Engaging the Nonprofit Board: Let Them Lead

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Outcomes for this session

• Three forms of governance

• Engage the board with generative discussion

• Techniques to encourage board conversation
Three modes of governance

- Fiduciary
- Strategic
- Generative Thinking
Fiduciary Governance

- Approval of Budget
- Give meaningful financial contribution, open doors for funding opportunities
- Policy approval
- Assure legal and ethical standards
Strategic Governance

• Mission, vision, values and planning

• Address issues strategically

• What drivers and associated performance will allow the organization to achieve its goals?

• Board actively participates with staff
Generative Governance

– Collaborative approach with executive staff and board not evaluative

– Gives problems and challenges a framework and definition

– Looking back helps shape the future. Asking why were we successful, unsuccessful?
CEO or Executive Director Hiring Process

• Fiduciary Mode—What is a competitive salary range? Approval of Position Description.

• Strategic Mode—hiring the right executive director. What strategies will assure a successful hire?

• Generative—what qualities are needed in our new staff leader to move the organization forward?
Why 3 modes of governance

• Makes a more meaningful role for the board
• Helps utilize the talents and skills of the board members, political and social connections as well as professional expertise
• Moves the organization forward
Techniques for generative conversations

- Facilitated board meetings
- Staff serves as internal consultants, not the one to run the meetings
- Suspend the meeting rules; take a playful approach to discussion
- Promote robust discussion
How to encourage board discussion

• Use small groups to discuss substantive issues
• Write down before discussion the most important question
• Counterpoint—several board members develop arguments against a recommendation
• Surveys
Improved board structure, Improved board meetings

- Fewer committees, work groups adapt to specific issues and relevant questions
- Agenda features ambiguous or problematic situations
- Time allotted for discussion
- Leaders as facilitators
- Written reports in advance of the meeting
- Generative work can occur outsides of board meetings
Exercise—what are the top three strategic issues

• Put on your board hat
• Identify what the top two or three strategic issues are for your organization
• Pick one
• Determine what mode(s) of governance would be most useful to handle the topic
Opportunities for generative work outside the board room

• Board and CEO have brown bag lunches with open-ended discussion
• Board engages stakeholders about new direction or challenges
• Boards meet with other boards to learn about similar issues
• Board participates by serving as a direct service volunteer, attend tours, agency orientations
Closing thoughts

- Boards and executive staff should be adept at all three forms of governance.
- Board members are eager to find more meaningful and satisfying roles.
- Leadership matters--build a board that is thoughtful and willing to think, not just share their expertise.
- Your next steps.
Bibliography and Resources

- Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan and Barbara E. Taylor (2005), *Governance as Leadership*, John Wiley&Sons, BoardSource