving on more than two committees (not including the Executive Committee or subcommittees of the standing committees). The board president serves on all committees, and youth board members are encouraged to serve on all committees, with the exception of the Executive Committee, in order to gain experience with the varied subject matter and areas of responsibility. Committees generally meet in conjunction with regular full-board meetings, but board members are expected to be available for committee meetings between regular board meetings as needed. Some committee meetings are by conference call or video conference. Board members are expected to accept and complete committee assignments and be prepared for committee meetings.

Committees include:

Executive Committee (responsible for finance, fundraising as related to the budget and finances, personnel, membership, legal issues)

Governance Committee (board candidate nominations, orientation, board maintenance, board member recruitment, executive director performance review)

Fundraising Committee (donations, fundraising events, development planning, board giving)

Program Committee (program development, program evaluation, overall service goals, annual conference activities)

Public Policy Committee (position statements, advocacy, legislation)

Each committee may have one or more subcommittees. Ad hoc committees may be created and meet as needed.

Selection Process

The composition of the board is carefully monitored by the Governance Committee. The board is an all-Native board. The committee strives for a balance of one-third Tribal leadership, one-third Indian child welfare staff or directors, and one-third volunteers or persons from related fields such as substance abuse, education, or mental health. A geographic, gender, and age balance is also sought in board composition as well as expertise that is essential for strong governance. These factors are all monitored in the tracking documents reviewed regularly by the Governance Committee.

The Governance Committee searches out potential candidates for board nomination and evaluates potential candidates for the criteria above as well as their existing or potential contribution to NICWA's mission. Once identified as meeting the needs and criteria of the organization, a committee member or the executive director contacts them individually and asks them to submit an application. Candidates are then interviewed and considered by the committee for possible nomination. Nominations that go forward must have the approval of the full board and are finally presented to the NICWA membership for a vote at the annual membership meeting. Voting is completed by ballots mailed to members after the annual membership meeting.

Youth board members are elected to the NICWA board for a three-year term through an open application process in order to ensure the representation of youth perspectives and input in NICWA's governance. Youth board members have full voting rights on the NICWA board and are expected to act as information conduits between the NICWA board and other youth-serving organizations, including in their own community.

At the expiration of their term of service, youth board members who meet the general requirements for new non-youth board members are eligible to be elected to the NICWA board. Youth members should express their interest in continuing to serve and submit a completed application to the Governance Committee, which will consider them for possible nomination according to the same criteria used for other prospective board members. If approved by the full board, youth board members will be presented to the NICWA membership for a vote alongside other new and renewing board members.

Miscellaneous

Board members conduct themselves with dignity, maintain respect for fellow board members, and bring spiritual strength to the organization.

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NATIONAL INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ASSOCIATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS RESPONSIBILITIES

The NICWA Board of Directors provides the continuity on which the organization is based.

Individual members of the staff and the board will change from time to time, but the spirit of the board exists as long as the organization does. Individual members of the board together form a corporate body that has the overall responsibility for the organization.

Board members generally assume responsibilities in the following functional areas:

Budget and Finance

The board members approve the budget, which is generally prepared by the fiscal director with guidance from the executive director. They monitor program expenditures and determine sound fiscal policy and internal control practices. They assume responsibility for the fiscal accountability of the organization.

Planning

Members of the board of directors approve the long-range plans of the organization, including the program's goals and objectives. They assist the staff in the development of these plans and set organizational priorities for action.

Fundraising

Board members maintain current membership in NICWA and ensure that adequate funds are available for financing the agency's operations. They approve the general fundraising methods used by the organization. They are responsible for helping support the organization financially through both giving and soliciting resources to the best of their ability, by participating in fundraising activities, and by paying their own travel expenses to board meetings and the annual conference if possible. Each board member (with the exception of youth board members) is expected to demonstrate contributions to the board's overall annual fundraising goal. Individual board members may serve as the agency's contact for soliciting and reporting on specific sources of funds. Board members who are concerned about meeting their fundraising responsibilities should address those concerns in writing to the Executive Committee.

Policy

Members of the board determine the organization's policies. Policies can be defined as the board guidelines that provide a framework for future decision making. Policies set by the board include but are not limited to governance, fiscal, fundraising, advocacy positions, coalition participation, and ethics. Policies are reflected in procedures, which are more specific, narrow parameters that are used in organizational decision making. Procedures

clarify what steps must be taken, what rules must be followed, and who must be included in the process. Procedures are generally formulated by the staff rather than by the board.

Personnel

The board of directors hires the executive director, monitors the effectiveness of the director's performance, and removes the director when their performance is unsatisfactory. It determines the salary scales and benefits for the staff via approval of the annual budget. Staff members are hired, evaluated, and, if necessary, removed by the executive director, not the board; the executive director is also responsible for setting personnel policies and determining specific ranges of salary scales and benefits with human resources and the staff management team.

Public Relations

The board of directors serve as ambassadors of the organization, communicating with constituents, funders, community leaders, and other interested parties about the program. It represents the organization in the community, and it advises the staff regarding public relations, organizational image, branding, and communications.

Program Evaluation

Board members monitor the program's effectiveness. They review program evaluation procedures on a regular basis, and they advise the staff on the agency's self-evaluation. They assess the organization's performance and effectiveness no less than every two years and determine future actions required to achieve the mission.

Board Development

The board of directors determines the structure of the board and committee membership. It nominates and selects new board members and sets the standards for its own periodic self-evaluation beyond the general tracking measures regularly reviewed by the Governance Committee.

Advising

The board offers administrative guidance to the executive director and advises the staff in the various program areas. The organization relies on the expertise of board members, who can give advice or provide a new perspective on problems or issues.

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