

BOARD DEVELOPMENT – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The American Camp Association was founded in 1910 by a group of camp directors to share information about the profession. It was incorporated as a public benefit organization and granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service as an educational, recreational association that served the public. The ACA Board of Directors consisted mainly of camp professionals elected by the membership in popular elections, with some board positions designated for regional representatives and chairmen of various commissions and councils.

The size of the board varied and at one time reached approximately 40, which included representatives from regions, affiliates and other groups. In the 1980s, the Bylaws were amended to reframe the board as a leadership, not representative, board and the size was reduced considerably, although some board positions were still filled by representatives of affiliate groups and membership categories (AIC, ACF, and business representatives). This revision also provided for the appointment of three additional directors by the ACA President to balance the board and ensure fair representation from within the association by geography, by camp type, by gender, and by skill set. Some of these appointments were individuals from outside the camp profession.

Over its history, the ACA was often (even by its own members) seen not as a public benefit association but as a trade association, promoting the interests of the industry. When the current CEO of the association began her tenure in 1998, the question of the association's purpose was brought to the national board, which re-affirmed its desire to be an educational, not trade, association benefitting the public, with an emphasis on youth development through the camp experience.

In 2007, the ACA National Board consisted of 21 individuals – 9 at-large members and 4 officers, elected by the ACA membership in a popular vote for three-year, non-renewable terms, plus the presidents of the American Camping Foundation and the Association of Independent Camps, 3 members appointed by the board, and 3 additional members appointed by the ACA President to balance the board as noted above.

Late in 2007, the ACA National Board took a hard look at what were called “the brutal truths” about both the association and the board itself. That board realized that like the boards that preceded it, the great majority of board members were camp professionals and if the association were to truly embrace serving the public, the board should include broader representation from the public. The 2007 National Board acted boldly, essentially voting itself out of office and cancelling the popular election that was to take place in January 2008. At the same time, the 20/20 task force was appointed to make recommendations that would enable the association to reach its vision of serving 20 million campers and having 20,000 participants in ACA by the year 2020.

Changing the governance of the association was the first priority in achieving this vision, as the board recognized the need to bring on to the board independent directors who believed in the camp experience, but who were from professions other than camp. With the January 2008 elections cancelled, the task force and board had recommendations for changing ACA's governance that were explained at the February 2008 national conference. The necessary bylaws amendments were approved by the board after meeting with the Council of Delegates.

The Board also developed the following “Association Board Principles”:

In its commitment to achieve 20,000,000 children and youth at camp and 20,000 participants in ACA by the year 2020, the Board of Directors establishes the following principles related to the Board:

1. The National Board believes that all board members, present and future, must:
 - understand and value the vital role camps play in the development of healthy children and young people;
 - advocate articulately for ACA and its vision in political, social, community and business forums;
 - access, activate and lead volunteers through corporate, civic and governmental connections;
 - engage philanthropic or corporate networks to solicit and secure immediate and long term financial resources for ACA;
 - advance the mission, vision, values and ends of ACA by extending personal and professional credibility, expertise, and leadership to the organization; and
 - think broadly and strategically about the role of camps and of ACA.
2. ACA is committed to having half of its National Board members from the public.
3. ACA is committed to recruiting board members from ethnically diverse communities.
4. ACA is committed to having board members from throughout the United States and from a broad spectrum of professions.
5. ACA is committed to recruiting board members who can connect the association to individuals and organizations of influence outside of ACA who also believe in youth development and the camp experience
6. ACA is committed to recruiting board members who will support the association with their wisdom and wealth, at the greatest level possible for each individual.
7. The National Board is also committed to evaluating and adjusting its meeting and communication policies and practices in order to make the best use of time for its members.

As a result, an interim board development committee was appointed to seek at least three independent directors to present to the board for election, which was accomplished with the recommendation and election of Ed Greene, Alan Yuspeh, and Glynn and Jo-An Turman. This committee continued their work through early 2009, when three additional independent members were recommended and elected – Anthony de Guzman, Rick Roth, and Ellen Gannett. The first regular Board Development Committee was then appointed and in late 2009, they recommended and the board elected the next class, which included both camp professionals and independent directors. With that class, the board had reached its desired goal of 50% camp professionals and 50% independent directors.

Through 2012, the Board Development Committee has recommended and the board has elected two more classes of directors and officers for the association, conducted three board orientation sessions, developed a growing database of board prospects, and refined its procedures and protocols to institutionalize the work of board development for the American Camp Association.