

Why Board Assessments Are So Important

Effective board development depends on identifying clear targets for improvement. This self-survey will help your board determine where to prioritize its development efforts.

Board assessments are designed to strengthen relationships, build trust, and improve individual and organizational effectiveness. They enable boards to step back from the preoccupations of regular board business, candidly review board performance, and develop action steps to strengthen board operations, communications, and interactions. This self-survey board assessment can help establish:

- A clearer understanding of the board's primary roles and core responsibilities
- A renewed sense of commitment to the institution's mission and purpose
- Consensus on specific objectives and plans to improve board organization and performance
- More productive board meetings
- A better working relationship between the board and the chief executive
- A commitment to expectations for personal philanthropy

How This Self-Survey Works

Boards succeed or fail in their abilities to fulfill specific roles and responsibilities. The structure of this self-survey aligns with the areas and duties that define effective board service.

This self-survey has been curated from our full 75-question assessment of institution boards so that you can conduct it on your own. It focuses on six major areas of board responsibility and activity:

1. Mission and Strategy
2. Leadership and Shared Governance
3. Institutional Sustainability
4. Quality of Educational Experience
5. Board Performance
6. Board Culture

Each section includes assessment ratings for evaluating the board's performance as well as open-ended questions where members can provide comments and suggestions. Answers to the assessment ratings will capture your board's sense of its performance. Answers to the open-ended questions will help you understand why members rated the board as they did. Both are important for gaining a balanced sense of the results. In this way, the survey serves as a diagnostic tool for determining the current state of your board.

How to Conduct Your Self-Survey

Confidentiality and candor are the keys to a successful board assessment. Board members must be completely confident that their responses will only be used to constructively improve the board.

This self-survey is designed to highlight your board's strengths and to reveal areas where you may need to improve your performance. In particular, it will help you to confirm that your board understands and is fulfilling its governance roles and responsibilities. We recommend that you conduct the survey during a working session or retreat—perhaps in conjunction with making plans for continuing board development.

Please provide these instructions to members as they complete the survey:

1. This survey is designed to assess the board's collective performance.
2. Rate the board as a group. Account for variations in individual performance by raising or lowering your overall rating. For example, if some, but not all, members are addressing a certain responsibility, lower your rating accordingly.
3. If you are new to the board, select "Don't Know" for things you cannot yet assess.
4. Many responsibilities span multiple components. Please read the entire question before selecting your answer.
5. Responses are confidential and will be reported in the aggregate. Please answer with openness and candor.
6. Answers to open-ended questions will be reported verbatim. Please avoid identifying yourself or others.

Participant Profile

What is your role on this board? Please check one.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| Chief executive of the institution | Board member |
| Chair of board | Administrative officer |
| Other board officer | Staff |
| Other (please describe your role) _____ | |

How long have you served on this board?

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Less than 1 year | 10 to 12 years |
| 1 to 3 years | 13 years or more |
| 4 to 6 years | N/A |
| 7 to 9 years | |

Do you have a vote on the board?

- Yes
- No

Section 1: Mission and Strategy

The institution’s mission is the standard by which key decisions are made and strategic directions are set. Board members are charged with ensuring the appropriateness of their institution’s mission and ensuring that it guides both their work and the strategic priorities of the institution.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Ensures the institution operates under a strategic plan that defines the institution’s strengths, challenges, and priorities						
Is actively involved in shaping and supporting institutional strategy and direction						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the board’s performance in the area of Mission and Strategy:

Section 2:
Leadership and
Shared Governance

The board’s authority for policy development and strategic decision-making is a multi-stakeholder process. The board shares governance duties with the chief executive, administration, and faculty, and solicits input from a broader campus constituency. To govern effectively, the board works to establish a strong partnership with the chief executive of its institution.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Works with the chief executive and appropriate constituent groups to gain support for institutional goals						
Works with the chief executive to build a strong working relationship						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the board’s performance in the area of Leadership and Shared Governance:

Section 3:
Institutional
Sustainability

The board is accountable for the success or failure of the institution, and preservation of its assets for future generations. In order to make informed decisions and fulfill their fiduciary responsibility, board members must focus their attention on the institution’s finances and educational effectiveness, the changing trends in the higher education landscape, and potential significant risks to the institution.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Follows industry standards when overseeing the audit process (i.e., auditor independence, audit committee membership)						
Monitors auxiliary organizations (e.g., alumni, foundations, institutes)						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the board’s performance in the area of Institutional Sustainability:

Section 4:
Quality of Educational
Experience

The board has a fiduciary responsibility for educational quality and value. In order to fulfill their responsibility, board members must understand and monitor the institution’s academic programs and policies. An effective board acts in concert with the administration and faculty and recognizes their respective roles.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Reviews the institution’s accreditation reports, including responses to identified concerns or deficiencies						
Ensures the institution plays a positive social and economic role in the communities it serves						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the board’s performance in the area of Quality of Educational Experience:

Section 5:
Board Performance

The board monitors its own overall performance, ensuring that institutional policies about board member responsibilities, development, ethical behavior, and conflicts of interest are current, understood, and followed. The board uses its meetings and members effectively to accomplish its work.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Implements steps for board development (e.g., continuing education, retreats, regular board assessments)						
Adheres to a comprehensive conflict-of-interest policy and addresses conflicts appropriately						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the area of Board Performance:

Section 6: Board Culture

The board establishes a culture of engagement built upon trust, respect, and a commitment to inquiry and inclusion. It conducts itself in an exemplary manner and acts with transparency.

Please assess the board’s performance in this area of responsibility.

The board...

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very Good	Excellent	Don't Know
Productively explores ideas by engaging in robust discussions						
Respects the confidentiality of board and committee materials and discussions						

Please provide comments or suggestions related to the board’s performance in the area of Board Culture:

Summary Questions

I feel satisfied that:

	Not At All Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
My time, energy, and expertise are put to good use					
The board retains its independence from external and internal stakeholders and acts in the best interests of the institution (duty of loyalty)					

Strengthening Board Performance

How important do you think it is for the board to...

	Not a Priority	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority
Improve its own capacity and functionality through increased attention to qualifications and recruitment of board members				
Increase understanding of board roles and responsibilities and scope of authority				

What is the board's most significant accomplishment over the past two years?

What change or action would most improve the board's performance?

Policies and Practices

This section should be completed by only one person, designated by the institution to respond on behalf of the board. The questions will not be visible to other respondents.

Please respond to the following questions related to board policies or practices.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Not Applicable
Did the full board formally approve the institution's strategic plan?				
Do board members receive a written statement of responsibilities and expectations related to board service?				

Evaluating the Results of Your Self-Survey

Boards tend to rate themselves above average, but assessments typically reveal variability in performance and relative areas of strength. In analyzing the information gathered with this tool, focus on the areas where:

- The board scored lowest
- Board members gave inconsistent ratings
- Comments indicated a need for change, information, or attention

To make the most of this effort, we encourage you to use these results to educate the board about its responsibilities, inform your plans for continuing board development, and take action to enhance your board's performance.

How AGB Can Help with Your Assessment

AGB has 100 years of experience strengthening governing boards. Helping boards assess performance is the foundation on which to build improvement. Here are some resources from AGB thought leaders that will help you determine when and how to conduct your board assessment:

Assessing Board Performance: A Practical Guide for College, University, System, and Foundation Boards

Marla J. Bobowick and Merrill P. Schwartz

Ensuring its own effectiveness is one of the board's basic responsibilities, whether members are appointed or elected. This guide provides practical resources and expert advice to help boards identify areas of concern, strengthen their performance, and continually educate and renew themselves.

2018 • 76 pages

When to Take a Second Look at Your Board

AGB

A Q&A with Theodore Long of AGB Consulting discussing the need for board assessment, signs when a board should look to improve, common mistakes boards make, and how restructuring and revitalizing a board can make the institution's governance better.

Trusteeship magazine, May/June 2013

The Incalculable Benefits of Revitalizing Your Board

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M.

The Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., president of DePaul University, shares that institution's experience of growth and academic rise and the role its board played in both.

Trusteeship magazine, May/June 2013

You may also decide that you would benefit from objective, outside assistance as you assess your board. AGB offers three types of board assessment support. In addition to this self-survey, we can:

- **Conduct a full institution board survey or interview your board members and your president or CEO** and provide a written report of the results with a summary of best practices for making improvements in each assessment area.
- **Provide a written interpretation of survey or interview findings by an AGB consultant** with institution-specific recommendations for strengthening your board's performance. Our consultant will present the written findings in a video call with your board leaders, chief executive, or entire board.
- **Conduct a one-day, on-site board development workshop** that uses the results of your assessment and benchmarks from effective boards to help you develop an action plan for board development.

Use these resources to ensure you are employing best practices as you administer this self-survey. They will be especially helpful as you interpret and evaluate the results of your assessment.

You may need additional help, especially if your board faces complex internal dynamics or external challenges. AGB can help you navigate the entire board assessment process and target meaningful action based on the results.