

Checklist for a Top-Level Board Governance Committee

by Gail Perry on April 1, 2011 - <http://www.gailperry.com/2011/04/checklist-for-a-top-level-board-governance-committee/>

Who is looking out for the care and feeding of your board? You really, really need a **Governance Committee** to do this important work.

In fact, I can't think of anything MORE important.

Because if you want to have a [high-performing board](#), you've got to make it happen. It certainly won't happen by itself.

The Governance Committee also serves as your board nominating committee. But in this case, it morphs into a larger, full time role – the job of making sure the board is working properly.

In a way, the Governance Committee is the recruiting, assessing and social committee of the board. Here are its jobs:

1. Track Board Skill Sets.

Maintain an [inventory of the skills](#), capabilities and other desirable characteristics that are currently represented on the board and of those that you are seeking to add.

2. Enlist New Board Members.

Monitor board vacancies and enlist new board members who fit the [Dream Team profile](#). See my post "[How to Enlist Your Dream Team Board](#)," and download the 24 page [Enlist Your Dream Team Board Workbook](#).

Meet with candidates and explain the expectations and duties of board members.

It's up to this committee to be sure everyone understands and signs on to a clear set of expectations.

3. Develop Potential Board Members.

Meet quarterly to identify and review the cultivation status of potential board members.

You need to be working all year long to develop a solid "bench" of potential board members.

4. Conduct a Self-Assessment.

The annual Board Self-Assessment is essential to find out how board members feel the board is functioning – both as a whole and as individuals.

Many boards use an anonymous survey vehicle such as Survey Monkey to collect responses from board members.

The Self Assessment is a wonderful way to pull out important issues that are not talked about publicly at board meetings.

5. Monitor Board Meetings.

This committee makes sure board meetings are both effective and efficient. You do NOT want to have high level board members doing low level work in your meetings.

It's up to the Governance Committee to be sure meetings are interesting and engaging for board members.

See my posts: "[How to Evaluate a Board Meeting.](#)" or "[12 Ways to Liven Up Your Board Meetings – and Your Board.](#)"

6. Enforce Term Limits.

Time and again, boards are shying away from enforcing term limits.

BUT, in the words of a very smart board member, who said to me recently, "If we are ever going to get serious about raising money, we have to have term limits."

Term limits make sure that new ideas come into your board – ideas you should welcome. They ensure that the board does not turn into a private social club, in which case your mission will get subverted.

And most importantly, they rotate more and more members of your community into a close relationship with your cause. It lets you expand the number of close friends of your organization – and then anything is possible!

7. Ensure Good Governance Practices.

Term limits are just one of the many good governance practices in this list.

Establishing clear expectations for board members is another.

See my post [26 Practices of High Performing Boards.](#)

8. Monitor Board Member Involvement.

Oversee the involvement and engagement of all board members.

Check in with those who miss meetings and those who have a lot of absences.

Encourage everyone to be involved and active as appropriate, and to fulfill the expectations of board members.

See "[What You Can Count on From Your Board Members, and What You Can't.](#)"

9. Track Board Member Performance.

Institute a board member Report Card or Checklist.

This lets each individual board member track his or her actions and contributions against expectations.

The highest performing boards that I work with arrange this type of feedback to individual board members.

Remember: What gets tracked gets done! This goes for your board too.

10. Organize Social Time.

Manage board social events so that all board members can get to know each other.

Understand that bringing the board together socially is vitally important for teambuilding and establishing cordial personal relationships among board members.

They can't work together as a group if they don't know each other.

11. Orient New Members.

Manage appropriate board orientations and encourage the rest of the board to attend them.

Orientation is so very important! It helps bring new board members on as full members of the team.

Otherwise they will tend to hold back until they feel comfortable as members of the group.

12. Monitor Board Diversity and Inclusiveness.

Manage appropriate board diversity.

It's one thing to recruit diverse members of the board. It's another thing to be sure they feel included as full members of the group.

Otherwise you may lose your highly-sought minority members.

13. Manage Continuing Education.

Many board members say they want more education about their organization and the context that it operates in.

A recent study of corporate board members found that they were tired of endless data on how their business was doing. Instead they wanted more information on competitors and the industry. Consider bringing this type of education to your board members.

Try some informal education sessions that are optional for your board members. Let them choose the topics.

You'll emerge with a happier, higher-performing board.