

Identifying the Board's Values

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Every board has a set of values whether they know them or not. Some organizations add a list of values to complement their mission and vision statements. The three statements make up the “brand platform.”

From experience I can identify the values by listening to board discussions for a few minutes. They may not be written but they become clear to me.

If values are documented, directors should be familiar with them. They should frame the discussions and decision making.

If the values have not been documented, consider this brief exercise with the leadership.

Identify Values

Set aside 15 to 20 minutes to ask directors what values they most respect when it comes to governance. They are likely to throw out concepts such as “timely” and “transparency.”

Make a list on a flip chart or pad of all the values they suggest. The intent is not to reach consensus but to build the list and understanding. Let the ideas flow – it will be revealing.

In a meeting with the Leadership Academy at the Georgia Realtors®, the presidents and others made a list of more than a dozen desired values for directors.

Mission Driven – Understanding that the purpose is to work as a team to advance the mission statement.

Accessible – Members have access to the director.

Timely – Demonstrating a respect for time, including starting and ending meetings as scheduled; postpone unneeded meetings.

Selfless – Giving of themselves to advance the organization; not focused on personal interests.

Personal Growth – A desire for continuous improvement.

Diversity – Respect for differences in ideas, people, models and an effort to be inclusive.

Transparent – Respect for openness, avoiding a culture of secrecy.

Integrity – Desire to comply with all laws and to govern with honor.

Visionary – Able to think beyond one's term of office; identifying what's best as the organization and environment transform and evolve.

Open-Minded – Impartial in listening to and discussing ideas.

Structure – Respect for organizational structure, hierarchy and lines of authority, especially the board – staff partnership.

Confidentiality – A board treats discussions and documents with confidentiality.

Accountable – Follow through on commitments and deliver value to members.

Purposeful – A board that works towards meaningful outcomes.

Stewardship – Desire to be a good steward in the organization; a model of excellence.

Heritage – Respect for the past and culture of the organization.

Member-Driven – Consideration for the members at all times.

Prioritize the Values

After directors have offered what they believe are the primary principles applicable to governance, ask them to prioritize.

Put an asterisk next to each value that resonates with a majority of the board. Most boards are able to narrow down the list to just four or five guiding principles. Keep the final list in front of directors as a reminder of the principles which should frame discussions and decisions.

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