Transforming Board Practice

NC State University
A&T State University
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
Empowering People • Providing Solutions

INSTITUTE FOR
NONPROFITS

Becky Bowen She is an attorney and has served several nonprofit organizations in various capacities, including communications director, general counsel and executive director. She currently is a Co-Director of Carolina Common Enterprise, a nonprofit cooperative and community development center.

Jessica Katz Jameson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at NC State University. She teaches courses and conducts community-engaged research on the topics of organizational communication, conflict management and nonprofit leadership. She chairs the Academic Council for the Institute for Nonprofits and serves on the Extension, Engagement and Economic Development task force for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Susan Scherffius Jakes is the Associate State Program Leader for Community Development, an Extension Assistant Professor with NC Cooperative Extension and an Adjunct Professor in Psychology at North Carolina State University. She received a Ph.D. in Community Psychology from North Carolina State University.

Mary Tschirhart is a Professor of Public Administration at The Ohio State University. She served as Director of the Institute for Nonprofits and Professor of Public Administration at NC State University from 2008-2013. She has published extensively on nonprofit topics including board governance. She recently co-authored a text titled *Managing Nonprofit Organizations*. Dr. Tschirhart has served on six nonprofit boards in a variety of roles, including president, and led a nonprofit as its executive director.

Module 4

Enhancing Board Engagement

Goals for this Module

Participants will be able to:

– Describe the qualities of a fully engaged board

– List the four key elements needed to develop a culture of engagement

– Build an agenda that will enhance board engagement

What does a fully engaged group look like?

1. Tell of a time you were in a fully engaged group.

2. You are on non-profit board that fosters full engagement of its entire board. What are key strengths of this board?

3. You have three wishes as a non-profit board chair to make your board the healthiest board it can be. What are they?

TBP

What did you learn?

What are the qualities of a fully engaged board?

What key elements do you need to have in place to be fully engaged?

What really makes it work?

Culture of Inquiry (Axelrod, 2007)

Trust, Information Sharing, Teamwork

and Dialogue

Trust

- An intentional tone of safety and engagement set from the top

- Rules in engagement are evident and agreed upon

- Deliberate opportunities made for board to get to know each other

- Candor and consensus are encouraged

Information Sharing

- Quality board orientation

- Enough well-organized information before meeting

- Background and contextual information is given as needed

- Think about the ways the board needs information

TBP

Teamwork

- Balance board member skills within diversity

  – Expertise Diversity

  – Demographic Diversity

  – Role Diversity

- It is critical that teamwork skills are used to turn diversity into an organizational asset
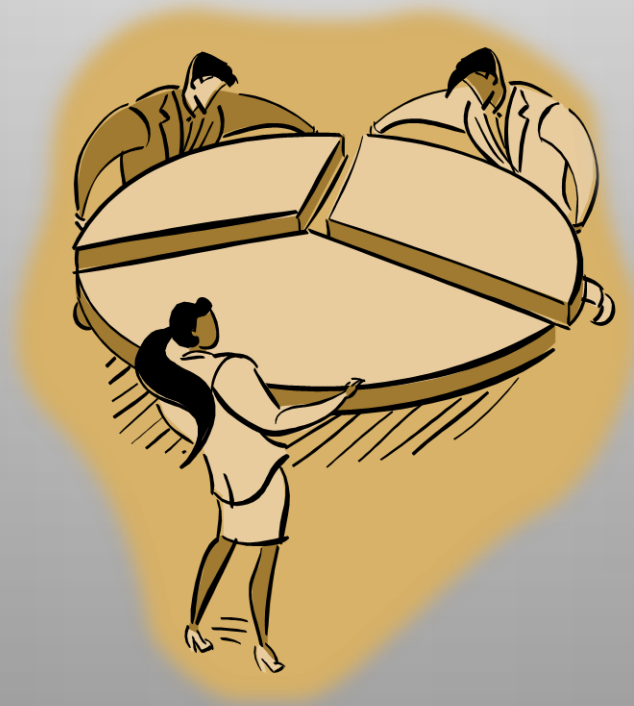
Important Board Roles
(Axelrod, 2007)

- The Analyst
- The Healthy Skeptic
- The Facilitator
- The Observer
- The Caller
- The Coach
- The Reframer
- The Synthesizer

Activity

Worksheet 4.2:

Board Diversity Matching Exercise

Dialogue

- Prepare meeting agendas with a generative focus

- Frame issues as questions rather than decisions to be approved

- Encourage constructive dissent/conflict

TBP

Promoting Generative Discussion (Activity)

1. Imagine your board is discussing whether to create a new staff position, such as a CEO or Development Officer.

2. Reflect on behaviors that either promote or prevent generative discussion.

3. Write each idea on a separate post-it and post on appropriate flip chart.

TBP

Tools to Support Robust Discussion
(Chait, Ryan & Taylor 2005)

Silent starts: All board members take two minutes to prepare a question on a particular topic.

Role plays: Assume the perspective of various stakeholders as you define different outcomes, concerns, etc.

Breakouts: Small groups discuss the same idea to reduce groupthink.

Surveys: Ask the board questions in advance of the meeting and start discussion with results.

TBP

Signs You're Getting There

- Conflict that ends productively
- Imagination is engaged in board work
- Group think is short-lived – frequent reframing
- Sense of wonder restored to work
- Mutual respect is evident
- Board buys-in and supports decisions

TBP

Evaluation

What are the key points of this module?

- – What did you find most useful?
- – What can we improve upon?
- – Other items you want us to cover?

TBP

Curriculum Modules

Module 1: Foundations for Transforming Board Practice
Module 2: Legal and Recruitment Issues
Module 3: Governance and Board Structure
Module 4: Enhancing Board Engagement
Module 5: Constructive Conflict
Module 6: Thinking Strategically
Module 7: Asking the Right Questions
Module 8: Board Meeting Communication

TBP

Curriculum Modules

PDF copies of the curriculum modules are

available for viewing on the

NC Thrive portal:

http://communitydevelopment.ces.ncsu.

edu/local-government-nonprofits/

Resources

Axelrod, N. (2007). *Culture of Inquiry: Healthy Debate in the Boardroom*. Board Source: Washington, DC.

Bradshaw, P. and Fredette, C. (2011). The Inclusive Nonprofit Boardroom. *The Nonprofit Quarterly* Spring issue.

Chait, R. P., Ryan, W. P., and Taylor, B. E. (2005). *Governance as Leadership*. BoardSource. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Jameson, J. K., Metelsky, B. A., Holt, S., Bracken, S., Jakes, S. S., Landsman, R., and Petteway, R. (2009). The Board Communication Initiative. Grant funded by the NC State Office of Extension Engagement and Economic Development, the Institute for Nonprofits, and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. (Unpublished research).

Metelsky, B. A. & Jameson, J. K. (2013). Getting it all out on the table: Eliciting diverse perspectives to foster generative governance In T. Temkin (ed.), You and your board: New thinking from the field's top practitioners, researchers, and provocateurs. Charity Channel Press.