

# OPTIMIZING BOARD EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS



VECTOR  
COMMUNICATIONS<sup>SM</sup>

Presented by

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## Potential Board Meeting Governance Topics

It is always important to ask the agency's Chief Executive, what keeps him/her up at night? That can be the focus of a board discussion/dialogue. Following are other potential governance topics:

- What challenges are we facing because of changes in our external environment? (i.e. competition for clients from new organization in the community)
- What opportunities now exist that haven't in the past due to changes in the external environment?
- For social service organizations, what can we do about the increased need in the community for our services? (could lead to a discussion about engaging in more advocacy activities or forming a coalition with other organizations, etc.)
- Is what makes our organization distinctive still true? Is there more or less duplication of our work from ally organizations?
- What can we learn from our successes and/or setbacks?
- What are our core values? How do we help them pervade the organization?
- How have funding sources shifted and what are the implications for our approach to fundraising and resource generation (i.e. changing funder priorities, an aging donor base, fewer large corporations in town)
- Are there funders from whom we would not accept funding? Or under what circumstances?
- What is the future of events in our fundraising strategy?
- Should we start an endowment? How much should we aim for? What would it fund?
- What is our case for support? What is our "value proposition" to stakeholders?

- Should we expand the mission and scope of our work?
- How do we assess the costs and benefits of proposed new programs?
- If we had to cut programs to make budget, what are our priorities?
- What process should we create for board development (training, education, succession planning)?
- What should our staff look like in the future (optimum size, structure)?
- What are our outreach goals? (which constituencies and why?)
- How do we create a board that reflects our constituency/the community we serve?
- Who is our constituency? How do we define “community” when we use that word?
- Are we in the right location? Are we using the property we own optimally?
- How fast should we move forward on having a second site?
- How do we decide whether to disband or merge?
- How much should board members be required to contribute?
- What are board responsibilities in the area of fundraising (in our organization)?
- What should our position be on proposed legislation that affects our clients?
- What is the one major organizational challenge we should address this year?
- What is a sustainable rate of growth and how do we measure growth?
- Are we using the most appropriate tracking methods and systems to measure outcomes?
- How does our board become a model of cultural diversity?

# BOARD MEETING EVALUATION SHEET

Board Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject	Evaluation				
1. The board materials were	<i>Confusing</i>		<i>Informative</i>		
	1	2	3	4	5
2. The meeting's focus was	<i>Operational</i>			<i>Strategic</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
3. The educational session was	<i>Not Very Informative</i>		<i>Very Informative</i>		
	1	2	3	4	5
4. The meeting structure allowed	<i>Limited Participation</i>			<i>Full Participation</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
5. I was able to contribute to the conversation	<i>Not At All</i>			<i>A Lot</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
6. The main discussion topic was	<i>Unfocused</i>			<i>Focused</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
7. The issues covered were	<i>Not Very Important</i>			<i>Very Important</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
8. Time given to all agenda items was	<i>Inadequate</i>			<i>Adequate</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5
9. What topics would you like to learn more about at future board meetings?					
10. What topics would you like to address at future board meetings?					
11. General comments.					

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

## Board Member Trait and Preference Inventory

When creating a board matrix and determining the professional and financial skills a current and/or potential board member brings to the organization, it is also important to consider what he or she will bring in terms of critical thinking, behavior and disposition. A high-performing board wants a healthy mix of people.

*“ . . . governance as leadership suggests a new approach to board member recruitment that augments the standard way, ‘one that stresses quality of mind, a tolerance for ambiguity, an appetite for organizational puzzles, a fondness for robust discourse, and a commitment to team play.’”* (Richard Chait, Harvard Graduate School of Education Research Professor who studies the management and governance).

Item	Choice Options	Response
I prefer:	A. What’s possible B. What’s practical	
I am primarily:	A. A divergent thinker B. A convergent thinker	
I tend to be:	A. Task-oriented B. Process-oriented	
I most enjoy:	A. Starting new projects B. Seeing projects through to the end	
I am typically:	A. A provocateur B. A consensus-builder	
I participate:	A. On most issues B. Selectively C. Rarely	
I prefer to:	A. Define and frame problems B. Solve problems	
I tend to:	A. Speak my mind B. Bite my tongue	

Source: Richard Chait and Cathy Trower 2008.

## PROSPECTIVE BOARD MEMBER INFORMATION SHEET

Name of prospective board member: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of referral person: \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIAL SKILLS	
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel/Human Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Finances
<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising	<input type="checkbox"/> Business
<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing/Public Relations	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal	<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND	
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporation	<input type="checkbox"/> For-profit business
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit organization	<input type="checkbox"/> Government
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-Employed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

EDUCATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> Some high school	<input type="checkbox"/> Some graduate coursework
<input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate	<input type="checkbox"/> Graduate degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Some college	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate degree	<input type="checkbox"/>

RACE/ETHNICITY (check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian and Alaska Native
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic or Latino	<input type="checkbox"/>

Current board service: \_\_\_\_\_

Known levels of giving: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interests: \_\_\_\_\_ Other pertinent information: \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Compiled from BoardSource and Vector Communications*

## POTENTIAL BOARD CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

1. Why are you interested in contributing your time, talent and treasure to our board?
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. What skills do you feel you will bring to our board?
4. Tell us about your previous board experience.
5. What did you like about boards on which you previously served? What did you dislike?
6. Have you ever served in a leadership role on any boards? If so, what were they and which organizations?
7. On what other boards do you currently serve?
8. Do you foresee any potential conflicts of interest if you serve on our board?
9. Do you have the time to devote to our board and agency? How much time can you give to our agency on a monthly basis?
10. What do you think are the characteristics of an effective board member?
11. Are you willing to make a stretch donation to the board every year?
12. If you are elected to our board, are you willing to help cultivate potential donors? Are you willing to go on potential donor calls with our development director or ED?
13. We annually conduct individual board member self-assessments. How do you feel about personal evaluations of board members that are shared with our Governance Committee members?
14. Review board meeting schedule. How do these meetings fit in with your current schedule? Are you available at these times of day to attend board meetings?
15. Review committees. On what committees are you interested in potentially serving?
16. Outline board member requirements, i.e. board meeting times, annual financial gift, committee participation, event attendance, etc. Then ask if any of these requirements concern you? Can you meet the annual financial gift?
17. After your board term ends with us, what will make you say/feel that your time spent serving was worthwhile?
18. Give the following documents to potential candidate to take with him or her:
  - a. Board member job description
  - b. Latest annual report
  - c. Board roster
  - d. Board meeting schedule
  - e. Newsletters and/or brochures
  - f. Committee job descriptions and committee meeting schedule
19. If you do not already have it, ask for potential candidate's resume.

### Sample Board Self-Assessment

	Unsure	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>OVERALL</b>					
1. Board members have a clear understanding of the agency's mission.					
2. Board members support the Executive Director.					
3. Our board annually evaluates the Executive Director.					
4. Board members promote the highest ethical values for the organization.					
5. Board members have a shared sense of the agency's strategic plan.					
6. Board members understand the specific external challenges facing the agency.					
7. Our board will regularly ask, "what problems are we solving?"					
8. Our board ensures the strategic plan is realistic.					
9. Board members are results oriented.					
10. Our board regularly evaluates the performance of major programs and services.					
11. Our board approves all new organizational policies before they are implemented.					
12. Board members put the agency's interests above all else when making decisions.					
13. Our board provides financial oversight and ensures that the operating budget reflects strategic priorities.					
14. Board members give and raise funds to help achieve the agency's identified priorities.					
15. Board members serve as agency ambassadors.					
16. Our board reviews the agency's mission and purpose each time it conducts strategic planning.					



17. Our board exercises its governance role by ensuring that the agency supports and upholds its vision, mission and core values.					
<b>BOARD ORGANIZATION</b>					
17. Our board is the right size.					
18. Our board terms are the right length.					
19. Our board receives information in a timely fashion					
20. Our board receives the right amount of information to make informed decisions.					
21. Our board receives information relevant to the issues at hand.					
22. Our board has an effective orientation for new board members.					
23. Our board provides ongoing education and training for board members.					
<b>BOARD MEETINGS</b>					
24. Board meetings are well attended, with near 100% attendance					
25. Our board meets frequently enough during the year to address the organization's issues.					
26. Our board meetings are the appropriate length of time to handle the work at hand.					
27.					
28. During our meetings and in our work together, our board allocates an appropriate amount of time to focus on the issues and the most important strategic priorities.					
29. Our board meetings balance staff presentation and board discussion.					
30. Our board meetings provide opportunities for honest, constructive, and respectful debate of issues.					
31. Our board meetings involve a lot of give-and-take between board members and management.					
32. No single or few board members wield most of the power most of the time.					

33. Our board has the talent we need to do our job well.					
<b>COMMITTEE MEETINGS</b>					
34. Each committee establishes its goals and plans at the beginning of the fiscal year.					
35. Our board has the right committees for the work it needs to conduct.					
36. Our board members actively participate in standing committees.					
37. Our committees meet frequently enough during the year to address issues.					
38. Our committee meetings provide opportunities for honest, constructive, and respectful dialogue of issues.					
39. Our committee meetings involve a lot of give-and-take between members and management.					
40. Standing and ad hoc committees complete their tasks in an effective and timely manner.					
<b>BOARD MEMBERSHIP AND ORIENTATION</b>					
41. Our board size is adequate to govern effectively the agency.					
42. Our board has a range of talents, experience and knowledge to accomplish our role.					
43. Our board uses members' talents and skills effectively.					
44. Our board makeup is diverse with experience, skills, gender, ethnicity, race, age and personalities.					
45. Our board regularly assesses the skills, expertise and other contributions we need from potential new board members to maintain or increase our effectiveness.					
46. Our board actively recruits new board members based on identified needs and not solely to fill a board vacancy.					
47. Our board and staff provide new board members with a structured new member orientation.					

48. Our board annually assesses board members and addresses any identified needs.					
<b>BOARD AND STAFF ROLES</b>					
49. Our board understands the difference between governance and operations					
50. Our board has a constructive partnership with the Executive Director that is built on trust, candor, respect and honest communication.					
51. Communication is strong and clear between the board and Executive Director/staff.					
52. Staff support before, during and after board meetings is effective.					
53. Staff provides information that is adequate enough to ensure effective board governance and decision making.					
54. Our board members do not directly interact with staff to influence staff or programs without first coordinating with and getting agreement from the Executive Director					

## Annual Board Member Self-Assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Maybe or Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I enthusiastically support the agency's mission.					
2. I have had sufficient board member training.					
3. I understand the board's role and my legal and ethical responsibilities as a board member.					
4. I am aware of what is expected of me as a board member.					
5. I understand the difference between the staff's responsibilities and my own as a board member.					
6. I attend board meetings.					
7. I read the board meeting materials before meetings and come prepared with questions and/or comments.					
8. When I have a different opinion, I voice it.					
9. I try to be an objective decision maker.					
10. I avoid all conflicts of interest.					
11. Once board decisions are made, I support them even if I do not agree with them.					
12. I know the goals of the agency's strategic plan.					
13. I attend committee meetings.					
14. I attend community events to help further the agency's community presence and work.					

15. I can explain to friends and associates why our agency is important.					
16. I promote the agency's work in the community whenever possible.					
17. I follow through on things I say I will do.					
18. I stay informed about issues relevant to our mission and bring information to the board's attention.					
19. I suggest potential board members.					
20. I suggest potential donors.					
21. I make a yearly contribution to the agency.					
22. If asked, I would be willing to do more for the agency.					
23. If I chair a committee, I know what tasks/issues my committee is supposed to address.					
24. I enjoy being a board member.					

24. If you were asked to serve another term, how would you like to contribute or be involved?

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25. Which committee would you like to serve on during the next fiscal year? If so, please circle which one:

- Governance

- Fund Development
- Finance/Audit

26. How can the Board Chair and Executive Director help you become a better board member?

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27. What assistance do you need in order to become a more effective board member?

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28. What changes would you suggest regarding the board's involvement?

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29. Additional comments and/or suggestions.

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