

Building Teamwork and a Positive Culture for Governance Support Staff throughout Corewell Health

By **Steffany J. Dunker**, Managing Counsel, *Corewell Health*

In large, complex organizations, especially those created through a series of integrations as Corewell Health was, multiple governance support staff (we use the term “liaisons”) support various boards and committees—and each has their own way of doing the governance work. As Corewell Health moved toward a single health system with unified governance practices and standards, it has been invaluable to create a team of the many liaisons who were previously on an island alone.

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Bringing Governance Support Staff Together

As our health system moved from a “federation” to an operating company model, we sought to leverage the governance knowledge of all of our professionals (collectively with well over 100 years of experience) by bringing them together to create a “governance team.” Each of these liaisons works in different parts of the organization, but all interface with one another, share best practices, and create standard work used throughout the organization.

We started the dialogue by bringing a group of our hospital liaisons together four years ago for quarterly lunch education and sharing sessions (sharing of best practices as well as asking for assistance with technology hurdles and other governance challenges). Over salads and sandwiches, we built rapport, earned each other’s trust, and jointly worked to solve various governance issues. This became a forum for communication where none formally existed. After a year or so, that group expanded from the hospital liaisons to all liaisons across the organization and, while it became a bit more complex by including other business lines, the number of practical solutions created and best practices shared far outweighed the complexity of the discussions.

What’s Inside:

- **Building Teamwork and a Positive Culture for Governance Support Staff throughout Corewell Health**
- **Game Changers: Sharing Tips, Successes, Challenges, and Fears**

Through this forum, we built a team of governance liaisons from a disparate group of individual contributors. Our initial meetings lasted 1.5 hours with 30 minutes of lunch and conversations, 30 minutes of education, and 30 minutes of questions/answers and problem sharing/solving. Everyone at the table had a voice and was expected to contribute; the only ground rules were to be curious and open to new ideas and that we would leave the meeting with clarity about organizational directives, initiatives, etc. and how they would impact governance (or vice versa!). At first, the conversations were simple: “I have this challenge” or “this is how I solve that.” But after a few sessions, the conversations evolved to be “what if we tried this,” “I think doing this would be more efficient,” and “I know this is done at X health system and is highly effective.” Our little lunch group transformed into a governance town hall. Work friends brought work friends who also supported governance activities and it ballooned to a connection point and support system for 40-plus individuals in our organization. The liaisons began requesting information, materials, and standard work, identifying areas that needed improved processes.

→ Key Takeaways for Governance Support Staff

As governance support staff work to build teamwork and a positive culture at their own organizations, they should:

- Create a culture where each team member’s job, ideas, and perspective are valued. Suggestions and solutions can and should come from everyone.
- Be curious (ask tough questions), open (explore new ideas), and available/present (ready to collaborate and work together).
- Have a positive attitude.
- Ensure communication is robust—you cannot overcommunicate.
- Have training and onboarding for governance support staff that explains their role and responsibilities, as well as the importance of working with others across the system to improve governance.

The Result: A Team Working towards the Same Goal

Our goal all along has been to create community and a support system for governance professionals. With formal education, expectations, and most importantly, others who understand the job (and the tremendous amount of pressure that comes with the role), new liaisons get more training and onboarding than those in the past. They have a body of standards to rely on as opposed to creating something themselves. Some of

the original underpinnings still resonate in that we will often come up with an idea, pilot it, and then revisit what needs to be altered in order to make it even more effective. We have created a network of support and camaraderie. All are on the same team, working toward a common goal.

During the early COVID years, we collaborated on the problem-solving that was required for virtual meetings, a virtual office, and other remote governance work conundrums we never could have fathomed before then.

The structure has changed to drop-in sessions for all liaisons and monthly meetings with the advisors (the governance support to the main boards) who then share the standard work with the liaisons in their regions. The advisors have their own sessions with liaisons for their regions to discuss region-specific issues and coalesce around specific approaches. Participation is still voluntary and everyone has a voice—the more difficult the question posed, the better. We all leave meetings learning something and implementing a new idea or practice. We are all committed to continual improvement.

Our governance team members have developed materials to help onboard new liaisons to their roles and many of the seasoned professionals lean in to their less-experienced colleagues and provide wisdom and help them learn tips as well as grace under intense pressure. In addition to informal mentoring, we have a formal orientation and mentoring process for new liaisons. Another benefit is that with standard expectations, liaisons can support each other when they are out of office.

Transparent and consistent two-way communication is critical to allow the governance team to function at the highest level. In addition to the regularly scheduled communications, we have a culture that encourages any and every liaison to ideate and collaborate, and to share solutions with the governance team at any time. This includes asking questions and pointing out any lack of clarity or inconsistency in what they are hearing. By creating one governance team with one goal, we have adopted efficiencies that make all of us work smarter, together.

The Governance Institute thanks Steffany J. Dunker, Managing Counsel, Corewell Health, for contributing this article. She can be reached at steffany.dunker@spectrumhealth.org.

Game Changers: Sharing Tips, Successes, Challenges, and Fears

The following is a summary of a session at The Governance Institute's September 2022 Governance Support Forum. This session was facilitated by Lindsay Laug, Solutions Expert, The Governance Institute, and speakers included Suzie Marcum, M.B.A., Executive Assistant, Reid Health, and Julie Dresback, Director of Corporate Governance, St. Luke's Health System

Governing Board Succession Planning

Having the right board members at the table—with the expertise, experience, skills, engagement, and level of diversity needed—is critical to effective governance. Yet, finding these board members can be challenging. Many hospitals and health systems are struggling to ensure their boards are robust enough to lead their organization in the current market. Suzie Marcum, M.B.A., Executive Assistant at Reid Health, discussed her organization's board recruitment challenges and steps they are taking to ensure they have an engaged, competency-based board.

Reid Health, an independent health system in Indiana, has 17 volunteer board members, and they are actively recruiting for three additional members. Up to 25 percent of board members can be physicians, and they currently have four physician board members. In addition to these physicians, they have three medical staff officers (Chief of Staff, Vice Chief of Staff, and the Medical Staff Secretary) serving as ex-officio, non-voting board members. These members come to all the board meetings, participate in strategic retreats, and attend educational opportunities such as The Governance Institute's Leadership Conferences. Having physicians involved in governance has been a game changer for Reid Health's board. These members are highly engaged, bring a much-needed point of view, and have expertise that has been beneficial during boardroom discussions.

Reid Health also has a group of 29 community members that sit on subcommittees, which they call their community board members. Before anyone can become a board member, they must first be a community board member. This committee experience serves as a training ground for possible new board members, and it is also a way to vet these members to see if they may be good candidates for Reid Health's governing board (for example, do

they prepare for meetings, ask relevant questions, attend meetings, and take part in discussions?).

In addition to the governing board and community board members, Reid Health has a Network Operating Council, which is a group of physician board members that work with the physician practices owned by Reid Health. The Network Operating Council has six subcommittees: audit and compliance, community well-being, finance, quality and legal/risk, and strategic planning. The physicians that are chairs of the Network Operating Council subcommittees are placed as a community board member on the governing board subcommittees.

→ Key Questions for Consideration

- Do we have an up-to-date, comprehensive board development and recruitment process?
- What competencies are missing on the board? Have we conducted a competency assessment to identify gaps in knowledge, expertise, and diversity?
- What are we doing to ensure board members are properly educated and engaged in their role?
- Do we have a board leadership succession plan that identifies the skills and competencies needed, the nomination and selection process, and how to handle transitions from one leader to another?
- How are we ensuring that board leaders thoroughly understand their role and are performing their duties? Do we regularly assess board leaders for effectiveness?
- What is our process for identifying and developing potential board leaders?

While Reid Health has a governance structure in place that allows for robust physician participation and the community board members offer a group of potential candidates for the system governing board, they still face recruitment challenges in their region. Reid Health serves an extensive rural geographic market, covering 10 cities, eight counties, and two states, which can make it difficult to recruit new board members. Many are not willing to drive long distance to attend monthly meetings and be fully engaged in the system's governance. There is also a fairly small pool of candidates. There are many

non-profits in the region and those in leadership positions are often asked to serve on several boards.

Marcum, the board chair, the CEO, and the leadership development committee came together and identified two specific challenges they would like to work through: 1) taking board members from participants to board leaders, and 2) moving community board members to governing board members. The board and leadership development committee then came up with an action plan that included:

- Increase membership to 20 individuals (as authorized in their bylaws). This will allow them to have a larger pool for the next board leaders.
- Conduct individual board and community board member competency self-assessment. They asked all members about their current competencies—in areas such as finance, quality and safety, strategy, technology/cybersecurity, community health, leadership, and others—and compiled those to see where there were gaps.
- Have subcommittee chairs evaluate all committee members for engagement.

Next steps will also be to:

- Engage with a third-party consulting firm to further evaluate potential board leaders. This will include conducting interviews with board members who have leadership potential, developing a recruitment plan, and creating a roadmap for the expected succession scenario over the next five years.
- Develop step-by-step educational, orientation, and mentoring plans. They will be revitalizing their orientation plan, outlining an education plan for both potential leaders and new board members, designing a mentoring plan for senior board members to mentor incoming board members, and having educational speakers at their social events.

While Reid Health's efforts are still in the works, they anticipate that taking these steps will allow the system to ultimately have a more engaged, diverse, knowledgeable, and competency-based board.

→ Recommended Resources

Board Recruitment and Leadership Succession Planning

- [Board Recruitment](#)
- [Board Development and Recruitment: The Right Experience, the Right Balance, and the Right Attributes](#)
- [Building a More Diverse Board](#)
- [Planning for Future Board Leadership](#)
- [Recruitment Tips to Advance the Diversity of Independent Hospital Boards](#)
- For a sample board skills matrix, board succession planning grid, board leadership position descriptions, and more, view our templates collection at www.governanceinstitute.com/Templates.

Maintaining Due Diligence, Improving Agility, and Preserving Board Engagement through a CEO Transition

In January 2020, St. Luke's Health System, an Idaho-based system with eight hospitals and over 339 clinics and centers, hired a new CEO. While the transition to a new CEO can be daunting for boards, management, and governance support staff, especially since the past CEO had served for 10 years, Julie Dresback, Director of Corporate Governance, discussed how her organization was able to maintain board engagement and use this leadership change as an opportunity to improve governance processes and practices.

"With the new board planning process, we don't set it for a year and go. We reorganize it constantly."

—Julie Dresback, Director of Corporate Governance,
St. Luke's Health System

The transition to a new CEO allowed the system board and Dresback to step back and reconsider their board planning process. Previously, when planning deep-dive topics for the year, the board had a retreat in November where they would set the schedule for the entire year. With the pandemic, economic shifts, workforce issues, and many other strong headwinds affecting the system, it became clear that this was no longer effective. To plan properly in this new

environment, they would need a planning process that was flexible, allowing for regular changes and updates to ensure the board was focused on the right topics at the right moments.

Dresback had already begun creating a board calendar that listed out topics the board and its eight committees were planning to discuss so that everything was in one place and easy for her to review and track. This allowed her to stay organized and see everything that was coming up at a glance. Throughout the last couple years, the calendar has grown and become the foundation for planning efforts. It is now a working document that is regularly reviewed by the board and executive team (see **Exhibit 1**).

Exhibit 1: Sample Board Plan

2022/2023 - Board Topic Planning

This is a dynamic planning document subject to change.
Last updated 11/28/2022

September	November	January	March	May	July	September	November
2022	2022	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023
Safety Together Mission Moment							
<i>Dr. Smith</i> (20 min)	<i>Dr. Finch</i> (20 min)	<i>Green, RN</i> (20 min) Focus on Safety Huddles	<i>Dr. Smith</i> (20 min)	<i>Brown, RN</i> (20 min) Focus on Patient Safety	<i>Dr. Gale</i> (20 min)	<i>Dr. Doe</i> (20 min)	<i>Dr. Lowry</i> (20 min)
Balanced Performance and Enterprise Risk Management							
Balanced Performance FY23 Targets & Metrics <i>Johnson</i>	Balanced Performance Deep Dive: Care Exp <i>Dr. Smith</i>	Balanced Performance Deep Dive: RAMI <i>Jane Doe</i>	Balanced Performance Deep Dive: TBD <i>Black</i>	Balanced Performance Deep Dive: TBD <i>Jane Doe</i>	Balanced Performance FY24 Target Development <i>Johnson</i>	Balanced Performance FY24 Targets & Metrics <i>Johnson</i>	Balanced Performance Deep Dive: TBD <i>Brown, RN</i>
Budget FY23 Financial and Capital Plan Approval	Enterprise Risk Management: Quarterly Update	Enterprise Risk Management: Workforce Engagement	Enterprise Risk Management: Cyber Security	Enterprise Risk Management: Patient & Staff Safety	Enterprise Risk Management: TBD	Budget FY24 Financial and Capital Plan Approval	Enterprise Risk Management: Quarterly Update
Strategy and Education Topics							
Annual Board Retreat Dialogue and Prep	Review Retreat Outcomes Business Plan & Priorities	Shifting Economy Impacts on Consumer & Market Dynamics	Care Management Benefits of Effective Care Management Design	Current Healthcare Landscape Updates & implications for Healthcare Systems	Technology Solutions Tools to improve Healthcare Equity	Annual Board Retreat Dialogue and Prep	Review Retreat Outcomes Business Plan & Priorities
Community Health & Engagement	Approve 5-year Strategy Review plans for strategic focus areas	Effective Governance Review current and proposed Board Competencies	Effective Governance Initial conversation regarding committee structures	5-Year Strategy Progress Updates	TBD	Effective Governance Recommendations on committee structures	TBD
Executive Session Topics							
September Strategy: Discussion & development	November Proposed Strategic Initiatives	TBD	TBD	May Effective Governance: Review initial Structure Recommendations	TBD	TBD	November Proposed Strategic Initiatives

Blue indicates proposed primary facilitator

Example document only. Names and topics have been changed

This calendar is also included in the materials for President’s Cabinet, which meets every other week. Having all the executives in the President’s Cabinet see this allows them to know what is coming up, have input into what the high-priority topics should be, and to understand what the board and CEO are focusing on at meetings. This has also allowed the board to be more agile and transparent with the executive team, creating alignment among system leadership.

The year after hiring a new CEO, St. Luke’s also hired a new COO. She is accountable for the cross-functional governance bodies and runs balanced performance and enterprise risk management efforts. This change in leadership became a perfect opportunity to revise and revamp operational governance.

The COO, CEO, and Dresback reviewed their performance metrics and mapped them to specific committees to ensure that those committees are tracking and monitoring these key areas. From this work, they created a performance snapshot that is sent to the board before each meeting and highlights how the system is performing. Recently, they also worked to map enterprise risks to different board committees so that those are effectively watched and managed. Ensuring that these performance and risk areas are prioritized by the right committees and that highlights are reported to the board ensures they are getting the attention needed and that all can work together on these efforts.

All these changes, fueled by new leadership, have led to a dynamic planning process and leadership that is aligned throughout the system.

→ Recommended Resources

CEO Succession Planning and Transitions:

- [The Board and CEO Relationship: The First 120 Days](#)
- [Searching and Preparing for a New CEO](#)
- [Succession Planning, Fourth Edition](#)
- [Webinar: How to Hire a CEO: A Guide for Ensuring Effective Selection at the Most Important Position](#)

Board Calendars and Planning:

- [Resource Planning: A Framework for Enhancing Board Work](#)
- [Governance Support: A Behind the Scenes Guide to Ensure Your Board is Prepared, 2nd Edition](#)
- To view additional samples of board calendars, view The Governance institute’s templates collection at www.governanceinstitute.com/Templates.

The Governance Institute is holding ongoing Game Changers networking sessions via Zoom. If you would like to join these conversations, email Lindsay Laug at llaug@nrchealth.com.

To view the full presentation or others from the 2022 Governance Support Forum, visit www.governanceinstitute.com/Vid_Support-forum_2022.

