



BOARD EVALUATION AS A LEVER TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

Great boards commit to regular board evaluation to illuminate opportunities to improve both board and organizational performance and to enhance the board experience. Most boards advance this process on an annual basis to explore issues at both the collective board level and the individual board member level to uncover specific growth opportunities. This provides insights into competencies, accomplishments and shortcomings to identify and prioritize opportunities for growth.

Routine evaluation is similar to making a commitment to “preventive” care rather than “sick” care: it is a hallmark of a healthy organization. The intentional board embraces board evaluation as a positive and proactive process to uncover opportunity and refine performance rather than a tool to be critical or punitive. Information from board surveys is generally shared in aggregate and is not linked to specific names to encourage forthrightness and productive criticism. Candid responses enable an honest and actionable snapshot of board performance and areas of opportunity.

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Most boards use a formal, self-assessment tool delivered in a paper or electronic format. Most tools offer a scale of response rather than “yes” or “no” to allow members to more clearly indicate the relative performance. Results from an assessment generally provide a median score, a range of scores and the number of board members responding to illuminate variances in and validity of response. It is also valuable to participate in a larger scale survey tool to allow comparisons between your organization and similar organizations to place the performance of your board in context; often, this means the board will receive the median score on the same question at other organizations or a percentile ranking for each question.

Boards should plan to schedule a formal agenda item to discuss results of the board evaluation survey. After the board receives results, it is helpful to discuss areas that demonstrate where the board has made significant gains and where the board has

the greatest opportunity for improvement. There is no need to allocate precious discussion time to areas where performance has remained consistently good and is aligned with median performance at other institutions; those results can simply be provided in written form for members to review at their leisure. Once results are reviewed, it is helpful for the board to identify and prioritize two to five areas of opportunity to address and to discuss how improvements could be achieved in those areas either collectively or through a board committee or task force.

A commitment to address and monitor these issues is generally made and documented in the board minutes to assure collective ownership of intent.

The board governance committee generally serves as champion of the board evaluation process. This committee should help develop and approve the evaluation process. In regard to selecting a survey tool, it is advisable to utilize the same tool or at least a core set of identical questions on an annual basis in order to chart performance over time. However, most boards also include a few custom questions each year to address timely or emerging opportunities or issues to ensure the tool is agile and relevant to their needs. Once the process and tool are selected, many governance committees rely upon external facilitators or foundation management to do the heavy lifting in distributing the survey, monitoring participation, compiling data and presenting results.

Being intentional about using ongoing board evaluation as a tool to measure and to refine actions and priorities enables the board to be optimally effective in its role. Embracing board evaluation is a sign of health and strength for the high-performing board.

For Board Discussion ≡

How could we use board evaluation to accelerate our performance journey?

What information, resources or partners do we need to successfully drive evaluation?

What committee(s) or person(s) should lead and/or shepherd this process for us?

When does board evaluation best fit in our annual calendar?

Evaluation Tips:

1. Commit to undertaking a board evaluation at least annually. With many boards turning over one-third of their membership each year, it's important to keep a finger on the pulse to spot issues before they become problems.

2. Utilize the same board tool or at least a set of standard, core questions year after year to uncover changes and trends in performance over time.

3. Consider using a survey tool that also allows the foundation to benchmark its performance against other health care foundation boards to put results in greater context.

4. Evaluate both individual and collective performance to uncover insights and to support each board member's self-awareness of fulfilling key roles and responsibilities.

5. Use feedback from the assessment to frame a board discussion about key opportunities for board development and improvement.

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