SQLOrlando Operating Manual

Revised November 20, 2020

Introduction

The intent of this document is to be an operating manual for Board members and key volunteers, providing the why and what and how, at a high level in most cases, but more prescriptive in areas such as financial controls. The details of how to actually do tasks are maintained on [Trello](#) template cards.

Changing This Document

Changes to this document are expected - it should match the way we work. Changes are reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors on an as needed basis. This document will not contain any confidential or individual identifying information and will be published on sqlorlando.org.

Where to Find More Information

- By-laws and minutes are on [sqlorlando.org](#) as well as our monthly message to the community
- Bank statements and documents we treat as confidential are stored on our Google drive (SQLOrlando - Board to Directors)
- Planning and other documents that we share with Volunteers is on our Google Drive (SQLOrlando)
- [Trello](#). We use one board for all routine events and recurring tasks and a separate Board for any major event such as a SQLSaturday (accessible by Board members and some volunteers)
- [Sunbiz.org](#) has the status of the required annual filings
- [Meetup.com](#) is used for our most of our free events
- [SQLSaturday.com](#), host site for our main annual event
- [Pass.org](#), partner for SQLSaturday and some of group events

Governance for a Charitable Organization

We are a 501c(3) organization that has been granted tax exempt status by the State of Florida. To maintain that status we must do the following:

- A quorum of the Board of Directors must meet at least annually and record minutes of the meeting via an in-person or video meeting
- Comply with all legal requirements, of which we consider these two the most important:
    - We cannot make any type of political statements on behalf of the organization
    - Board members receive no compensation (this does not preclude reimbursing for expenses, but those should be rare).
- File an annual tax return. It's important to keep in mind that as long as our annual revenue is less than $50,000 we can file an IRS Form 990-N instead of a full return

- Pay the annual corporate filing fee in Florida
- File for a renewal of our tax exempt status every five years
- Follow our by-laws

The Role of the Board of Directors

Board members are responsible for monitoring the health of the organization and making sure we comply with our internal policies and procedures. These include but are not limited to:

- Reviewing bank statements
- Reviewing and approving an annual budget and plan
- Monitoring the execution of the annual plan and stepping in if volunteers are no longer able to meet their commitments
- Making sure that we have funds on hand to cover planned events and that we are meeting fundraising goals

The Board may and often does delegate delegate authority to the President and other officers, but that is entirely at the discretion of the Board.

Goals

Mission Statement

Our mission statement has been written to give us some flexibility in serving our community while retaining a core focus on technology and people. Section 2.2 of the bylaws says the following:

> This corporation exists to further the career development of students and information technology professionals in Orlando and surrounding areas that are interested in or working with SQL Server and related or complementary technologies and applications.

What We Do

We bring people together to learn and connect by a variety of means, not limited to:

- Organizing or facilitating free or low cost events, typically in the form of meetups, lunches, classes, and SQLSaturday, that provide training and/or networking opportunities
- Connecting the community we serve with other training and networking resources and opportunities (free and paid)
- Giving volunteers the opportunity to plan and participate in our events
- Growing local speakers

See the [How We Serve](#) section for more details.

Guiding Principles

As we search for various ways to serve the community, we keep these points in mind:

- We should never take on a financial risk we cannot cover with organization funds on hand
- We can't measure success solely on attendance. A one day class with five attendees can be a big win for those five people.
- We're volunteer driven, so we have to find ways to serve that our volunteers will find fun, challenging, and empowering.

It's Not About Money

We are not trying to make money. Money is useful in that it allows us to organize some events without having to make a personal guarantee or to host some events without a sponsorship. Our general rules regarding fees are:

- If we are paying a speaker (typically for presenting a full day class) or incurring a significant cost for the venue then we would normally charge attendees a fee ranging from free up to a maximum of $299 per day.
- For free events we may charge a meal fee of up to $10, but attendees will always have the option to bring their own food.
- We can absolutely decide to make some events free even if they are not revenue neutral
- We may reduce or waive fees for students or those that are unemployed

Measuring Success

We use the following to measure success, recognizing that measuring the full impact of what we do is very hard and often has an extended time frame:

- Each year we build a plan of events with goals for attendance and sponsorship, executing on that plan is what drives all the rest.
- We track hours served as a rough metric of service, whether it's someone joining us for an hour at lunch or an hour class

This is an area where we need more and better metrics!

Volunteers

We absolutely rely on volunteers at all levels. A key part of our mission is to find volunteers and match them with opportunities. Those opportunities can range from greeting people at the door to finding speakers to organizing entire events. Some guidelines we apply to volunteers:

- Respect their time. It's up to us to define the task clearly and give them any information or tools needed to accomplish the task.
- We don't pay volunteers. It is acceptable to waive fees for lunch or attendance, to provide an event shirt or other small gift, and when appropriate a small gift card ($10) and a thank you card.
- We typically give speakers at meetups (whether online or in-person) at $25 gift card or equivalent gift
- Most volunteers tend to over commit. We must build a relationship with all volunteers that allows and encourages them to 'give back' tasks if they are overloaded *before* it's too late to reassign the task.

It's also important to be continually watching for and growing volunteers that can move into leadership roles. Every volunteer will hit a point in life where they are tired or have other obligations, our goal is to be able to continue operations when that happens.

Fund Raising

Our goal is to raise enough funds each year to cover the planned events and maintain a buffer in savings. The majority of the fundraising is done at our annual SQLSaturday in the form of sponsorships. For other events we typically try to make them revenue neutral, either by finding sponsors or charging attendees a fee.

Most of our sponsorships will come from vendors in the same technical space we target, but we do at times accept other sponsorships if we believe they are relevant to those attending the event or on the mailing list. Most sponsorships are for a single event or mailing, but can be no longer than one year so that we don't have to manage a long term commitment.

We highly prefer to collect sponsorship payments in advance via PayPal. In some cases sponsors will pay for and provide items directly (food at a meetup for example).

Annual Planning

The President is responsible for building an annual plan and budget and submitting it to the Board prior to the annual meeting for review and approval. This plan will contain at least the following:

- The calendar by month of events we plan to do. For each event it should include an attendance goal, a budget request if needed, any fees to be charged to attendees, gift cards for volunteers for each event as needed and a sponsorship/fundraising plan goal if appropriate.
- Budget lines for any other recurring or projected expenses (Wordpress, Meetup, etc).
- A budget line for discretionary spending by the President, typically $250.
- A detailed sub-budget for any event with an expected cost or revenue of more than $1000

Once reviewed, updated as necessary, and approved by Board vote, this plan becomes the authorization for the President to spend organization funds for the year and is how we will measure our success at the end of the year. The plan and budget can always be amended, with Board approval.

End of Year Report

The President is also responsible for preparing the End of Year Report which will be submitted to the Board and published as a post on sqlorlando.org. The intent of this report is to be as transparent as possible by explaining what we did in service to our mission statement, how we used the funds we raised, and any highlights or lessons learned from the year in an approachable, narrative format.

Key Relationships

PASS

We are affiliated with PASS (pass.org) as a "user group/chapter" and we report on all of our events to them as part of the agreement. In return PASS provides a variety of resources and discounts as well as one free or highly discounted admission to the annual PASS Summit.

Note: The discounted admission typically goes to the President as our best representative, but it can be awarded to any volunteer that was previously configured as a site administrator within PASS. While we see sending someone to the event as a plus for the organization, we do NOT *reimburse for any expenses related to attending.*

PASS "owns" the list of their members who join our group, we have no ability to export it, but we can send messages to that list via the PASS website. We typically encourage members of Our Meetup group to join PASS and vice versa.

Seminole State College

We have a long standing relationship with the Seminole State College. They have provided free space for SQLSaturday each year and in return we send someone to participate in their Advisory Council as well as organizing a Student to IT Pro seminar that runs concurrently with SQLSaturday. We work directly with the Dean and faculty of the Information Technology department (and sometimes with the public relations team as well).

Florida SQL User Groups

We also maintain ties with the other SQL focused groups in Florida, coordinating major event dates to avoid conflicts and cross promoting them as well.

ONETUG

In Orlando we see ONETUG as a companion organization, serving the Orlando community with a different technical focus. We cross promote SQLSaturday & Orlando Code Camp, and look for other opportunities to work together throughout the year.

How We Serve

Most of how we serve is accomplished by organizing events, but we're not limited to that. We could create and post content to our blog or a Youtube channel, organize learning or certification contests, or anything else that aligns with our mission statement.

Monthly Message

We send out one email each month to both the Meetup.com and the PASS.org mailing lists with a calendar of upcoming events and that email may also include surveys, links to online learning sites or events, or other information we think the recipient would find useful. We post the same message to our website.

SQLOrlando Website

We maintain a website (blog) as the public landing page for anyone that wants to know more about us, either from the local community or from an organization that we have contacted for some type of non profit support. The intent is to have resource links, a monthly post (that is the same as the monthly message we send out) plus the by-laws and minutes of Board meetings. It is not intended to be a site that generates a lot of traffic or has a lot of new content.

SQLSaturday

SQLSaturday is by far our biggest event, averaging 250 attendees and 35+ speakers with a budget of $3000 or more. It's also the event that requires the most work and the most volunteers on a project that spans months. We typically create a separate Trello board just to manage all the tasks. Concurrent with SQLSaturday we deliver a 3 hour Student to IT Pro Seminar at Seminole State College that typically has 50-100 students attending.

Meetups

We currently organize a number of different event formats that we group into the Meetup category; Social Meetups, Lunch & Learn, User Group Meeting, and a Holiday Event. For all of these we hope to provide either learning or networking opportunities for those in the community. There are templates for all of these in Trello. We create a card per event (or more!) to track planning and execution.

Training Classes

From time to time we offer half day and full day training classes. These are much more work to organize and promote and they typically mean that we have to commit up front to paying for meeting space and the speaker/trainer, which in turn means that we charge attendees a fee to cover costs. Attendance ranges from 5 to 35 (limited by venue in most cases), so it's important to set fees appropriately and manage costs.

Tools We Use

Trello

We use Trello to track tasks and it is the heart of our operations. All tasks should be represented by a card either on our main board or an event specific board. This allows us to see work that is approaching past due status and reassign if needed, track participation of volunteers, and provide an accessible history of what we've done in the past (especially important when there is a change in leadership).

- We have templates for most recurring tasks and update the templates as our way of working changes or we identity new sub tasks
- We assign cards to volunteers and set a due date
- Status updates and decisions are documented in the card discussion
- For many recurring cards the final task on the list is "create a new card from the template and set the due date"

It's important that we walk the board at least twice a month to catch cards that are past their due date or otherwise seem at risk.

Slack

As much as possible we use Slack for internal communications as this helps to facilitate knowledge transfer by having all the conversations in one place.

Meetup & Eventbrite

We use Meetup.com for almost all of our free events and shift to Eventbrite when we need to charge a fee or need the flexibility to add discount codes or to be able to download the attendee list.

Zoom & Google Meet

We use Zoom for virtual meetings with a speaker where we need good moderating controls and use Google Meet for lunches and internal meetings.

Google

We use Google for our domain registrar and for all our collaboration work, in particular shared documents and calendar. We have a shared drive set up with a basic set of folders. We also have a few email forwarders set up.

Social Media

We have a Twitter account, @sqlorlando. Posts to the website are automatically tweeted.

Marketing

Most of our marketing is done indirectly by publishing our events to PASS as well as Meetup or Eventbrite and using the built in message capability to send out reminder emails. SQLSaturday events are managed via the SQLSaturday web site and we also use that for contacting registrants via the built in messaging system. The combination of using hosting sites that help people find us and mailing reminders to our subscribers has worked well. This doesn't rule out using other means!

We do try to get other groups, both locally and in Florida, to share information about SQLSaturday and any paid events we host. We also work with local staffing companies to have them send that information to their client lists.

Mailing Lists

We do not maintain a list of subscribers. This is important for two reasons:

- From a security and privacy perspective we don't have to spend a lot of effort because we don't have the data.
- In the worst case if we were to lose access to the lists on PASS and Meetup we would have a very limited ability to reach people interested in our events. We see this as a minor risk and worth the trade off compared to having to manage our own list.

We have these lists available for use:

- PASS and Meetup. We can send messages to the list but we do not have access to any of the contact information.
- Eventbrite. We are able to download registration lists and we may do so to assist in managing the event, but we keep those files stored on the SQLOrlando drive and delete them when the event is complete.
- SQLSaturday. We can send messages to the list and we may download the registration list for purposes of printing name badges and related items as well reviewing the final attendance count. We only have access to the SQLSaturday event site for a period of about one year following the event.

It's important that our messages stay focused and true to our mission statement. We should mention sponsors of our events and from time to time we may send out a message on behalf of a sponsor, but always keeping in mind that those messages must be of general interest to our subscribers.

Privacy & Anti-Harassment

For SQLSaturday we adopt the PASS provided privacy and anti-harassment policies. We have not yet published formal policies to cover other events, but in short we expect to treat everyone with respect and we do not share contact information outside SQLOrlando.

Appendix A - Board Meetings

Board Meetings

Planning

Beginning in 2021 we will plan to hold two Board meetings, one in June and one in December, though additional meetings can be scheduled if needed. All Board members must be notified of all Board meetings and we must have a quorum (currently 4) in order to vote on motions. Board members must attend in person or by video chat. In general we should schedule Board meetings well in advance and then aim to provide an agenda plus any documents that need review at least 7 days prior to the meeting.

Motions

Formal decisions should be made by a Board member making a motion (provided there is a quorum present), having someone second the motion, followed by a vote. All votes are recorded and attributed to the voting member. Board members may opt to abstain.

We would typically have a motion for any of the following (but not limited to this list):

- Elections
- Approval or change to the annual budget and event plan
- Changes to the by-laws
- Contracts in excess of $5000 or extending more than 2 years
- Changes to banks, bank accounts, or those with access to spend funds
- Reimbursements to Board members that exceed $250 annually
- Review of financial statements since the last Board meeting

Minutes

Minutes should contain the following as a minimum:

- Date/time and location of the meeting (in-person or a video chat)
- Board members present and any guests
- A list of motions made and if seconded, the roll call of votes (yes, no, abstain) by Board members

Minutes should *not contain:*

- Financial account numbers or bank statements
- Social security numbers

Minutes are written during the meeting, then reviewed and approved as the final step in the meeting prior to adjourning. Minutes are then posted to sqlorlando.org. The goal of the minutes is twofold; to show that we are complying with the requirement to have at least one annual meeting and to provide transparency to the community we serve.

Elections

We also will typically vote on at least three Board seats each year. The President and/or other officers are responsible for contacting members whose term is expiring to see if they wish to stand for re-election. All Board members may suggest other candidates, either to fill a vacancy or to replace a member up for re-election.

Appendix B - Banking & Financial Controls

Banking

Checking & Savings

We maintain one checking and one savings account. Only officers can be added to the signature card and only the President has a debit card (used as credit only).

- No paper checks are authorized, any payment that needs a check will be sent via the online banking portal
- No cash withdrawals are authorized and should be disabled
- Transfers from or to savings will normally be approved by Board motion in advance, but in an emergency the President can notify the Board after the fact.

Transactions are posted to the Slack bankalerts channel automatically based on the bank alert configuration. For any non-recurring charge that happens a thread should be opened and a note added, ideally with the receipt. We have few transactions so this does not add a lot of work.

We prefer to pay fees or subscriptions on an annual basis when possible.

Statements will be provided to all Board members upon request during the year as well as for the year to date at any Board meeting.

PayPal

We maintain one PayPal account for collecting money from sponsors and event attendees. Access to this account is limited to officers only. Typically we will accrue funds for the event until the event is completed and any refunds or adjustments are done, then the remaining balance for the event will be transferred to checking.

Except as noted above, any money received (a sponsor payment for a group meeting for example) should be transferred to checking

We will not make payments from PayPal, those should be done from the main checking using the bank card.

Statements will be provided to all Board members upon request or at each meeting of the Board

EventBrite

We use Eventbrite for most paid events and events that need more flexibility than is provided by meetup (the ability to use discount codes is one example). We typically will have Eventbrite collect the money and then deposit the final amount (minus any refunds or adjustments as well as their fee) to our checking account. A final accounting of each event should be created and posted to the team drive and shared with the Board.

Meetup

We rarely use it, but Meetup does have the ability to collect a fee from attendees. In those cases we would follow the same process used with EventBrite.

Equipment Purchases

In general we prefer to not own equipment, both so that we don't have to keep track of it and because one or more volunteers will have to find space to store it. For items we do purchase such as signs, banners, a laser printer, coffee containers, etc, we track those informally on a Trello card.

Bookkeeping

We use the free WaveApps.com for financial reporting and reconciling. Transactions are pulled automatically from our bank account(s). We have to make sure they are assigned to a category (we have about 10) and reconcile to the bank statement monthly. They have a great mobile app for scanning receipts that we should use as our first choice for entering expenses. They *do not* have a way to assign a receipt to an existing transaction (you can remove it and accept the receipt one instead as a hack).

Appendix C - Non Profit Services

This is an inventory of companies or services we use that are provided free or at reduced cost because of our non profit status.

- [Techsoup](). We have been verified by Techsoup as a non profit and this is often accepted by other companies when requesting discounts on products or services.
- [Google](). We are approved as a non-profit.
- [Slack](). We are approved as a non-profit and we try to use it for all internal communication

Appendix D - Important Dates

These should be on the shared calendar and have active cards with due dates, instructions, and tasks in Trello.

Task	Due Date
Annual Tax Filing	Jan 30
Florida Corporate Filing/Annual Report	Jan 30
Reserving SQLSaturday Event Date	Nov 1 (typically as soon as the current event completes)
Board Meeting - First Half of Year	Any time in June
Board Meeting - Second Half of Year	Any time in November or December
Meeting with Seminole State team	July/August