

Let's reimagine the way we think about not-for-profit governance

Blog
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Board: Effective Governance



For those of us who work with not-for-profit sector organizations and their governing bodies, the same issues in not-for-profit governance seem to keep coming up year after year. That insight has caused a thoughtful sector leader to ask: “why are we doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results?”

We hear these types of stories all the time:

“My board blurs the lines between operations and governance.”

“The executive director expects the board to fundraise, that’s not what I signed up for!”

“Nobody told me we’d spend so much time looking at boring financial statements.”

“We elected a chartered accountant to the board, and now he’s refusing to act as Treasurer!”

“We’ve tried to recruit for diversity on our board, but we don’t know any qualified candidates from minority communities.”

Reimagining Governance

On March 12, Vantage Point partnered with Ignite NPS to start conversations on how we can shift our perspective and do governance differently. Executive directors, board members and consultants met with Linda Mollenhauer to explore how not-for-profit governance structures, processes and practices should and could be adapted to meet the challenges of today’s complex environment.

Linda is a cofounder and the Board Chair Ignite NPS, where she volunteers her time and expertise to support development and distribution of practical research, resources and tools designed for board members and staff of non-profit organizations across the sector. Her goal is to foster new ways of working and support leaders to adapt to the complex and competitive not-for-profit landscape.

The questions Linda posed on March 12 certainly ignited my thinking! Here are three of the many insights raised in the three-hour facilitated conversation:

- 1. Governance is a team sport.** All too often, we think of governance as the board’s work, but in fact, it involves the collaboration of the chief executive, staff, and stakeholders in the community served by a not-for-profit organization.
- 2. Successful governance requires a shared understanding.** How often do we stop and explore what we mean by “successful governance”? Some people hear that word and think “govern”, focusing on the fiduciary. Others think “vision” or “leadership”. It’s time to get on the same page, to achieve clarity through an explicit conversation that leads to a shared understanding of what we mean by “successful governance”.
- 3. Each of us has a role in finding a new model.** If we always do what we’ve always done, we’ll always get what we’ve always got. Everyone working in the sector can shift our energy, from focusing on the challenges, to imagining how we could make it better.

Thanks, Vantage Point, for making space to encourage thought leadership and reimagine governance. It’s a conversation whose time has come!