

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

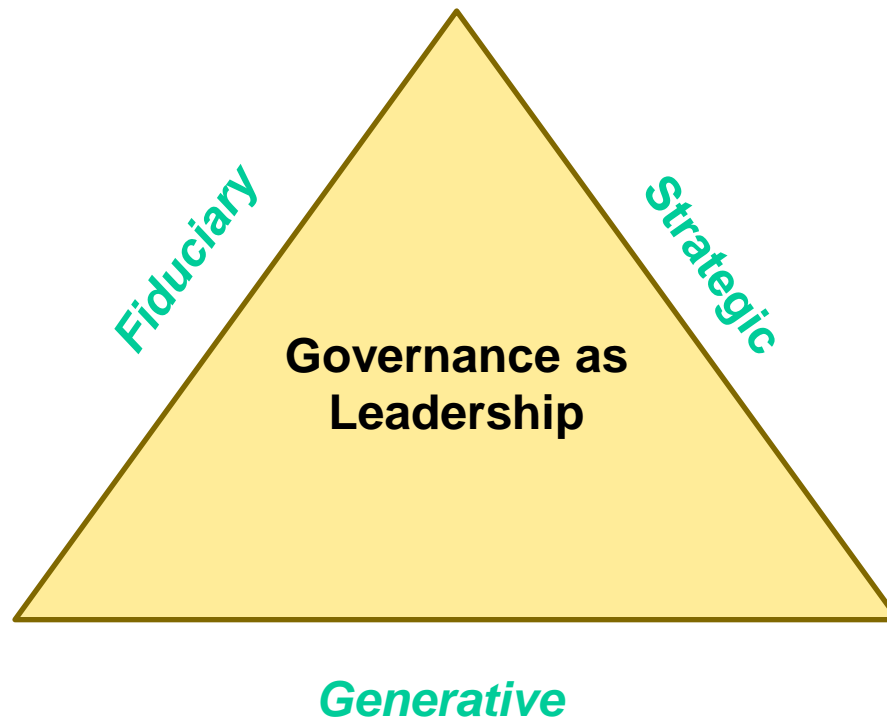
What are critical questions?

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?

- How do you explain the high turnover?

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What type of question is this?

- 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 or check out www.mapfornonprofits.org

