



The Role of the President

Community association presidents are required to fulfill many roles, but the primary roles are leader and manager. Different situations will determine which role the association president assumes. Sometimes the president must set aside other roles, such as neighbor or friend, to accomplish a task or make a decision.

Association presidents gain their authority to lead a community association from state law—generally called the Common Interest Ownership Act. The president should have a basic understanding of the law pertaining to community associations, as well as the association’s governing documents—the declaration (also called Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions—CC&Rs), bylaws (which address the association’s structure, the board, the officers, definition of a quorum, ability to enter into contracts, etc.), and the rules and regulations (the operational and behavioral laws that apply to association residents). Therefore, presidents must perceive the association as both a community and a business, as well as operate on the democratic principles of government.

OVERSEE OPERATIONS

Association presidents must adhere to budgets, formulate and enforce rules and policies, conduct meetings, prepare agendas, and work with committees.

SPEAK FOR THE BOARD AND ASSOCIATION

The president is the official spokesperson for the board—to association members, the community manager (or management company), vendors, the press, and the greater community.

SEEK KNOWLEDGE

Learning how to be president of a community association generally comes from on-the-job training. However, educational resources for association volunteers are available in books, seminars, periodicals, and networking offered by groups that serve common-interest communities, such as Community Associations Institute and its chapters.

WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS

The president is the *leader of the board*, a body that typically includes:

- The vice president—who substitutes for the president in his or her absence
- The secretary—the official recorder of the association's activities
- The treasurer—the chief financial officer of the association

It's in the president's best interest to encourage the officers' participation in association affairs and to develop their skills as team members. The president should also attempt to identify and train potential association leaders, encourage them to join the board, and orient them to their new responsibilities.

TOOL 3.1: *Use the New Board Member Orientation Checklist at the end of this section to plan your orientation.*

WORK WITH PROFESSIONALS

Many associations employ either a community management company or a professional manager who directs association operations based on policy set by the board. The president is the liaison between the manager and the association.

Seeking the services of an attorney, architect, or insurance professional is in the best interests of the association. Experts provide information and expertise that board members don't normally have. For example:

- Reviewing legal contracts requires advice from an attorney.
- Managing reserve funds requires guidance from an accountant or investment advisor.

PROTECT THE ASSETS

Board members (and, in particular, the president and treasurer) have a fiduciary obligation to protect the community association by:

- Preparing and adhering to an association budget (with the assistance of the professional manager) that reflects the values and wishes of the members.
- Adequately funding reserve accounts and educating homeowners about the value and purpose of a reserve fund.
- Collecting fees from homeowners.
- Seeking the advice of a certified insurance specialist and protecting the association with appropriate levels of insurance coverage.

The position of association president is not for everyone, but fortunately every president has a board from which he or she can draw support. As long as the members recognize the importance of the community that unifies them, the role of president can be very satisfying.



Cautions

Working cooperatively with the board is essential to the success of the association. Heavy-handed or independent action by a president can put the entire association at risk.

Presidents must educate themselves on the nature and scope of their obligations. Well intentioned but uninformed actions by a president can threaten a community's economic and social stability.

The president must adhere to and enforce rules. Arbitrary or inconsistent application of rules weakens the association's ability to enforce them.

The president must see that the association's insurance is adequate and appropriate. Federal and secondary mortgage agencies will not fund mortgages in the community otherwise, and this will affect property values.



FOR MORE HELP

Available online at www.caionline.org/bookstore.cfm or call (888) 224-4321 (M–F, 9–6:30 ET).

The Board President: Roles and Responsibilities in Community Associations, a Guide for Association Practitioners. (Community Associations Press, 2005.)

Community Association Leadership, a Guide for Volunteers. (Community Associations Press, 2002.)

To download a PDF of the entire Board Member Tool Kit, go to www.caionline.org/toolkit.

New Board Member Orientation Checklist

- Schedule orientation before the member's first board meeting.
- Provide a roster of key association contacts (leaders, managers, vendors, etc.).
- Explain important relationships between the board and the manager, vendors, employees, attorney, etc.
- Provide and explain association governing documents.
- Provide meeting minutes and financial reports for the previous six months.
- Explain the function and current projects of each committee.
- Explain the goals of the board and how the board functions.
- Emphasize the importance of participating with and supporting the board.
- Encourage the new board member to attend board member education seminars run by your local CAI chapter or take a free course online at www.caionline.org/about/homeowner_education.cfm.