



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

September 2026

From Passion to Perspective:

STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC THINKING SKILLS IN BOARD LEADERSHIP

Building leadership capacity for stronger decisions and better results

Passion may bring people to nonprofit board service, but passion alone is not enough to govern effectively. Boards also need the ability to anticipate change, evaluate options, and align decisions with the organization's mission and long-term priorities.

Strategic thinking is not an innate talent reserved for a select few. It is a skill that board members can learn, practice, and strengthen.

What Strategic Thinking Looks Like

Strategic board members:

- Interpret information and recognize emerging trends
- Evaluate options, risks, and potential outcomes
- Consider how decisions affect people, systems, and resources
- Communicate complex issues clearly
- Connect today's decisions to long-term priorities

These abilities allow boards to navigate uncertainty, make sound decisions, and provide clearer direction.



Four Ways Boards Can Strengthen Strategic Thinking

1. Ask Better Questions

Strategic questions focus on direction, impact, and outcomes:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- Why does this matter?
- What evidence supports our assumptions?
- What could change?
- What will success look like?

Questions about who will perform specific tasks or how the work will be completed generally belong with staff. Maintaining this distinction keeps the board focused on governance while allowing staff to manage implementation.

2. Understand the Problem Before Choosing a Solution

Boards often move too quickly from identifying a concern to proposing a solution. Strategic thinkers pause to determine whether they are addressing the actual problem or merely one of its symptoms.

The **Five Whys** is a simple method for uncovering root causes. By asking “Why?” several times, boards can move beyond the most visible issue and identify what really needs to change.

3. Test Assumptions and Anticipate Change

Strong boards do not accept a plan simply because it sounds reasonable. They review the evidence, explore alternatives, invite respectful disagreement, and consider potential risks or unintended consequences.

They also look beyond current conditions by asking:

- What changes are emerging?
- How could they affect our mission, services, or resources?
- What should we do now to prepare?

Healthy debate is not a barrier to progress. It is part of making better decisions.

4. Measure, Learn, and Adjust

Strategy is not a static document. Boards must monitor whether decisions and actions are producing the intended results.

Dashboards, key performance indicators, and regular progress reports can help boards identify challenges, assess results, and determine when adjustments are needed. Measurement should support learning—not simply prove that activity occurred.

The Bottom Line

Strategic thinking is not about predicting the future or having all the answers. It is about asking thoughtful questions, examining information carefully, and making decisions that advance the mission.

Boards that practice these skills become more focused, confident, and effective. The result is not simply better governance—it is greater impact for the people, communities, and causes the organization exists to serve.

NEXT MONTH: From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders: Building the Board Your Organization Deserves

LAST MONTH: The Most Common Strategic Gaps on Nonprofit Boards (read it [here](#))

The 5 Whys

Solving the Problem Beneath the Problem

Nonprofit leaders are often under pressure to fix problems quickly. A committee misses its goals, board attendance declines, fundraising stalls, or a program falls short of expectations. The temptation is to respond to what is most visible—but the visible problem is often only a symptom.

The **5 Whys** is a simple technique for uncovering the underlying cause. Begin by clearly stating the problem, then ask “Why?” Continue asking until you move beyond the immediate explanation and identify something the organization can meaningfully address. It may take three questions or seven; five is a guide, not a magic number

Example

Problem: Board members are not attending meetings.

Why? They don't believe the meetings are a good use of their time.

Why? Most of the meeting consists of reports and operational updates.

Why? The agenda is built around sharing information rather than making decisions.

Why? Reports are not distributed—or expected to be read—before the meeting.

Why? The board has never established clear expectations for meeting preparation and participation.

The initial response might have been to send more reminders or adopt a stricter attendance policy. Those actions would address the symptom. The deeper solution is to redesign meetings, clarify expectations, and make board members’ time matter.

Before fixing the next problem, pause and ask one more “Why?” The first answer may explain what happened. The next few may reveal what needs to change.



This cohort is almost full. Act NOW to save your place!

STRONG BOARDS. CLEAR DIRECTION. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP.

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



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.

SESSIONS	
PART ONE • Thursday, October 1	STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC THINKING: From Routine Oversight to Future-Focused Leadership
PART TWO • Thursday, November 5	BUILDING THE BOARD: From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders
PART THREE • Thursday, December 3	LEADING THE BOARD: How to Be the Board Chair Your Organization Needs

All sessions: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

REGISTRATION		
FULL THREE-PART SERIES	ONE OR TWO SESSIONS	Add Additional Person (Vice Chair, Governance chair, etc.)
\$320 per leadership team	\$120 per leadership team, per session	\$160 for Series \$60 per session

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER - <https://www.ElevateNPT.com/events-and-training>
Space is limited. Act now.

Become a Stronger Board Member—and a Stronger Leader at Work

Effective nonprofit board service requires a meaningful investment of time, energy, and judgment. One of the best ways organizations can honor that commitment is to invest consistently in board development—helping members build skills that benefit both the nonprofit and their own professional lives.

Learning to govern effectively strengthens skills that matter in any workplace: asking better questions, interpreting financial information, weighing competing priorities, and considering the long-term consequences of decisions. These abilities help board members look beyond their immediate responsibilities, connect their work to broader goals, and make more thoughtful, informed decisions.

Effective governance also means working with people who bring different experiences, perspectives, and priorities. Board members must listen carefully, challenge assumptions respectfully, navigate disagreement, and build agreement around a shared direction. Because authority rests with the board collectively, members learn to lead through influence—a valuable skill whether they are managing a team, collaborating across departments, or advocating for change.

These benefits take intention. Board members who participate in training, seek feedback, and put new skills into practice can bring stronger judgment, greater confidence, and more effective leadership back to their own work. Investing in board development strengthens the organization while giving members something valuable in return: skills they can use throughout their careers.

Ready to invest in your board's growth? ElevateNPT provides customized education to strengthen strategic thinking, effective governance, and leadership. Start with a complimentary 30-minute

consultation to discuss your current situation and explore how we can help you build the leadership team your organization needs.

[Schedule a Call Today](#)

Coming in 2027

90-Minute Seminars for board and executive leadership

From Seat-Fillers to Strategic Leaders

BUILDING THE BOARD YOUR ORGANIZATION DESERVES

From Meeting Manager to Strategic Leader

BE THE BOARD CHAIR YOUR ORGANIZATION NEEDS

Build the Future—On Purpose

THE READINESS CHECK YOU NEED BEFORE STRATEGIC PLANNING

[Check Out Our Complimentary Resources](#)

[Follow us on LinkedIn](#)

ElevateNPT

Kansas City | Denver | Ormond Beach

www.ElevateNPT.com

info@ElevateNPT.com

270.564.2770

[Unsubscribe](#)

