

Expanding Board Criteria Beyond Competencies to Enable More Holistic Recruitment

By Betsy Chapin Taylor, FAHP, Accordant

Hospital and health system boards are grappling with fast-evolving issues and balancing often-untenable agendas in an increasingly fluid and complex healthcare operating environment. In this new reality, an excellent board member must be prepared with more than competencies that reflect areas of knowledge, skills, and experience to be successful. The new board member must also be able to call upon personal characteristics and commitments that support agile and purpose-driven leadership. Further, there is a newly honed sensibility around the value of crafting teams that represent a more diverse set of life experiences and perspectives. To capture the many facets that now support and enable excellence, it's time to embrace a more expansive and holistic set of board member selection criteria to secure leaders who can better respond to the dynamic opportunities, issues, and needs of the hospital or health system.

A healthcare board will be only as strong and effective as it is designed to be, and no strategy outperforms selecting the right people to lead. Yet, despite the importance of talent selection, many organizations invest too little time

and discernment in identifying the criteria needed to lead, and an organization must identify *what* it needs in order to know *who* it needs. Improving board quality starts with applying deliberate thought and intention to the selection criteria for individual board members.

Identifying board selection criteria begins with a very simple value chain: board roles, responsibilities, and expectations must be rooted in the work to advance the mission and strategy. So, board member selection criteria must directly support successful fulfillment of these board roles and responsibilities. Given the elements that support vibrant leadership extend beyond competencies, this article unpacks a holistic board selection model rooted in four dimensions: commitments, competencies, connectivity, and characteristics. These dimensions go beyond competency-based knowledge, expertise, and skills to include a broader set of behaviors, beliefs, traits, and more. This flexible model also enables each organization to customize

Key Board Takeaways

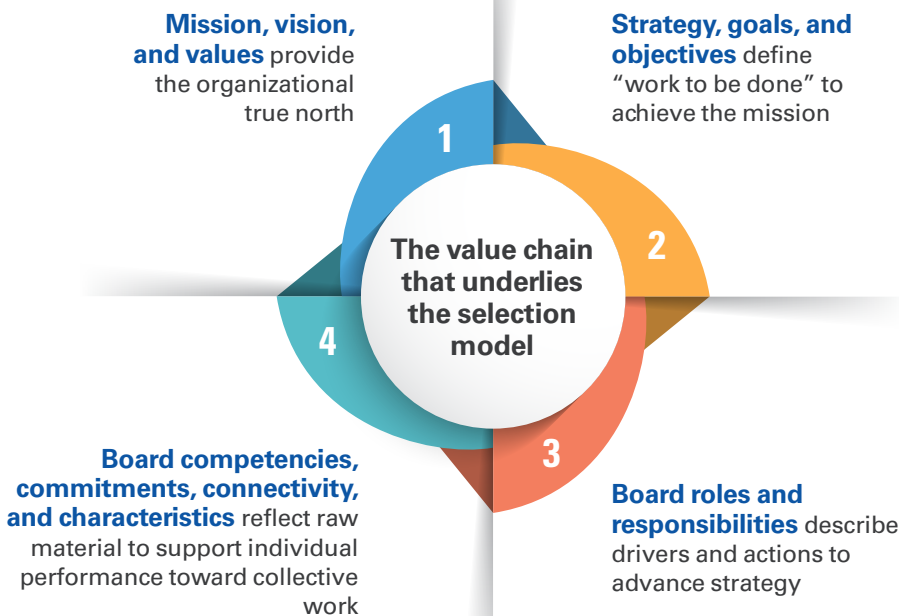
- Today's complex and fluid healthcare environment demands a more expansive and holistic set of board member selection criteria to secure leaders who can better meet contemporary needs to govern and lead and can better respond to the dynamic opportunities, issues, and needs of the hospital or health system.
- Board members fulfill a legal fiduciary role to steward a community asset; however, they are called to govern rather than manage. So, it's more valuable for leaders to bring tacit knowledge and experience that supports wisdom, leadership capabilities, decision-making prowess, and intuition to effectively guide the organization than it is to bring specific subject matter expertise.
- Board member selection criteria cascades down from the mission and strategy to inform the work to be done to shape specific board roles and responsibilities that will drive value. Knowing those roles and responsibilities allows the organization to identify strategic board selection criteria.

its approach based upon its strategy, community, culture, constraints, organizational life cycle stage, and more. The ultimate intention is to kickstart a thoughtful and systematic approach to elevate board selection.

Building a Board Selection Model

A healthcare organization's mission and strategy provide the basis for great talent acquisition. Board member selection criteria cascades down from the mission and strategy of the organization that, in turn, dictates the most valuable work to be done. Knowing the work to be done allows the organization to identify specific board roles and responsibilities that will drive value. Knowing those roles and responsibilities allows the organization to identify specific levers to individual and collective success. This enables board selection criteria to be strategic rather than resorting to a generic list of desirable skills and qualities.

Identifying both fundamental, non-negotiable criteria as well as desirable criteria enables identification, pressure-testing, and prioritization of potential candidates. Specific levers to enable individual or collective performance generally include hard skills, soft skills,



and characteristics. Specific competencies, experience, behaviors, circles of influence, intentions, beliefs, etc. should also be considered within the context of the hospital's opportunities, competitive pressures, challenges, culture, resources, and operating environment. While core elements will be broadly applicable to leading in most non-profit hospitals and health systems, the list of ideal criteria can be uniquely tailored to each organization to account for an organization's dynamic strategy, situation, and environment. Criteria are organized across four dimensions:

1. **Commitments:** values, beliefs, and intentions that shape a potential board member's passion and purpose for advancing the mission
2. **Competencies:** knowledge, expertise, experience, acumen, skills, and abilities correlated with capability to fulfill the role
3. **Connectivity:** civic, social, and business relationships and networks and ability for a leader to utilize influence, gravitas, or credibility to advocate for or to connect others to the organization
4. **Characteristics:** personal traits, perspectives, life experiences, and attributes that support diversity of perspective

Evaluation of potential members is intended to occur sequentially in the order listed. For example, it does not matter if someone has the right competencies to serve if fundamental commitments are not in place. Additionally, within each of these four dimensions, specific criteria are further prioritized to reflect what is:

- **Critical:** table stakes for all members
- **Core:** expected for all members with few compromises
- **Strategic:** select and evolving elements tied to organizational strategy or needs that must exist within the board but do not need to be held by all members

Ultimately, the selection criteria framework is intended to guide consistent and objective decision making to identify and to prioritize potential members who are best positioned to help the organization thrive. Now, let's unpack each of the dimensions further.

Translate Needs into Clear, Concrete Roles and Responsibilities

Once you know the work to be done, consider what each board member would *do, say, or commit to* in order to successfully move the dial. For example, here are sample behaviors and actions that would be valuable for board members to individually undertake:

- Articulate organizational mission, vision, and values.
- Advocate to secure community interest, understanding, ownership, and engagement.
- Steward financial, human, and reputation assets of the hospital.
- Connect those in their civic, professional, and personal networks to the mission.
- Ensure that an effective organizational planning process occurs.
- Review, serve as a sounding board, provide input on, and affirm strategic plans.
- Endorse, monitor, and evaluate goals and objectives articulated in plans.
- Monitor and evaluate organizational financial/programmatic performance.
- Support sound and successful leadership by the hospital president/CEO.
- Promote collaboration and cooperation within the board.
- Ask questions to understand or to get to the root of an issue.
- Ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, and ethical standards.
- Drive innovation and new ideas, and embrace appropriate risk to pursue them.
- Ensure financial stability and sustainability of the organization.
- Help shape the hospital's vision and future strategic direction.
- Foster philanthropic support from individuals, corporations, and foundations.
- Identify prospective community partners with similar values, interests, and goals.
- Shape policies to guide decision making, provide controls, and create an effective operating environment.
- Foster a culture that reflects the organization's values.
- Advance care, maintenance, function, education, and evaluation of the board.
- Identify, select, recruit, appoint, and orient excellent hospital board leaders.
- Make a meaningful, personal, financial, charitable commitment at least annually.
- Participate actively and constructively in meetings.
- Demonstrate being an informed, engaged, and independent thinker.
- Place the organization's interests ahead of personal interests.

Commitments

Commitments illuminate an individual's embrace of and value alignment with the hospital's mission. Boards can't compromise here. If a prospective member does not have passion for the mission and believe the hospital's work is valuable, the leader can be immediately withdrawn from further consideration. Healthcare organizations deserve leaders who are personally moved and motivated by their deeply human work and the critical role they fulfill in the social fabric of their communities. Further, because of the considerable demands made upon each board member, a personal motivation to serve is an essential element of

fit; simply, a board member who joins at the behest of their employer, to pad their resume, to seek business leads, or to pursue any other form of self-interest is unlikely to make the requisite level of commitment needed or to bring their entire selves to the role. Therefore, it is incumbent to identify board leaders whose willingness to serve represents an extension of their own personal values, passion, and purpose. Further, commitments also consider the essential fiber of a person's character, identity, and values to include issues such as integrity, loyalty, respect, fairness, and similar. Commitments are a non-negotiable prerequisite to board service and provide

Commitments: Criteria to Consider

| Critical | Core |
|--|---|
| Integrity: Demonstrates principled leadership that earns credibility, confidence, respect, and trust of others. | Health experience: Has a patient or family healthcare experience with the organization and/or its clinicians that drives understanding or ownership. |
| Purpose: Passion, value alignment with, and emotional investment in the healthcare organization's mission. | Respect for religious tradition: Upholds or respects the values, beliefs, and legacy of the founding religious organization. <i>(When applicable.)</i> |

the first filter when considering potential candidates.

Critical elements of commitment include:

- **Integrity:** Demonstrates principled leadership that earns credibility, confidence, respect, and trust of others.
- **Purpose:** Passion, value alignment with, and emotional investment in the organization’s mission.

Uncovering opportunities:

- Who has a deep and abiding interest in the work of our organization?
- Who has had a personal or family health experience that deepens their ownership or understanding of our work?
- Whose values and beliefs align with those of the organization?
- Who has demonstrated a willingness and ability to advocate for the organization?
- Who has made a charitable gift in support of the organization’s work?
- Who has already served as a volunteer or organizational ally?

Assessing potential members:

- What shows alignment between the hospital or health system’s mission and this leader’s interests, values, and purpose?
- How has this leader already been involved in the hospital or health system as a patient, donor, advocate, volunteer, clinician, or other ally?
- Does this leader’s personal character inspire trust, respect, and confidence?
- What similar causes has this leader demonstrated interest in and support of that indicate fitness and motivation to serve this cause?



| Competencies: Criteria to Consider | |
|--|--|
| Critical | Core |
| <p>Agility: Gathers and processes information quickly within continuously changing circumstances in order to respond, reposition, or reinvent.</p> | <p>Financial literacy: Understands financial information/reports and utilizes that information to guide sound decisions and to serve as an effective steward to safeguard, grow, and deploy organizational funds.</p> |
| <p>Confidentiality: Demonstrates discretion; respects and maintains privacy and security of sensitive information at all times.</p> | <p>Emotional/cultural intelligence: Demonstrates self-awareness, empathy, and cultural understanding and considers the feelings, needs, and perspectives of others in making decisions.</p> |
| <p>Engagement: Demonstrates willingness, ability, and intention to fully participate in board roles and responsibilities as a motivated self-starter.</p> | <p>Collaboration: Works well with others and values being part of a team; connects and empowers others toward a common goal.</p> |
| <p>Objectivity: Brings an open mind and independent thinking to discussions and decisions. Seeks to understand various perspectives to inform debate.</p> | |

- Would this leader likely be self-motivated to be actively involved in the work of the board?
- Does the leader demonstrate respect for the values, beliefs, and legacy of the hospital or health system?

- What soft skills would enrich board effectiveness and/or experience?
- What unique experiences and insights would help us better navigate the current landscape, opportunities, and challenges ahead?
- What expertise, knowledge, or skills could enable meaningful innovation?

Competencies

Competencies include relevant and substantive knowledge, expertise, experience, acumen, skills, and abilities correlated with a board leader’s capability to successfully fulfill the role. Competencies involve both hard skills (i.e., learned capabilities such as financial acumen) and soft skills (i.e., inherent or developed traits such as collaboration).

Critical competencies include:

- **Agility:** Gathers and processes information quickly within continuously changing circumstances in order to respond, reposition, or reinvent.
- **Engagement:** Demonstrates willingness, ability, and intention to fully participate in board roles and responsibilities as a motivated self-starter.
- **Confidentiality:** Demonstrates discretion and respect for and maintains the privacy and security of sensitive information.
- **Objectivity:** Brings an open mind and independent thinking to discussions and decisions. Seeks to understand various perspectives to inform debate.

Uncovering opportunities:

- What expertise, knowledge, or skills are essential to organizational success now?

Assessing potential members:

- Will this leader bring hard and soft skills directly related to advancing the mission?
- Does this leader have the agility to learn, pivot, and respond amidst change?
- Will this potential member add real value in advancing key issues and priorities?
- Does this leader have the vision and focus to provide strategic leadership?
- Will this leader willingly share their professional expertise on a volunteer basis?
- Is this leader an effective storyteller and advocate who can engage others?

The competency dimension of the selection framework is most sensitive to local strategy and requires the most input and discernment of the hospital or health system governance committee. Required board competencies should reflect the strategy, environment, opportunities, and challenges of the organization—and what is valued generally evolves over time. When you consider strategic competencies, the board only needs a handful of strong leaders with the key abilities needed to enable the collective ability to adequately address these issues. Further,

as the board determines competencies required to advance its work, it must remember board work is about high-level, conceptual, strategic issues rather than daily operational issues; so, competencies should reflect that level of work rather than the ability to drive day-to-day operations or to fulfill roles that are appropriately the purview of hospital management.

There has often been debate in the competency arena about the specific subject matter expertise that should be held by hospital and health system board members. For example, how important is it for a board member to have a strong, working knowledge of the healthcare delivery system? Or, how important is it to have leaders that represent specialty expertise in areas like risk management, clinical quality, or data security? With this in mind, it is helpful to harken back to the legal role and obligation of the board: to fulfill a fiduciary role to steward a community asset. Board members are called to *govern* rather than to *manage*; hospitals hire highly qualified executive leaders who bring the explicit knowledge and experience to fulfill the management function. Therefore, avoid the temptation to over-index on subject matter expertise or to fall into the trap of building a shadow management team with experience in, for example, legal, accounting, IT, HR, and other management functions that then invites role and decision right confusion. Instead, it's more valuable for board members to bring tacit knowledge gained from personal and professional life experience that provides them with the wisdom, leadership capabilities, decision-making prowess, and intuition to effectively guide the organization forward. The organization is much better served by a board member with leadership capabilities to agilely address a broad range of issues and with the willingness and ability to continually seek to learn and understand key issues than it is to have someone with niche or duplicative expertise.

Connectivity

Connectivity illuminates existing relationships and civic, social, and business networks where a board member is positioned to utilize influence, gravitas, or credibility on behalf of the organization. The board can be transformative in opening up an organic and growing network of contacts to

A Competency Pick List

An organization's unique circumstances and opportunities will likely demand the addition of other select, strategic competencies and characteristics. These will be dictated by the work to be done to advance the organization's mission and strategy. While this list is far from exhaustive, below are additional competencies and characteristics frequently considered as board selection criteria. Generally, only select members hold these criteria rather than everyone. The hospital or health system governance committee can review this list to identify additional competencies for recruitment or can add other competencies based upon specific strategic needs, opportunities, and aspirations.

- **Accountable:** Accepts responsibility for follow-through and outcomes.
- **Active listening:** Makes a conscientious effort to hear what another person is saying to understand, process, and thoughtfully respond.
- **Change leadership:** Thoughtfully communicates, structures, and drives change to advance new or refined objectives.
- **Communication:** Advocates and shares stories to effectively illuminate and build support for the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plans.
- **Consensus building:** Builds shared understanding and ownership.
- **Courage:** Ask questions, challenges status quo, and positively utilizes productive dissent to drive better decisions and outcomes.
- **Creativity:** Sees new, unique, and valuable connections and insights.
- **Critical thinking:** Uses analysis and insights to understand and learn from quantitative and qualitative information in order to make decisions.
- **Curiosity:** Constantly seeks information to learn and to understand.
- **Decisiveness:** Demonstrates ability to make sound and timely decisions utilizing good judgment and available information.
- **Diplomacy:** Interacts with others in a thoughtful and effective manner to foster relationships, shared understanding, or similar.
- **Financial/business acumen:** Utilizes an understanding of business/finance to shape decisions, guide strategy, and evaluate performance.
- **Innovation:** Brings a spirit of discovery to identify new approaches and new opportunities as well as pathways to improve current work.
- **Insight:** Ability to use information and intuition to gain a deeper understanding or to see how things move together.
- **Long-term perspective:** Able to perceive the future state of issues and opportunities to bring a longer-term view to guide current work and decisions.
- **Negotiation:** Capacity to bring multiple parties to mutual agreement in a way that ideally fulfills the needs and wishes of each party.
- **Opinion maker:** Has the insights, influence, and gravitas to shape the perceptions or embrace of others around an issue or opportunity.
- **Partnership building:** Connects individuals, institutions, and community through forging meaningful partnerships.
- **Political astuteness:** Sees and navigates changing dynamics, perceptions, and priorities.
- **Problem solving:** Ability to identify and advance solutions to problems.
- **Risk tolerance:** Promotes smart risk-taking, understands and accepts the ramifications of risk, embraces interim failures, and supports disruptive initiatives to pursue transformational opportunities.
- **Team leadership:** Builds a culture of "we" — unifies the group around common goals.
- **Vision:** Harnesses intuition and insights about future opportunities, innovation, and growth to envision and guide the organization toward optimal strategy.

Connectivity: Criteria to Consider

| Critical | Core |
|---|---|
| Influence: Leverages personal social capital, stature, clout, and connections to advocate for and to foster philanthropy in support of the organization. | Community champion: Serves as an active leader within community social, civic, and/or business networks; seeks, understands, and shares community and stakeholder perspectives, priorities, and needs. |

secure advocates, partners, donors, and more.

A critical element of connectivity is:

- **Influence:** Leverages personal social capital, stature, clout, and connections to expand the circle of partners and advocates as well as securing the support of those of influence, affluence, and opinion-making.

Uncovering opportunities:

- Are there gaps in existing networks or circles of influence that must be filled?
- Whose influence, endorsement, or access will be essential to achieve our goals?
- Are there specific opportunities that require establishing new relationships?
- Who can provide or secure participation or endorsement that will be essential?
- Who can add needed credibility or gravitas to our work?
- Who has access and ability to secure essential meetings and commitments?
- Who can foster community partnerships to elevate the hospital's ability to serve?

Assessing potential members:

- Is this leader connected to individuals/organizations whose support is desired/required?
- Could this leader initiate relationships with or influence those we must engage?
- Would this leader utilize their social capital on behalf of the organization?
- Would this leader add credibility to our work?

If each board member has a role in creating and growing relationships, it can be helpful to consider the following:

- **Vocation:** A board member's professional role can indicate likely spheres of community influence. Here, you aren't considering their professional role because you need those skills and expertise to fill an operational function. Instead, you are looking for access to discrete and often well-defined niches.
- **Geography:** While most board members likely reside in the hospital's primary or secondary service area, there's value to "heat-mapping" home addresses of board members to ensure true community representation. The reality is that people who live

| Characteristics: Criteria to Consider | |
|--|--|
| Critical | Core |
| <p>Equity: Supports the organization's commitment to ensure every person has fair and equal access to opportunities and resources to support their ability to grow and succeed.</p> | <p>Diversity: Brings perspectives and life experiences to enrich discussion, decision making, and engagement. This dimension reflects attributes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race/culture/ethnicity • Gender/gender identification • Age • Religion/faith tradition • Sexual preference • Physical ability • Geographic location |
| <p>Inclusion: Committed to respecting values and calls upon each person's unique ideas and experiences.</p> | |
| <p>Belonging: Creates an environment of acceptance, psychological safety, and respect where leaders feel welcome, connected, and embraced.</p> | |

in one neighborhood often attend different schools, churches, clubs, and events than those who live in an adjacent neighborhood or zip code, so there is merit to looking at the geographic distribution of leaders both to ensure community interests and needs are represented and to facilitate access to movers, shakers, and allies in key communities.

- **Board roles:** There is value to figuring out where else a board member serves. For example, in a time when healthcare organizations are leaning in around addressing social determinants of health and social needs, there could be value to having a connection to potential partner organizations that address issues such as food insecurity, homelessness, or similar.

The value of board member connectivity will continue to rise for several reasons, including the healthcare's evolving role, the rise of systemization, and the need for charitable giving. First, hospitals and health systems increasingly reach beyond their own four walls and into the greater community, because the next curve of healthcare prioritizes going upstream to proactively build and safeguard community health and well-being rather than solely responding to illness and injury in an acute care environment. This means there is value in looking at the larger continuum of care and identifying community partners who can provide services, access points, or information to address social determinants of health and social needs. Second, as hospitals continue to come together as larger systems, the need for local community boards to represent the specific interests and needs of the local community and to build relationships within each community will become increasingly important. Third, as

healthcare organizations increasingly rely upon the value of voluntary, charitable giving from individuals, corporations, and foundations to fund their progress and plans, it will be essential for board members to help create a growing network of donor support to fund strategic initiatives including capital and programmatic investment. In each of these areas, the ability for board members to build local relationships and to utilize influence will be a valuable source of competitive advantage for the organization to harness.

As the board strategizes around connectivity needs for board recruitment, there is value to visually mapping both existing and aspirational relationships with individuals and institutions that have the capacity to advance the non-profit healthcare organization. The intent is to think strategically about where introductions or influence need to be secured in order to focus board selection in the connectivity dimension.

Characteristics

Characteristics are personal traits, perspectives, life experiences, and attributes. Characteristics capture elements that support a diversity of perspectives and experience around the board table. When you reach the characteristics dimension of the board selection framework, you have already identified well-qualified candidates based on each leader's individual ability both to fit and to add value. So, ensuring a broadness of perspective becomes a final filter in the consideration matrix to prioritize invitations to serve that will result in a well-balanced board.

Uncovering opportunities:

- What are the demographics of those we serve, and does our board reflect that?

- What life experiences and perspectives would promote understanding, community connection, or enhanced ability to advance mission?
- Who could enable being more in touch with or reflective of those served?
- Who can enable the board to have a broad and balanced perspective?

Assessing potential members:

- Will this person offer a unique and valuable perspective to our work?
- Will this person help infuse more empathy and understanding into our mission?
- Does this person have the credibility within the discrete segment of individuals they could represent to advocate for or to share the perspectives of that group?

Since the board acts as a steward on behalf of the community, the board must reflect that community. That's why the characteristics dimension of the selection framework integrates the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) at this phase of discernment and selection. Here is what each individual pillar is about:

- **Diversity** focuses largely on demographics and considers qualities like ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith tradition, and more.
- **Equity** ensures every person has fair and equal access to opportunities and resources to support their ability to grow and to succeed.
- **Inclusion** commits to leaders having not just a seat but also a voice. Inclusion respects, values, and calls upon each person's unique ideas and experiences.
- **Belonging** creates an environment of acceptance, psychological safety, and respect where leaders feel welcome, connected, and embraced.

Now, let's be quite clear here: this is not about box-checking, tokenism, or political correctness. Further, nobody is invited to join the board simply because they represent a diverse perspective or life experience—because nobody wants to be chosen simply because of a quota system. The aim is to authentically engage those with diverse and broad perspectives *who simultaneously fulfill every other selection dimension* in order to make the organization better. There

A Characteristic Pick List

Once again, as the board tailors the model to its unique circumstances, there will likely be other characteristics—such as individual traits or qualities—the board wishes to prioritize. Below are a few common characteristics boards often include in their decision-making matrix:

- **Awareness:** Knows the organization, its priorities, and its place in the community.
- **Compassion:** Demonstrates care and concern for the condition of others.
- **Energy:** Brings enthusiasm, initiative, and positivity.
- **Financial capacity:** Has ability to make a meaningful charitable gift.
- **Future-focused:** Can envision a desired future state and work backwards from it.
- **Goal-oriented:** Committed to achieving key plans, outcomes, and milestones.
- **Inspiration:** Motivates others through their passion, purpose, and commitments.
- **Loyalty:** Demonstrates fidelity and allegiance to the mission and organization.
- **Motivation:** Has the drive to act to make things happen and to achieve goals.
- **Proximity:** Lives or works in the organization's primary or secondary service area.

is an abundance of qualified talent out there to fulfill all of the criteria, so it's not an either-or proposition. That's why DEIB is a final set of filters for prioritizing invitations to those already identified as having the competencies to contribute value and to lead. It's about driving for excellence, and the strategic lift of achieving DEIB is supported by research. For example, a Deloitte study found organizations that commit to DEIB principles secure increased competitive advantage, better decision making, improved financial performance, and enhanced innovation.¹ Organizations that are thoughtful about DEIB also achieve a board that better reflects the composition of their community.

The aim is to authentically engage those with diverse and broad perspectives who simultaneously fulfill every other selection dimension in order to make the organization better.

It can feel overwhelming when you begin to recalibrate the board to better reflect underrepresented perspectives. However, take it in steps rather than giving in to the frustration of what can feel like an unattainable goal—inaction is far worse than incremental action. Boards are encouraged to start small and to deliberately move toward a desired state rather than feeling the board has to be “fixed” all at once. For example, it can be daunting to make meaningful movement across a broad span of opportunities—such as race, religion, gender, and age—all at once. So, start

somewhere and commit to continuing to move the dial. First, make the effort to understand your current environment, to identify the gaps between your present and ideal future state, and to have thoughtful and authentic discussions about the organization's philosophy, approach, and process to ensure a diversity of perspectives. Second, communicate your vision and intentions and secure the input and endorsement of the board as a whole. Third, create a plan for change that includes intended outcomes, timelines, and evaluation points.

It's also okay to start with a more narrow intention in order to achieve some early movement. For example, “diversity” in the past largely focused on bringing women and people of color around the table. While the concept of diversity continues to grow, this is still not a bad place to start as you begin to shift the composition of the organization. It is better to make a deeper commitment to movement in two realms than to take a scattershot approach that does not demonstrate meaningful change.

Many organizations must take a hard look at how they build a pipeline of prospective candidates and move beyond informal brainstorming to proactively sourcing the names of prospective board candidates to move the dial on DEIB. However, when making DEIB a conscious commitment moving forward, the board can create lasting and sustainable change across about three board term cycles.

Another area of reflection here: nobody wants to hold up a tent pole alone. Let's be blunt. Nobody wants to be the token “X” person in the room; you must commit to creating communities

1 Paul Wellener, Victor Reyes, and Chad Moutray, “Beyond Reskilling: Manufacturing's Future Depends on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” Deloitte, 2021.

Board Discussion Guide:

- Does our board have a shared understanding of the essential and strategic criteria required for successful board leadership?
- Do we have clear, documented, and consistently utilized criteria for identifying, vetting, selecting, and inviting future board members?
- How can we strengthen our resolve and our process to exclusively invite future board members who are optimally suited to serve?
- What demands different qualities, expertise, capability, or readiness now?
- What board activities, behaviors, and commitments would really move the dial?
- What other needs and opportunities affect the criteria for future board members?
- What's required to navigate today's complex environment or overcome obstacles?
- What are we committed to do in the next 100 days to enhance board selection criteria and our processes for identifying, vetting, and inviting new board members?

within the board. So, if you want to make a move on any indicator, work to ensure there are multiple people to represent a perspective. Board size is a supreme limiting factor here: most organizations only have about 20 leaders on their entire board. However, everyone needs an ally to provide the strength and support to use one's voice—and ensuring that occurs is a fundamental aspect of true inclusion.

Characteristics also envelops other concepts beyond DEIB. For example, what other individual traits will be valuable to have around the board table? These qualities can enrich board performance, cohesion, experience, or more. For example, the organization may wish to proactively seek those who excel at being future-focused or those who are an inspirational force for good. As the board talks about what is needed to further hone the organization, additional personal traits and qualities can be nestled under this dimension.

Integrating Criteria into the Prospective Board Member Interview

Once the board has identified its selection criteria and used that framework to identify prospective candidates, the framework can also be used for the next layer of candidate vetting and engaging. For example, a diligent selection process generally includes a face-to-face, personal interview with each candidate to ensure perceived fit with selection criteria. This interview is generally conducted by a member of the board governance committee—sometimes with the participation of the board chair or hospital president/CEO. The interview first seeks to uncover commitments such as passion for the mission and motivation to help the organization. Then, the interview shifts to considering characteristics, competencies, and



connectivity that position a board member to add value to the work. Questions to explore each dimension can include:

Commitments:

- What personal experience have you had with the healthcare organization?
- Why is the hospital's work personally meaningful to you?
- How does the mission inspire, motivate, and speak to you?
- Are there specific areas of the hospital's work you particularly care about?
- How does advancing health align with your values, beliefs, and interests?
- Are you willing to commit time to work inside and outside the boardroom?

Competencies:

- What knowledge, experience, or skills would you bring to this effort?
- How could you leverage your experience to add value to the board?
- How do the roles and responsibilities align with your expertise and interests?
- Are you comfortable sharing the hospital's vision and story with others?
- Would you be willing to use your professional expertise on a volunteer basis?

Connectivity:

- Would you be willing to connect the hospital with those in your network?
- Are there areas where you feel your influence could be particularly helpful?
- Are you willing to take an active role advancing advocacy and philanthropy?
- What training, tools, or support would position you to be successful?

Characteristics:

- What unique perspectives and life experiences would you bring to the board?
- What segments within our community would you hope to offer a voice?

Through the individual interview, the board has an opportunity to, once again, affirm the rightness of fit against selection criteria and to also have a meaningful pre-commitment conversation with prospective future members, so they are positioned to make an active and informed choice to serve and to bring their full selves to the board role.

Bringing It All Together

The hospital or health system board can be a powerful force for good. The board can be a unique and valuable source of competitive advantage when there is tight alignment between mission, strategy, roles, and selection criteria to serve. In today's turbulent healthcare operating environment, it is also more important than ever to secure board leadership who bring a well-rounded set of attributes to their board service. By embracing an expanded and holistic set of criteria that embraces commitments, competencies, connections, and characteristics, the organization is positioned to identify and engage a cadre of committed board members that can deliver exceptional value and drive impact to advance the current and future needs of the hospital or health system.

Download a comprehensive board recruitment matrix for evaluating possible candidates based on this framework at www.governanceinstitute.com/board-recruitment.

The Governance Institute thanks Betsy Chapin Taylor, FAHP, CEO, Accordant, for contributing this article. She can be reached at betsy@accordanthealth.com.