

Elevate Insights

Leadership. Governance. Strategy. For nonprofits that want to excel.

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The Most Common Strategic Gaps on Nonprofit Boards

What's Missing? A Culture of Strategic Governance

Over the years, I have seen a consistent pattern. Most boards don't struggle because members don't care. They struggle because no one has intentionally built a culture in which strategy lies at the core of every discussion, every decision, every action.

That lack of focus on strategy leaves nonprofits busy but not impactful.

Here are some of the most common gaps:

Meetings Focused on Reporting Instead of Thinking

Many board meetings are consumed by updates.

Committee reports. Staff reports. Financial reports. Program reports.

By the time reports are complete, little time remains for meaningful discussion.

Board members leave informed — but not necessarily engaged in leadership.

A strategic board meeting should prioritize:

- future-focused discussion
- key decisions
- organizational risks
- mission alignment
- emerging opportunities.

If the majority of meeting time is spent reviewing information rather than discussing implications, strategy is probably being crowded out.

Operational Drift

When boards lack strategic focus, they often drift into management.

Board members begin troubleshooting staff issues, weighing in on day-to-day decisions, or trying to solve operational problems.

This usually happens with good intentions.

But operational drift creates confusion, frustrates executive directors, and distracts boards from their actual role.

The board's responsibility is not implementation.

The board's responsibility is governance.

Strategy belongs to the board.

Implementation belongs to staff.

Weak Alignment Between Strategy and Board Composition

Organizations often recruit board members based on availability, relationships, or willingness to serve.

The result?

A board filled with good people — but not always the leadership capacity the organization needs.

If an organization's future depends on stronger fundraising, financial expertise, community partnerships, legal guidance, advocacy, or strategic growth, those competencies should be represented around the board table.

Board recruitment should follow strategy, not convenience.

Lack of Governance Education

Many nonprofit board members are never taught what effective governance looks like.

They arrive committed to the mission but unclear about expectations, responsibilities, or how to contribute strategically.

Without intentional development, boards default to passive participation.

Strong boards invest in learning.

They understand that governance is not instinctive.

It is a leadership discipline.

Bottom Line

None of these gaps exist because board members lack passion or commitment. They exist because strategic governance rarely develops by accident.

The strongest nonprofit boards are intentional about how they meet, how they make decisions, who they recruit, and how they prepare leaders to govern effectively.

The encouraging news is that each of these gaps can be addressed with practical changes that strengthen both board performance and organizational impact.

In next month's article, we'll explore specific steps boards can take to build a culture of strategic thinking that moves beyond oversight and becomes a powerful driver of mission success.

NEXT MONTH: Five Practical Steps to Build a More Strategic Board

LAST MONTH: Why Strategic Thinking at the Board Level Matters More Than Ever

If you missed the June issue, you can find it [here](#).

Get "The 10 Governance Questions the Board Should Ask Monthly"

Is Your Strategic Plan a Roadmap... or Just a Wish List?



Many nonprofit organizations have a strategic plan tucked away on a shelf or buried in a shared drive. It was developed with enthusiasm, approved by the board, and then gradually overtaken by the demands of daily operations.

If that sounds familiar, you're not alone.

The problem often isn't the quality of the plan. It's that most strategic plans stop at identifying *what* the organization hopes to accomplish. They don't establish *how* those priorities will be executed, *who* is responsible, *what* indicators will be used to track progress, *when* measurable progress is expected, or *how* the board will maintain accountability.

That's where ElevateNPT's **Strategic Plan Activation & Execution Framework** comes in.

Rather than starting over with a new strategic planning process, we help organizations transform their existing plan—or even a collection of strategic ideas—into a practical management system that guides decisions, drives accountability, and keeps the board focused on long-term success.

Depending on your organization's needs, our engagement can include:

- **Strategic Plan Refresh** – Validate your existing plan, assess changes in your operating environment, refresh priorities, and update the strategic plan to reflect today's realities.
- **Strategic Activation** – Build the infrastructure that turns strategy into action by creating an execution roadmap, assigning ownership, establishing realistic timelines, defining meaningful performance metrics, developing dashboards, and creating structure for annual planning.
- **Strategic Execution Partnership** – Extend the work through quarterly coaching, board strategy sessions, executive support, dashboard reviews, and annual plan updates to ensure your strategy continues to evolve as your organization grows.

To help organizations build momentum, we also offer an optional **90-Day Launch Sprint**. During the first three months after adoption, ElevateNPT works with the executive director and board leadership to establish reporting routines, remove implementation barriers, and reinforce accountability—when new strategic initiatives are most likely to lose momentum.

A strategic plan should be more than a list of good ideas. It should be a living roadmap that helps your board and leadership team make better decisions, measure progress, and confidently move your mission forward.

If your strategic plan has become more of a wish list than a working guide, let's talk about how ElevateNPT can help turn it into a framework for action.

Schedule a Complimentary Situation Analysis

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

STRONG BOARDS. CLEAR DIRECTION. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP.

A Three-Part Board Governance Series for Board Chairs and Executive Directors



AND



Presented by

OCTOBER 1
Strategic Thinking

NOVEMBER 5
Building the Board

DECEMBER 3
Leading the Board

All sessions: 8:30–10:00 a.m.

Caring about the mission is essential. It is not enough. Underperforming boards are a primary reason why organizations struggle to achieve their mission. Strong nonprofits need leaders who understand their distinct roles, work as leadership partners, and focus the board on the organization's future—not on day-to-day operations.

Designed for board chairs and executive directors to attend together, this series builds shared language, practical tools, and clear expectations each leadership team can put into action immediately.

SESSION	WHAT YOU WILL WORK ON
PART ONE • October 1 STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC THINKING: From Routine Oversight to Future-Focused Leadership	Shift from routine oversight to future-focused leadership. Clarify the board's strategic role, create more focused and productive meetings, ask better questions, keep strategy visible, and build a governance culture centered on mission impact.
PART TWO • November 5 BUILDING THE BOARD: From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders	Stop just filling seats and build a leadership team. Connect recruitment to strategy, strengthen onboarding and accountability, plan for succession, and develop a leadership pipeline.
PART THREE • December 3 LEADING THE BOARD: How to Be the Board Chair Your Organization Needs	Move beyond simply running meetings and instead lead governance culture intentionally. Strengthen the chair–ED partnership, guide productive discussion, address disengagement and accountability, and lead through change.

LOCATION: Community Foundation and United Way of Volusia and Flagler Counties
Daytona Beach, Florida (In person only)

Check [HERE](#) for more information coming soon

A Little Summer Breathing Room



I have spent a good part of this summer at the beach—and I make no apologies for it.

There is something about stepping away from the usual pace that clears the mental clutter. A little sun, a lot of water and fewer meetings can do wonders for perspective. I am returning to work refreshed and ready to bring even more clear, practical tools to organizations that want to strengthen their performance and increase their mission impact.

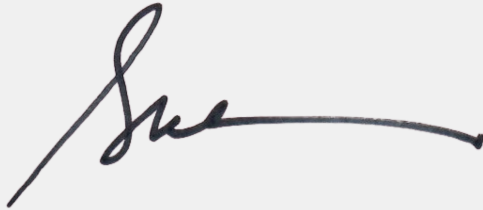
As summer winds down and everyone begins shifting back into work mode, it is also a good time to think about your board's development. Not with a major retreat or an ambitious new initiative—at least not yet—but with a few simple questions:

What does our board need to do better this year?

*Are there leadership transitions we should begin preparing for?
What skills or perspectives will we need in our next board members?
What would make our board meetings more useful and engaging?*

You do not need to solve everything at once. But fall calendars fill quickly, and January has an annoying habit of arriving before anyone is ready.

A little planning now can make board recruitment, leadership development and governance work much easier later. Consider it your board's version of coming back from the beach rested, clearheaded, and ready for what comes next.



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ElevateNPT

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