

# High-Performing Boards



## EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN MEMBER-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS



# Dimensions of Board Performance



- **Stewardship**

- Overall quality of board relations with staff
- Overall quality of relations among board members
- Stewardship over the organization's resources
- Taking responsibility for difficult decisions
- Organizational interests, not self interest
- Public trust

# Dimensions of Board Performance



- **Strategic Performance**
  - Strategic rather than operational thinking
  - Aligning resources with strategic needs
  - Catalyst for change
  - Understanding external environment and trends
  - Ability to achieve strategic plan

# Dimensions of Board Performance



- **Internal Accountability**

- Board's ability to set performance standards for itself
- Record of enforcing self-imposed performance standards
- Securing feedback from constituencies

# Dimensions of Board Performance



- **Member Relations**

- Overall quality of board relations with the membership
- Accountability to members
- Direct outreach and engagement of membership
- Chapter/Affiliate Relations

## How to tell if it's not working...



- Dead board members still get meeting notices.
- Board members refer all the tough issues to the executive committee.
- There is no follow-up on action items.
- Committees don't meet (or they meet way too often).
- The mission is not getting accomplished.

# Big Question #1



**“Why does there generally seem to be an inverse correlation between the importance of a matter and the time accorded to it in our board meetings?”**

# ASAE Foundation Research Series



**Beth Gazley and Ashley Bowers**  
**Survey of 1,585 nonprofit CEO's**



# Key Findings



**The diversity of the association sector means there will be no single recipe for a high-performing board.**

- ✦ Competitive Environment
- ✦ Geographic Scope
- ✦ Complexity
- ✦ Budget Dynamics
- ✦ Board Size and Structure

## Key Findings



- **Tax status, age, and membership structure shape boards in important ways.**
- **Board recruitment is still a challenge.**
- **Many boards put a limited emphasis on performance measurement.**

# Key Findings



- **Performance measurement notes:**
  - Half of boards do not set performance goals for themselves or assess their own performance.
  - 1 in 6 boards allow direct appointments by affiliated organizations, a practice we find connected to other board dysfunctions.
  - 1 in 5 does not evaluate the CEO.

## Key Findings



### **High-performing boards have a strong strategic focus.**

- More than half of member-serving boards spend at least 25 % of their meeting time on strategic thinking and discussion, and two thirds work jointly with staff to develop a strategic plan.

# Big Observation #1



Paradoxically, staff members can inadvertently invite the board to micromanage by providing predominately *administrative* information to board members.

# Key Findings



- CEO ratings reflect the value of training staff in board support.
- CEO ratings reflect the value of investing in board development and training.
- Staff turnover is linked to poor performing boards....  
**DUH! (29% planning to leave).**

## Observation #2



When board work teams mirror and monitor staff functions, it is difficult for individual board members *not* to function as either surrogate administrators or staff supervisors in fulfilling their roles. Committees and task forces should reflect the association's and the board's strategic priorities, not the administrative structure.

# Key Findings



- **Board size matters some, but board focus matters most.**
- **Practice careful board member selection.**
  - Competitive elections
  - Screening
  - Diversity and representational requirements
  - Term limits



# Recommendations



- Train staff in board support.
- Think strategically.
- Practice a culture of learning and accountability.
- Decide how success is defined.

# Accountability



- A responsible committee – executive or governance
- Collective (and individual) performance targets: “As a result of our efforts as a board.....”
- Systematic monitoring
- Continuous improvement

# Easy Ways to Start



- **Board Meeting Effectiveness**

- *Are you leaving the meeting confident in the overall performance of our organization?*

- *Did you feel you had ample opportunity for input?*

- *Would you change anything about future meetings?*

# Self-Evaluation



- Once a decision is reached, I support it.
- I do my best to avoid interruptions from other business or personal matters during board meetings.
- I show respect for opinions expressed by others.
- I respect confidential information, discussions and documents.

## Big Observation #3



**“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”**

--- Albert Einstein

# Resources



- **High-Performing Boards Gazley & Bowers**
- **Road to Relevance, Coerver & Byers**
- **BoardSource**
- **Nonprofit Center**
- **National Council of Nonprofits**
- **ASAE**
  - ***Associations Now*** magazine, especially the annual Volunteer Leadership issue.
  - ***Associations Now Daily News***.
  - **State affiliates of ASAE**

# Are we moving toward or away from priorities?

