CONTINGENT REPRESENTATION

All clubs are comprised of contingents, each a group of people who share something in common. Consider: low-handicap golfers, retired weekday golfers, women golfers, paddle players, poolside parents, etc.

Contingent representation means that the governing board is comprised of people whose interests, priorities, preferences, and/or utilization is similar to that of the club’s contingents. In most nonprofit organizations, contingent representation is a high-priority and it should also be strongly considered in the formation of boards for private clubs. However, several barriers provide resistance to the concept, some of them should be overcome and some of them should probably be acknowledged, but maintained.

For instance, the ideal number of board members is somewhere between 7 and 11. In most clubs, it is likely that there are more contingents than positions on the board. Additionally, there are many other important factors that must be considered during board member selection. Contingent representation should not dictate the size of the board.

Another hurdle is that the bylaws of many clubs prescribe who is eligible to serve on the Board in such a manner that it is difficult or impossible for women, singles, seniors, non-golfers, and other stake-holders to serve on the board and sometimes on committees. This risks the quality of the decision-making process by excluding from consideration the perspectives of important contingents. There are very few clubs that can survive financially by making decisions in the interest of “stock-holders” only, ignoring the interests of other “stake-holders” who often represent the majority of the club’s utilization and income.

Boards who find that their bylaws provide barriers to contingent representation should consider:

- Changing the bylaws to grant full-voting privileges and board service to more stake-holders
- Changing the bylaws to permit broader representation on the board (Members who serve on and vote on the Board, need not have voting-privileges at the Membership Meetings). The number or percentage of these positions can be limited
- Actively seeking formal input from the impacted contingents prior any decision
- Regularly seeking both formal and informal input from all stake-holders through board receptions, town-hall meetings, and surveys

Boards are formed to make decisions on behalf of their clubs. The quality of those decisions is greatly enhanced when the perspectives of everyone impacted are given serious consideration. Contingent representation provides those additional perspectives and should be considered by your board and nominating committee.

It should be mentioned that contingent representation does not mean that members of the board are expected to vote in concordance with their contingent. Board members are ethically and legally obligated to make decisions in the best interest of the whole club, not any particular group.