“Welcome to the leadership team.” The purpose of the board is to govern. To familiarize you with governance it has been dissected into five high-level areas.

Board discussions should be characterized as visionary and directors as thought-leaders\(^1\). It is never about personal gain but rather advancing the statement of purpose to benefit the community. Discussions drifting into management, administration and committee work are discouraged. The board is expected to set a clear direction so that the staff and committees can work toward that objective.

**Elements of Governance**

A. **Mission Focused** – The mission will frame nearly every decision of the board. Be sure it is clear and understood by all audiences. Keep it in front of the board; memorize it. Frequently ask, “How does this advance our mission and vision?” Avoid the distractions of politics and crises by focusing on the mission.

B. **Culture of Trust** – Little will be achieved without trust amongst the leadership and staff. Trust on a board is built upon principles such as accountability, transparency and integrity. As board members transition it is critical to respect and integrate all of the parties (board, committees, CEO, staff) as quickly as possible.

C. **Board – CEO Partnership** – It takes a partnership. The board focuses on governance while staff does the management. Directors should respect

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\(^1\) One whose views are taken to be authoritative and influential based on a global and environmental perspectives.
boundaries by not delving into administrative and personnel matters.

D. **Strategic Plan** – The road map is the strategic plan. It communicates goals and priorities for multiple years, guiding volunteer leaders and staff. It should answer, “How does our organization deliver value and make best use of our resources?”

E. **Access to Information** – It would be difficult to govern without access to information. It begins with on-boarding of new directors and continues with reliable lines of communication. No director should feel left out of the loop.

**Suggested Approaches**

Understanding the essentials of good governance, consider these recommendations within each area:

**Board - CEO Partnership**
1. Respect the distinctive roles and responsibilities.
2. Recognize the body of knowledge and demands of respective jobs.
3. Be transparent in actions and decisions.

**Access to Information**
1. Governing documents guide the board; be very familiar.
2. Prepare for meetings by reading.
3. Respect confidentiality of discussions and documents.

**Strategic Plan**
1. Be committed to the strategic plan.
2. Frequently ask, “Does this action advance our strategic plan?”
3. Develop a “program of action” for the year based on the strategic plan.

**Culture of Trust**
1. Integrate the organizational values into decision making.
2. If discussions are difficult, reference the values.
3. Share the values with stakeholders to enhance understanding of the organization.

**Mission Focused**
1. Promote the mission as often as possible; it distinguishes the organization.
2. Supplement the mission with vision and values statements.
3. Periodically review and update the mission statement, as needed.

Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com).