
He offers seminars that are interactive, focused on core-knowledge and realistic organisational capacity. He utilises case studies, trends and headlines for board orientation, training, strategic planning, staff training and consulting and is known around the world for sharing best practices and promoting sustainability of associations and chambers.

Bob, based in Florida, is also the founder of the online resource ‘The Non Profit Center’. One of the primary goals of this website is to provide Associations, Chambers and other organisations with useful, reusable documentation, at no charge. In an issue in which we predominantly look at one of the most rapidly changing scenarios facing Association Leadership teams in current times – the emergence and increasing influence on our organisations of the world wide web – we felt it pertinent, to consider the challenge presented by one of the resource documents available from The Non Profit Center.

Is it Time for a Governance Review?

Many Associations developed their governance system when they were founded 20, 50, 100 or more years ago. Some have never changed since.

‘But we’ve always done it that way!’ is the common reply by boards when asked about their rationale as to why they meet so often, why they sustain ineffective committees, or why the agenda is primarily ‘reports and updates.’

There are certain influential factors such as; environmental changes (technology, economy, generations, etc.), subpar performance or significant developments in the sector that tend to be the catalysts for reforming governance. Aside from these it may just be that, if elements of governance have maintained a status quo since the foundations of the organisation, it is time for a comprehensive governance review. Indicators such as a never changing board size, the same committees and the same by law may all indicate a need to consider potential change. Most established organisations benefit from change – when it is the right change done for the right reasons and in the right way.
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Existing Governance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Improved Governance</strong></th>
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| **Committees**        | • Few standing committees and more task forces and quick action teams (QATs)  
                      • Clear alignment with elements of the strategic plan  
                      • Thorough orientation and guidance  
                      • Board and/or staff liaison  
                      • Producing significant outcomes each year |
| Too many on the committee  
Minimal understanding of their work for the board  
Not aligned with the goals in the strategic plan | Bylaws review and removal of policies and clutter for a broader perspective  
• Policies adopted for compliance and efficiency; organized for access by the board  
• Governing documents in good order and accessible; an aspect of board orientation |
| **Governing Documents** | Agenda formatted to expedite the meeting and align with strategic goals  
• Meeting held only as needed for results  
• Mission and strategic plan always on the board table to frame discussions  
• Rules of conduct guide or cultural expectations adopted by the board  
• Knowledge based discussions  
• Use of a consent agenda to reduce reports and focus more on outcomes |
| Bylaws cluttered with policies  
Board unaware of distinction of importance of articles, bylaws and policies  
Policy manual outdated or overloaded | • Empowerment of staff to participate in discussions and help make leadership decisions  
• Sufficient resources to train staff annually  
• Avoidance of micromanagement |
| **Board Meetings**     | • Fewer goals to hone in on meaningful results for the community or industry  
                      • Spanning 3 to 5 years  
                      • Member and community awareness of the plan  
                      • Plan guides all the discussions of the leadership and committees  
                      • Reviewed annually and updated about every 3 years  
                      • Closely aligned with the budget |
| Frequent meetings full of updates by committees and officers  
Minimal awareness of the strategic plan  
Minutes reflect slow progress or no results at a meeting resulting in the general feeling of “why did we hold that meeting?” | Updated to reflect an innovative organisation  
• Promoted frequently and on every agenda  
• Directors rely on it to communicate the purpose, vision and values  
• Mission may be combined with vision to reduce “clutter.” |
| **Professional Staff** | • Reduce board size to reach the number of directors who will effectively govern the organisation  
                      • Highly effective orientation and access to documents  
                      • Reliance on a strategic plan (roadmap)  
                      • Accountability enforced by the officers  
                      • Cultural expectations described at the start (director “ground rules.”)  
                      • Fiduciary duties understood  
                      • Balance between authority of the executive committee and the board  
                      • Minimal ex-officio and past presidents (if any)  
                      • No “alternates” or “proxies” |
| Staff told what to do and micromanaged by directors  
Minimal investment in professional development in budget | • Appropriate composition of officers  
• Authorised by the bylaws and limited by policy  
• Respectful and open to the board of directors |
| **Strategic Plan**     | Nominating Committee transformed to a Board Development Committee with year round duties; including:  
                      • Year round volunteer leadership identification  
                      • Assist with annual board orientation  
                      • Assist with annual board self-evaluation  
                      • Highly effective vetting process |
| Developed at a retreat focused on dinner and golf  
A 10 – 50 page report shelved to collect dust  
Not a guide for committees, board and staff  
No alignment with resources or industry needs. | Updated to reflect an innovative organisation  
• Promoted frequently and on every agenda  
• Directors rely on it to communicate the purpose, vision and values  
• Mission may be combined with vision to reduce “clutter.” |
| **Mission, Vision and Values (brand)** | • Fewer goals to hone in on meaningful results for the community or industry  
                      • Spanning 3 to 5 years  
                      • Member and community awareness of the plan  
                      • Plan guides all the discussions of the leadership and committees  
                      • Reviewed annually and updated about every 3 years  
                      • Closely aligned with the budget |
| Too long or redundant mission and vision statements  
Not a guide for the board  
Hard to commit to memory and articulate  
Old fashioned | Updated to reflect an innovative organisation  
• Promoted frequently and on every agenda  
• Directors rely on it to communicate the purpose, vision and values  
• Mission may be combined with vision to reduce “clutter.” |
| **Board of Directors** | Appointed by chapters or geographic regions and mistakenly thinking they are working for the chapter  
                      • Minimal orientation and access to information  
                      • Lack of accountability enforced  
                      Too large | • Fewer goals to hone in on meaningful results for the community or industry  
                      • Spanning 3 to 5 years  
                      • Member and community awareness of the plan  
                      • Plan guides all the discussions of the leadership and committees  
                      • Reviewed annually and updated about every 3 years  
                      • Closely aligned with the budget |
| Appointed by chapters or geographic regions and mistakenly thinking they are working for the chapter  
Minimal orientation and access to information  
Lack of accountability enforced  
Too large | Updated to reflect an innovative organisation  
• Promoted frequently and on every agenda  
• Directors rely on it to communicate the purpose, vision and values  
• Mission may be combined with vision to reduce “clutter.” |
| **Executive Committee** | • Nominating Committee transformed to a Board Development Committee with year round duties; including:  
                      • Year round volunteer leadership identification  
                      • Assist with annual board orientation  
                      • Assist with annual board self-evaluation  
                      • Highly effective vetting process |
| Usurps role of the board by meeting and then dictating expectation  
Closed door sessions | • Fewer goals to hone in on meaningful results for the community or industry  
                      • Spanning 3 to 5 years  
                      • Member and community awareness of the plan  
                      • Plan guides all the discussions of the leadership and committees  
                      • Reviewed annually and updated about every 3 years  
                      • Closely aligned with the budget |
| **Nominations**        | Updated to reflect an innovative organisation  
• Promoted frequently and on every agenda  
• Directors rely on it to communicate the purpose, vision and values  
• Mission may be combined with vision to reduce “clutter.” |
| Group throws names in a hat  
Minimal focus on identifying competent directors and vetting them for appropriate skill sets and commitment | • Fewer goals to hone in on meaningful results for the community or industry  
                      • Spanning 3 to 5 years  
                      • Member and community awareness of the plan  
                      • Plan guides all the discussions of the leadership and committees  
                      • Reviewed annually and updated about every 3 years  
                      • Closely aligned with the budget |
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• Recognising and Rewarding Best Practice
• European Associations Need to Improve their Lobbying Capabilities

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