

# Vision: Leadership Focus



June 2009

## Board and Staff Partnerships and Beyond

### Fast Focus Tips

- Exceptional boards and chief executives ensure that trust, candor, and respect guide their relationship.
- They share good news often and bad news early and openly and informally discuss concerns and ideas between board meetings.
- They attract increasingly qualified and talented chief executives and retain them longer.

Find the book,  
\*[www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org)

Don't miss the article on page 3 on reframing governance for successful collaborations and partnerships.

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As we embrace the summer of 2009, we can say with certainty that the way we approach our challenges does make a difference. United Ways and agencies are being more innovative than ever. To make it all work, high quality board and chief executive relationships are essential. Constructive Partnership is the first principle noted in the book, *The Source: Twelve Principles of Governance that Powers Exceptional Boards*, published by BoardSource\*.



Exceptional boards encourage a strong, honest chief executive to pose questions and offer answers. In turn, the chief executive provides boards with tools and information to govern exceptionally so they are ready for strategic thinking. Both welcome differing points of view.

Weighty decisions abound this year. Exceptional boards make each decision a thoughtful and strategic exercise, not merely one to help get through until the next phase of the cycle. With each major decision, perspectives shift and new possibilities may emerge. The chief executive can make decisions easier by giving attention to three key areas:

- 1. Fill the information gap:** Bridge the span between staff who live and breathe the organization every day and board members who come together for brief periods of time. Find a balance between providing too many trees and not enough forest for the board to see the way to future-oriented decisions. Frame decisions so the board can find the entry point most important to the organization.
- 2. Build board cohesion:** Candor is most easily achieved and sustained in a climate of mutual respect. So time invested in helping the board know one another and work as a team is highly worthwhile. Also, provide time for board members to discuss things not suggested by the staff so they "own" their time together in a positive way.
- 3. Create the right meeting structure:** Boards need time to reflect and have exploratory discussions, apart from addressing a long list of "action items." Ensure time for long-range planning as well as oversight roles.

\* Reprinted with permission from *The Source: Twelve Principles That Power Exceptional Boards* by BoardSource Blue Ribbon Panel, a publication of BoardSource, formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards. For more information about BoardSource, call 800-883-6262 or visit [www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org). BoardSource © 2007. Text may not be reproduced without written permission from BoardSource.

**12 Principles of Governance That Power Exceptional Boards**

1. **Constructive Partnership**
2. Mission Driven
3. Strategic Thinking
4. Culture of Inquiry
5. Independent-Mindedness
6. Ethos of Transparency
7. Compliance with Integrity
8. Sustaining Resources
9. Results Oriented
10. Intentional Board Practices
11. Continuous Learning
12. Revitalization

*Vision* features one 'power' principle in each issue.

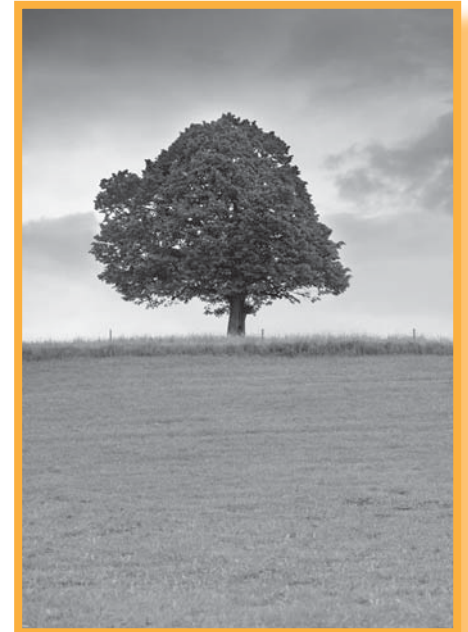
# Checklist: Investing in your Board, Realizing Rewards

Building a quality partnership between the board and chief executive is worth the time and effort. Here are some "investments" important for making the partnership stronger:

- Take time to develop trust and candor. For the chief executive, it takes courage to admit to the full board if something has not worked well. Be sure the chief executive has private time with the board chair who practices strong listening skills.
- Display the full dedication required of the board to attend meetings faithfully and arrive prepared to discuss the materials sent in advance.
- Board members must ensure a real commitment to understand the issues facing an organization so they can help develop the right strategies and performance measures for success.

Here are some benefits of these investments:

- Recruitment becomes easier because new board candidates are attracted to the energy and enthusiasm displayed by current members.
- For staff and volunteer teams, there is real satisfaction and confidence in knowing that the strategies being implemented have the full endorsement of the board.
- The entire organization benefits by making full use of both board and staff contributions, wherever the lines may be drawn.



**The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.**

**- Nelson Henderson**

<b>Responsible Boards x</b>	<b>The Source of Power =</b>	<b>Exceptional Boards</b>
Delegate operations to chief executive Evaluate chief executive annually Ensure fair and competitive compensation Develop a job description with and for the chief executive	Trust, candor, and respect Sharing good and bad news Communication in and between meetings Open and honest chief executive Insightful tools and information	Face and resolve problems early Attract more qualified chief executives Retain talented chief executives longer Change executive leadership at the right time

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## Beyond Boards: Governing Partnerships

Hold on to your hat – a new dynamic is in town. It's bold, aspirational, and can be... well, messy. In addition to the enhanced roles of exceptional boards, increasingly, governance is "owned" by multiple arrangements of partners and organizations. Consider that some services are developed, organized, delivered, resourced, and coordinated (in other words, governed) by the overarching network of relationships (among organizational leaders) that crosses and links all of the participating organizations and entities. Similar dynamics are evident in policy and advocacy domains. Governance is a function, and a board is a structure, increasingly a decentralized structure.

To be sure, individual boards are still important in the nonprofit sector. Each board must own its priorities, policy-making, and oversight throughout a partnership's life. But a more complex and flexible structure is called upon as a new "unit" addressing society's most challenging issues and opportunities. Several levels of leadership and strategic alliances are important to make an initiative successful.

Just as importantly, the "governance" process is still grounded in a shared sense of mission, vision, and purpose, including setting strategic direction, setting priorities, developing and distributing resources, and implementing a system of quality assurance. It's a new skill set, full of its own nuances and variations.

Just as United Ways are getting comfortable with new community partnerships, innovative relationships between United Ways are emerging as well. They are exploring possible increased efficiencies and synergies. Stay tuned.

Quite simply, the new partnerships, new board and staff roles, the "new governance," is whatever it takes to Advance the Common Good. Ever more, these partnerships address vitals areas of education, income, and health, working toward long-lasting community change.

Adapted from Nonprofit Quarterly, Vol 13, Issue 4, Winter 2006, Reframing Governance, by David O. Rentz, Ph.D., [www.nonprofitquarterly.org](http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org)

## Appreciative Corner: The Stewardship Bottom Line

As an organization grows, evolves, and meets new challenges, board and staff roles can shift somewhat. **However, the board's overall responsibilities do not change.** Boards are responsible for:

### ■ Setting Direction

### ■ Ensuring Resources

### ■ Providing Oversight

Here are some discussion prompts for board meetings or pre-planning meetings between the board chair and the chief executive to help keep the roles clear and fresh for current needs. Address one at a time or as a group in a longer board retreat setting.

■ **Setting Direction:** When has your organization excelled in board ownership of the vision and mission? What inspired any extra attention? What brought about the circumstance – a particular board leader or group of leaders? – a serious financial situation? – a great grant or other opportunity requiring innovation and strong leadership? What roles did the chief executive and board play? Draw out the factors that made decisions strong.

■ **Ensuring Resources:** Especially if the staff is small, a "working board" acts in staff capacities. The board ensures that sufficient support is on hand by recruiting other volunteers or adjusts the extent of staff work required. In larger organizations, when funds are tight, access to adequate volunteer and staff support may need to be adjusted, too.

Consider: When is your organization working at its best? Who is doing what? What evidence suggests that resources are where they are needed most? What three wishes does the board or chief executive have that would bring strong support where it is needed most? What situations have shifted that might require a review of levels and types of support?

■ **Providing Oversight:** Boards must monitor and account for all financial and other resources as well as ensure that funds are spent wisely on behalf of the community.

Consider: How does your board demonstrate superior monitoring roles? Who is doing what, monthly, seasonally? Think about the use of technology, processes, and checks and balances used optimally. For community work, think about the ultimate benefits for the community.

Indiana Association of United Ways...Bringing Indiana United Ways together to help them create a successful future.

**Relationship/Association - Members actively engage with their IaUW neighbors and peers around issues and experience, contributing to higher performance.**

- 63 member organizations
- 4community2 matching grant program
- Roundtables and collaborative assistance

**Learning/Training - Members involved with IaUW learning opportunities are strengthened to improve organizational functioning.**

- State Leaders Conference and recognition programs
- 4community2 technical assistance and training
- Regional conferencing and national program hosting
- Software user groups
- Vision Leadership Focus newsletter
- Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network

**Research & Development/Innovation - Members have improved capacity to engage organizational technology with confidence.**

- NP&AS, Nonprofit Processing & Accounting Service
- www.iauw.org and other Web site features

**Representation - Members receive substantial grant support and have strong state-level relationships.**

- Partnerships and strong relationships with Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, Indiana Coalition for Human Services, Indiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
- Public Policy
- United Way Council of States and other national involvement
- Indiana 211
- Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana
- United Way of America

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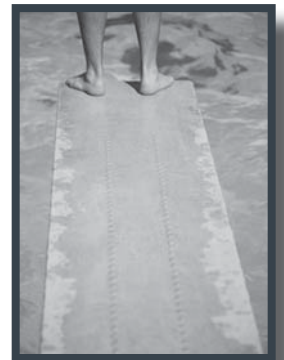
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**Give it a Try: A Deep Dive**

Ben Franklin wanted to improve his personality. He listed 20 traits he admired in other people. Then he focused on developing one trait in himself per week. When he had cycled though all 20, he started over again. He became one of the most respected statesmen of all time.

Consider doing a “deep dive” into one area of organizational focus every few meetings or

a couple of times each year. Look at the original aspirational purpose behind each goal with fresh eyes and weigh its current relevance. Reflect on progress, explore lessons learned, successes, and options for moving forward.



**IaUW Supports: Strengthening Your Board and Staff Partnership**

- A strong governance best practice includes holding an annual board strategic planning retreat. Discuss basic and exceptional governance levels with IaUW or with your Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network regional director.
- Explore collaborations with your United Way neighbors. Discuss ideas with IaUW to learn about existing similar collaborations. Watch for opportunities to apply for collaboration grants.