

Promising Practices for the Board

This document contains a variety of 'promising' practices implemented by and recommended to boards we have worked with. Implementing some of these strategies – and adapting them to a board's situation - can dramatically improve a board's effectiveness.

Composition & Expertise



- Maintain an up-to-date board profile to ensure the skills, expertise and perspectives you need are represented around the table; track members' start and end dates on the profile to facilitate succession planning
- Consider how to integrate the perspectives of key stakeholders – whether at board meetings or through participation on committees and task forces
- Hire or enlist (think pro bono) expertise for specific short-term projects

- Use your Governance Committee to manage the process and share your expectations with prospective board members
- When terms are up encourage board members to exchange places with a board member from a related organization
- Consider inviting prospective members to attend board meetings so you can get to know each other better
- Ensure there is a good values match when recruiting for members... look for an emotional connection

Board Recruitment



Board Orientation



- Partner new with seasoned board members to help new members get up to speed more quickly
- Develop an orientation package containing key documents
- Quickly engage new members in activities that are meaningful to them
- Make it real for them... organize site visits, community tours, and meetings with staff and/or clients if appropriate

- Think of the board as a kind of 'brain trust' – engage them in conversations that matter so they can share their perspectives and generate new insights
- Provide board members with opportunities to share their expertise and build on areas they are interested in to enable them to make a real contribution to the organization (a board profile can help staff and committee chairs identify and reach for expertise as they need it)
- Balance the board's fiduciary, strategic and generative work – weave them together where possible

Board Engagement



Strategic Planning



- Consider planning over a 3-5 year horizon; keep it relevant by doing an annual review and update
- Consider planning as an opportunity for board and staff to collaborate and learn from each others' perspectives
- Do a SWOT analysis prior to a planning session as a way to 'prime' people's strategic thinking
- Introduce more creativity and strategic thinking to planning sessions by developing and exploring scenarios

Promising Practices for the Board

- Deal with decisions early in the meeting while people are fresh; leave the reporting to the end
- Distribute Project/Staff/Committee Reports in advance along with strategic questions to be discussed at the meeting
- Track Action Items in a separate document detailing What, Who, When; review and update it offline and/or at the start of each meeting to promote accountability
- Circulate relevant information in advance with the agenda
- Do something different to keep meetings fresh: invite members of other boards to join you for a strategic discussion; invite a key stakeholder to present to the board on a specific topic; hold the meeting at a partner's boardroom

Board Meetings



Board Agendas



- Structure your agenda around your organization's Strategic Priorities/Directions and other indicators the board wants to monitor... this helps everyone keep them top of mind
 - Label agenda items: for discussion, decision, or information
 - Note the time for each item on the agenda... and assign a timekeeper to ensure you keep to it
 - Take 10 minutes at the end of some meetings to reflect on which meeting processes are working and what could be improved
- Establish two standing committees: Finance & Audit and Governance
 - Establish task forces for short-term projects and define an end date for them
 - Create terms of reference at the time that a committee or task force is struck
 - Engage stakeholders via committees and task forces - invite professionals to contribute their expertise without making a 2-year commitment to the board

Committees and Task Forces



Policies and Bylaws



- Develop a policy governance manual to ensure stability and cohesion as board members change
 - Ensure policies are in alignment with bylaws
 - Review policies and bylaws regularly to keep them up to date
 - Include the date policies are developed
- First define the kind of board you need and want
 - Find out what your funders consider good governance and incorporate that into your assessment
 - Identify the learning needs of your board and its individual members
 - Ask for informal feedback between formal evaluations
 - Be prepared to act on the results

Board Evaluation

