

Raising the Low-Income Voice

Case Studies in Democratic Selection Procedures



Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency (SEICAA)

Word-of-mouth engagement, program-based voting, and a commitment to the low-income voice

SEICAA Overview

Location:	Pocatello, ID
Staff Size:	36 employees
Annual Revenue:	\$4,000,000
Service Area:	11,000 square miles
Chief Executive:	Shantay Bloxham
Board Size:	12 seats
Major Programs:	LIHEAP and WAP, housing, senior programs (Meals on Wheels), GED program
Appendices:	Democratic selection procedures, board member application, board member job description, bylaws excerpt

RECRUITMENT

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, recruiting candidates for the low-income sector of the board at SEICAA was largely a word-of-mouth endeavor. SEICAA runs several programs that provide opportunities for staff to interact directly with clients, including multiple food pantries and a market salvage food program. Staff use these interactions to educate clients about the mission of Community Action, the importance of the low-income voice on the tripartite board, and the procedures for upcoming elections. But when a seat in the low-income representative sector opened up in the fall of 2020, new CEO Shantay Bloxham knew that her agency would have to switch

things up in order to successfully recruit a board member who would be ready and engaged, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Since the amount of time SEICAA staff spent interacting with the community dramatically decreased when the agency had to reduce access to its offices to ensure the safety of clients and staff, recruitment efforts for its low-income sector election also looked quite different. For the first time, SEICAA devoted substantial time and resources to conducting its recruitment and election process online. This was facilitated in part by the fact that at the beginning of the pandemic, SEICAA

decided to implement a new client database that interfaces with the Idaho state CSBG office and allows clients to submit benefits applications and documentation through SEICAA's website. SEICAA used its new database to contact over 300 clients by email to gauge their interest in standing for election to the low-income representative sector. The agency also publicized the open seat using its Facebook page.



PUBLICITY

Once candidates have been recruited for the election, the Board Liaison—a SEICAA staff person—usually prepares written biographies for all of the candidates, which are then distributed to clients as they come through the office for services. Staff again use the power of word-of-mouth to strengthen the process by encouraging participants to vote and educating them about the election—who is running, what the position means, and when and how voting will take place. During the pandemic, SEICAA made its board application form available on its website. The form was a fillable PDF that encouraged applicants to identify skills or characteristics they could contribute to the board, other major interests they had, any civic or community involvement, and participation on other boards. The form also contained information about SEICAA's bimonthly board meetings and required applicants to commit to attending regularly scheduled meetings and a training session for new members. Finally, the application asked broad, narrative questions like, "Why would you like to serve on SEICAA's Board?" and, "Please write a brief statement of your understanding of the mission". CEO Shantay Bloxham says that these questions are important because they help to identify candidates who are passionate about uncovering the foundational causes and conditions of poverty and implementing outcome-based initiatives. Such candidates contribute to the

board's ability to work collectively, with a shared understanding of their community and their role in it.

Like many CAAs across the country, SEICAA runs a number of programs with different income eligibility requirements. Some, like its Affordable Homeownership Program, have higher income limits. Because of this, SEICAA's election recruitment, publicity, and voting are usually focused on programs with income limits consistent with its CSBG-funded programs. However, the federal CSBG Act does not require that CAAs verify CSBG income eligibility for voters for low-income sector democratic selection procedures.

HOLDING THE ELECTION

Because of SEICAA's success with word-of-mouth publicity and face-to-face interactions, the agency's election is usually scheduled on a day with high foot traffic in its community programs. When participants come through a program, staff ask if they are interested in voting and may also offer some thoughts about the importance of low-income board service. While there is an occasional "No thank you," the vast majority of participants are interested in casting a ballot, and turnout is often substantial—Shantay's predecessor Debra Hemmert saw elections with as many as 250 votes cast.

In the era of COVID-19, SEICAA staff were pleasantly surprised by the level of participation they witnessed in their web-based election procedures. Two community members stood as candidates for the open board seat. Shantay and her team developed an online ballot using SurveyMonkey, which was distributed to clients using the email list created during the recruitment



phase. Ballots were collected for almost a month via online submission and using paper copies distributed throughout a housing complex run by the CAA. Through those two avenues, they received a total of 37 votes.

ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

Of all of the challenges that CAAs face in running a tripartite board, retaining low-income sector members is one of the most difficult. Some low-income sector members have difficulty balancing work and family commitments to attend board meetings, and some may be intimidated by the business or professional backgrounds of other members. SEICAA has developed a number of creative strategies to combat low-income sector attrition, including:

- Being clear about board responsibilities and expectations during the recruitment phase;
- Using a board member application and job description, both of which are on SEICAA's website (see Appendices 2 and 3);
- Providing orientation to all new board members;
- Utilizing a Community Development Committee, comprised of staff, the Executive Director, and other low-income board members, to support the low-income sector and keep it engaged. The committee holds quarterly meetings to discuss a variety of topics, from program evaluation to alignment with the strategic plan and community needs assessments. Shantay says that in this smaller setting, low-income sector board members are more likely to speak up and offer their thoughts and feedback, leading to more effective conversations; and
- Proactively seeking low-income member input during board meetings.

While the pandemic created additional challenges for board member engagement, CEO Shantay Bloxham says that the board has also benefitted from the increased accessibility of meeting online, especially given that their service area spans such a large, mostly rural area. She says in response to this crisis, it feels like the board has come together and become more cohesive, with a renewed sense of the importance of their role to the community. Shantay hopes

that this feeling will continue after the area recovers from the pandemic and accompanying economic downturn.

MAINTAINING THE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SEICAA documents its policies and procedures in a number of ways, including: retaining all of the ballots cast in the election; maintaining written procedures for the low-income sector election in a policy separate from its bylaws (see Appendices 1 and 4 for written procedures and bylaws); and posting a board member application and job description to its website.

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Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency Appendices

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Appendix 1, Democratic Selection Procedures

- Seek applicants through social media, word of mouth, civic/community involvement and other entities that serve low-income population.
- Qualified applicant(s) is/are elected by low-income population in service area.
- Ballot election is held:
 - » In Community Services Department
 - » During high volume service time
 - » Bio for applicant available during the election process
 - » Educate voting participants in person and in written document as to the need for low income Board representation
 - » Voter sign in sheet
 - » Ballots are tallied when election is complete
 - » Hold orientation for newly elected Board member before the next scheduled Board of Director' meeting
- Outcome of election is presented to Board of Directors for approval at the next scheduled meeting
- Ballots/Voter sign in sheet retained in Board Minutes permanent record

Appendix 2, Board Member Application



**South Eastern Idaho
Community Action Agency**

Helping People. Changing Lives.

Application for Nomination to the Board of Directors

Name: _____ **Social Security #** (Will be asked for if nominated)

Address: _____ **City** _____ **Zip** _____

County: _____ **Home Phone:** _____

Occupation: _____ **Business Phone:** _____

Employer: _____ **Address:** _____

Fax: _____ **E-MAIL:** _____

Please send mail to: ___ My Home ___ My Work

Your Background

What Characteristics or skills could you contribute to our Board? (Please check all that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Experience | <input type="checkbox"/> Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing/Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge of Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Dvlpment/Mgmt | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Low-income services |

Other involvements, skills or major interests: (please explain)

Civic/Community involvement: (please list and explain)

Participation on other Boards:

Your Ability to Serve

SEICAA Board Meetings are held the 3rd Wednesday of every other month, beginning in January, (generally recessing in the summer months (June-August); from 12 PM – 1:15 PM, in Pocatello. (You are required to attend most regular scheduled meetings board membership)

Will you attend regularly scheduled Board meetings? Yes No

Will you attend a training session for new Board Members? Yes No

Will you offer services & expertise as needed at times other than Board Meetings? Yes No

Why would you like to serve on SEICAA's Board?

Please write a brief statement of your understanding of the mission of the Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency.

Please summarize the education, skills & expertise you would bring to SEICAA.

Board Member Definition

Which one of the following 3 Board Membership Sectors are you eligible to fill?

SEICAA has a 12-member tripartite Board of Directors. According to the Community Action Agency Bylaws, 1/3 of its members must be proportioned in the following 3 categories:

Public Sector: 1/3 of the members of the Board are elected public officials, currently holding office, or their representatives.

___ I am a current, elected public official _____
(Name of office & term of office)

___ I am a representative of _____
(Name of official, office & term of office)

Low-income Sector: 1/3 of the members of the Board are democratically elected representatives of low-income individuals and families.

___ I am qualified under this category because:

___ I represent low-income individuals & families

___ My income does not exceed current poverty guidelines.

Private Sector: 1/3 of the members of the Board are officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, law enforcement, education, or other major groups and interests in the community served.

___ I am qualified under this category. Describe private sector affiliation: _____

Signed by: _____ Date: _____

Return application to: SEICAA, 641 N 8th Ave., Pocatello, ID 83201 or Fax to (208) 234-4429

Appendix 3, Board Member Job Description



SEICAA Board Member Job Description

Board members provide governance of Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency Inc. (SEICAA), a private non-profit 501c3 corporation serving Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Power and Oneida counties in southeast Idaho. SEICAA's Board of Directors is comprised of 15 members from three different population sectors, Public, Private and Low Income.

Duties:

1. Demonstrate a strong belief and commitment to SEICAA's mission.
2. Devote the necessary time to prepare for and participate in Board and or Board Committee Meetings.
3. Exhibit high ethical standard and integrity in all Board actions.
4. Be an enthusiastic advocate for SEICAA's administration of its mission and programs.
5. Be willing to attend trainings to enhance Board expertise.
6. Ability to work as a team member with a 15 member Board for the betterment of SEICAA.
7. Commit to attend regularly scheduled Board of Director meetings
8. Willing to assist as needed in SEICAA fundraising efforts.
9. Willing to recruit new Board Members as needed.
10. Knowledgeable of fiduciary responsibility of a non profit corporation.

Qualifications:

- Education level to understand basic written/verbal requests.
- Possess good communication skills.
- Low-Income Sector members must be either qualify according to CSBG low income guidelines or represent a low income organization, neighborhood or community group.
- Public Sector members must be elected officials or their designee.
- Private Sector members may be from private or public business, industry, or the community at large.

SEICAA's Mission Statement

SEICAA is dedicated to providing opportunity and support for individuals and communities to thrive and reach their fullest potential, promoting self-sufficiency and greater economic independence through services, education, affordable housing and training

Appendix 4, Bylaws Excerpt

ARTICLE V – DIRECTORS

Section 1. Number and Term. The property, affairs, activities and programs of the Corporation shall be managed by a Board of Directors, consisting of no fewer than nine (9) directors (hereinafter, at times, “the Board”). The directors shall be elected for four-year terms except as noted herein. The members of the Board shall, upon election, immediately enter upon the performance of their duties and shall continue in office until the election of their successors. Directors may be elected for three successive four-year terms. Notwithstanding the above, the terms of Public Sector elected officials, or their representatives or appointees, serving as directors shall be determined by their terms of office.

Section 2. Qualification and Selection of Directors. The directors must reside within one of the seven counties of Southeastern Idaho that comprise the Corporation’s service area: Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida and Power Counties. The directors shall be chosen from the public, low-income and private sectors as follows:

- (a) **Public Sector.** One-third of the Board are elected public officials, holding office on their date of selection, or their representatives, except that if the number of such elected officials reasonably available and willing to serve on the Board is less than one-third of the membership of the Board, membership on the Board of appointive public officials or their representatives may be counted in meeting the one-third requirements.
- (b) **Low-Income Sector.** (i) No fewer than one-third of the Board are persons chosen in accordance with democratic selection procedures adequate to assure that these members are representative of low-income individuals and families in the neighborhood served; and (ii) each representative of low-income individuals and families selected to represent a specific neighborhood within a community under clause (i) resides in the neighborhood represented by the member.
- (c) **Private Sector.** The remainder of the directors are officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, law enforcement, education, or other major groups and interests in the communities served.

Section 3. Duties of Directors. The Board of Directors shall: (1) hold each year the annual meeting described in Article IV, above; (2) hold such additional regular meetings each year as the Board schedules at the annual meeting, and hold special meetings at such times and places as the Board of Directors (or a majority of the directors) determines are needed; (3) appoint committees of the Board of Directors on particular subjects (as provided in Idaho Code Section 30-30-617); (4) disburse the funds of the Corporation in accordance with the charitable purposes and programs of the Corporation; (5) carry on correspondence and communicate with other associations interested in like endeavors; (6) employ agents; and

(7) generally exercise the powers of the Corporation as provided in Idaho Code Section 30-30-601.

Section 4. Meetings of the Board. For any regular or special meeting of the Board of Directors, notice of the meeting, signed by the Secretary, shall be sent (by mail, facsimile or e-mail) to the address of each director at least three (3) days before the time appointed for the meeting. The Chairperson may, when he or she deems it necessary, or the Secretary shall, at the request in writing of a majority of the members of the Board, issue a call for a special meeting of the Board, and three (3) days' notice shall be required for such special meetings, with notice of the special meeting to be provided to the directors by the Secretary in the manner prescribed in this Section 3 for regular meetings of the Board. Any director may participate in a meeting of the Board of Directors by telephone to the same effect as if personally present, as provided in Idaho Code Section 30-30-612(3). Any director may waive notice of a regular or special directors' meeting, as provided in Idaho Code Section 30-30-615. Notice of a regular or special meeting to consider amendment of the Bylaws shall require a ten (10) day advance notice, as provided in Article XII of the Articles of Incorporation. All Board meetings shall be open to the public.

Section 5. Quorum. A majority of the members of the Board of Directors shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any regular or special meeting. In the absence of both the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson at any regular or special meeting, the quorum present may choose a Chairperson for the meeting. If a quorum is not present, a lesser number may adjourn the meeting to a later day, not more than ten (10) days later, with written notice of such adjournment to be promptly given by the Secretary to each director.

Section 6. Voting. Each director of the Corporation shall be entitled to one vote upon every proposal submitted to vote at any meeting of the Board of Directors.

Section 7. Vacancies. Whenever any vacancy occurs in the Board of Directors by death, resignation, or otherwise, the vacancy shall be filled without undue delay by a majority vote of the remaining members of the Board at a special meeting which shall be called for that purpose. The Board will fill the vacancy from the appropriate sector best completing the coverage, while trying to maintain diverse representation. Any such required election shall be held within sixty (60) days after the occurrence of the vacancy. The person so chosen shall hold office for the remaining term of the person succeeded.

Section 8. Removal of Directors. Any one or more of the directors may be removed upon a showing of cause, at any time, by a vote of two-thirds of the directors present at any special meeting called for that purpose. Cause may include the unexcused absence of a director from two or more regularly scheduled Board or committee meetings during a calendar year.

Section 9. Informal Action by Directors. Any action required by law to be taken at a meeting of the directors, or action which may be taken at a meeting of the directors, may be

taken without a meeting if a consent in writing, setting forth the action so taken, shall be signed by all of the Directors, as provided by Idaho Code Section 30-30-613.

Section 10. Compensation. Directors shall serve without compensation to further the charitable purposes of the Corporation, but shall be entitled to reimbursement of expenses incurred in service as a director.

Section 11. Director Conflict of Interest. Pursuant to Idaho Code Section 30-30-619, the standards and procedures of the Corporation with regard to director conflict of interest shall be as follows:

- (a) A conflict of interest transaction is defined as a transaction with the Corporation in which a director has a direct or indirect interest.
- (b) A director will be considered to have an indirect interest in a transaction if:
 - (i) Another entity in which the director has a material interest, or in which the director is a general partner, is a party to the transaction; or
 - (ii) Another entity of which the director is a director, officer, or trustee is a party to the transaction.
- (c) Any director who may have a direct or indirect conflict of interest on a transaction proposed for the Corporation, before voting on any issue related to the same (or taking any action in furtherance of the transaction), shall disclose to the full Board of Directors (or to any committee of the Board of Directors considering the transaction) the material facts of the transaction and the director's interest therein.
- (d) A transaction in which a director has a conflict of interest may, nevertheless, be approved if, following the disclosure referred to in subparagraph 11(c), above, the Board of Directors authorizes, approves or ratifies the transaction.

Section 12. Miscellaneous.

- (a) Directors cannot be the immediate family of an employee of the Corporation.
- (b) No person may be elected to or serve on the Board who is currently, or has been within the preceding 12-month period, an employee of the Corporation.

- (c) Current Directors and individuals who served as Directors in the preceding 12-month period may not be employed by the Corporation.

ARTICLE VI - OFFICERS

Section 1. Officers. The officers of the Corporation shall be a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. Any two (2) offices may be held by the same person, except the offices of Chairperson and Secretary and Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

Section 2. Method of Election. The Board of Directors shall elect all officers for one-year terms, with all officers being elected from the members of the Board of Directors.

Section 3. Duties of Officers. The duties and powers of the officers of the Corporation shall be as provided generally in Idaho Code Section 30-30-622, and as provided specifically in the following paragraphs of this Section 3.

CHAIRPERSON – The Chairperson shall preside at the meetings of the Board of Directors. The Chairperson shall communicate to the Board at the regular meetings of the Board (and at such other times as the Chairperson deems appropriate) such matters and suggestions as may, in the Chairperson’s opinion, tend to promote the welfare and purposes of the Corporation and shall perform such other duties as are necessarily incident to the office of the Chairperson.

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – In the case of the absence of the Chairperson, or of the Chairperson’s inability from any cause to act, the Vice-Chairperson shall perform the duties of the Chairperson.

SECRETARY – It shall be the duty of the Secretary to give notice of, and attend, all meetings of the directors of the Corporation and keep a record of their proceedings; to carry on all correspondence and to implement all orders, votes, and resolutions of the Board; to keep a list of the directors, including their addresses; to notify the officers of the Corporation of their election; to notify members of the Board of their appointment to committees of the Board; to furnish the Chairman of each committee with a copy of the resolution of the Board under which the committee is appointed, and at the Chairman’s request, give notice of the meetings of the committee; to prepare, under the direction of the Board of Directors, an annual report of the