

## Clean Governance Bob Harris, CAE

It is good to look for ways to improve board meeting processes and outcomes. Are there any bad habits? Does the governance reflect a high performing organization? What improvements can be made?

Too many meetings end with directors whispering, “What did we accomplish?” “Was there a need to meet?” “Too much information, not enough time.”

I have observed the offenses. So many reports that directors’ eyes glaze over. Running out of time to discuss meaningful topics. Disrespect for the chair’s role or the meeting agenda.

Is it possible to clean up governance? Here are the tips I most frequently offer.

1. **80% Right is OK** – The devil is in the details ---- and the details bog down decision making. If the board can get their discussions and decision about 80% right they should feel confident that committees, staff and consultants be able to understand the motion and reach 100%.
2. **Brief is Best** – Volunteers are busy. Keep reports to a page or two, dashboards depict data and trends, and info-graphics communicate impact.
3. **Shun Micromanagement** – The board’s responsibility is governance --- NOT management, micromanagement or supervision.
4. **Read to Lead** – Governance requires familiarity with the mission, bylaws and policies. Directors who do not read tend to question or repeat issues that were prescribed by prior boards. Prepare for meetings by studying the agenda and reports. You can recognize volunteers who do not prepare by the frequent phrase, “I just have a question.”
5. **We are in the Weeds**– Position discussions at a 50,000 foot altitude or higher. Committees work under the board, at about 30,000’. Staff administer to the daily tasks. Directors are empowered to recognize conversations that take a dive into committee or staff work by stating, “I feel like we are in the weeds.”
6. **Respect** – There are many players in governance and management. Be respectful of the entire team, embracing diverse ideas and people.

7. **Don't Do Committee Work at the Board Table** – Committees supplement the board's work. Avoid discussions that rehash committee recommendations or drop down into committee work.
8. **Board Governs, Staff Manage** – The phrase describes the most important relationship in the organization. A board governs and allows staff to carry out management duties without interference.
9. **Measure Performance** – Many proposals come before the board. Frequently ask, "How will we know if we are successful, shouldn't we set performance measures?"
10. **Dust off the Plan** – The strategic plan is the roadmap. Dust it off and keep a copy on the board table. As motions are made ask, "What part of our strategic plan does this advance?"
11. **Craft the Agenda** – It is not the best use of board time to listening to reports and updates. Craft an agenda focused on advancing the mission and goals so that every meeting ends with significant outcomes.
12. **Board Self-Evaluation** – Undertake a self-evaluation to discuss board effectiveness and satisfaction. "Are we doing a good job?" Members have a right to expect a high-performing board.



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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com).

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<b>Shun Micro-management</b>	<b>Respect</b>	<b>Measure Performance</b>	<b>Board Self-Evaluation</b>	<a href="mailto:bob@rchcae.com">bob@rchcae.com</a>