BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

Reference Guides
for
CGIAR International Agricultural Research Centers
and their
Boards of Trustees

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Guides in this Series:

1. The Role, Responsibilities, and Accountability of Center
   Boards of Trustees
2. The Role of the Board Chair
3. Creating a Well-Balanced Board
4. Building Effective Board Committees
5. Choosing a Director General: The Search and Selection
   Process
6. Evaluating the Director General: The Assessment Process
7. Board Self-Assessment
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Foreword

Each CGIAR center is an autonomous, international institution governed by an independent board of trustees. The effectiveness of the trustees in discharging their fiduciary responsibilities, and in setting and overseeing center policies, is essential to the continued success of individual centers and of the CGIAR system as a whole.

For over two decades the boards have benefited from the dedicated service of many individuals who have brought rich experience and insights to their task. In the recent past they have also benefited from CGIAR guidelines and papers on the role of center boards, in particular those prepared by Professors Lowell Hardin ("Report on the Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities of Trustees of International Agricultural Research Centers") and John Dillon ("Some Thoughts Toward Ensuring the Successful Performance of Boards in the CGIAR System").

Over time, the context within which the centers function has become more complex and challenging, as have the expectations of internal and external stakeholders. In response, center boards have been seeking new and better ways to discharge their basic obligations to their center and the system.

The idea of preparing a new set of reference guides on the role and operations of CGIAR center boards, taking into account new principles and practices of institutional governance, was advanced by the CGIAR Oversight Committee and the Committee of Board Chairs. The project was implemented by the National Center for Nonprofit Boards (NCNB), located in Washington, DC, and the CGIAR Secretariat, by a team made up of Selçuk Özgediz (coordinator), Maureen Robinson, and Pammi Sachdeva.

The seven guides in the series are based primarily on NCNB materials and CGIAR reports on center governance, and were reviewed by the Oversight Committee and the Committee of Board Chairs. In addition, the first guide, entitled The Role, Responsibilities, and Accountability of Cen-
ter Boards of Trustees, was discussed and endorsed by the CGIAR at its 1996 Mid-Term Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The CGIAR Secretariat is pleased to make these reference guides available to the CGIAR centers and other interested institutions. They will be updated when necessary. We welcome reactions on their usefulness, and invite suggestions for improvement.

Alexander von der Osten
CGIAR Executive Secretary
Board Self-Assessment

The Benefits of Self-Assessment

Serving on a center board is an opportunity to contribute skills, experience, knowledge, and wisdom to an organization carrying out valuable work. It also requires a level of care and commitment on the part of individual board members and the board as a whole to provide the oversight and evaluation that are required. Given the critical role of the board in the work of the centers, it is important that boards periodically assess their performance and consider ways in which to strengthen it. Although the process takes time to conduct, and for center boards time is always at a premium, conducting a periodic review of the board’s performance is a worth while investment of the board’s resources.

Properly conducted, a self-assessment offers tangible and intangible benefits to the participating board members and the Director General, to the programs they are governing and assisting and, ultimately, to the people the center seeks to serve.

Board self-assessment can help to:

- refresh the board’s understanding of its role and responsibilities;
- identify important areas of board operation that need attention or improvement;
- measure progress toward existing plans and objectives;
- define criteria for an effective and successful board;
- build trust, respect, and communication among board members and with the director General and staff; and
• enable individual board members to work more effectively as part of a team.

An Overview of the Process

There are five steps in the proposed process for board self-assessment.

1. Establishing the time frame for the process, including scheduling adequate time at a full board meeting for a review and discussion of the results.

2. Assigning responsibility for coordinating the process to a member of the board or a committee of the board.

3. Distributing the questionnaire.

4. Collating and interpreting results.

5. Presenting the results to the board for discussion, and determining a plan of action that will help to clarify the work of the board and strengthen its performance.

Board self-assessment requires the commitment of the board’s leadership. Even if the responsibility for the administration of the process is delegated to another board member or a special board committee, the Board Chair must take responsibility for the process and communicate its seriousness and value to the rest of the board. Because the results of the self-assessment may reveal dissatisfaction with aspects of the board’s operations within the immediate control of the Chair, the process requires that the Chair be open to the suggestions and criticisms of his or her peers. A good Chair will reassure the board that candor and constructive criticism will be welcome and that confidentiality will be respected.

Evaluation is always challenging; the value of self-assessment is that it is a peer process and reflects the desire of board members to work together to strengthen their part in the center’s success.
Scheduling a Self Assessment

The board self-assessment process can take several weeks to complete, from distributing the questionnaires to compiling and analyzing the results. Rarely will all of the questionnaires be returned by the deadline (usually a minimum of two weeks from the date the questionnaires are distributed), and time must be built into the schedule for reminders and late returns. The person or committee assigned to coordinate the process and to collate and analyze results needs to fit these tasks into an undoubtedly busy calendar. In addition, board members need time to read and reflect on the results before coming together to discuss them.

The frequency of conducting a self-assessment will reflect the needs of individual center boards, and the election cycle for new board members. Generally, a full assessment as outlined in this guide should be conducted every two years or so. This allows the board to measure the success of any changes it has undertaken as a result of an earlier assessment, and encourages the board to be forward looking about itself in the context of the center’s anticipated future.

A board self-assessment may not be useful when board turnover has been so significant that not enough collective experience exists to assess. Generally, however, board self-assessment is a good adjunct resource to a larger planning process, since it acknowledges the part an effective board will play in the ability of the center to achieve the goals it sets for itself.

The Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire is organized into areas of board responsibility. These parallel the responsibilities outlined and discussed in the Guidelines on the Role, Responsibilities, and Accountability of Center Boards of Trustees. Within each area there is a set of questions that explore different aspects of the responsibility. At the end of each section, board members are asked to suggest ways in which the board might improve its performance.

Throughout the questionnaire board members are asked to comment on how they as individuals view the performance of the board as a
whole, and of its committees. Although individual self-assessment is very useful, research with this process indicates that individuals have a greater tendency to over- or understate their own performance than they do that of the board as a whole.

The questionnaire that appears as part of this publication was developed with the general needs of center boards in mind. Individual boards may find certain questions irrelevant, or wish to add or adjust questions to make them more reflective of the role and practice of the board. If the questionnaire is revised, consider carefully whether a question that may not now reflect board practice addresses a practice the board should be encouraged to adopt. One of the goals of board self-assessment is to help the board consider ways in which it might need to change to help the center meet its future need.

Distributing the Questionnaire

Although distributing the questionnaire is a purely administrative function, there are a number of things that will make it go smoothly.

The questionnaire should always be accompanied by a letter from the Board Chair stating the objectives for the board self-assessment and the importance of obtaining a response from each board member. The letter should include a reasonable date for the return of the questionnaire, usually two weeks from the mailing date.

Although the questionnaires can be sent from the center’s offices, they should be returned to the board member charged with responsibility for overseeing the process. This is frequently the Board Chair, but may be the chair of a special ad hoc committee appointed for the purpose, or the chair of the nominating committee if it has been charged with this responsibility. Enclosing an envelope with a clear return address or providing instructions for faxing the questionnaire helps board members comply with this request. If board members are to feel comfortable in expressing their views candidly, it helps to assure them that the questionnaire is going to a peer rather than to the center’s offices.

The goal is to get a 100 percent response, but this is not always possible. Each board must make a determination about the level of re-
sponse they need. Expect to extend the deadline for returning questionnaires once and build that into the schedule. If there are board members who have been chronically inactive, no amount of persuasion may get the desired response. The response rate may be as strong an indicator of board strength as any of the information that appears in the questionnaire.

Collating the Results

The simplest way to collate and report results is to express the responses to each question in three categories—Not Satisfied, Satisfied, and Not Sure—as a percentage of the full number of responses. For example, if three out of ten board members express dissatisfaction with the first question in the questionnaire, five express satisfaction and two say they are not sure, the result is reported as 30 percent, 50 percent, and 20 percent.

Although the format of the questionnaire allows room for board members to express degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as a general rule consolidating the responses into either satisfaction or dissatisfaction allows for a simpler reading of the results. Although a certain nuance may be sacrificed, this could be captured in the responses to the open-ended questions and in separate tabulation of responses which show the gradations in satisfaction.

The questionnaire has not been designed to make calculating the average overall responses in each area of responsibility useful. Determining that on average board members were more satisfied than dissatisfied in the general category being assessed, reduces the benefits of specific insights that are gained by looking at each question individually and assigning it a weight that is meaningful to a particular center.

The responses to the open-ended questions are in many ways the heart of the self-assessment. In compiling the report, it is recommended that all comments to the open-ended questions be reproduced, and only edited for clarity and to neutralize the rare unconstructive comment. Board members benefit from reading what their peers answered, discovering that others share their concerns, and seeing the full array of suggestions for improvements.
Interpreting the Results

Some boards will be able to make good use of a straightforward presentation of the results, free of any interpretative summary or highlighting of significant issues, but most boards find it helpful to have some form of written interpretation available. Usually it highlights areas where board members felt the board was generally strong and where they identified weaknesses or areas for improvement. The summary also tries to capture the tenor and sense of urgency expressed by members in response to the open-ended questions.

The summary provides a useful starting place for the board's discussion of the results of the self-assessment. It should be accompanied by the full report and sent to every board member and to the Director General in advance of any discussion of its implications.

The interpretation of the results is more an art than a science. In every center there will be unique factors or circumstances that require more from the board in certain areas than in others. Some aspects of board operations are important but mechanical, and therefore relatively easy to address. Even a relatively high level of dissatisfaction can be resolved without too much difficulty. Other areas of the board's work, such as the relationship with the Director General or with the staff, involve more complicated issues, and any degree of dissatisfaction may require careful attention and thoughtful consideration.

It is important in analyzing and summarizing results to look at the information that is generated in its entirety. Responses to the individual questions may be contradicted by the tone of the responses to the open-ended questions. Suggestions or comments shared in one part of the questionnaire may offer insights into areas of board work addressed in earlier sections.

All questions are not assigned equal weight; even within a section of the questionnaire, some questions are more important than others. For instance, dissatisfaction with or ignorance of the board's process for evaluating the Director General is usually more significant than ignorance about the search process used to recruit the current Director General. It is possible to have joined the board long after the recruitment of the present Di-
rector General and to be unsure about the search process, but whatever the tenure of a board member, unless very brief, he or she should have a clear understanding of how the Director General’s annual evaluation is conducted.

Making the Most of a Board Self-Assessment

The very process of self-assessment has benefits for a board. It helps to build commitment and to create a climate in which evaluation of different kinds can take place constructively. Nevertheless, to gain the greatest benefit from the process, the board must develop and act on a set of “next steps” that will capitalize on its willingness to effect change and seek improvements in its practice. If the composition of the board is identified as an area that needs greater attention to correct imbalances, the nominating committee must see that as an assignment and link its activities to that agreement. If the board feels that the accumulation and investment of reserves is not well understood by the board as a whole, the center staff, the Chair, and the executive committee should develop a plan to educate the board and help it to think more strategically about these and other financial issues.

Having taken the time to participate in such a complex process, the board needs to put the information to use. Individual board members need to see that their efforts to be constructive are rewarded by improvements in the way they work together. The result is a board culture that seeks ways to contribute to helping make the center as successful and effective as possible.

The Role of the Director General in Board Self-Assessment

The Director General plays an important role in the self-assessment process, but it is a secondary role. He or she can be the impetus for initiating the process by encouraging the Board Chair to make time for it in the board’s annual plan of work, and can also help to facilitate the logistics of distributing the questionnaire. The Director General, like members of the board, should complete a questionnaire and should feel the same freedom as others to respond to questions candidly and with complete confidence in the confidentiality of the process.
It is important for the Director General to keep in mind that board self-assessment is primarily a way for board members to focus on governance issues, and not a mechanism for the Director General to reform the board. For this reason the Director General should never present the results of the self-assessment or be the facilitator of the board's discussion of the results, and during the discussion he or she should be more listener than participant.

Variations on Board Self-Assessment

During the intervening periods between full board assessments, it may be worthwhile to use a simpler survey instrument to get feedback from board members on an annual or intermittent basis. Board members often welcome an opportunity to offer comments or suggestions on how board activities and operations can be improved, and whether all “improvements” deserve the designation. The open-ended questions at the end of the self-assessment questionnaire can be adapted to this purpose.

Another fruitful area of board evaluation is the quality of board meetings. Shortly after a board meeting, board members can be asked to assess the focus of the agenda, the adequacy of background materials, and the quality of board discussions, and to suggest how the board could better focus its time and organize itself in the interest of the center and its work.

Shorter formats for gathering feedback are easy to disseminate by fax or e-mail and encourage boards to be less passive and more engaged in their roles.
Sample Questionnaire

Responsibility 1

Determine the Center’s Mission and Purpose

One of a center board’s fundamental responsibilities is to determine and safeguard the mission of the organization. In addition, the board should review the mission periodically and revise it whenever necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 All board members are familiar with the current mission statement of the center?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The current mission statement is appropriate for the center’s role in the next two to four years?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The board’s policy decisions and the center’s programs and services conform with the mission of the center?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can the board do better in this area?
..........................................................................................................................................................
Hire the Center Director and Evaluate His or Her Performance

Perhaps the most significant decision a center board makes is the selection of the Director General. An effective board will draft a clear job description that outlines the duties of the Director General, and will undertake a carefully planned search process whenever the position is vacant. In addition, the board will support its Director General by providing him or her with frequent and constructive feedback, and by periodically conducting an evaluation to help the Director General strengthen his or her performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 A written job description clearly spells out the responsibilities of the Director General?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The board respects the responsibilities distinct to the Director General?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The board conducted its last search for a Director General in a professional and competent manner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 The board assesses the Director General's performance in a systematic and fair way on a regular basis?</td>
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</table>

How can the board do better in this area?

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Responsibility 3

Determine the Center's Policies

The board is the center's highest policymaking body. However, the board is not
expected to be involved in every center-level decision. Board involvement is essential for
all major strategic decisions that give direction to management's actions. These include
science and program policies as well as those in the areas of finance and human resources.
The board is often also involved with shaping the center's policies on relationships with
other institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 The board devotes adequate attention to strategic issues</td>
<td>☐ 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facing the center?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The board refrains from involvement in routine operational</td>
<td>☐ 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matters of the center?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The board is effective in giving strategic guidance to</td>
<td>☐ 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management on science and program policies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The board is effective in giving strategic guidance to</td>
<td>☐ 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management on finance and human resources policies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The board is effective in setting policies on the center's</td>
<td>☐ 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships with other institutions?</td>
<td></td>
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How can the board do better in this area?
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Responsibility 4

Ensure Effective Organizational Planning

One of the major contributions that a center board can make to the organization is to anticipate how the organization needs to evolve over the next three to five years, to recommend action to reach those goals. At least every three to five years, often in conjunction with the center’s medium-term plan (MTP) preparation, the board should engage in a planning process to better understand the environment in which the center is operating, and to then decide what changes it should make to function more effectively in that environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 The board focuses much of its attention on long-term, significant policy issues rather than short-term administrative matters?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☑ ☑ ☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The board has a strategic vision of how the organization should be evolving over the next three to five years?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☑ ☑ ☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The board periodically engages in a strategic planning process that helps it consider how the organization should meet new opportunities and challenges?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☑ ☑ ☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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12
Responsibility 5

Monitor the Center’s Performance

A center carries out its mission by engaging in specific programs. The board, though not responsible for managing or administering these programs, is responsible for deciding which programs, among the many that an organization could offer, are the most consistent with the mission. In addition, the board is responsible for monitoring the programs to ensure that their quality is as high as possible by reviewing program documents, commissioning internal and external reviews, and conducting field visits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 The board is knowledgeable about the center’s current programs?</td>
<td>1 ☐</td>
<td>2 ☐</td>
<td>3 ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 The board knows the strengths and weaknesses of each major program?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 The board periodically considers adopting new programs, and modifying or discontinuing current programs?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The board periodically considers the center’s organization structure, and its suitability for effective research management?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 The board periodically considers the center’s human resource management policies and practices?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 The board periodically considers the effectiveness of the center’s management team, and the internal organizational culture?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can the board do better in this area?........................................................................................................................................................................
Responsibility 6

Assist in Mobilizing Resources

The board must take an active role in identifying and cultivating the resources the center needs to do its work. Board members must serve as ambassadors and advocates for the center, and support the staff’s strategy for resource mobilization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1  The board understands the resource mobilization strategy for the organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2  Board members actively support the center’s resource mobilization efforts with donors and other stakeholders?</td>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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Responsibility 7

Oversee the Effective Management of Financial Resources

Ensuring that financial resources are managed wisely is an important aspect of accountability and a major responsibility of the center board. The board should approve an annual planned operating budget, and then monitor throughout the year the center’s ability to adhere to the budget. In addition, the board should require an external audit once a year by an independent outside auditor to verify to itself and to donors and stakeholders that the center is reporting accurately the sources and uses of its funds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 The board with the help of its designated committee, discusses thoroughly the annual operating budget of the organization before approving it?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The board takes advantage of the budget process to consider the most effective allocation of limited resources?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 The board monitors the level of the center’s reserve funds and the appropriateness of investments?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The board receives financial reports on a regular basis that are understandable, accurate, and timely?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 The board requires an annual audit and considers all recommendations made in the independent auditor’s report and management letter?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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Responsibility 8

Serve as a Court of Appeals

Because centers are established as international organizations, it is particularly important that boards see that adequate policies are in place governing employment, compensation, grievances, and appeals. Contracting activities need to be clearly organized to preserve the reputation of the center for prudence and fairness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 The board has adopted adequate policies governing contracting and procurement that preserve the reputation and integrity of the center’s work?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 The board has adopted policies for staff selection, training, promotion and the handling of grievances?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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Responsibility 9

Ensure Effective Board Practice: Carefully Select and Orient New Board Members

An effective center board is made up of individuals who bring the skills, experience, perspective, and wisdom needed by the center.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1 The board has an effective process to identify the qualification and expertise that new board members should bring to the center?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 The board’s composition reflects the diversity needed by the center?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 The board cultivates and recruits candidates who possess the qualities needed to strengthen board composition?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4 The board provides new board members with a comprehensive orientation to board responsibilities, the center’s services and programs, and administrative procedures?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5 The board has established policies for length of board service and rotation of board members?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How can the board do better in this area?

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### Responsibility 9 (continued)

#### Ensure Effective Board Practice: Board Organization and Productivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.6 The board regularly reviews its policies, procedures, and bylaws?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.7 Board members receive clear and succinct agendas and supporting written material sufficiently prior to board and committee meetings?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9.8 The agendas of board meetings focus on substantive issues appropriate for board consideration?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.9 Board members have adequate opportunities to discuss issues and ask questions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.10 The Board Chair facilitates the involvement of the full board in policymaking and encourages sound and timely decision making?</td>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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Responsibility 9 (continued)

Ensure Effective Board Practice: Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.11 Current committee structure contributes to board productivity?</td>
<td>☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.12 Committee assignments reflect the interests, experience, and skills of the board members?</td>
<td>☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.13 Each committee has a stated purpose and an annual plan of work?</td>
<td>☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.14 Committees communicate effectively with the full board, enabling board members to stay current with program and policy matters?</td>
<td>☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.15 Policies regarding committee assignments offer adequate opportunities for leadership development?</td>
<td>☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐</td>
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</table>

How can the board do better in this area?

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19
Responsibility 10

Assess Its Own Performance

Because of the critical role of the board in the work of the centers, it is important that boards periodically assess their performance and consider ways in which to strengthen it.

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<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you that:</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.1 The board has adopted appropriate policies and procedures for periodically assessing its own performance (as a board)?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2 The board adequately assesses the performance of the Board Chair?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.3 The board adequately assesses the performance of committee Chairs and members?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.4 The board adequately assesses its own mode of operation and procedures?</td>
<td>□ □ □ □ □</td>
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How can the board do better in this area?

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General Assessment (Open-ended Questions)

1. What issues should occupy the board’s time and attention during the coming year or two?

2. How can the board’s organization or performance be improved in the next year or two?

3. What other comments or suggestions would you like to offer related to the board’s performance?
Sample Form for Assessing Board Meetings

This questionnaire can be handed out periodically at the end of board meetings. The collated responses could be used by the Director General and Board Chair to plan future meetings and could be shared with the board for further discussion on how to strengthen meetings.

1. The issues we covered today were:

   MINOR           1  2  3  4  5  ESSENTIAL

2. The materials provided were:

   UNINFORMATIVE 1  2  3  4  5  INDISPENSABLE

3. Today's discussion concerned primarily:

   OPERATIONS 1  2  3  4  5  POLICY AND STRATEGY

4. What might we have done differently to improve the meeting?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

5. What was the most valuable contribution we made to the organization at the meeting?

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6. Did we use the time allotted for the meeting wisely?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
7. In light of today's meeting, what are the most important topics we should address at our next meeting?
References


This publication is an evaluation tool designed to help nonprofit boards determine how well they are carrying out their major responsibilities and highlight areas that need improvement. Each questionnaire allows individual board members to assess the board's performance as a whole and their own contribution to the board's work. The user's guide provides a framework for administering the questionnaires, compiling the comments, and leading the board through a discussion of the results.

Suggested Resources


Assists in identifying eight ways the chief staff officer can strengthen the governing board so both the board and chief executive work effectively to fulfill the organization's mission.


Designed specifically for governing boards of hospitals, the manual includes many sample worksheets and questionnaires to guide a board through a self-evaluation process. Much of the content is relevant to boards of other nonprofit organizations interested in self-assessment.


An exploration of the board's role in remaining accountable to the public. Questions for the board to address include: How does the
board fulfill this responsibility? How is the board’s role distinct from the chief executive’s? What are the obstacles to remaining accountable? If the board fails to regulate itself, what are the consequences?


A discussion of how boards work best when they focus on setting direction, policy, and strategy, not on administration. This booklet suggests specific procedures and policies that chief executives, board members, and senior staff can follow to strengthen the board’s capacity to govern.


A comprehensive text providing practical advice, principles, and procedures on more than forty major topics affecting nonprofit boards. These topics include chief executive-board relations, evaluating the executive, and improving the quality of the board.


A primer on the most fundamental and critical responsibilities that the board as a whole is charged to carry out. Also includes information on individual board member responsibilities.


A special edition of Board Member, NCNB’s bimonthly periodical. A discussion of the traditional distinction between governance and management, examines why boards tend to interfere in management, and offers advice on how boards can strike the right balance.