

Board Diagnostic

IS YOUR BOARD STRATEGIC OR OPERATIONAL?

Many boards believe they are strategic. This quick assessment helps determine whether your board is actually governing at the strategic level—or unintentionally managing operations.

Rate each statement from **1 (rarely) to 5 (consistently)**.

	SCORE	TOTAL
Strategic Direction		
Our board regularly discusses long-term direction.	_____	
Our board understands how our organization fits within the broader ecosystem.	_____	
Board discussions focus on future impact, not just current programs.	_____	
Subtotal		_____
Meeting Structure		
Board agendas prioritize strategic issues.	_____	
Routine reports are handled through consent agendas.	_____	
Meeting time is spent on discussion rather than presentations.	_____	
Subtotal		_____
Strategic Oversight		
The board reviews impact metrics, not just activity reports.	_____	
Board members ask questions about outcomes and trends.	_____	
We regularly examine whether programs align with strategic priorities.	_____	
Subtotal		_____
Governance Discipline		
Board members avoid operational micromanagement.	_____	
Strategic questions are welcomed and encouraged.	_____	
Meetings focus more on direction than detail.	_____	
Subtotal		_____
TOTAL		_____

SCORE INTERPRETATION

16–30 Operational Board

Your board is spending most of its time in operations rather than governance. Conversations likely focus on program logistics, staffing decisions, event details, or troubleshooting day-to-day issues. While these discussions are important to the organization’s functioning, they are primarily management responsibilities, not board responsibilities.

When boards operate this way, two things often happen: staff lose the space to manage effectively, and the organization’s long-term direction receives too little attention.

Direction for Improvement

To shift toward strategic governance:

- Redesign board agendas so that at least half of meeting time is dedicated to strategic discussion.
- Move routine reports and updates into a consent agenda reviewed before the meeting.
- Clarify the distinction between governance (direction and oversight) and management (implementation).
- Introduce a quarterly strategic discussion topic to begin building the habit of future-focused conversations.

The goal is not to eliminate operational awareness, but to ensure the board’s primary focus becomes the organization’s future rather than its daily activity.

31–50 Transitional Board

Your board is beginning to engage in strategic thinking but still spends a significant portion of meeting time on operational matters. Strategic conversations may occur occasionally, but they are often squeezed between reports or pulled off course by implementation details.

This stage is common. Many boards recognize the importance of strategy but have not yet established structures that keep discussions at the governance level.

Direction for Improvement

To strengthen strategic focus:

- Adjust board agendas so that strategic topics appear at every meeting, not just retreats.
- Provide board members with strategic information, such as impact metrics, trend data, and community indicators.
- Encourage the use of the “altitude test” during discussions: ask whether the issue belongs at the board level or the staff level.
- Empower committees to analyze issues and bring recommendations, allowing the full board to focus on decisions rather than details.

With consistent practice and improved meeting design, a transitional board can quickly become a strategic governing body.

51–75 Strategic Board

Congratulations! Keep up the good work!

Strategic boards typically spend most of their time discussing long-term direction, mission impact, partnerships and collaborations, emerging opportunities and risks, and progress toward strategic goals. This kind of governance significantly strengthens an organization’s effectiveness and sustainability.

Direction for Continued Excellence

To maintain and deepen strategic leadership:

- Schedule periodic environmental scans to ensure your strategy remains relevant as community needs evolve.
- Conduct an annual strategy review to assess progress and adjust priorities when necessary.
- Continue investing in board education and leadership development so new members adopt the same strategic mindset.
- Regularly ask the question: “Are we spending enough time thinking about the future?”

Strategic governance is not a one-time achievement—it is a discipline that must be reinforced over time.