

Building a Visionary Board of Directors

Visionary Board Leadership Assessment

Introduction

One of the most reliable ways the board can strengthen its performance as a governing body is to periodically assess its own performance. The Visionary Board Leadership Assessment that follows this page focuses on competencies and characteristics which, when taken together, delineate the profile of an effective future focused board. The results of the assessment will be used to develop action plans to strengthen the visionary leadership capacity of your board.

Based on experiences with successful assessment, BoardSource offers the following suggestions for use of a tool like the Visionary Board Leadership Assessment:

- Give all board members and the Chief Staff Officer an opportunity to discuss the value of a self-assessment and to commit to the process. After discussion, adopt a formal resolution to conduct the assessment and utilize the results to strengthen the board's visionary leadership capacity.
- After adopting the resolution, designate a group to oversee the self-assessment process. The board can delegate this responsibility to the Executive Committee. In either case, the responsible group should be fully committed to the Assessment process.
- Distribute the Assessment to all board members. Specify the date for return of the assessment forms. Compile the results.
- Schedule a special meeting of the board or a retreat session to review the results of the Assessment.
- Conduct the review session. Strive for consensus on 3-5 areas for improvement based on the assessment results. Identify specific plans of action to address the areas targeted for attention. Assign responsibility for implementation and agree on follow-up procedures the board will take to assure accountability.

Sources: The following resources were used in the development of the Board Visionary Leadership Assessment: Boards that Make a Difference by John Carver; Managing for Profit in the Nonprofit World by Paul B. Firstenberg; Self-Assessment for the Nonprofit Governing Boards by Larry H. Slesinger; Learning Organization Practices Profile by Michael O'Brien; Profiles in Nonprofit Excellence by INDEPENDENT SECTOR; and Katie Burnham, Executive Director of the Learning Institute for Nonprofit Organizations.

For assistance in using this assessment and related materials with your Board of Directors, contact:

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Helping Determined Nonprofit Leaders Harness the Power of Shared Vision . . .

Part One: Visionary Board Leadership Assessment

Introduction: This Visionary Board Leadership Assessment contains a list of 26 statements describing the characteristics and competencies of an effective nonprofit board of the future. Rate the degree to which your board reflects each statement by circling the appropriate number in the rating scale to the right of the statement. Base your rating on your knowledge and experience. Make any reasonable assumptions. **"0" means your board is completely lacking in this quality; "5" means that your board strongly reflects the characteristic or competency.**

	Weak					Strong
1. The board is a team of involved and committed individuals who are passionate about a shared mission and vision.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. There is clear understanding of the board's responsibility for leading and guiding the organization into the future in contrast to a passive caretaker mentality.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. The relationship between the Executive Director and the board is one of mutual trust and respect. The board feels fully informed.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. The board focuses on general policy and long-range goals. It is intimately involved in any basic changes in mission and vision. It monitors finances and reviews and approves the annual budget and plans.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. The board delegates the day-to-day management of the organization to the Executive Director. That individual is the only staff member responsible for reporting directly to the board as a whole.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. The position of the board chair is considered a post of responsibility to be occupied by an individual fully dedicated to the mission of the organization and prepared to devote the required time and attention to the task while working closely with the Executive Director.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. There exists a clearly articulated mission that serves as the focal point of commitment for board and staff. It is the guidepost by which the organization judges its success and evaluates the need for adjustments in course over time.	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Weak					Strong
	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. The board is actively and regularly involved in a strategic planning process that helps it consider how the organization should meet new opportunities and challenges.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. The board keeps abreast of changes in the industry, field, or profession. The board discusses trends and forces that drive current and future changes in the organization's marketplace.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. There is within the board a spirit of responsible risk-taking. Members understand that even after careful analysis, the decision to act - to try something new - comes with some risk.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. The board takes into account the organization's vision, long-term goals and strategies as it considers issues, makes decisions and creates policy.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. The organization's vision and strategies are continually reviewed and updated, based on changes in the business environment and customers' needs.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. The board can rapidly respond to changing conditions. There is a sense of where the action of our times is and how to impact it.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. The board has a bias in favor of forward thinking. The board thrusts the majority of its thinking into the future with the understanding that strategic leadership demands the long-term viewpoint.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. The board is able to separate large issues from small ones. The board has a common way to discern the big items that should be the focus of its attention.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. The board provides new board members with a thorough orientation that includes member responsibilities, program and administrative information so that new members are able to perform from the start of their term of service.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. The board is concerned with the diversity of its membership and has a plan in place to assure that it is diverse in its composition and its thinking. The board is also aware of its need for "new blood" as a source for new ideas.	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Weak					Strong
	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. The board has a long-term plan for identifying and cultivating people to become future board members.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. In keeping with their fiscal responsibilities, the board plays a leadership role in developing fundraising policies and plans that assure long-term viability of the organization.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. Board members are personally involved in the annual fund development activities of the organization in a manner appropriate for board members.	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. The board is effective in relating to its diverse constituencies within the broader community. The board is involved in building and maintaining relationships with government, business, and other not-for-profit agencies so that the organization can leverage its resources - both monetary and human - for the benefit of its customers.	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. In approaching problems and issues, the board displays a propensity to think in terms of systems, root causes and relationships among parts rather than surface events and parts in isolation.	0	1	2	3	4	5
23. Innovation is encouraged in an environment of open, uninhibited communication among board members in which new and especially unconventional ideas receive a supportive hearing.	0	1	2	3	4	5
24. The board is committed to the pursuit of service quality. In support of this commitment, the board relies on measurable outcomes as the centerpiece of an accountability system to assess the positive impact of the organization's programs on customers and the broader community.	0	1	2	3	4	5
25. The board operates from a marketing orientation, viewing the organization's clients and constituents as customers who choose to utilize the organization's programs and services and their continued patronage is never a given in today's competitive marketplace.	0	1	2	3	4	5
26. The board maintains effective communications with its members through a variety of means - phone, text, mail, social media/internet, and face-to-face contact.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Part Two: Please respond to the following questions:

Based on your responses to the board assessment above, what do you see as the most critical board development issues and challenges?

- Issues and challenges facing the board as a whole?

- Issues and challenges facing you as an individual board member?

Is there anything else that currently gets in the way of the Board effectively carrying out its governing responsibilities?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions that will help us plan the board development retreat so that it is an effective use of your time?

Thanks for completing this survey.

Your responses to this assessment will help us plan for a productive training and development retreat session.