



Use these criteria to rate — and improve — your board.

# How to Develop a High-Impact Board

By Doug Eadie

**H**ow do you know if you have a high-impact board, one that makes a real difference in your organization's success? Here are the most important characteristics that high-impact boards hold in common:

- **They focus on governing above all else**, never letting non-governing activities interfere with their governing work. To govern means to play the leading role —

in partnership with the CEO and senior managers — in setting the organization's course by continuously answering three fundamental questions:

1. Where should your organization be headed and what should it become over the long run?
2. What should your organization be now and in the near future?
3. How well is your organization performing — programmatically,

financially, and administratively?

- **They play an active part** in creating clear, detailed mission, values, and vision statements. Performing this role creates a strong feeling of ownership among board members.

- **They pay meticulous attention** to developing themselves as a human resource, making sure the board consists of qualified members whose governing skills are

systematically developed.

**They have a firm grasp** of financial and operational performance and make sure that sufficient resources are allocated to programs within the framework of the mission statement.

**They have a close, positive, enduring partnership** with the CEO.

**They take responsibility** for managing their own performance as a governing body, setting clear, detailed performance targets and regularly assessing their governing performance.

### The Essentials of Board Development

To strengthen its capacity to do its work, the board needs to put time and energy into developing itself. Board development consists of the following key elements:

#### Develop the People on Your Board

What should your board's composition be in terms of such factors as gender, race, and professional affiliation? What attributes should you look for in new board members? What steps should you take to achieve the desired composition? What should you do to strengthen board members' governing skills?

#### Develop the Structure of Your Board

How large should your board be? What process should you use to appoint board members? How often should your board meet? What standing committees should your board use in doing its work?

#### Develop the Work of Your Board

Answer in detail the following four questions:

1. What governing decisions should your board regularly make to oversee your organization's affairs?

2. What kinds of governing "products" (for example, updated vision and mission statements, the annual budget) and documents should the board make decisions about on a regular basis? How should the board go about making these decisions?

3. How involved should your board be in shaping and generating these governing products and documents?

4. In shaping, generating, and making decisions about various governing products and documents, how should your board divvy up the labor with the CEO and executive managers?

While "governing product" may sound strange at first, the term helps clarify the process of governing as opposed to policy-making. A governing product in the area of planning, for example, would be an updated values and vision statement and a list of strategic issues facing your organization. In contrast to governing products, most policies in any organization are essentially operational in nature and would never come to the attention of a governing board. ■

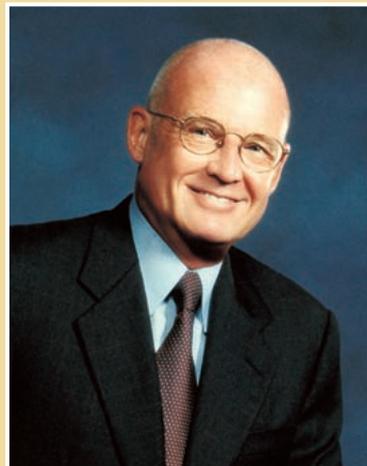
#### Resources

Brudney, Jeffrey & Vic Murray, "Improving Nonprofit Boards: What Works & What Doesn't," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 15, No. 3.

Houle, Cyril, "How Effective Is Your Board? A Rating Scale," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 5.

Michalko, Michael, "Seven Creative Ways to Energize Your Board," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 3.

These resources are available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members). Also see Learning Institute programs online: Board Governance ([www.snpo.org/li](http://www.snpo.org/li)).



The author of 16 books on nonprofit leadership, Doug Eadie is the founder and CEO of Doug Eadie & Company, based in Palm Harbor, Florida ([www.DougEadie.com](http://www.DougEadie.com), [DEadiePres@aol.com](mailto:DEadiePres@aol.com)). During the past 20 years, Doug has helped nearly 500 public and nonprofit organizations strengthen the governing capacity of their boards. His newest book is *High-Impact Governing* in a Nutshell, available through ASAE at 1-888-950-2723 or [www.asaenet.org](http://www.asaenet.org).

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