

Creating an Effective Board Action Plan

By Nick A. Fabrizio, Ph.D., FACMPE, FACHE, Principal, MGMA Health Care Consulting Group

A board action plan is a valuable tool that helps ensure governance goals are well thought out and accomplished throughout the year. Setting these goals often starts by looking at the board self-assessment results. While many boards perform an annual self-assessment, very few are able to successfully use the results to create a living, breathing tool that the board can use to monitor its actions and keep the organization on track. When reviewing the self-assessment, the board should highlight areas of weakness and develop improvement goals to add to the action plan.

The strategic plan should also be considered when creating a board action plan. While the majority of boards are involved in creating and monitoring a strategic plan, it can be a challenge for the board to take the additional step of creating an action plan. During the yearly strategic planning process, the board agrees to the strategies and tactics for the following year. Milestones are created and reviewed by the board, and at each meeting, the board should review the monthly goals and affirm that those goals are being met. It's also important that the board create and review a yearly calendar of action items and affirm that the organization is on track to meet its agreed-upon objectives.

As shown in the following sample governance action plan, the most important part of this tool is to specify the action item, which person/committee that action item is assigned to, and the month that item is due. It's crucial to be as clear

Key Takeaways: Creating and Implementing an Action Plan

- Use board self-assessment results and strategic plan to come up with action items for the year.
- Decide who should be responsible for each action item and a deadline for completion.
- List out specific goals related to each action item.
- Include the goals for each action item in the board/committee calendar to ensure they are top-of-mind for the board/committees and everything is completed on time (governance support staff can do this with help from the chair).
- Use the board calendar as a guide for board meetings and items that need to be addressed.

as possible when developing goals, assigning a person/committee to that goal, and specifying when that goal is due. The goals from the action plan should then be added to the board calendar, which lists specific action items that are due for the board to accomplish each month.¹ Doing this allows the board to weave governance improvement and strategic planning goals into a document that is used monthly by the board, committees, and senior leadership.

The board will first need to agree that creating a document that lists monthly duties and responsibilities is important. The governance support staff can then help the board chair turn monthly goals into a tracking tool, and work with the board at every meeting to make sure that it

stays on track. During each board meeting either the chair or that person's designee, which oftentimes is the governance support professional, will review and read that month's key duties and tasks. The governance support professional can go through key tasks for that month and the upcoming months to make sure the board is completing its responsibilities. Doing this gets everyone on the same page and highlights items that have not been accomplished, which allows the board to make course correction strategies in real time.

This is a valuable tool in keeping the organization moving forward. Given busy schedules and competing demands, it's easy to lose track of what was identified eight to 10 months earlier during the strategic planning process and board self-assessment evaluation. It's essential to note that the board chair must stress the importance of these tasks and take the necessary time to review the action plan or it will fail.

¹ For sample board calendars, see The Governance Institute's templates collection at www.governanceinstitute.com/templates.

Sample Governance Action Plan

Action Item	Specific Goals	Assigned to	Deadline
Improve/enhance strategic discussion for more effective board meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a board education session regarding the difference between operational and strategic discussions Implement an inverted agenda with strategic discussion taking place first Review consent agenda procedure to ensure best practice is in place to free up as much meeting time as possible Increase time for board education during meetings prior to major decisions Create executive summary of board meeting minutes to include in board packet for review prior to meetings 	Board chair/board support person	March
Revamp quality dashboard to include population health and value-based metrics at the right level of information for the board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with quality improvement staff to determine which metrics to include that show a big-picture view of quality and value performance over time Create two-level dashboard with a front-page summary of performance showing major metrics such as mortality rates, bundled quality metrics for major service lines, and costs of care; interior pages with lower level of detail if board wants to dig deeper 	Quality committee	May
Develop and implement a succession planning process for board leadership (chair, vice chair, and officers)	<p>Develop a written board leadership succession plan for full board approval. Elements to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear process for selecting officers Skills, competencies, and prerequisites for officers <p>Educate board members and implement board leadership succession plan</p>	Governance committee	September
Ongoing governance education and training plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop annual board education calendar to include education sessions at every board meeting and educational retreats, based on needs from strategic plan Set goals for board member time commitment to educational activities outside of board education sessions (and specify activities/resources) 	Governance committee	February
Additional actions...			

Putting the Action Plan to Work: Using Tools to Create Engagement and Accomplish Goals

Are board members actively engaged in board meetings, strategic discussions, policy making, and committee development or do they sit and listen to hours of staff reports, CEO briefings, and the board chair? Do your board committee chairs spend their time leading committees or just revisiting what was previously discussed or accomplished?

Committee chairs must be active members of their committees by providing information to the board

and soliciting members to be more involved in the organization. Committee chairs need to be more thoughtful in bringing proposals to the table and in moving the organization forward. Committees should add value to the organization by providing outside perspectives that the board doesn't have the time or expertise to discover on their own. Committees are often thought of as the lifeblood of the organization.

The action plan and board/committee calendars are good tools to help ensure critical board and committee work is accomplished. For example, the table below lists the key responsibilities and timeline for the quality committee for its

action item to "revamp the quality dashboard to include population health and value-based metrics at the right level of information for the board." The quality committee will work with the health system's staff to create benchmarks and dashboards to monitor performance. The table clearly lists the activities and objectives that the quality committee is responsible for, as well as when the activity begins and when it's due for completion.

In looking at the board calendar below, the board has clear expectations for the quality committee. Based on the calendar, the board expects the quality committee to complete its work

Quality Committee Calendar

Month	Item	Date Due
January–March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify quality dashboard to include population health and value-based metrics appropriate for board oversight. • Work with quality improvement staff to determine which metrics to include to show big picture view of quality and metrics for cost of care, mortality rates, bundled payment and quality metrics for service lines, etc. • Develop two-tier reporting dashboard—one for staff and quality committee and the other for board oversight. 	April

Board Calendar

Month	Item	Date Due
November	Evaluate CEO	December
December	Agree to next year’s performance KPIs	January
January	Conduct board self-evaluation	February
February	Review and update board policies and personnel policies	March
March	Prepare for board retreat and finalize agenda	March
April	Conduct board retreat	April
May	Finalize quality committee metrics	May

and deliver a final product to the board by the May board meeting. At this meeting, the chair of the quality committee will present their recommendation to the board for discussion and approval.

As mentioned, at each board meeting, the board chair (or a designee such as the governance support professional) should review

the yearly calendar by month and ensure that the board is meeting its agreed-upon objectives. It’s a relatively quick and easy process for the board chair to facilitate. Having been a part of board meetings as a trainer, facilitator, and official board member, it only takes 10 minutes to go through the board calendar.

Having board action plans and calendars is an efficient way to keep track of responsibilities and keep everyone engaged and on the same page. Governance support staff play a large role in working with the chair to ensure these tools are created, regularly updated, and properly used so the board can effectively lead the organization.

The Governance Institute thanks Nick A. Fabrizio, Ph.D., FACMPE, FACHE, Principal, MGMA Health Care Consulting Group, and Governance Institute faculty member, for contributing this article. He can be reached at nfabrizio@mgma.com.

