

Board Development Plan

What is it?

“Board Development” can mean many different things to different people. It is based on the premise that we are not perfect, that in all humility we may be mistaking mistakes without even knowing it, and that we can always do better. In the context of the CMA Principles and Standards, a Board Development Plan means that a plan which outlines how the governing body (here called a Board, but encompassing a Council, or governing Committee, or similar) intends to continuously review and improve its effectiveness (Standard 4.4).

The most important thing however is to have an attitude of wanting to learn and improve. Complacency is the enemy of all Board Development Plans!

Developing a Development Plan

1. What are we trying to do?

If a Board Development Plan is an intentional process to make a Board more effective, the first step is to work out what the Board wants or needs to be effective at doing. One way of categorising the key functions of a Board is the following:

- Strategy
- Risk management
- Culture
- Relationships (internal, eg staff, and external, eg donors and service users)
- Structures/policies/procedures

There may be other or different functions that are more applicable to your own organisation.

2. Sample topics

What sort of topics you wish to address around the above functions will differ for every Board and organisation. Purely to give you some ideas, here are some potential topics under each head:

- Strategy

How new technology might affect your mission and strategic plan; what are your “competitors” doing; trends in Government regulation in your sector; how to write a strategic plan; international trends for your sector; how do you assess outcomes and outputs for your ministry; are we at risk of mission drift; reviewing research papers/statistics about the sector.

- Risk Management

What legal obligations does the organisation have; what personal obligations does each Board member have; how do our financial accounts work; how to deal with a crisis; how to build and maintain a reputation; different legal/accounting/tax structures and their benefits and pitfalls; what if any tax benefits do we utilise.

- Culture

How do healthy organisations evolve; what makes staff happy; how can we stay centred in Christ; what does it look like to reflect the love of Christ in all our dealings with all our stakeholders; what do our stakeholders think of us; how to lead without micro-managing.

- Relationships

Speak with/hear from our service users; visit a program we provide; enhance listening skills; enhance communication skills; fundraising techniques; how to deal with conflict resolution; how best to monitor any overseas relationships; cultural differences with our stakeholders; how can social media help build relationships; how to keep in touch with alumni; what are donors looking for; how to be a good mentor; how to recruit Board members; how to look after your CEO; what does a foundation/the Government look for in a grant application.

- Structures/policies and procedures

What policies do we have to put in place as a matter of law and what are they about; what is the job of a Board; how do we develop a Board Manual; how to run a meeting; how to run a committee; do we meet the CMA Standards Council Principles and Standards; what is best practice from other Boards; what is a Board Calendar; reviewing cash handling or cheque writing procedures; ethics training; how does our conflict of interest policy work; what should every new director know (and do we know it ourselves); what do you wish you had known when you first joined the Board.

3. Prioritising

Education and self-improvement can be limitless and even the above list is daunting. Where to start?

The best way is for the Board to make its own decision in that regard. This can be as simple as spending 5 or 10 minutes at the next meeting discussing where the best value could be added for your Board, or filling out a board assessment or evaluation questionnaire to give you some feedback. Another (fun) way to do this is by way of a quiz. Alternatively, you could seek help from an external consultant.

After completing this process, you will have some idea of what needs to be addressed first.

4. How to do it

This will depend very much on the particular circumstances of your own organisation. Some options are:

- Doing it yourself (eg, tasking a particular Board Member, or a rotating Board Member to lead a discussion, or to distribute an article or chapter of a book for discussion)
- Using a consultant to come to the Board
- Sending the whole Board, or one or more members, to external courses or seminars

Obviously cost, availability and need will have a big impact on this decision. There are some excellent courses and consultants available either generally or for specific topics if you think external help would be an advantage.

5. How often to do it

Again, there are many options. Some Boards prefer to simply allocate 10 to 15 minutes at each Board meeting for a discussion on relevant topics. Some choose to concentrate everything into an annual planning or strategy day. Others allocate a specific day, particularly if they are using an external consultant, or attending courses or seminars. Alternatively, there can be a mixture depending on your own circumstances.

Experience shows that regular bite sized chunks of education can often be the best way forward

6. Reviews

An important part of the Board Development process is review. Typically, this is done by the Board carrying out an annual, biennial or triennial self-assessment of how it stands. This can be worked in with item 2 above, ie, the self-assessment or questionnaire used to sort out your priorities can be used as a measurement tool against the last time it was completed as well as providing information about the most important needs to be addressed.

Alternatively, if you don't require that level of formality, there could be an annual, biennial or triennial time set aside at a Board meeting to do a review and work out what to do for the next relevant period.

Resources

Deloitte Canada - The Effective Not-for-Profit Board A value-driving force

<http://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ca/Documents/public-sector/ca-en-public-sector-effective-npo-board.pdf>

The Board Development Planner – Boardsource

Help4NonProfits - **Ongoing Board Education: Ensuring Board Members Have the Knowledge They Need** - http://help4nonprofits.com/NPLibrary/NP_Bd_OngoingBoardEducation_Art.htm

CMA - <http://www.cma.net.au/>