

The Governance Institute

Checklist: Make Time for Strategic Discussions

Governance Institute research shows that boards that spend half or more of their meeting time devoted to “active discussion, deliberation, and debate about strategic priorities of the organization” are more likely to be high-performing boards, and it has been demonstrated that high-performing boards have a significant impact on organizational performance.

With full board meeting agendas, it can seem nearly impossible to free up at least half of the meeting time to these kinds of discussions. The following is a checklist for the board and/or support staff to implement to enable the board time for this mission-critical activity:

1. **Implement a consent agenda** for routine items that only need approval and do not require discussion, such as prior board and committee meeting minutes.
2. **The board chair and CEO should jointly develop board meeting agendas** that include “framing questions” for selected topics on the agenda to help focus the discussion (e.g., what do you need to better understand regarding the organization’s clinical integration efforts?).
3. **Delegate work to committees appropriately**, and review committee charters and structure every two to three years to ensure that the committees are as efficient and effective as possible. This way, the board is not spending time doing work that committees could do, nor duplicating committee work.
4. **Prioritize discussion over reporting** during board and committee meetings (all members should be expected to read board packets and other relevant materials prior to the meeting and understand that there will be no verbal reports of the materials during the meeting). Only allow verbal presentations if there is a specific “ask” of the board.
5. **Schedule committee meetings in proper sequencing** prior to board meetings to facilitate workflow and approvals.
6. **Schedule an education session at every board meeting** to ensure the board is knowledgeable about topics before decisions must be made.
7. **Include in the board calendar a specific date for an annual, multi-day board retreat on strategic issues and/or planning.** All those who need to attend must commit to this date far in advance. This also allows for plenty of time to determine which topics need to be addressed at the retreat.