

# Clarity

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## **Empowering individuals to understand and engage**

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*Boards for All Webcast training Series  
Board Resource Center  
[www.brcenter.org](http://www.brcenter.org)*

*Charlene Jones and Mark Starford describe how a webcast training program is creating opportunities for people with low literacy to participate more meaningfully in their communities*

### **Participation for all in civic and governance matters**

Basic human rights insist that everyone be guaranteed equal opportunities to life and liberty. Yet people with limited literacy have had fewer opportunities to participate, or have been excluded from participating, in social and governmental affairs. We know, however, that individuals with varied literacy and comprehension abilities can play an active role in shaping their world through participating meaningfully in advocacy and civic affairs.

As societies expand the reach of social justice, increased diversity on governing boards is one of the greatest civil rights transformations occurring today. Many governing groups are examining their policies and practices to address the potential offered by the range of differences that make up their communities.

### **The Boards for All project**

*Boards for All* is a collaborative project between private, state and federal agencies that is designed to improve nonprofit governance. By providing straightforward instruction in an easy-to-follow design with multi-media

tools, the *Boards for All* webcast sequenced training series opens doors for many more individuals to contribute constructively. A priority of the project is to provide ordinary citizens with greater access to, and meaningful participation in, governance positions on community nonprofit organizations, state advisory committees and federal councils. Many governance boards and advisory committees require that community members be represented. By increasing the understanding of basic governance requirements by a wider spectrum of people, that representation is made more meaningful and more productive.

*Boards for All* advances inclusive community leadership and civic engagement by serving two objectives:

- to increase personal empowerment, and
- to create opportunities for people with low literacy to be viewed as fellow community members.

As newly valued contributors, those people are recognized as bringing essential voices and leadership to boards of directors, advisory committees and community councils.

### Teaching nonprofit governance rules

*Boards for All* teaches basic rules of nonprofit governance for a range of organizations, from advocacy groups to stakeholder committees and nonprofit corporations with multi-million dollar budgets. The series is divided into five video topic areas: Boards of Directors, Role of Board Members, Purpose of Committees, Board Development, and Facilitation and Mentoring. It guides users to read content pages on each topic, review a “Key Points” summary and then complete two to three questions on a corresponding worksheet all to reinforce straightforward subject matter. For example, the topic *Purpose of Committees*, provides three pages of content, with a “Key Points” page that answers central questions: What is a committee and its purpose? What are three types of board committees? How does a board use its committees? The user may continue by using a worksheet with similar leading questions.

### Using plain language techniques to make the material user-friendly

As we know, plain language means more than short sentences and manageable vo-

cabulary. Design, organization and field testing were core components in developing the self-paced public domain tool. Reading and comprehension levels in multiple languages, along with respect for diverse cultural differences, increase the opportunity to obtain governance participation in meaningful ways. Representative community groups determined the training format and webcast structure, video sequence, and narration content. Over the course of two years, project collaborators (Board of Directors of Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center and California State Council on Disabilities), recommended and tested content, language and webcast layout. In addition, two consumer advocacy groups also contributed to identifying most significant “boardsmanship” essentials to effective leadership.

The outcome is that *Boards for All* offers an easily understood way to learn about board and committee participation. This allows more people to successfully engage in community affairs.

You can see and download the *Boards for All* webcast videos, tools, and plain language resources at [www.brcenter.org/library](http://www.brcenter.org/library).

*Boards for All* Partners—

Board Resource Center ([www.brcenter.org](http://www.brcenter.org)),

Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center ([www.elarc.org](http://www.elarc.org)),

California State Council on Disabilities ([www.scdd.ca.gov](http://www.scdd.ca.gov))

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**Mark Starford** is founder and executive director of the Board Resource Center (BRC), established in 1994 to provide leadership development and management facilitation for government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups. BRC focuses on advocating for people from underserved communities to increase civic engagement and access to policy-making. BRC partners with community, state, and federal agencies to develop plain language tools that help people with limited literacy to gain self-determination and involvement in governance. Active in training and advocacy for 30 years, Starford has designed community-specific training curricula with supporting materials in a range of accessible formats used across the US. BRC offers a comprehensive library of accessible training tools and media that make complex ideas easier to understand and apply.



**Charlene Jones** has been an Associate with Board Resource Center (BRC) since 2007, providing expertise in production of written materials in accessible formats. The focus of her work has been developing easy to access tools for individuals that increase personal leadership and civic engagement. She provides trainings on diversifying nonprofit agency boards of directors to encourage participation from underserved communities. Charlene participated in writing and facilitating trainings on two key BRC publications; Feeling Safe, Being Safe emergency preparedness web training tools and the end-of-life planning publication Thinking Ahead. Additionally, Charlene provides technical assistance to numerous California service provider agencies on information accessibility and service quality.

