

BEST PRACTICES

For ELCA Campus Ministry

BOARD EVALUATION

“To rule is easy,” quipped Goethe, “to govern difficult.” It’s one of those insights that seem to span the ages. With poetic incisiveness, Goethe seems to have touched the nerve of so much of our present difficulty, whether it is national politics, the local school board, or your church council. It is difficult to govern these days, even more difficult to assess the effectiveness of the work of those who step forward and take on the responsibilities of governance. How is the work of the board to be evaluated?

Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom¹ tell us that one of the most neglected and sensitive of all board duties is the assessment of its own performance. There are a number of reasons:

1. Evaluation of peers is touchy business
2. No external entity requires it or even exerts pressure to do it.
3. Few board members know how to coordinate an evaluation and fewer still volunteer to do it.
4. The press of other urgent board business keeps the board from less pressing topics such as self-evaluation.

The authors go on to suggest reasons why evaluation is essential:

- ✓ An organization, in the long run, is no better than its board. It is in everyone’s interest to help the board to function as effectively as it possible can.
- ✓ Board members become frustrated when they perceive that the board is dysfunctional in key areas. As a result, attendance drops and some may resign.
- ✓ Staff morale suffers when the board doesn’t seem interested in getting its act together. When staff trust and respect for the board wanes, few chief executives can fill that leadership vacuum on their own.
- ✓ When a board can address its own needs honestly, it sends the right signal to staff members that making mistakes and learning from them is natural and good.
- ✓ An effective board addresses issues, keeps the mission clear, uses funds wisely, and makes board meetings enjoyable. New member recruitment becomes easier.

Evaluation at Each Meeting

There are a number of ways to conduct board evaluations. The simplest way is to have conversation on an ongoing way. Set aside 5-10 minutes at every board meeting to ask, “How are we doing?” “What went well at this meeting; what could be done better?” Solicit the comments of newer members in particular. They often have the keenest eyes and ears. When members are given the freedom to make suggestions for improvement, they feel more ownership and understand that their ideas are valued. However, when change is discussed, change is

¹ Robert Andringa and Ted Engstrom, *Nonprofit Board Answer Book* (National Center for Nonprofit Boards: Washington, DC, 1998).

expected. So when a consensus emerges about a new direction for board action, it should be addressed, perhaps by a task force or subcommittee.

Retreat Setting for Evaluation

The next level of evaluation is to consider a retreat or special event where the board will avail itself of some training by using a book or tape, by having an outside, experienced presenter work with them, or by hiring a consultant. In this kind of setting standards can be set and job descriptions written by which board members can gauge their performance in the future.

Third Party Survey

A third level might be a survey conducted either internally by a special committee or externally by a third party. A survey includes aspects of the board's work to be rated on a scale of one to five, as well as several open-ended questions. The board receives a summary of the responses, although no names are mentioned. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and should be collated by someone outside the board, perhaps a former member, who will report back the results of the survey. The survey covers such material as mission, board size, committee structure, orientation, and quality of meetings. An alternative would be to do shorter surveys periodically on a single aspect of the board's work.

External Audit

A fourth level of evaluation would be an external audit. At this level a consultant with expertise on board governance is asked to (a.) review of the articles of incorporation and bylaws, (b.) conduct interviews with officers, other board members, and staff, (c.) observe board and committee meetings, (d.) create and administer a survey, and (e.) facilitate a discussion about key issues raised.

While board evaluations can occur at any time, there may be natural cycles in the life of campus ministry that are obvious times for such activity. The end of the academic year is one important time for board reflection. The process of the quadrennial review is another built-in time in the campus ministry cycle. Summer months, when activity on campus is at a minimum, leaves some time for gathering survey responses. Early fall is often a good time for retreats that look both forward and backward at the ongoing work of the board.

Imagine a family setting out on a trip, but with no clear ideas about where they are going or how to get there. As this family drives along, they got more and more disoriented, but they just keep driving. They stop for gas, for an occasional bite to eat, and to sleep by the side of the road. But they do not stop for directions or to ask for help. They just imagine that if they keep driving they will arrive at their destination sooner or later. If you've ever felt like you were along for that kind of ride with the board on which you serve, you know how valuable it would be to stop and ask for directions or to seek some help. A board that never evaluates its performance is hoping, even risking, that all it needs to do to accomplish its mission is to keep on driving. But what do you think its chances are of getting there if there is never time set aside for serious evaluation?

In the appendix is an evaluation tool that may be useful with your own board. Use it, if it is helpful in its current form, or work with your board to develop their own instrument. Evaluate the work of your board; the outcome of your trip will depend on it.

BOARD EVALUATION

	INDICATOR		5	4	3	2	1	NA
1	The roles of the board and staff are well defined and respected.							
2	The board participates fully in visioning and strategic planning.							
3	Each board member has an up to date job description and has signed it.							
4	The board sets fund raising goals and is involved in the generation of resources.							
5	The board's nominating process ensures that membership is appropriately diverse.							
6	Board members receive initial orientation and ongoing training, including mentoring.							
7	The board regularly reviews the bylaws and policy documents.							
8	The board has a process for handling urgent matters between meetings.							
9	The board has an attendance policy and an annual calendar of meetings							
10	Meetings have written agendas and materials are distributed in advance of the meeting.							
11	The board has a process for managing conflict.							
12	An audit or financial review occurs annually.							
13	The board is involved in accurate reporting of programs and financial resources							
14	The board has a process to regularly review staff performance.							
15	The board has comprehensive personnel policies that have been reviewed by a professional.							
16	Each board member feels involved and interested in the board's work.							
17	The board takes time regularly to understand campus issues and students' concerns.							
18	Care is taken that necessary skills and professional expertise are present on the board.							
19	The board understands and follows campus ministry policies and procedures.							
20	The board is involved in interpretation and communication to the community and churches.							

(5=Very Good, 4 Good, 3 Average, 2 Fair, 1 Poor. NA=Not Applicable)

TOTAL

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Best possible score: 100

Please list three to five points on which you think the board should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible.

1

2

3

4

5

