

# Critical Questions: Reframing Nonprofit Board's Work *Welcome!*



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# What We're About

- Help boards and executive directors frame the questions and discussions that can propel your organizations' work
- Share practices and tools to create powerful boardroom conversations that can bring fresh understanding to complex issues.

*Before we start, let's see who's on the webinar...*



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# Definition

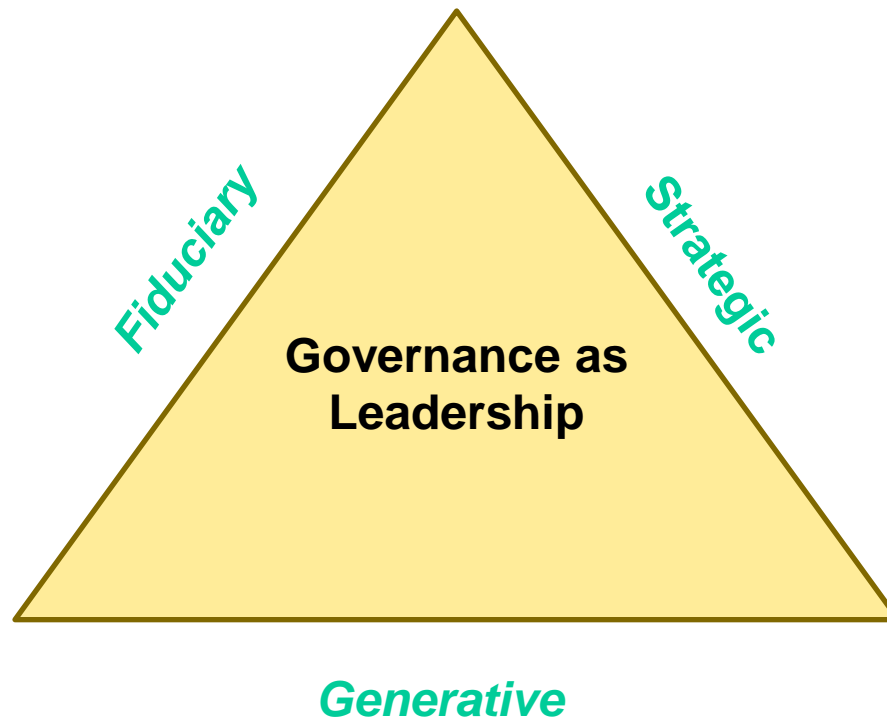
What are critical questions?

# Challenging Times...

- Economic realities driving unpredictable change
- Financial viability of individual organizations increasingly fragile
- New organizational networks, structures emerging

# Areas of Inquiry

Related to 3 modes of governance



# Areas of Inquiry - Fiduciary

*The key question is:*

“What is wrong/right?”

# Areas of Inquiry - Strategic

*The key question is:*

“What is your thinking about the future of this organization and what is the plan?”

# Areas of Inquiry - Generative

*The key question is:*

“What is the right question?”



# Practice: A Case Study

**The Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) decided to loan 21 Monet masterpieces to the Bellagio Casino in Las Vegas.**

**What questions might the board have considered in making that decision?**

- 1. Take a minute to jot some questions on a piece of paper.**
- 2. Now, jot a note to identify which mode of governance does each question reflect? *Fiduciary? Strategic? Generative?***
- 3. Sharing of actual questions**

# Quick Check-in

What type of question is this?

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- How do you explain the high turnover?
- What's our plan to retain staff?
- What would it take to build a world class staff?

# Four Characteristics for Critical Questions

- A tolerance for ambiguity
- An appetite for organizational puzzles
- A fondness for robust discourse
- A commitment to team play

*Chait, Ryan and Taylor, 2005*

**Leadership agility**

**Financial sustainability**

**Shift in foundation funding focus**

**Changes in government funding**

**Organizational growth strategies**

**Competition for individual donors**

**Competition with other organizations**

# QUESTIONS

**Mergers and acquisitions**

???

**Measuring outcomes and impacts**

**Aging population**

**Impact of Immigration**

**Leadership transitions**

**Increase in the rates of poverty**

**Maintaining Mission Clarity**

**Attracting board members**

**Increased demand for services**

**Complexity of services**

**New community vision**

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# Building an Agenda for Critical Conversations



# Typical Board Meeting Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Executive Director Report
4. Finance Committee Report
5. Development Committee Update
6. Other
  1. Old Business
  2. New Business
7. Adjourn





# Better Board Meeting Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes
2. Executive Director Report
  - **Changes in program demand in first quarter**
3. Finance Committee Report
  - First quarter decline in contributions
4. Development Committee Update
  - Submit 5 names for invite

# Strategies for Critical Conversations

- Bundle consent items together
- Design sessions with an eye toward creating critical dialogue
- Frame questions around choices
- Make sure board chair actively encourages daring ideas and deep worries
- Provide thought-provoking articles about issues affecting your organization



# Critical Conversation Agenda



1. Consent agenda
2. Strategic choices for addressing declining program participation
3. Identify financial contingencies for continued economic downturn
4. Compare strategies for increasing size and number of individual gifts

# Critical Conversation: Dig Deeper



## Strategic Choices for Declining Program Participation

- Does this program still align with mission?
- What is its impact on revenue, expense, bottom line?
- What environmental factors are driving change?
- What do we think the future holds?
- What are our choices?
  - Maintain, invest, spin-off, close
- What criteria should we use to evaluate the choices?

# What critical conversation(s) do you want your board to have?



- What's our purpose?
- Change geography?
- Add or eliminate programs/services?
- Take the best to scale?
- Consider new partnerships?
- Look for merger partners?
- Strategize how to increase contributions?

# Write a Critical Conversation Agenda



- People know what they need to know to engage
- Conversations align with challenges and choices
- Conversations are highly-relevant
- Alternatives are aired
- Outcome not predetermined

# Critical Conversation Agenda

1. Consent agenda
2. Topic One \_\_\_\_\_
3. Topic Two \_\_\_\_\_
4. Topic Three \_\_\_\_\_



# Critical Conversation: Dig Deeper

■ Topic \_\_\_\_\_

■ Critical Questions

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Examples:

- What environmental factors are driving change?
- What are our choices?
- What criteria should we use to evaluate the choices?



# Summary of Board Behavior in Three Modes of Leadership



	Fiduciary	Strategic	Generative
Key Questions	“What’s wrong?”	“What’s the plan?”	“What’s the question?”
Board Focus	Define problems Review performance	Solve problems Shape strategy	Frame problems Engage in sense-making
Board Process	Parliamentary procedure	Logical and empirical discussion	More informal and creative
Problems are to Be	Spotted	Solved	Framed
Decision Making	Resolution	Reaching consensus	Framing the question
Board Sees Their Role As	Oversight & authority	Strategist	Fresh perspective
Performance Metrics	Facts, figures, finances, reports	Strategic Indicators, competitive analysis	Signs of learning and discerning

Adapted by CentrePoint, Calgary, Alberta, Canada from: Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards. Chait, Ryan & Taylor.



# Wrap Up



“Asking more of the right questions reduces the need to have all the answers”

- Donald Peterson, Former CEO, Ford Motor Company

*What can you do to dip your toe in the water?*

Thank you and good luck!

*Christie and Amy*

*For questions or inquiries, contact Christie Hammes at [chammes@mapfornonprofits.org](mailto:chammes@mapfornonprofits.org) or check out [www.mapfornonprofits.org](http://www.mapfornonprofits.org)*

