

BY DESIGN:

Best Practices for Organization Governance and Operations



By Design was created by NeighborImpact after August 2021 listening sessions during which NeighborImpact partners said they needed more information on the management and operation of a nonprofit. NeighborImpact needs reliable partners to leverage its work and resources, and investing in the operational strength and capacity of our partners help us do more. By Design is distributed quarterly.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ✓ What makes a good Board of Directors?
- ✓ The importance of Board Culture
- ✓ How to be intentional about Board Culture

Today's Topic: Board of Directors



Our Central Oregon communities are rich with amazing people. They share their talents, time, ties, and treasures including taking on the hard work of serving on non-profit boards. They tend to have a personal commitment to an organization's cause and are deeply knowledgeable about its direction and operations. They engage in and support organizations with a crystal-clear vision (what will be better) and mission (how the organization contributes to the vision).

Amazing People, Amazing Boards

Nonprofit board members know change happens and can happen fast. Let's look at the impact of the recent pandemic. Purposefully designed boards and staff who quickly embraced innovation and collective critical thinking designed strategies that addressed the immediate impacts of the pandemic. Most often, this opened doors for what and how the organization could operate beyond the pandemic. This may include new internal efficiencies, engaging partnering organizations in ways that leverage limited resources for "win-win" actions, and/or increased awareness and understanding of "essential services."

Amazing people working together can create amazing boards. These are the boards that operate in a culture that weathers the storm of a pandemic and continuously seeks new opportunities to reach the organization's goals. Board culture is about constructive interactions between board members and is critical for boards that strive to be more dynamic, are performance-oriented, and want to make real and meaningful impacts.

A board's culture is about the unwritten rules that influence its members' interactions and decisions. Mindsets, hidden assumptions, beliefs, and values all influence board discussions, the quality of engagement and trust, and how decisions are made. Identifying board culture can be all over the map with a wide range of working styles and dynamics however, four main board culture styles exist.

The 4 main board culture styles:

Inquisitive:

Boards who value the exchange of ideas and the exploration of alternatives.

Decisive:

Boards that focus on measurable results, drive a focused agenda and make outcome-oriented decisions.

Collaborative:

Boards who value consensus and focus on having a greater purpose.

Disciplined:

Boards that emphasize consistency, manage risks, and prioritize planning and protocols.

The board culture should align with the organization's business strategy and environment. For example, an organization envisioning significant growth when strategy must be reviewed and reinvented frequently may benefit from a board culture that is more inquisitive and flexible, where members question assumptions and value the exchange of ideas.

"The board culture should align with the organization's business strategy and environment."

Because board culture is an important driver of board performance, identifying board culture and how it supports the organization can occur during an annual board assessment, when a new Executive Director or its composition is changing, or when the business strategy is changing. Another less obvious but important time for examining board culture is when trends are occurring external to the organization that may influence the organization's vision, mission and how the organization's work is getting done.

" Public and private funders are calling for greater board diversity and accountability."

Today, Central Oregon is experiencing significant external shifts such as unprecedented population growth, an increased number of people who are homeless/houseless, and public safety issues. Any of these trends can directly or indirectly impact an organization.

The good news is a wider cross-section of residents are getting involved in issues they are passionate about. Policy leaders and elected officials are re-prioritizing their efforts to align with current and emerging shifts, and public and private funders are calling for greater board diversity and accountability.

An organization's internal direction and operation and external trends impact board culture. No one board culture is right or wrong, rather it is about the board recognizing their existing culture and collectively identifying the optimum way for the board to work together. For example, in a crisis, like a pandemic or a turnaround situation, the board may want to be more decisive and results-driven. Or, at a strategic point when an organization needs new resources to increase capacity, the board may want their culture to become more collaborative which can cause bringing new and diverse members to the boardroom.

As boards identify their targeted culture, four questions are typically asked:

Do we have the right people serving on our board?

Boards can consider becoming more diverse, expand expertise, and/or connections to help shift dynamics toward the desired culture. A board wanting to become more adaptive and inquisitive may add entrepreneurs or innovators.

Are we structuring our discussions and tasks to focus on the right issues and actions?

Boards can reinforce their priorities by structuring committee and board assignments and meeting agendas in ways that support their targeted board culture.

Do board and committee leaders model the targeted board culture?

Board presidents and committee chairs can move topics and meeting agendas to align with the desired culture. Board discussions can be re-framed for idea generation or decision-making.

How are individual board members contributing to the culture?

As board culture is identified, individual board members can provide feedback to one another on behaviors that may need to change.

Amazing boards engage amazing people, those who bring their talents, time, ties, and treasures and are committed to making real and meaningful impacts for organizations, communities, and society. Fostering the desired board culture is a good investment in making results happen.

About NeighborImpact: NeighborImpact is a private non-profit governed by a board of directors drawn from across the community. Since 1985, NeighborImpact has led the region in developing solutions and bringing resources to Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. We help meet the basic needs of Central Oregonians, build economic security and create a community where everyone thrives. To learn more about NeighborImpact please visit www.neighborimpact.org.

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