

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF YOUR BOARD

A Checklist for a Top-Level Board **Governance Committee**

The governance committee is the committee of the board, by the board, and for the board. This committee — which is sometimes called the board development committee and in the past was usually called the nominating committee — ensures that the board is doing its work effectively.

*Every board should have a standing governance committee or some other formal mechanism that carries out its functions. In fact, some leaders argue that the governance committee is the most important board committee. And yet, according to *Leading with Intent: A National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices 2015*, only 53 percent of nonprofit boards have a stand-alone governance committee or a combined governance/nominating committee.*

If your board does not have a governance committee, we invite you to read on to learn more about its function from consultant Gail Perry and to form one in the near future.

Who is looking out for the care and feeding of your board? You really, really need a governance committee to do this important work.

In fact, I can't think of anything MORE important.

Because if you want to have a high-performing board, you've got to make it happen. It certainly won't happen by itself.

The governance committee also serves as your board nominating committee. But in this case, it morphs into a larger, full time role — the job of making sure the board is working properly. In a way, the governance committee is the recruiting, assessing, board development, and social committee of the board. Here are its jobs:

1 **Track Board Skill Sets and Develop a “Dream Team” board profile.**

Maintain an inventory of the skills, capabilities, and other desirable characteristics that are currently represented on the board and of those that you are seeking to add.

2 **Identify and Develop Potential Board Members.**

Meet quarterly to identify and review the cultivation status of potential board members.

You need to be working all year long to develop a solid “bench” of potential board members.

3 **Monitor Board Meetings.**

The governance committee makes sure board meetings are both effective and efficient. You do NOT want to have high-level board members doing low-level work in your meetings.

It's up to the governance committee to be sure meetings are interesting and engaging for board members.

Create a meeting evaluation form and ask each board member to complete it after each board meeting. Work with the board chair to address any issues that surface.

4 **Enlist New Board Members.**

Monitor board vacancies and enlist new board members who fit your “dream team” profile.

Meet with candidates and explain the expectations and duties of board members. It's up to the governance committee to ensure everyone understands and signs on to a clear set of expectations.

5 **Conduct a Board Self-Assessment and Address the Issues Surfaced through Board Development.**

A board self-assessment is essential to find out how board members feel the board is functioning — both as a whole and as individuals. The self-assessment is a wonderful way to pull out important issues that are not talked about publicly at board meetings.

BoardSource recommends that you conduct a comprehensive self-assessment approximately every two years and then create and implement a board development plan to address those issues surfaced. Consider planning a board retreat to focus on the results of your assessment and on board development.

6 **Enforce Term Limits.**

Time and again, boards are shying away from enforcing term limits. BUT, in the words of a very smart board member, who said to me recently, “If we are ever going to get serious about raising money, we have to have term limits.”

Term limits make sure that new ideas come into your board — ideas you should welcome. They ensure that the board does not turn into a private social club, in which case your mission will get subverted.

And most importantly, they rotate more and more members of your community into a close relationship with your cause. It lets you expand the number of close friends of your organization — and then anything is possible!

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Ensure Good Governance Practices.

Term limits are just one of many good governance practices. Establishing clear expectations for board members is another.

BoardSource has developed a list of [29 recommended governance practices](#), and I have a list of 26 that I invite you to access as well.

Track Board Member Performance.

Institute a board member report card or checklist.

This lets each individual board member track his or her actions and contributions against expectations.

The highest performing boards that I work with arrange this type of feedback to individual board members.

Remember: What gets tracked gets done! This goes for your board too.

Orient New Members.

Manage appropriate board orientations and encourage the rest of the board to attend them.

Orientation is so very important! It helps bring new board members on as full members of the team.

Otherwise they will tend to hold back until they feel comfortable as members of the group.

Manage Continuing Education.

Many board members say they want more education about their organization and the context that it operates in.

A recent study of corporate board members found that they were tired of endless data on how their business was doing. Instead they wanted more information on competitors and the industry. Consider bringing this type of education to your board members.

Try some informal education sessions. Let your board members choose the topics.

You'll emerge with a happier, higher-performing board.



Monitor Board Member Involvement.

Oversee the involvement and engagement of all board members. Check in with those who miss meetings and those who have a lot of absences.

Encourage everyone to be involved and active as appropriate, and to fulfill the expectations of board members.

Organize Social Time.

Manage board social events so that all board members can get to know each other.

Understand that bringing the board together socially is vitally important for teambuilding and establishing cordial personal relationships among board members.

They can't work together as a group if they don't know each other.

Monitor Board Diversity and Inclusiveness.

Manage appropriate board diversity.

It's one thing to recruit diverse members of the board. It's another thing to be sure they feel included as full members of the group.

Otherwise you may lose your highly sought minority members.

Gail Perry, MBA, CFRE, is an international fundraising consultant, speaker, trainer and thought-leader. Her Fired-Up Fundraising approach, developed over the past 25 years as a nonprofit philanthropy expert, has helped organizations raise hundreds of millions in gifts.

Gail's approach to raising money in today's world pulls from the very latest innovative strategies. A popular speaker, she leads energizing fundraising workshops and board retreats around the globe. She particularly enjoys working with nonprofit board members; introducing them to a new perspective on fundraising and ways they can be successful. Her book, Fired-Up Fundraising: Turn Board Passion into Action (Wiley/AFP) has been called the "gold standard guide to building successful fundraising boards."

Gail launched her fundraising career at Duke University and then went on to lead fundraising at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You can read her weekly blogs at [FiredUpFundraising.com](#), and also find her articles at Fundraising Success, Guidestar, and Capital Campaign Magic.