

Developing Your Board's Governance Handbook

Purpose

A Governance Handbook describes the principles of governance and the supporting practices. It is an important tool for creating a framework within which your governance team can operate effectively.

Getting Started

Your board's Governance Handbook must become a living document that is reviewed and revised in an ongoing manner. The key questions below are prompts to guide the dialogue that leads to agreement on your governance structure. Critical to the success of this effort is to document and collectively commit to the agreements made.

Unity of Purpose

Unity of Purpose is a common focus, overarching goals, and the core values and beliefs governance team members share in common about the organization and the residents they serve that help them transcend their individual difference to fulfill a greater purpose.

What is our purpose?

- ✓ What do we value and believe in about the work of the county and the residents we serve?
- ✓ What do we want to accomplish as a governance team?

Governance Culture – Norms and Standards

- ✓ What are the values that matter most to us as a board?
- ✓ How can demonstrate these values in the way we conduct business?
- ✓ What do we need from the chief administrative officer to do our job? What does the chief administrative officer need from us to do his job?
- ✓ How does this mean we should behave? With each other? With the staff? With the community?
- ✓ What norms (agreements on how we will act toward each other when working as a group) do we need to develop?

Governance Role and Responsibilities

Effective governance teams have a clear understanding of their role as leaders and their shared responsibilities and duties for ensuring quality services.

- ✓ Have we come to mutual agreement on the role of the board and the chief administrative officer?
- ✓ Do we understand that board members have collective, not individual authority and that the full board gives direction to the executive director through decisions reached at board meetings?
- ✓ Do we all understand how the board can use the five governance responsibilities to align and focus the work of the county?

Our five responsibilities:

1. We set the direction for the county. What are our long-term goals? What are our priorities?
2. We establish the framework for the operation of the county. We adopt the policies that govern the county.
3. We provide support for the work of the CAO and the staff. What can the Board do to actively support the operations of the CAO and staff?
4. We ensure accountability. We evaluate the CAO, and monitor policies and the budget. We ensure the board's fiduciary responsibility is fulfilled by the independent audit and fiscal oversight.
5. We act as community leaders for the county.

Structures and Process – Protocols

Effective governance teams discuss and agree on the formal structures and processes used by the board and chief administrative officer in their operations and how they do business.

- ✓ What protocols do we need to adopt in order to do business that reflects our unity of purpose, our agreement on role and responsibilities and our commitment to norms?
- ✓ What agreements do we need to adopt in the areas of effective meetings, board/board relations, board/executive director relations, board/staff relations and board/community relations?

Structure – The Board's Protocols

Protocols describe how the governance team operates. Protocols can cover a wide range of operational issues. From the list below, which ones do you feel are important?

Unity of Purpose – Setting Direction

1. Strategic Planning - Role of the Board of Supervisors
2. Board Assignments
3. Use of Board Sub-Committees
4. Role with Advisory Bodies
5. Using Meetings as Strategic Leadership Tools
6. Use of board work/study sessions

Roles and Responsibilities

7. Interactions with County Staff
8. Individual Supervisor Requests for Information
9. Individual Supervisor Requests Requiring Resources
10. Evaluating the County Administrator
11. Feedback to County Administrator on Department Head Performance
12. Role of Supervisor's Deputies

Board Operations

13. Board Meeting Agenda Development
14. Agenda Item-Related Questions
15. Role of the Board Chair
16. Role of Individual Supervisors
17. Public Comment in Board Meetings
18. Bringing up new ideas - Deciding on whether to move forward on an idea
19. Conflicts of Interest
20. Confidentiality
21. Board Reports
22. Self-Monitoring of Board Effectiveness
23. New Board Member Orientation

Board of Supervisors in the Community

24. Handling Complaints from the Community
25. Reliance on majority rule, standing behind the decision of the board
26. Electronic Communication Outside Board Meetings
27. Electronic Communication During Board Meetings