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Bob Harris, CAE

Board Performance
Should Members Know?
Bob Harris, CAE

Most boards are elected by the membership or appointed to represent chapters or constituent groups. Directors are seated to fulfill the responsibilities of governance on behalf of the members – a fiduciary duty[1].

What if the board, or some members of the board, are under-performing? For example those who come ill prepared, those who promote a personal agenda or those who miss excessive meetings.

"Do the members have a right to know if the board is carrying out its responsibilities?"

It was a question posed by the chair of the Young Industrialists Committee of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists. He explained, if the general assembly elected the leadership, shouldn't they know how it is performing?

I will always remember the cartoon of directors talking to each other saying, *"They can't measure our performance, we're just volunteers." Bob Harris, CAE*

My response was that we promote the hard work of the board, celebrating their achievements. It is important to recognize those who contribute to the organization. Quite often an association is a safe environment for leaders to test their leadership skills.

But it gave me pause. Does he have a point?

Should the membership know if the board or individual directors are under-performing, neglecting duties, skipping meetings?

Transparency

His question was framed by the principles of accountability and transparency. The directors are elected and took an oath to serve the organization and its members.

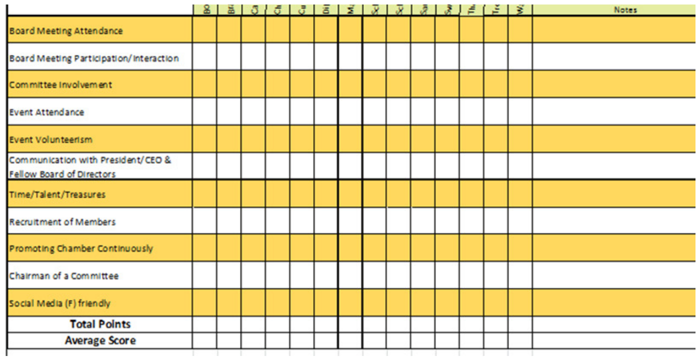
Though few organizations include an evaluation of the board in their annual report or on-line for members to view, the tools exist to assess board performance.

Report Card

[1] A **fiduciary** is a person who holds a legal or ethical relationship of trust with one or more other parties.

The bylaws delineate the duties of directors. In addition, there will be cultural expectations. These may include signing up new members, raising funds, chapter outreach and government relations.

Track director attendance and involvement in special projects on a report and recognition card. If the board wants to review director performance the staff can provide it. (It is not intended to point out omissions as much as to highlight contributions.)

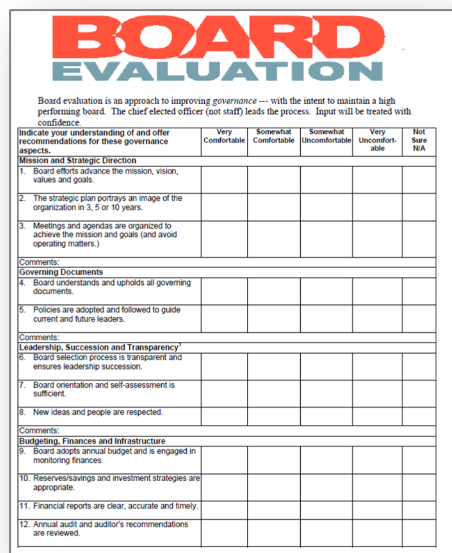


	Notes
Board Meeting Attendance	
Board Meeting Participation/Interaction	
Committee Involvement	
Event Attendance	
Event Volunteerism	
Communication with President/CEO & Fellow Board of Directors	
Time/Talent/Treasures	
Recruitment of Members	
Promoting Chamber Continuously	
Chairman of a Committee	
Social Media (F) friendly	
Total Points	
Average Score	

The report card is used as an internal tool. Would there be merit for including it in board packets or keeping it on line for members to see how their directors and the board are performing?

Self-Evaluation

Another tool is a self-evaluation conducted internally by the board. It is a 1 or 2 page survey about meetings and responsibilities; for example, are the meetings producing results, do you have the information you need, how could we make changes to improve board meetings?



BOARD EVALUATION

Board evaluation is an approach to improving *governance* --- with the intent to maintain a high performing board. The chief elected officer (not staff) leads the process. Input will be treated with confidence.

Indicate your understanding of and offer recommendations for these governance aspects.	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfort-able	Not Sure N/A
Mission and Strategic Direction					
1. Board efforts advance the mission, vision, values and goals.					
2. The strategic plan portrays an image of the organization in 3, 5 or 10 years.					
3. Meetings and agendas are organized to achieve the mission and goals (and avoid operating matters.)					
Comments:					
Governing Documents					
4. Board understands and upholds all governing documents.					
5. Policies are adopted and followed to guide current and future leaders.					
Comments:					
Leadership, Succession and Transparency[1]					
6. Board selection process is transparent and ensures leadership succession.					
7. Board orientation and self-assessment is sufficient.					
8. New ideas and people are respected.					
Comments:					
Budgeting, Finances and Infrastructure					
9. Board adopts annual budget and is engaged in monitoring finances.					
10. Reserves/savings and investment strategies are appropriate.					
11. Financial reports are clear, accurate and timely.					
12. Annual audit and auditor's recommendations are reviewed.					

The self-evaluation is led by the chief elected officer (not staff.) The results should be discussed to make improvements based on director input. Should a summary of board evaluation and recommended improvements be made public to members?

I am appreciative of the emerging leader in Lebanon who suggested that members have a right to know how their board and elected directors are performing. There are tools to facilitate his idea.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.