

# ON THE BOARD

## WHAT YOU BRING TO THE TABLE

### Effective Partnering

Strong, synergistic relationships are built on mutual respect and trust. Look for ways to partner with the board, the executive director, and other stakeholders toward a culture of respect and trust.

### Personal Mission

Consider how your personal mission and values align with that of the organization and the work of the board. This will aid your motivation and creativity for visioning and problem-solving.

### Accountability

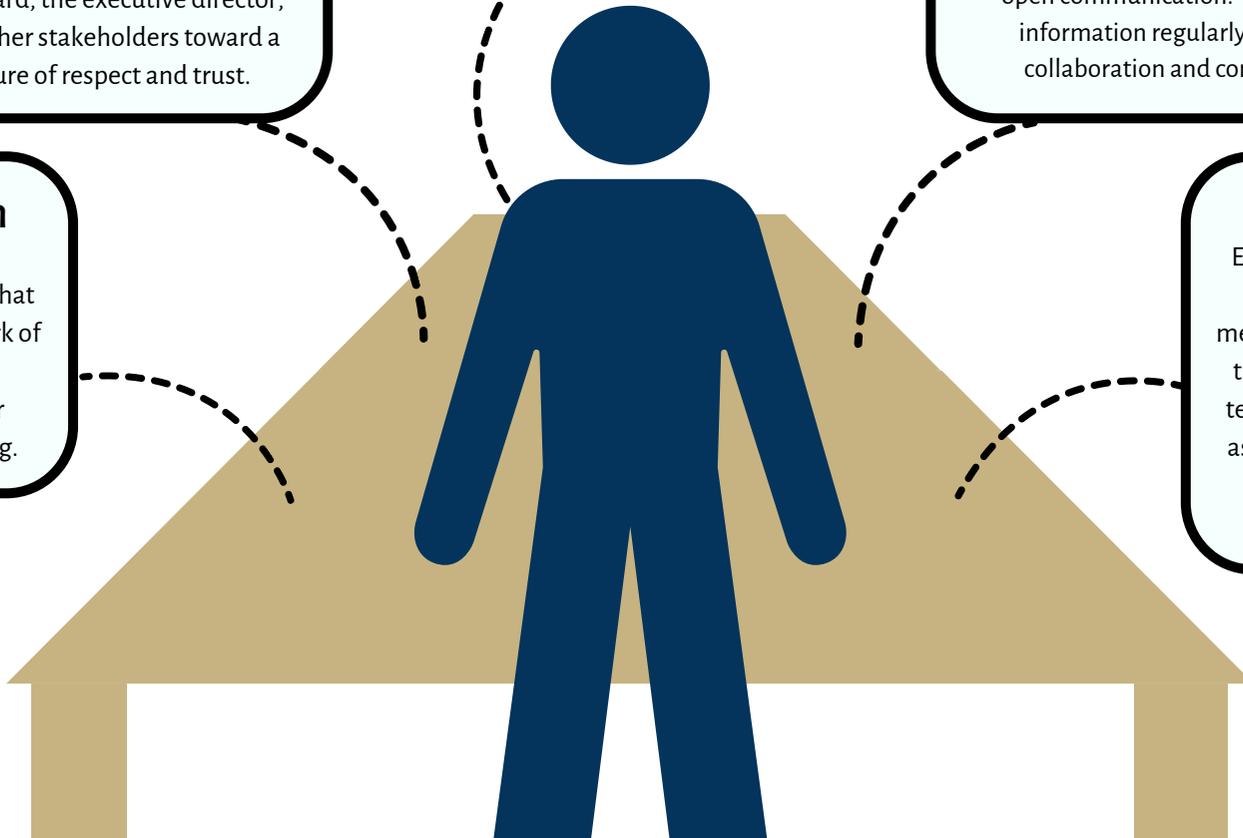
Make it a personal practice to follow through on your commitments in a timely manner. Modeling this in the organization helps to establish a cultural standard of accountability and follow-through.

### Active Listening

Make board members, executive staff, and other leaders feel heard by actively listening for understanding and pursuing open communication. Solicit new information regularly for good collaboration and consensus.

### Clarity

Effective board members deeply understand their role, the mechanics of the organization, and the board's short-term and long-term objectives. Seek clarity on all aspects of your work on the board to give you a vivid sense of direction and purpose.



# QUESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE BOARD GOVERNANCE

## What is your purpose?

The board is responsible for the conduct and performance of the organization in partnership with executive leadership. Board members anticipate and respond to the organization's needs and its constituents according to the established mission and values. Be sure that all of your initiatives, programs, policies, and decisions are rooted in the values and mission of the organization.

## What knowledge do you need?

- Knowledge of **how the organization operates** on every level gives you a multi-faceted prospective that will aid your strategic thinking. You can achieve this over time.
- A strong grasp of the **mission and values**, which succinctly describe why the organization exists and express a “moral compass” of standards, focuses the board on the most relevant issues and ensures ethical shared responsibility. As you gather, refer to the mission and values frequently.
- Learn the **specific duties of the board** as defined by its policies. You will be more effective as a board if your responsibilities to the executive leadership, the organization, and to one another are very clear.
- Developing awareness about the **constituency, field of endeavor or industry, and the funding environment** of the organization gives you critical information for problem-solving and future-visioning. With this knowledge, you can adapt to trends, respond to unique needs, and discover useful partnerships and other valuable resources.

## What should be your focus?

Board members and Executive directors should work to focus the collective minds of leadership on the **mission, program effectiveness, and the long-term health of the organization**. Govern effectively by focusing on:

- **Oversight.** Ensure the agency adheres to legal standards and ethical obligations in its operations. Have a process in place for an appropriate response to ethical issues that may arise.
- **Strategic priorities.** Avoid small-stakes operational questions and information sharing. The collective wisdom of the board should be employed for creative planning and generative conversations that complement the staff's insider view.
- **Board Structure.** The structure of the board doesn't need to be static. The structure should mirror the agency's strategic priorities. Flexibility in board structure allows for ad hoc arrangements where board members can occupy functional intersections rather than pre-determined functional niches.
- **Policy.** With management, set and implement policy that sets the parameters within which leaders can move the organization forward.
- **Partnering.** Make a habit of stepping back and evaluating the unique needs of the organization for the given period of time it is in. Rather than “following” a strong staff or “leading” the organization, demonstrate flexibility by continually redefining your partnerships with management as the needs of the organization change.
- **The changing needs of the organization.** Because of the current environment of constant change, introduce situational leadership and flexible partnering into your strategic design.

## Sources

"Chapter 6: Governance," in Executive Directors Guide: The Guide for Successful Nonprofit Management, by Deborah Linnell et al., 2002.

"What Is This Business of Board Governance?" by Richard M. Biery, MD in Prehospital Care Administration: The Industry's Best Articles, Essays and Case Studies on the Toughest EMS Issues, 2004.