Board of Directors Self-Assessment
Process and Tool[1]

Introduction

Board self-assessment is an important way to strengthen governance, making members more aware of their responsibilities and enhancing engagement. Yet the most recent (2021) BoardSource *Leading with Intent* survey of nonprofits found that, according to the Board Chair, only 56% have ever carried out a formal, written Board self-assessment, and only 45% have done so in the past two years.[2] Every Board should regularly ask itself how well it is carrying out its governance roles and helping the nonprofit reach its goals and fulfill its mission. Sound practice is to do some form of self-assessment annually, with a formal, written process at least every two years. This is a natural role for the Governance Committee; in the absence of such a committee, Boards sometimes assign the role to the Executive Committee or establish a special task force for this purpose.

Self-assessments vary in scope. The tool provided here assesses three aspects of governance:
- Culture of the Board
- Each member's performance as an individual Board member
- Performance of the Board as a whole

It also asks each member to provide a narrative summary of overall strengths, weaknesses, and most-needed changes to strengthen governance.

It is helpful for the Board to establish procedures for self-assessment that can be updated as needed and used regularly, making it easier to ensure that self-assessment is a regular effort that continues regardless of changes in individual Board leadership. Procedures might include the following:

1. Preparation by the Governance Committee, which agrees upon a process, a tool, and a schedule for the self-assessment.
2. A full-Board discussion, led by the Governance Committee, of why self-assessment is needed – its benefits for individual members, the Board as a body, and the organization.
3. Individual member completion of the self-assessment tool, with the Committee reminding all members to participate, with no identifying information.
4. Committee aggregation and review of responses, including strengths, weaknesses, and priorities for strengthening the Board.
5. Full-Board discussion of findings and implications, perhaps as part of a Board retreat.
6. Agreement on specific priorities and actions to enhance Board effectiveness that are documented by the Governance Committee, approved by the Board, and implemented with Governance Committee monitoring.

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[1] The tool provided here builds on a self-assessment tool originally developed by Meredith Emmett and Jane Kendall for the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits based on models from James M. Hardy's 1990 book, *Developing Dynamic Board*. Mosaica and EGM Consulting, LLC have revised and expanded it many times over several decades for use with many groups, mostly Boards of community-of-color-led community-based organizations.

[2] *Leading with Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices,* June 2021; see https://leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-Leading-with-Intent-Report.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fleadingwithintent.org%2F.

Self-Assessment Tool

Individual Board Member Instructions: The survey is divided into four parts: the culture of the Board, the responsibilities of individual Board members, the responsibilities of the Board as a whole, and overall strengths and weaknesses. The first three sections include a total of 30 items that ask you for ratings based on a 4-point scale, where 4 = the highest and 1 = the lowest rating. For each item, circle the number on the rating scale that corresponds to your evaluation of that element. Descriptions are provided for a "4" and a "1" response for each element. When in doubt, "go with your first response." Use the space titled "Comments" to provide an explanation or detail on why you selected the rating you did, or to record your ideas about how the Board could improve its performance and thus strengthen the organization. *If you don't have enough knowledge to respond to any question, do not rate it and note that in the "Comments" section.*

1. Culture of the Board

Please rate the Board in terms of its culture and operations.

1. **Board Roles**

The roles and functions of the Board are clear. We distinguish clearly between Board governance roles and Chief Executive/staff management roles.			There is often confusion about the division of roles between the Board and the Chief Executive/staff.
4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

_____

2. **Shared Leadership**

Leadership is shared among members. Every member's resources are used, with all members encouraged to take on new responsibilities.			Leadership is dominated by one or a few members, and other Board member resources and skills are not used.
4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

_____

3. **Addressing Issues**

Important issues are consistently on the agenda for open consideration, debate, and decision.			Important issues are not dealt with, but instead "swept under the rug" or dealt with outside of Board meetings.
4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

_____

4. Preparation

Preparation is outstanding. Committees and staff do excellent preliminary work. Members are well informed and understand the pros and cons of issues being decided.

Preparation is lacking. We are often caught off guard at meetings, asked to act without the information and analysis needed for sound decision making.

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

5. Communication/Listening

Communication of ideas is good. We listen and try hard to understand one another's ideas. New ideas are actively considered.

Communication of ideas is poor. We do not really listen. New ideas are often ignored.

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

6. Productivity

Productivity is high at Board meetings. We focus on important matters and follow the agenda. We make decisions and agree on action steps.

Productivity is low. Our meetings waste time. We often fail to make needed decisions or do not agree on clear action steps.

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

7. Creativity/New Ideas

The creative ideas of individual members are respected and encouraged as essential to the Board's role of setting organizational direction

Conformity is explicitly and implicitly fostered, with creativity and new ideas left to a few Board leaders and the Chief Executive.

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

8. Decision Making

Decision making is participatory. All data are available to everyone, and all opinions are aired, resulting in shared ownership of Board decisions.

Decision making is superficial. Board often "rubber stamps" decisions made by the staff or a small group of Board+ members, without active discussion.

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

9. Participation

Board members participate actively and responsibly. We attend meetings regularly, are available for consultation with the Chief Executive, respond promptly to emails, and complete assigned tasks between meetings.

Responsible participation is lacking. We often miss meetings, fail to do not respond to emails or other communications between meetings, and do not complete assigned tasks.

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

10. Relationships

Relationships are grounded in mutual trust and respect. The atmosphere at meetings is friendly and relaxed. Individuals are appreciated for their contributions.

Relationships and interactions often reflect hostility, suspicion, anxiety, and superficiality. The efforts of individuals are rarely recognized.

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

2. Your Performance as an Individual Board Member

Please rate your own performance as a Board member.

11. **Attendance**
I attend Board meetings consistently, participate actively, and prepare for the meetings.

(I have 100% attendance/participation)   (My participation is irregular or low.)

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

12. **Committee Work**
I serve on a standing committee and on special task forces when asked.

(I serve actively whenever needed)   (I have not followed through on
                                                                                               my committee responsibilities)

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

13. **Persona**l **Financial Contribution**
I make a personally significant individual financial contribution to the organization each year.

(I give every year)   (I do not make a personal. contribution)

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

14. **Fundraising**
I help with fundraising by assisting with contacts with foundations, corporations, and individual donors
and by actively helping to carry out the resource development role of the Board.

(I participate actively in fundraising)   (I do not do fundraising)

| **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

Comments:

_____

15. External Representation
I seek opportunities to speak positively about the organization to contacts and constituencies, and represent it in more formal ways when asked.

(I actively look for representation opportunities)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(I rarely represent or talk about the organization)

4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

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16. Support for Mission/Goals
I support the mission and goals of the organization, advocating and voting for actions based on what will benefit the organization, not on my personal interests or benefits.

(I actively support the mission)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(I tend to focus on my own interests or those of my organization)

4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

_____

17. Learning about the Organization
I take responsibility for learning about the organization and its programs.

(I actively seek information)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(I depend upon whatever information is provided)

4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

18. Board vs. Chief Executive/Staff Roles
I recognize and respect the division of roles between the Board and the Chief Executive/staff.

(I recognize and distinguish roles)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(I do not make this distinction)

4	**3**	**2**	**1**

Comments:

_____

19. Support for Board Decisions
I support the decisions of the Board of Directors, so that we speak with a unified voice, even when I personally would have preferred a different decision.

(I support Board decisions, within   (I sometimes speak publicly against
the Board and publicly)   decisions I did not support)

          4   **3**   **2**   **1**

Comments:

_____

20. Confidentiality
I maintain confidentiality of information that is shared during Board meetings.

                                                           (I discuss confidential
                                                           information with others
(I always maintain confidentiality)   outside the organization)

          4   **3**   **2**   **1**

Comments:

_____

3. Performance of the Board as a Whole

Please rate the performance of the Board as a group.

21. Mission and Vision
We understand and regularly review the mission and vision of the organization.

(Board regularly addresses direction)   (No process exists)

          4   **3**   **2**   **1**

Comments:

_____

22. Planning
We ensure effective organizational planning and priority setting.

(Clear plans and priorities)   (No plan or priorities)

          4   **3**   **2**   **1**

Comments:

_____

23. Fundraising Involvement
We help raise the funds needed to accomplish the organization's mission and goals.

(We raise sufficient resources to support growth)   (Board is not active in fundraising)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

24. Partnership Development
We help the organization develop appropriate partnerships and relationships.

(Board actively involved)   (Board leaves this to staff)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

25. Financial Oversight
We ensure effective financial management and oversight.

(Board receives, reviews, and uses timely and informative
financial reports)   (Board does not review financial
                                                                      reports or provide fiscal oversight)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

26. Public Image
We work to enhance the organization's public image.

(We have a clear visibility plan with active Board role)   (Board is not active in visibility planning
                                                                      or implementation)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

27. **Evaluation of the Organization's Work**
We ensure that the organization evaluates its work, then use that information to review accomplishments and determine how well we are serving our clients and target community.

(Board is actively involved in organizational   (Board leaves this to staff)
review and program evaluation)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

28. **Board Policies**
We adopt and implement policies to maintain an actively engaged Board (e.g., attendance, conflict of interest).

(Sound policies, fully implemented)   (Policies missing or not followed)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

29. **Board Orientation**
We provide orientation for new members and help them become informed and engaged.

(Regular, formal orientation and new   (No orientation or new
member support)   member support)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

_____

30. **Board Self-Assessment**
We assess the Board's own performance and use the results to strengthen governance.

(Regular evaluation with plans for   (Not at all or only when there are
improvement)   serious problems; no follow up)

| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comments:

4. Overall Strengths and Weaknesses

Based on your assessment:

1. What do you see as the 2-3 greatest *strengths* of the Board?

2. What do you consider the 2-3 greatest *limitations* or *weaknesses* of the Board as it currently operates?

3. What if any action should be taken to strengthen the following:

    a. Board culture?

    b. Your own performance as an individual Board member?

    c. The performance of the Board as a whole?

    d. Other?