

## Board Models

There are various board governance models or styles. No one is perfect for every board. It may help a board understand their processes, outcomes, style and culture by considering the various models. (Most boards are a combination or hybrid of one or more of these.)

***The executive centered model*** of governance recognizes the fundamental role of the executive director in guiding board performance. The executive director is the glue that holds the board together. They help recruit board members, orient them on key responsibilities, and negotiate the board's role. Such a model flips the traditional top-down orientation and recognizes that the executive must "manage" the board to achieve optimal results (Block, 1998; Herman & Heimovics, 1991).

***The policy governance model*** recognizes that the board must address strategic decision-making and avoid operational issues. The model suggests that the board establish policies to guide staff decision-making, but should avoid direct involvement in issues that are not strategic. Strategic issues are identified as those that are long range and critical to the success of the organization (Eadie, 1998). Such a board aggressively evaluates the executive director providing guidelines for performance and expectations for results (Carver, 1997).

***Traditional board governance models*** recognize the top-down responsibilities of the board to oversee the operations of the organization. There is a clear distinction between the board and staff and interactions with board members are structured and controlled. Typically, the board is rather large and performs the critical function of raising funds for the organization. The board seeks prestige and influence in its membership and relies on the staff to provide guidance and direction. Committees conduct much of the work of the board with a staff member to assist the board in meeting its responsibilities. As a result, committees tend to report to the board propositions for approval (Houle, 1989).

***Strategic board model***, as described by ASAE, encourages the board to use the strategic plan as the primary guide for taking action and performance measurement. The staff is allowed to take all necessary actions so long as they fit within the bylaws, policies, budget and laws.

***The volunteer centered model*** places the board in the position of being more involved in the direct operations of the organization. Often such a board is present in young organizations with none or few paid staff. The board members are service providers, program coordinators, and administrators. They understand the intricacies of the organization because they are intimately involved in the fulfillment of its mission. They are deeply dedicated to the cause and often reflect a grassroots and collective orientation to solving community problems. Yet such board members can be troubled by the contradictory roles of being a board member and a volunteer service provider (Duca, 1996; Widmer, 1996).

***A corporate model*** of board governance is dedicated to outcomes and performance results. They emphasize the business of the organization and seek to ensure efficiency in the provision of services and programs. They are often bottom-line oriented which can distract from long-term missions and broader community needs. The culture of efficiency and performance drive the meetings, which are pragmatic and decision oriented. Often such boards are smaller and committees meet to solve specific strategic issues and then are disbanded until the next issue is identified (Alexander & Weiner, 1998; Bradshaw, Stoops, Hayday, Armstrong, & Rykert, 1998).