

Leading with Intent 2017 Opportunities for Board Development and Reflection



1 Help your board cultivate a deeper understanding of your organization’s work.

Make it an ongoing priority to deepen your board’s understanding of your organization’s programs

— what you do, why it matters, and how you know you are having an impact. To understand your starting point, reflect on the following questions with your governance committee members, or whichever group of board leaders has responsibility for board self-management:

1. To what extent do each of our board members understand our programs? Is the level of understanding strong enough to give us confidence about our ability as a board to make strategic decisions about our organization’s future?
2. How effectively are we creating opportunities for board members to experience our programs and/or hear from those we serve? Does our approach to board education include enough “show,” instead of just “tell”?
3. If our chief executive left the room during a board meeting, would board members be able to continue a robust discussion about what we have prioritized programmatically and why?

2 Create opportunities to build your board’s comfort with and engagement in providing leadership outside of the boardroom.

Think strategically and creatively about how to position board members for stronger leadership outside the boardroom through fundraising, advocacy, and broader community outreach. Consider asking each board member to reflect on the following as part of a full board conversation or another appropriate forum:

1. What makes you proud about your affiliation with our organization? How do you know that our work matters? Why and how does it matter to you personally?
2. How many of the people in your life — family, colleagues, neighbors, or others — know about your board leadership with our organization? Fundraising aside, how comfortable are you talking with them about the work that we do and why it is important to you?
3. If elected officials and other decision makers in our community knew of your involvement with our organization, would they be more interested in learning about our organization’s work? How could you leverage this connection to strengthen our organization’s impact or defend it from potential funding or policy threats?
4. If our organization ceased to exist, what would be lost? If we were to significantly grow or expand our impact, what new reality could this create? How could each of our roles as advocates and fundraisers help prevent the former and create the latter?

For more on the board’s advocacy role, visit standforyourmission.org.

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3 Explore and define your organization’s values as it relates to diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Start a conversation about what diversity means to your organization, and what a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity would look like for your board, your organization, and your work in the community. Consider the following questions as a part of a full board conversation:

- a. Is our organization’s reputation being negatively (or positively) impacted by our board’s current composition vis-à-vis diversity? If someone were to make assumptions about our organizational values based on our board composition, what would they be likely to think?
- b. How well are we cultivating a deeper understanding of the community or communities that we serve and bringing their perspectives, needs, feedback, and priorities into our strategic boardroom discussions? Are we ever at risk of making decisions without fully understanding how these decisions may affect those we serve?
- c. If we were to make a deeper commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, what would that mean for our mission, our work, and the people we serve?

For more on the board’s leadership role on issues related to diversity, inclusion, and equity, visit boardsource.org/initiatives/diversity-equity-inclusion.

4 Check in regularly on how well your board understands — and is fulfilling — its roles and responsibilities.

Ensure that every board member starts his or her service with a firm understanding of his or her roles and responsibilities — both what they are and what they aren’t — and continually reinforce the importance of role understanding throughout every member’s service. Reflect on the following as a part of a governance and/or executive committee meeting:

- a. How confident are we that each board member has a firm understanding of the board’s responsibilities and governing role?
- b. How effectively is our board leveraging its leadership for oversight,

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strategic and adaptive work, and external leadership and ambassadorship? Are we over- or under-emphasizing any of these categories or work? What would the ideal balance look like for us as a board?

- c. If we are veering toward micromanagement in a board conversation, do we have the understanding, culture, and leadership among our board members that enable us to self-identify that and recalibrate in the moment, or would it go unchecked or rely on the executive to say something?
- d. What mechanism do we have for regularly reflecting on our overall performance as a board, and how well we are fulfilling our leadership roles both within and outside of the boardroom?

5 Invest in the board's culture.

Work to cultivate a board culture of trust, respect, and mutual accountability within your board by creating opportunities for your members to engage with each other in a way that deepens their understanding of each other and their shared commitment to the organization's work. Reflect on the following as a part of a governance committee meeting or a conversation between the board chair and executive:

- a. Who is involved in the board's decision making? Is it a full board activity? Or are smaller groups of power (e.g., executive committee) making decisions before or after board meetings? How does this affect our culture, and the trust and openness between board members?
- b. Does the way that we facilitate board meetings encourage thoughtful discussion and deliberation? Are we closer to debating things too much or too little? How does this affect our ability to make well-considered decisions and move forward as a collective leadership body?
- c. To what extent have our board members cultivated relationships with each other that enable them to trust and respect each other, even when they disagree?