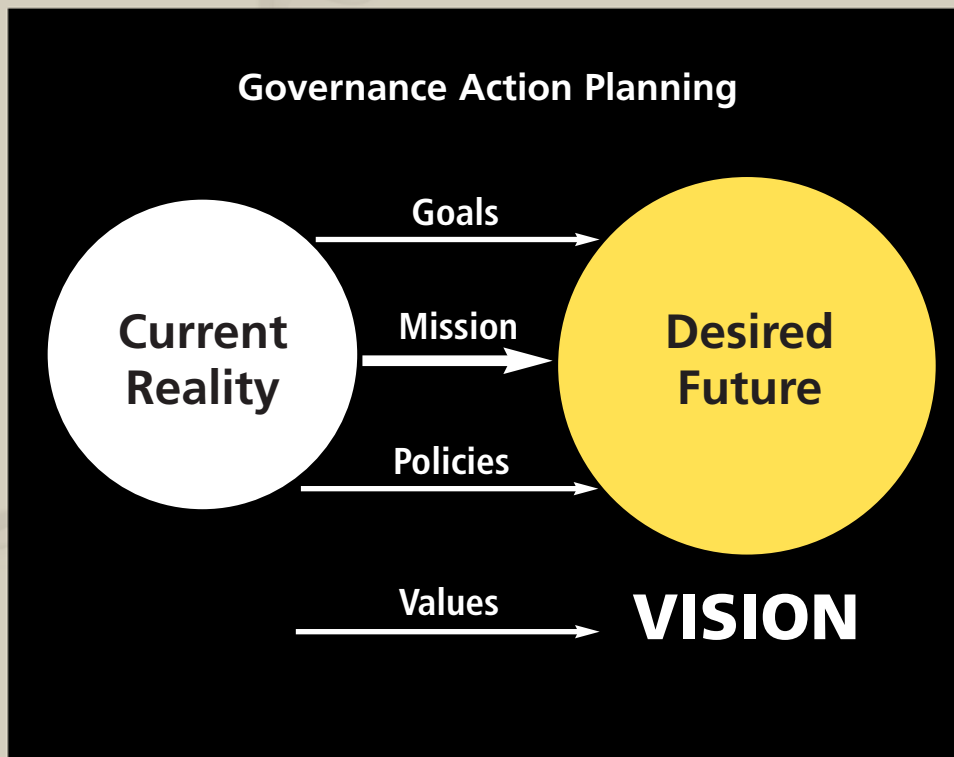


# CREATING THE FUTURE

*A Planning Handbook for  
Board Members and Administrators  
of First Nations' Boards*



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# Forward

This is the second in a series of handbooks written to assist board members and administrators of First Nations boards with strategies to improve their board's effectiveness.

The first handbook, *Effective Board Governance: A Handbook For Board Members and Administrators of First Nations' Boards*, defined the governance role and the seven key governance responsibilities of a board, and explained how these differ from the role and responsibilities of the organization's executive director.

The purpose of this handbook is to introduce a strategic planning process that links directly to the governance role and responsibilities of the board. This process of planning strategically coordinates the board's mandate, mission, vision, values, goals, and policies. The reader is guided, from start to finish, through one board's development of a governance action plan.

Board members may feel that their particular board structure or situation is unique, or that they work under limitations that detract from board effectiveness. The mandate, authority, structure and circumstances of boards may vary, but the role and responsibilities of a governance board are essentially the same in every case.

Not all boards are autonomous, nor do they all have full control and full authority over every aspect of their operation. This need not detract from board effectiveness. Whatever the board's situation, its members can attend to their governance responsibilities by developing a comprehensive strategic plan. To demonstrate this, our example of a board developing its governance action plan is one with limitations to its authority.

In Chapter One governance planning is defined and the process explained, with particular reference to the role and responsibilities of a board. Proactive boards are best positioned for a targeted approach to planning. Reactive boards avoid or minimize the importance of planning. How to differentiate between reactive and proactive boards is explained.

In Chapter Two, the planning process begins with a review of the board's mandate and purpose. Regardless of whether the board is newly formed, or has been in existence for many years, the first steps in strategic planning should always be a review and thorough understanding of the board's terms of reference. The process for developing an organizational mission statement is explained.

The most important step in governance planning, and the one most often missed – that of creating a clear, exciting and motivating vision - is explained in Chapter Three. This is the key to strategic planning. An exciting vision motivates all of an organization's members – directors, staff and constituents – to work together cooperatively towards the achievement of a common purpose and agreed-upon goals. Readers are introduced to a board's vision-setting process, using the example of a school board looking ahead to its desired future. This planning process can be applied to any non-profit board situation.

Chapter Four guides the reader through the goalsetting process. Setting and committing to purposeful long-term and short-term goals is the primary strategy for transforming the board's vision statement into a meaningful reality.

Chapter Five focuses on the board's role in developing and approving policy, that is, the board's written direction intended to guide the future actions of the board and staff. Effective board policy is more than establishing rules, regulations and boundaries. It must be purposeful and lead toward the achievement of the board's vision.

In Chapter Six the purpose of the budget in supporting the board's governance plan is explained. For many boards, budgeting is simply a means of carrying the organization forward into its next year of operation. Effective boards focus their budget development towards their vision – their desired future, and specifically towards those specific goals that will help them achieve it.

Chapter Seven gives attention to a planning omission for many boards, that of focusing on results. We look at how boards can track their success toward their goals by linking expected results with predefined expectations for success.

The board's role as an advocate for its constituents is explained in Chapter Eight. Effective boards are always focused outward, toward the needs of their constituents.

Communicating the board's plans to its various publics is the theme of Chapter Nine. How to both report out to constituents and seek their input and feedback are discussed.

Throughout the handbook, the various stages of the board's planning are explained, and then compiled in Chapter Ten into an actual example of a governance action plan.

Finally, in Chapter Eleven, readers have the opportunity to test their board's current effectiveness in governance planning. A governance planning checklist is included for board member reference.





# Chapter 1

## Planning Strategically

Planning is a strategy for creating an organization's future. How an organization evolves and is shaped over time will depend directly on the board's foresight, vision, commitment, perseverance and creativeness. How the board attends to its governance role and responsibilities is the key factor that, for the most part, will ultimately determine the organization's success or failure.

### **Where Does the Board Focus its Time and Attention?**

One strategy for determining a board's direction and what it considers important is to analyze the agendas and minutes of the board's various meetings. Where is the board's focus? What issues capture the board's attention? What is it that board members want to discuss and debate? What are the board's stated or implied priorities?

For some boards, the priorities of board members and their administrators are reflected in their desire to resolve the organization's current issues. This problem-solving approach, which board members sincerely believe will improve the overall effectiveness of their organization, becomes their board purpose. Because there are always pressing and urgent matters requiring attention, over time, the board finds itself stuck in its current reality.

In their efforts to attend to the urgent and the immediate, these boards neglect to do that which will really make the difference for the effectiveness of their organizations – to plan for their desired future. It is so much easier for boards to fill their agendas with problems and issues for the board to resolve than it is to plan for the long-term success of the organization. Besides, board members may take great satisfaction in knowing that the board has

personally dealt with issues at hand, and that constituents appreciate their direct involvement.

Your organization exists for a purpose. Exactly what is this purpose? Do all board members agree with this purpose? Is there a clear picture, a vision of what it is that the board is trying to achieve? Is the board on a mission to achieve it?

*The most important task of any board is to successfully plan for its desired future.*

The most important task of any board is to successfully plan for its desired future. Problems and issues at hand cannot be ignored. They must be addressed. The board's challenge is to create a balance between planning for the future and addressing current challenges. A board cannot concentrate on one at the expense of the other. It must do both, and do them well, if the organization is to succeed over the long term.

### **Conventional Planning Processes**

All boards plan, a little or a lot. The purpose of planning is to move the organization forward, into the future.

Conventional planning processes are often based on the organization's current reality. Any projection into the future may be discussed only as it relates to present circumstances.

Generally, the most immediate planning pressure on boards is preparing for the next year of operation. As a result, boards tend to have well-defined short term planning processes. Less common are processes that define planning for the long term. Long-term planning is a critically important, but less urgent pressure on a board.

*Boards in survival mode give primary attention to protecting their existing financial and human resources.*

As they struggle with financial pressures, a recurring problem affecting many non-profit organizations, boards may find that their planning has shifted into survival mode. Boards in survival mode give primary attention to protecting their existing financial and human resources. Rather than focusing on long term improvement, the board's planning gives attention to a more urgent priority, that of funding the organization for its next year of operation. In survival mode planning, the goal of the board simply becomes the continuation of the organization's current programs and services. Bringing about meaningful change, if it gets discussed at all, may be

opposed by board members, staff and constituents alike, particularly if it involves possible reductions in staffing or loss of programs and services. This is why many conventional planning processes are not strategic in their focus.

A board does not need to be in survival mode to find that its planning is not strategic. Many conventional planning processes start with the board's desire to protect and preserve existing resources. Boards in this situation may find themselves stuck in the present - not going backwards, but neither moving forward proactively towards a carefully defined and targeted vision.

What separates the planning processes of the more effective boards from their less effective counterparts is a commitment to a clear and purposeful vision. They are continually striving to ensure that all of the resources of their organization are mobilized toward their desired future.

*What separates the planning processes of the more effective boards from their less effective counterparts is a commitment to a clear and purposeful vision.*

One might expect that all boards have a clear sense of direction. Regrettably, this is not the case. Many boards set goals, whether written or implied, but not all goalsetting is based on a clear vision of the board's desired future. The most effective boards are those that plan strategically, with the expectation of achieving specific, predefined outcomes.

### **Governance Action Planning – A Definition**

Governance action planning is a process for shaping an organization's future. It connects the actions planned for creating the organization's future success to the governance role and responsibilities of the board.

It requires that the board understands, internalizes and commits to its purpose, known as its mission, and to giving definition to exactly what it is trying to achieve. Further, it requires that the board define its target – its vision, the future it strives to create. No planning can properly be called strategic if it does not specifically define the desired future.

*No planning can properly be called strategic if it does not specifically define the desired future.*

Governance planning requires that board members “dream the dream” of their organization's ideal future. It asks the question: “If there were no encumbrances or financial worries, if it were possible to create the ideal situation, what exactly is it that the board would commit to achieve?” And it

*It is the board's decisions, choices and actions, and not its circumstances, problems and constraints, that will for the most part determine the organization's future.*

then sets in place courses of action to create what at first might seem improbable, or at least very difficult to achieve.

Governance planning shifts board attention, from reacting to the organization's present circumstances, to proactively setting direction for desired change. It asserts that it is the board's decisions, choices and actions, and not its circumstances, problems and constraints, that will for the most part determine the organization's future.

We define governance action planning as a strategic planning process for shaping an organization's future that links planning directly to the governance role and responsibilities of the board.

### **Board Governance**

Governance planning links directly to the role of the board. When boards become proactive, and relate their planning processes directly to their governance responsibilities, board effectiveness increases. The first step for a board contemplating a governance planning process is to review its approach to board leadership.

Ask any member of a non-profit board, or their administrators, about the board's role and responsibilities and one often hears the word "governance" in their response. No other single word better describes the role of a non-profit board.

Board governance is a concept often misunderstood by both board members and the organization's administrative leaders. It is not, as some describe, the very process of a board undertaking its role and responsibilities. This definition implies that governance is "that which the board does." The fact that the board meets, discusses issues, makes decisions, and takes action, does not necessarily mean that the board is truly governing.

*Board governance is the process by which the board sets direction for the future of its organization.*

Governance has a special meaning as it relates to the operation of non-profit boards. Put simply, board governance is the process by which the board sets direction for the future of its organization. This approach is the key to effective planning. To the degree that the board's discussions, planning, decisions and actions are setting direction towards the board's vision of the desired future for the organization, the board is governing.

## **Approaches to Board Governance**

Any analysis of boards' operations will show a wide variation in approaches to board leadership and to board governance. Boards that place their primary focus with their present circumstances are referred to as reactive boards. Boards that put their primary focus toward their desired future are known as proactive boards. Proactive boards are best positioned to successfully undertake action planning.

*Proactive boards are best positioned to successfully undertake action planning.*

Reactive boards have difficulty with governance planning. They rarely define a clear and purposeful target. A proactive approach enables boards to link their planning processes to their governance responsibilities. As these two approaches to governance are explained, determine where your board is along the "reactive board-proactive board" continuum.

## **The Reactive Approach to Board Governance**

At one end of the scale of board governance are boards that take the reactive, or 'fire station,' approach to board leadership. With this approach, the board puts itself "on call," awaiting the breakout of small or large fires within its region of authority. Whenever an issue or problem develops, the fire alarm goes off, and the board springs into action. Sometimes the administrator is able to quickly douse the fire and no board action is required, other than a report to the board at an upcoming meeting. At other times, the board chooses to involve itself in operational matters according to the personal interests of its members, and whether or not members feel the board should deal directly with the issue.

The 'fire station' approach weakens board effectiveness. Not only is there no clear definition of who does what or why, but there is also confusion about the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and its administrator and staff. The most important consideration for the board with the 'fire station' approach becomes dousing, or at least containing, fires as they are reported.

A board that takes the 'fire station' approach ensures that it has an administrator and staff on-call ready to respond immediately to fire alarms, problems which may break out at any time. As problems occur, the board expects that the administrator will immediately inform the board, with the board then determining how matters will be handled and what action will

be taken. Board members may perceive this as a hands-on approach to board leadership.

Because there is no clear definition of board and administrative roles and responsibilities, the administrator is often unsure about which fires require the direct involvement of the board. This results in the administrator taking to the board what are more properly administrative matters. The board, because of its interest in the day-to-day affairs of the organization, starts doing the job of the administrator.

There is an absence of governance with the 'fire station' approach. Little planning occurs, strategic or otherwise, usually because the board is so caught up at any given time in its current circumstances and its challenges of putting out an increasing number of fires burning throughout its system.

The 'fire station' approach to board leadership is the reactive approach to board governance. Board members see the board's role through its current problems and the various issues that arise at the board table, regardless of who brings them to the board's attention. The board's leadership team, comprised of board members and their administrator, perceive themselves as problem-solvers, believing that the primary role of the board and senior staff is to resolve the various challenges brought to them at the board table.

*Members of reactive boards become preoccupied with their current issues, the management of the organization, and the work of the administrator and staff.*

Members of reactive boards become preoccupied with their current issues, the management of the organization, and the work of the administrator and staff. Because of their focus, they quite naturally want to be fully informed about the staff's activities and efforts, and particularly with personnel and related matters. They feel the board's role is to monitor the staff's work, and they demand detailed information about what the administrator and staff are doing, and how they are addressing management issues. They regularly ask for reports on operational and staff matters and they want to discuss them in considerable detail.

Active personnel, human resources and management committees are common elements of reactive boards. Board members may insist that the board become actively involved in the hiring of staff, and may find themselves discussing and debating other personnel matters including job descriptions, who gets which jobs and why.

Board members on reactive boards proudly comment that theirs is a “working board.” They take pride in the significant amount of time they are willing to expend on board business, and believe that the more meetings they have, and the more discussions they have, the more effective they will become. Their boards create numerous working committees – management, housing, personnel, finance, facilities – with board members as active committee members leading discussions and making recommendations about management actions that will improve their organization’s image and effectiveness.

They want to be fully involved in the management of the organization, and to assist the administrator in her administrative role. They want to know in advance how management issues and staff matters are going to be handled. They may even direct that problems be resolved in a manner as they dictate.

Although their organization may have a mission statement, clarifying the reason for its existence, it is seldom referenced, reviewed or discussed. Mission and vision statements exist as information filed away for handy reference if board members are ever asked about them. Written planning is minimal. Annual reports of the board’s successes amount to a recap of what the board considered to have been worthy of note over the previous year. There is no strong desire to define measures for board success.

Regrettably, boards that take the ‘fire station’ approach to board governance find themselves mired in conflict and confusion - conflict about what course of action should be taken on various issues, and confusion about who should be doing what. Their members are well intentioned, conscientious and hardworking. They genuinely desire to do a good job. They may work on the principle that no news is good news, and assume that everything must be proceeding along well if nobody is complaining.

Their difficulty is that they have misplaced priorities. They find themselves so caught up in the management and bureaucracy of the organization that they fail to attend to their governance role and responsibilities.

Their most obvious weakness is that they are so caught up in the problems of the present that they are unable to find time to plan effectively for the organization’s future.

*Boards that take the ‘fire station’ approach to board governance find themselves mired in conflict and confusion - conflict about what course of action should be taken on various issues, and confusion about who should be doing what.*

### **The Proactive Approach to Board Governance**

At the other end of the governance scale are boards that take a quite different approach to board leadership. Their focus is directed toward those goals and strategies that will move their organization forward towards a clearly defined vision of their desired future.

This is the leadership approach of a proactive board. Board members see themselves not only as problem-solvers but, more importantly, as problem-finders. They strive to anticipate issues and problems that might likely arise, and give direction and policy guidance for addressing them if and when they occur. They commit to expending as much time planning for the future as they do with resolving current issues. They are able to do this because they have clarified the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and the executive director, and they leave the daily management of the organization to their administrator.

Their members understand that the organization's long-term success will be the result of the choices, planning, and decisions they make today. They see opportunity where others see only problems. They accept that there will be many unintended circumstances and challenges that will frustrate their progress. They correspondingly understand that with each challenge comes choices for board action.

Their expectations for board and staff action are clear and purposeful, and they have contemplated, in advance, the results they expect. These expectations, intentions and desired results are written and well communicated, and become the focus of board discussions and board action.

Their board has recruited an administrator who supports the philosophy, mission, vision, values, goals and policies of the board, and who is willing and able to implement its direction and to lead the staff. They understand that the administrator and staff have a job to do which is quite different from that of the board, and they work, through their planning, policy and decision-making processes, to facilitate and support the administrator's and staff's work. By their actions they show a high level of trust in the administrator's judgement in handling the organization's daily operations. They do not draw their administrator into the board's political discussions.



Nor do they have a need for detailed information about everything the staff is doing, and with the staff's day-to-day work. They demand regular reports from the administrator to ensure that their goals, policies, planning and desired results, as approved, are on track. Their interest is in facilitating and supporting the staff's successes, and the results they achieve. By their actions, they show their support for staff. They celebrate the staff's achievements. Through their planning processes, they have clarified the accountabilities of the board, and the accountabilities of the administrator.

They do not become preoccupied with the specifics of job descriptions, and with who gets which jobs. They understand that these are not priorities for board attention.

They simply want to be assured that the resources they have provided, as allocated, will achieve the desired results.

Their communication is directed through their administrator, the executive director or equivalent. Their communication with staff is through this individual and they depend on their administrator to implement their direction, according to the goals, policies and decisions they have approved at the board table.

Proactive boards create two key committees to facilitate the board's work – a Planning Committee that monitors progress with the board's goals, and a Policy Committee that clarifies board direction. These are “board committees”, with the administrator attending in an advisory capacity. The majority of the board's attention is directed to the work of these two committees. Board members do not sit on administrative or management committees. They leave the management of the organization to the administrator.

*Proactive boards create two key committees to facilitate the board's work – a Planning Committee that monitors progress with the board's goals, and a Policy Committee that clarifies board direction.*

They have devoted time and effort to the organization's mission and vision, and towards those goals and policies that will help achieve their desired future. They are constantly communicating their vision and goals to their various publics, and their commitment towards achieving success is evident. Collectively, these characteristics of proactive boards are the indicators of board effectiveness.

## **The Seven Governance Responsibilities of a Non-profit Board**

Boards that are focused to their governance role give primary attention to seven critical tasks. A thorough understanding of these board responsibilities is needed to develop an effective governance action plan.

### **1. Creating a Vision**

*The job of the board is to transform the organization from what it is today to what the board desires for its long-term future.*

The most important task of the board is to clearly define and articulate its dream for the organization's future. The job of the board is not simply to resolve the organization's problems of today. More importantly, it is to transform the organization from what it is today to what the board desires for its long-term future.

### **2. Setting Strategic Direction**

*The board's planning processes are strategic to the degree that they lead the board purposefully toward its intended future.*

Only when the board has clearly defined its vision for the organization's future can it say its planning is strategically focused. The board's planning processes are strategic to the degree that they lead the board purposefully toward its intended future. Setting strategic direction is the process of the board coordinating the organization's mission, vision, values, goals and policies.

### **3. Hiring and Monitoring the Performance of the Administrator**

*It is the responsibility of the board to monitor and evaluate the performance of the administrator, based on predefined criteria.*

A board committed to a governance approach hires an administrative leader to handle the day-to-day management of the organization, lead the staff, and implement the direction of the board. As an integral member of the board's leadership team, the administrator also assists the board in its governance functions. It is the responsibility of the board to monitor and evaluate the performance of the administrator, based on predefined criteria.

### **4. Approving a Budget**

*The budget assists the board in working, over the long term, towards the achievement of its vision and, in the short term, towards the achievement of specific, measurable goals.*

The purpose of the budget is not simply to carry the organization through another year of operation, although the planning processes used by many boards may lead one to this conclusion. Rather, the budget assists the board in working, over the long term, towards the

achievement of its vision and, in the short term, towards the achievement of specific, measurable goals.

### **5. Focusing on results**

An important task of the board, and one often forgotten, is to achieve the results the board desires. How effectively the board monitors the system and measures results will depend directly on how clearly it has defined its expectations. The clearer the board's expectations, the easier it is for the board to track its success in achieving desired results.

*The clearer the board's expectations, the easier it is for the board to track its success in achieving desired results.*

### **6. Advocating For Constituents**

The attention of a governance board should always be directed outward - to the needs of its constituents. The reason the organization exists is to positively improve some aspect of life for its constituents, and it is to this end that an effective board devotes its efforts.

*The reason the organization exists is to positively improve some aspect of life for its constituents.*

### **7 Communicating**

Governance boards work diligently to establish strong two-way communication frameworks with their various publics – constituents, staff and others. They are as concerned with seeking input and feedback as they are with reporting information.

*Governance boards are as concerned with seeking input and feedback as they are with reporting information.*

### **Summary**

Boards will always find ways to deal with their current issues and challenges. Effective boards are proactive in their approach to board leadership, and focus their attention primarily towards their desired future. They deal with the present, and they make a commitment to planning for their future.

Conventional planning processes do not always start with a clear vision of the desired future. Board attention primarily may be directed towards resolving the organization's current problems. Governance planning, on the other hand, starts with a clear look at the desired future, regardless of the organization's present circumstances and challenges. It shifts the focus away from the present reality, and ahead well into the future, toward a well-defined target.

*Governance planning starts with an unbridled look at the desired future, regardless of the organization's present circumstances and challenges.*

For planning to be strategic, it must be targeted – toward a clearly defined vision of the board’s desired future for the organization. Specifically, strategic planning is the process of transforming the organization from its current reality towards its desired future, conducted in an atmosphere of conflict and change.

Governance planning links directly to the role of the board. Board approaches to governance tend to be reactive or proactive. All boards fall somewhere along the continuum of these two quite diverse approaches to board leadership. Reactive boards take a ‘fire station’ approach to board governance. Their planning is a reaction to the board’s current circumstances and emerging challenges. Proactive boards focus their attention primarily towards their governance responsibilities and their vision of success.

## **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness** **– Planning Strategically**

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- The board's focus primarily is with governance, and not with the daily management of the affairs of the organization.
- The board's commitment towards a governance approach is shown through its preparation of a comprehensive governance action plan.
- The board's approach to planning is primarily proactive, focusing on the desired future, and not just reactive, concerned with addressing current organizational problems.

## **Questions for Board Reflection**

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1. Does the board have a clearly stated purpose?
2. Does the board have a clear target – a description of its desired future for the organization?
3. Does the board have in place a written plan that clearly outlines the board's direction and its intended actions both for the short term and the long term?
4. Does the board's budget planning relate the organization's financial operations and needs directly to the board's stated long term and short term goals?
5. Has the board defined indicators of success for each of its stated short term and long term goals?
6. In what ways does the board demonstrate its advocacy in support of constituents?
7. Does the board have a communications plan that lists its strategies both for reporting to its publics, and for seeking input and feedback from constituents?



# Chapter 2

## The Board's Mandate and Mission

### **Mandate and Mission**

Governance planning begins with a review of the board's mandate, often referred to as its Terms of Reference, and the organization's purpose, often called its mission.

When and why was your organization formed? Who formed it and with what authority? What terms of reference were provided to the board that defined its role, responsibilities and authority? What external agencies, Chief and Council, government or otherwise, provide direction that the board must follow? These are questions of mandate.

Boards of provincially registered societies and associations are required to create and file a founding constitution, a document that defines the structure, role and responsibilities, and the authority of the board. A constitution provides societies and other agencies with basic terms of reference for the organization's operation. It mandates the organization's purpose, how the organization is expected to structure itself, and how it is to operate.

Other types of boards are established locally, for example by the authority of Chief and Council, to assume responsibility for some specific aspect of the life of the community's members. Mandate documents for such boards are as approved by the Chief and Council.

### ***Developing the Board's Governance Action Plan – Our Example***

Our example of an organization developing a governance action plan is that of an on-reserve school board formed by Chief and Council to assume overall responsibility for the schooling of the community's children. The decision to form a First Nation school board was made by Chief and Council after the membership had expressed longstanding concerns with the education available for their children.

We look at how this new board prepares its first governance action plan, and what strategies the board uses to establish and track its progress.

Previously, children from the community were bussed to public schools in the local school district. Several years ago, the First Nation had operated a small elementary school on the reserve, but it was an unsuccessful experience and the school closed after parents withdrew their children and chose to send them to the area's public schools.

Many of the First Nation's children experience attendance, behaviour and learning problems in the public schools. Parents and the community's leaders have expressed concerns and complained that their children have not been receiving the programs and services they need to experience success in school. The dropout rate is high. Few students succeed in graduating from the public school system.

Public school district officials have been meeting with the Chief and Council, but the public school district has been mired in financial difficulties of its own, and has not made Aboriginal schooling issues the priority that Chief and Council has requested.



A new elementary school has been built on reserve. The newly formed school board was tasked with ensuring that the school would be ready for opening for the start of the new school year just six months away. Community discussions to date have indicated a strong desire to develop a comprehensive, K-12, on-reserve school system.

During its initial meetings the school board, to establish a focus, directed its attention to the terms of reference as provided by Chief and Council. As the school board moved to structure itself and get properly organized, it agreed that it would direct its attention to the following priorities.

- Focus the board's attention toward its governance role and responsibilities.
- Develop mission and vision statements.
- Identify issues that require immediate board attention, and which will provide for a smooth opening of the new elementary school.
- Create a strategic plan to guide the board through its term of office.
- Hire a school principal to get the school operational, hire staff, and implement the board's direction.

Note that, for the most part, these priorities are not unique to a school board. They apply to any non-profit board that commits to a governance approach to board leadership.

### **Reviewing the Board's Terms of Reference**

It was only after extensive community discussion, debate and consultation that Chief and Council had authorized the formation of a school board. Chief and Council clearly outlined its expectations and provided direction to the school board in a mandate document referred to as the First Nation School Board Terms of Reference.

This mandate document, included in Chapter Ten as Appendix A to the board's governance action plan, defined: the composition and structure of the board; its term of office; the process for future school board elections; the governance role, responsibilities and authority of the board; limitations to the board's authority; Chief and Council expectations; the requirement for strategic planning; and reporting requirements.

To ensure that members of the first school board would have the enthusiasm, energy and commitment desired to see the board through its first term of office, Chief and Council invited applications for the initial school board member positions. Following an interview process, Chief and Council then appointed selected members to the first school board for a three-year term of office.

### **Developing a Mission Statement**

*An organization's mission statement specifies its purpose, the reason for its existence.*

An organization's mission statement specifies its purpose, the reason for its existence. It describes, usually in a single sentence - albeit, sometimes a very long sentence - why the organization exists. Effective board members keep their organization's mission close to their hearts, and use it as the basis for their every decision.

Is the purpose of your organization today the same as it was at its inception? Is this purpose known, understood and accepted by everyone with a vested interest in your organization – board members, staff, constituents and others? Do all members of the organization agree with the purpose as stated? How has your organization changed over time? Have new challenges affected the organization's purpose, and the way your board works to shape the organization's future? These are questions of mission.

A board should not assume that incoming board members are knowledgeable about the organization and its mission. They may know little about the history and development of the organization or the board to which they have been elected or appointed. They may have been specifically provided with terms of reference, a constitution, a policy book, and the stated purpose of their organization, but they may still come to the board table unaware of the guiding philosophy that drives the board's actions. If they have been provided with this information, they may not have, for whatever reasons, read it.

If the organization has a mission, board members may not know of it. If they are aware of it, unless it has warranted some discussion, they may not understand its purpose, its relevance or its importance. Often boards will find that none of the current board members was on the board when the mission statement was established. It is always a worthy goal to have regu-

lar and ongoing discussions regarding the organization's purpose and guiding philosophy.

The need for discussion, debate and agreement about the organization's mission may be dismissed by some board members, who feel the board's time could be better spent discussing other more pressing matters. When a board gives attention to the concept of mission, it may find that the purpose of the organization is not as self-evident as its members first thought. For example, school boards will find that a review of their organization's purpose creates discussion and debate about the very purpose of schooling and education. Ask several people at random to state the purpose of schooling, and one will receive a wide variety of responses. For some, schooling is preparation for training for a vocation, and they feel it should be specific in its purpose. Others prefer that schooling be more general in its purpose, and desire that schooling be broad-based and provide a foundation for lifelong and experiential learning.

Whatever your organization's purpose, it should be written. Requiring a written statement of purpose forces people to reflect upon, organize and clarify their thoughts. Without a written mission statement, people are left to their individual interpretations about why the organization exists and what it is trying to achieve.

The goal of the board in approving an organizational mission statement should be to describe the organization's uniqueness. If whatever statement is developed is general enough that it applies equally to any board or any organization of a similar type, it begs the question, "Why not have all boards of a similar structure and purpose under one jurisdiction?"

### **Approving a Mission – Our Strategic Planning Example**

As the school board began its mission-setting process, it considered three key questions:

- How inclusive should the mission-setting process be?
- What is a reasonable schedule for completing the process?
- What strategies can the board create to focus ongoing attention to its mission?

Again, these questions are not unique to a school board. They apply equally for any non-profit board.

*It is always a worthy goal to have regular and ongoing discussions regarding the organization's purpose and guiding philosophy.*

*Requiring a written statement of purpose forces people to reflect upon, organize and clarify their thoughts.*

*The goal of the board in approving an organizational mission statement should be to describe the organization's uniqueness.*

After reflecting on the comments from community members at various meetings, and reviewing the mandate document, the school board decided that the purpose of the First Nation school system was already well-defined, and that it was not necessary to expend time and effort calling for further input from the membership. This action drew criticism. Some community members felt that the board should have involved more people in the definition of a mission statement.

Regardless, at the board's initiative, an initial draft mission statement was developed as follows:

### **Draft Mission Statement**

The mission of the First Nation school is to provide on-reserve schooling opportunities that foster pride in their First Nations heritage, culture, traditions and language.

Board debate centered around the choice of the verb “to provide”. All agreed that providing opportunity was important, but several felt that the statement was not strong enough. Was it sufficient for the board just to provide opportunities? What if the opportunities provided didn't result in success? Should the board be doing more than just providing opportunities? After extensive discussion, board members agreed that the statement needed to be stronger. They needed to ensure that the opportunities that the board provided were those that would lead to successful results.

### **Final Mission Statement**

The final draft was a revised statement.

The mission of the First Nation school is to provide educational opportunities that lead to student success and achievement, and that instill student pride in their First Nations heritage, culture, traditions and language.

With this stronger statement of purpose, board members understood that they were placing a higher level of responsibility on the board. They were now saying that more than just providing opportunities, the board would work to ensure that these opportunities resulted in students' success.

The board considered how it would give ongoing attention to this statement of purpose. Three initial strategies were developed: posting the mission statement on posterboards located at the school; approving a policy requiring that the mission statement be formally reviewed each year (see Chapter Five); and developing a tracking process that would follow students' progress once they left the school.

### **Limitations to the Board's Authority**

Boards vary in their decision-making authority. Any limitation to a board's authority should be clearly indicated in the mandate document. One area where boards may find they have limited authority is in the area of finance and budgeting.

*Any limitation to a board's authority should be clearly indicated in the mandate document.*

In the case of our newly formed school board, Chief and Council has, for reasons explained in Chapter Six, placed limitations on the board's financial authority. Chief and Council, as the body ultimately accountable for all funding received by the membership, needed assurance that available funding would be properly expended. At the same time, Chief and Council wanted the school board to be fully responsible for the operation of the elementary school and any future school expansion which would include a secondary school program. The mandate document explained this balance and gave direction regarding the board's financial role and accountability.

### **Leading With a Governance Approach**

The expectations of Chief and Council that the school board take a results-focused, governance approach were clearly stated in the Terms of Reference document. It was not left to chance that school board members would understand the concept of governance. Chief and Council defined the school board's governance role and responsibilities in the mandate document.

*Chief and Council defined the school board's governance role and responsibilities in the mandate document.*

The school board, once formed, was expected to develop a vision and the appropriate short and long-term plan that would lead to the development of a successful school system. The board's long-term plan was to state how success would be measured. Requiring the board to meet regularly with the principal and to conduct his/her evaluation annually was meant to encourage a level of communication between the board and the principal that might otherwise not have occurred. Chief and Council wanted the community's membership to be involved in the development of the board's vision, and required that the membership be consulted as part of this process.

### **Identifying Immediate Issues that Require Board Attention**

Although the board set its focus on developing a long-range governance plan that would define its desired future, it also acknowledged that there were pressing current challenges that warranted the board's immediate attention. How would the board encourage parents to enroll their children in the new elementary school? Establishing a long-term vision for the community's school would be meaningless if the board couldn't get the school up and running effectively in the short term. Having hired an experienced principal, the board now wanted assurance that competent staff would be hired to attract new enrollments. School board members were aware that parents wanted assurance that a competent principal and staff would be hired before they would commit to sending their children to the new school. This was a chicken and egg issue for the board. On the one hand, the board was reluctant to hire new staff without a guarantee of enrollment. On the other hand, parents were reluctant to enroll their children until they felt comfortable that the staff was in place.

Who would equip and furnish the school? Somebody had to assume the responsibility of getting the school ready for opening. The board wanted a principal who could get the school operational with minimum direction from the board. The board knew that it had to address several pressing issues immediately, as well as undertaking long-term planning.

### **Summary**

Mandate documents provide both a foundation and direction for the board's work, and state limitations to the board's authority.

A clearly defined, written and posted mission statement informs constituents, staff and others about the purpose of the organization, and assists the board in setting a purposeful direction. Further, it defines the uniqueness of the organization.

Some boards are given full responsibility for raising the operational and capital funding required to run their systems; others have financial controls and requirements imposed on them by a higher authority. Regardless of any limitations placed on the authority of the board, the board's role is one of governance – setting the direction desired for the organization's long-term future.

With a review of the board's mandate and mission, the board is positioned to begin drafting its governance plan. These initial statements of intention and purpose as defined in the Terms of Reference guide the board as it defines and commits to its vision of the ideal future.

*A clearly defined, written and posted mission statement informs constituents, staff and others about the purpose of the organization, and assists the board in setting a purposeful direction.*

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness**  
**– The Board's Mandate and Mission**

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- The board regularly reviews its mandate and mission.
- At these reviews, the board takes time to properly discuss and debate the purpose of the organization.
- The board actively commits to its mission. The board's decisions and the board's direction reflect this commitment.

 **Questions for Board Reflection**

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1. Has the board defined a mission statement that clearly states the organization's agreed-upon purpose?
2. Do constituents understand and support the board's stated mission?
3. Do the organization's staff members understand, accept and commit to the stated mission?
4. What, if any, are the limitations to the board's authority?
5. What are the indications, if any, that the board allows these limitations to affect its approach to governance?



# Chapter 3

## Defining the Vision

The most critical step in governance action planning, and the one most often missed, is that of setting the board's target - a clear and motivating vision. With a clearly defined vision, every decision the board makes, and every action it takes, can more easily be linked to its purpose.

*The most critical step in governance action planning, and the one most often missed, is that of setting the board's target - a clear and motivating vision.*

Because boards can easily find themselves heavily involved in the management of the organization, it should not be a surprise that members on these boards often have difficulty finding time in the board's busy schedule to actively pursue long-term planning. They may be so focused on the present that they are unable to think about and make time for their organization's long-term future.

They may intend to define a vision, and similarly to attend to other governance tasks, as soon as they have dealt with the many problems they are currently facing at the board table. This often means that no clear vision is ever set, because boards will always have a multitude of pressures and problems to capture the attention of board members.

Effective board members turn this process around. They focus on plans and policies, and allocate time to those board tasks that they consider important. They are not prepared to just let things happen. They will deal with the organization's challenges as they occur, but they will not let these interfere with their commitment to ultimately achieve their vision of their desired future.

They understand that planning, and maintaining the board's commitment to a vision, requires time management. It requires discipline, commitment

and perseverance. It does not just happen. Effective planning only happens when the board makes it happen.

### **What is a Vision Statement?**

Once the board has carefully reviewed its mandate and has defined its mission, the next step in the planning process is to ensure that there is an agreed-upon definition of the desired future.

What exactly is it that the board is trying accomplish? What will the organization look like five, ten, fifteen or more years into the future? In what ways will the organization then be different from what it is today? How will constituents have benefited from the organization's programs and services? How will their lives have improved? These are questions of vision.

*A vision is a statement defining the desired future.*

A vision is a statement defining the desired future. It is a written description of what the board is trying to achieve over the long term. It paints the picture of what the board wants to accomplish. It is the foundation for the development of policy and the board's short and long-term planning.

### **Why is Vision-Setting Important?**

Non-profit boards are about programs and services to people. They exist to improve one or more aspects of people's lives. It is this improvement and enrichment of the lives of constituents that should always be the board's primary focus.

Boards that make their constituents their priority ask: "In what ways will people's lives be positively different as a result of this organization's work?" and "How can we ensure that the future we achieve is one of our own design?" Only when the board's eyes are clearly focused on the desired future for its constituents is it able to develop those specific strategies that will enable the board to achieve it.

*Without a clear vision, there is no ultimate purpose to the board's work.*

The target, the vision, comes first. The strategies to achieve it follow. Without a clear vision, there is no ultimate purpose to the board's work. With a well-defined vision, the board can lay a track towards its intended target, and it can measure its progress and success in reaching it. Without a

vision, the board wanders, moving towards a variety of targets that vary as to the board's current circumstances.

Governance planning must not be viewed as an event – as something that has a beginning, an implementation period, and an end. Rather, it must be seen as a continuing process that drives the board's direction. Effective boards are always in some stage of action planning. It is an ongoing process. It never ends.

*Effective boards are always in some stage of action planning.*

### **Who Sets the Vision?**

As a board ponders its process for setting an organizational vision, the question arises: "Whose vision is the board approving?" If the board undertakes the process in isolation, the resulting vision will be perceived as a board statement, and there will be no ownership of the process, or of the result, from the organization's constituents and staff. Unless those with a direct interest in the organization's success have input, they may reject the board's vision as not being representative of the people the board serves.

*Unless those with a direct interest in the organization's success have input, they may reject the board's vision as not being representative of the people the board serves.*

If the board wants input from constituents, staff and possibly others, then the vision-setting process becomes much more elaborate, complex and time consuming. How extensive should the consultation be? How much time should be allowed for the process? Who will gather, analyze and summarize this information for the board? And what will it all cost? These questions will provoke debate at the board table.

The more involved the process, the more the board needs to consider its available resources. For governance planning to work effectively, someone must lead the process. Who within the organization has the training, skills and knowledge to lead the governance planning process?

Often the organization's administrator is the catalyst that motivates the board to set a vision. If the board's executive director has training and experience in strategic planning, it may be appropriate to have her initiate and implement the process. Where this occurs, the board must make it clear that the administrator is assisting the board in its governance function. This is a legitimate task for the board's administrator. The board must approve the strategic direction. It is important that this direction be seen as the

*The board must be seen to be in the driver's seat and in control of the planning process.*

board's direction, and not just that created by the administrator. The board must be seen to be in the driver's seat and in control of the planning process.

It is not appropriate that a board member be the facilitator for the direction-setting process. Having a board member act as the facilitator may result in conflict among board members, and will be intimidating to constituents and staff. If the administrator cannot lead the process, the board is wise to use a consultant hired for this specific purpose. This will allow all board members equally, and the administrator, to fully participate in the planning process.

### ***Developing the Board's Governance Action Plan – Our example***

The process of developing a governance action plan raises important questions about the organization's desired future – questions that might not otherwise be addressed or even asked without a board emphasis on strategic planning. For example, our school board, tasked with creating a vision of an ideal school system for its constituents, was forced to think specifically about what the school board should strive to achieve for its constituents over the long term.

What exactly did parents want and expect for their children's schooling? What knowledge, skills, qualities and attitudes would their children ideally possess after completing the First Nation school program? How would their lives have improved, and in what ways would these students be positively different from those who did not attend the First Nation school?

Board members began these discussions by debating "The Educated Student." This was their ultimate goal. Once the board had defined its concept of the educated student, it could identify and commit to specific actions that would help achieve that result. Early in their discussions, board members realized that educating students to the level of the board's expectations would only happen if the board did what was necessary to make it happen. Board discussions centered on the results it desired. It quickly became clear that how the First Nation school system evolved over time – positively or negatively – would depend directly on the expectations, decisions and actions of the school board.

With the assistance of a facilitator, a series of community forums and meetings were held to seek the input of the community's members about what they desired for the schooling of their children, and specifically for their input into what constituted "The Educated Student". After a review of all the discussions and feedback, common themes and issues emerged.

The board gave approval in-principle to the following as its description of the educated student.

### **The Educated Student**

The educated student shows a curiosity about life and the surrounding world. S/he shows pride in our heritage and language, respect for nature, the land, and the environment. S/he is able to function effectively in both the local community and the broader society. S/he strives for personal excellence in all s/he aspires to attain. S/he demonstrates self-respect through positive attitudes towards personal health – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. S/he is honest, shows integrity in one's actions, and is respectful, tolerant, and compassionate towards others. S/he is a lifelong learner.

### **The Ideal School System**

To establish the educational environment that will help create the "educated student," the parents and community members, after extensive debate and consultation, listed the factors that would define their desired school system.

Community members want a school system that:

- teaches a First Nations curriculum that emphasizes students' understanding of their First Nations history, culture, traditions and language;
- offers the opportunity for their children to attend their complete K-12 school program on the reserve;

- strives to recruit qualified First Nations teachers who act as role models for the students;
- addresses the issue of poor graduation rates for First Nations students, by significantly increasing the percentage of students who graduate from school;
- promotes lifelong learning;
- promotes high levels of achievement and success in all aspects of each student's life;
- provides assistance to students who experience learning or behavioural problems, or who have difficulty adjusting to the school environment;
- employs teachers who show respect for the First Nations culture, who have excellence as their goal, who work to create high levels of achievement, who recognize the individual abilities and interests of students, who vary their teaching methods and adjust the curriculum and programs to the needs of their students, and who actively sponsor extracurricular programs and activities;
- welcomes children into the school and ensures it is a place where children feel safe, happy and appreciated;
- welcomes parents, Elders and others into the school and encourages them to actively participate in aspects of the school's programs;
- properly prepares graduates for post secondary training, employment and further education.

With a clear list of constituent expectations for what constituted the “educated student” and the indicators of an effective school system, the board created a draft vision statement.

## DRAFT VISION STATEMENT

The First Nation offers a K-12, on-reserve school widely acknowledged and commended for its educational opportunities, programs and services.

The school's programs give emphasis to the development of the whole child. Care is taken to positively develop all aspects of a child's development – mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Teachers modify programs and vary their instructional methods to respond to students' individual needs.

The school is alive with programs, cultural events and artwork that reflect the school's First Nations curriculum and culture. The curriculum focuses attention to First Nations history, heritage, culture, and traditions. As a result of the school's language program, all students become fluent in their native language.

Students feel welcome, safe and happy at the school. They enjoy school, approach their learning enthusiastically, and comment positively about their teachers and programs. They show high levels of respect and tolerance towards adults and their fellow students.

Students are well supervised. Students, parents, staff, and community members alike are proud of their school and the success and accomplishments of its students. Students actively participate in the school's curricular and extracurricular programs.

The school's staff includes First Nations teachers who work diligently to promote student excellence and high standards of achievement in all aspects of student life. The school's teachers see themselves as role models for children, and conduct themselves accordingly.

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The school's goal is a 100% graduation rate. Assistance is provided to students with learning difficulties who are not experiencing success. Graduates reflect back on their time at the First Nation school as a positive, enjoyable and rewarding experience. They report that their schooling properly prepared them for their post secondary education and training programs, for their future employment, and for their service as a contributing citizen of the community.

The school has become the center of the community. Community members of all ages feel welcome at the school, visit it regularly, and take an active interest in student programs and their progress in school. The First Nation is proud of the school's teachers and students, and of their accomplishments, and comment positively about the school, the staff, and the students. Elders are visible at the school interacting positively with students. The community is pleased that visitors from other communities comment that they wish their children were able to attend this school.

The board's goal is to provide a school environment and educational opportunities for students that motivate and enable them to achieve and to experience success. Specifically, the board desires that graduates from the school become successful in their personal endeavours by whatever their definition of success. Further, the board desires that graduates speak positively and proudly about their school and the education they have received.

### **Finalizing the Vision Statement**

The board was pleased with the draft of "The Educated Student" and with the draft of a vision statement. Before giving its final approval and publishing and circulating these statements, the board wanted further feedback from the community. The drafts were circulated for a period of sixty days



with a request for any feedback to the board. The community was pleased with the draft statements.

### **What this Vision Means**

The school program that this school board envisions and aspires to create represents a choice – a choice of desired outcomes that will only evolve to the degree that the board makes a commitment to bringing about those conditions that will make this vision a reality.

Every sentence of the vision statement is carefully worded to help create a descriptive picture of the board's dream for the First Nation school. Every comment has implications for the board's ongoing work.

This vision statement is shared with all prospective staff members, who are ultimately hired on the basis of their commitment to this vision. Teachers new to the school understand that they are role models for students and that they are expected to adapt curriculum and their teaching methods to what students need to experience success. They are clear about the board's expectations of having all students experience success in their schooling and graduate. They understand that they are expected to provide a strong extracurricular program for students. With the vision so clearly set, there can be no confusion among teachers or others about the board's expectations of the principal and staff. To assist in this process, the board established a strong, ongoing communication plan with the principal regarding its expectations for staff performance.

When a board states its vision in writing, it expresses not only what it aspires to achieve, but also what it stands for – what it values and what it considers as important.

In its early years, the First Nation school may only include the elementary grades. Because of the strong desire within the community for a complete K-12 offering, it may eventually consider expanding to include a secondary school component. A definitive vision, and a strong commitment to achieve it, may in itself become the catalyst that quickens this process.

*When a board states its vision in writing, it expresses not only what it aspires to achieve, but also what it stands for – what it values and what it considers as important.*

### Key Vision-Setting Questions

In completing its vision setting exercises, the board adopted a series of guiding questions to assist it with tracking its progress toward its newly defined vision. These follow-up visioning questions assisted board members in defining their role and responsibilities and greatly assisted the board with its goalsetting.

First, what exactly did the board want children to learn? This is the question of curriculum, the “what” of their learning. Second, what teachers, staff, facilities, equipment, and materials would the board provide to assist students with their learning? This was the issue of resources. The greater the board’s expectations for success, the greater would be the need for resources. Third, how would the board, parents and others know if the children were learning to the levels expected of them? This raised questions about student testing and the assessment of programs and services. Fourth, what programs and services would the board provide to assist those students who were experiencing learning difficulties? This was the issue of remediation. This last question presented a particular challenge to the board in light of its mission statement clearly specifying that the board would provide programs that would enable children to experience success. The board’s mission statement was clear in this regard. The board could not simply sit back and say it provided opportunities; it now had a responsibility to ensure that its programs led to student success, and success for all students.

School boards that ask and ponder these questions develop a focus as they work towards their vision of the ideal future. Generalized, they are the reflective questions that all boards, regardless of their constituency, should be asking. What is the benefit they are providing for their constituents? What programs and services will the organization provide to achieve this intended benefit? What resources will the board provide to support the programs and services the organization offers? How will the board know if its programs are achieving the results intended? And finally, what additional resources, if any, will the board provide to assist those constituents who, for whatever reason, are not experiencing the benefits and the results that the board intended?

*It is so easy for boards to fall away from their governance focus and become preoccupied with the management of the system.*

Regrettably, these important questions are not always addressed and, in too many cases, not even asked? Why? Because it is so easy for boards to fall

away from their governance focus and become preoccupied with the management of the system.

School board members at first felt uncomfortable with the question about curriculum – “What knowledge should children learn, and at what point in their schooling should they learn it?” As lay people, board members rarely have a background in curriculum development. Board members may find themselves wanting to immediately pass this one on to the educators.

This is an example of why having board members learn to ask the right questions is so important. The issue is not whether board members have any training or background in curriculum. Rather, the issue is the expectations of constituents, and the board, about what children should know. For example, the community had a vision of students leaving school with a strong understanding of their First Nations heritage – their history, their culture, their traditions and their language. They had high expectations in this regard. After all, that was one of the very reasons why the community wanted its own school!

What should be taught? What resources will the board provide to meet the targets set by the board? How will the board know if students are learning to the board’s expectations? And what help will the board provide for those students who, for whatever reasons, are experiencing difficulty in achieving the board expectations? These are key questions for members of a school board.

### **Defining Organizational Values**

Closely associated with the process of defining the organization’s vision is defining the organization’s values. Our values are what we hold to be important. What matters? What is it that the board is prepared to do, or not prepared to do in its work, because it considers it to be the right thing to do, or the wrong thing to do?

At its community forums, the broader based question of values was raised with parents and other interested community members. From these forums, the following values emerged as important: pride in First Nations heritage; respect for Elders; respect for the land and the environment; safety; and health.

### Summary

*Governance action planning requires a target.*

Governance action planning requires a target. Defining that target is the process of setting a vision for the organization, a vision directly linked to its purpose. This is a board responsibility which, when completed, demonstrates the board's commitment to the organization's purpose, its mission.

Ideally, the vision approved by the board will be the result of a broad-based process that seeks input from constituents. To mobilize the resources of the organization in one direction – directly towards the vision – the board must work to build the support of its total community.

Because non-profit organizations exist to improve or enhance one or more aspects of life for their constituents, there are key visioning questions that boards can ask to assist them in this process. First, over the long term, what benefit will the board ultimately achieve for its constituents? What programs and services will the board provide? For our school board, this first question required a description of the educated student. Second, in what specific ways does the board want them to improve? For the school board, this required a definition of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualities that children would possess as a result of their passing through the First Nation school system. Third, how will the board know if its programs and services are bringing about the desired improvements? This requires that the board define its expectations, and determine measurements for its success. Fourth, what will the board do to provide assistance to those who, for whatever reasons, are not successful in meeting the board's goals. For our First Nation school, this required that the board define the additional resources it is willing to provide for those students who experience difficulties in their learning.

An ongoing responsibility of the board is to ask questions about what is happening within the organization and why. For example, school board members may not be trained in the intricacies of instruction, but they should direct what curriculum is to be taught and ensure processes are in place for measuring student success.

*A board clarifies its values through discussion and debate at the board table.*

Developing the board's vision requires that the board also define its values – what it considers important as the board sets its direction. A board clarifies its values through discussion and debate at the board table. Whatever

values the board espouses should be evident in the decisions and actions of the board.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness**  
**– Defining the Organization’s Vision**

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- The board’s vision statement is both understood and accepted by board members, staff and constituents.
- The board’s planning processes start with a review of the organization’s vision and mission statements.
- An analysis of board meeting agendas and minutes shows that the board is focussed on, and committed to, achieving its vision.
- The board has defined its values in writing.

 **Questions for Board Reflection**

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1. To what degree has the board invited input from staff and constituents in its definition of the organization’s desired future?
2. In developing its vision, has the board correspondingly defined its values?
3. How do the board’s decisions, actions, mission, values, goals and policies link to the organization’s vision statement?
4. Who will lead the board through its vision-setting process?
5. What is the board’s timeline for completing the vision-setting process?

# Chapter 4

## Setting Purposeful Goals

With its purpose clear, its mandate understood, and its vision defined, the board can now begin to develop the long-term and short-term goals needed to move the organization forward towards its vision.

Boards that commit to governance planning link their goals to the organization's vision statement. Every sentence of the organization's vision statement reflects some aspect of the desired future. The board's task is to isolate these aspirations and transform them into statements of intended board actions.

Goals indicate the board's direction and the board's priorities. They describe the board's intentions for future action. Short-term goals are most often set on an annual basis. Longer-term goals are set for three, five or ten, perhaps even twenty years or longer into the future.

*Goals indicate the board's direction and the board's priorities.*

The board's vision must be long-term. Meaningful change takes time, effort, and perseverance. What is important for the board to do first and why? What should it do next and why? This focus on planning requires extensive discussion and debate, and should form a major part of a board's agenda.

### **Setting Goals – Our Governance Planning Example**

With a vision statement defined to guide its direction, the school board met to determine its priorities. Because the board felt that everything in the vision statement was important, it at first wanted to do too much too quickly. Realizing that it had limited resources, the task of the board was to

choose a few meaningful goals that, done well, would become the encouragement for everybody to continue the process over the long-term.

An effective, long-term goalsetting process suggests how the board will accomplish its intentions over time. A short-sighted approach gives emphasis only to the immediate future; that is, what the board intends to do over the next year.

### **Establishing Long-Term Goals**

An important part of the planning process is defining the long-term goals required to move the organization towards the board's vision. Each sentence in the vision statement describes a result that the board desires to achieve. Each of these results needs to be translated into a goal statement that will lead to its achievement. In turn, each long-term goal will require an annual set of strategies and actions that will cumulatively lead to its achievement.

In the case of the First Nation school board, the vision statement was carefully analyzed to determine what goals would move the school forward towards desired results. Following are the key long-term goals derived from the board's vision statement.

1. Develop a comprehensive, K-12, on-reserve First Nation school.
2. Give attention to the development of the whole child – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
3. Develop a strong First Nations curriculum that builds student pride in their First Nations heritage – history, culture, traditions and language.
4. Build staff and student pride in the school and in the successes of its students.
5. Create a safe and happy environment where students eagerly participate in an active curricular and extracurricular program.
6. Strive for a 100% graduation rate.
7. Provide assistance as appropriate for students who encounter learning difficulties, or who have difficulty adjusting to the school environment.
8. Demonstrate that graduating students meet the First Nation's definition of "The Educated Student."
9. Build the school as the focal point of the community.



## **Establishing Short-Term Goals**

From its review of the approved vision statement and its long-term goals, the board established its initial, short-term goals.

- Increase student enrollment in the school.
- Build a school staff committed to the First Nation vision of the desired future.
- Begin development of a curriculum rich in its emphasis on First Nations history, culture, traditions and language.
- Provide services to students who have special needs and/or have experienced difficulties adjusting to the school environment.
- Actively involve parents and other community members in the school's programs.

As organizational goals are formulated, it is important that the board understand it has responsibilities to provide the resources and help create the conditions that will enable staff to achieve these goals. This requires extensive communication between the board and the principal regarding expectations, and agreement about who will do what and when.

## **Organizing the Board's Goals**

It is not unusual in goalsetting to find that there is overlap in the definition of short-term and long-term goals. The challenge is in determining what should be done, in what order, by whom and by when.

After extensive discussion, the school board approved a final set of goals for its current year governance action plan as stated in Chapter Ten. The board's actions must be purposeful and show that the board is always working towards an endpoint, a target. It is critical that the board's communications strategies demonstrate how the board's intended actions will move the organization forward toward the vision.

## **Board Actions in Support of Goals**

Goals are the prerequisite for purposeful actions. If in its vision statement the board comments that its goal is a 100% graduation rate, then it will not be able to idly stand by when a student fails in his program and eventually drops out of school. With this commitment, the board now has a responsibility to strive to bring about the desired result, to show that it means what

it says, and that it will make a special effort to help all students succeed with their schooling.

The fact that this school does not yet have a secondary school component, and therefore will not have its own graduates for several years to come, should not alter the board's commitment to begin working towards this goal. Students who eventually complete their Grade 12 year will not achieve graduation based solely on their schoolwork during their final year. Rather, their graduation will be the result of their twelve years (actually, thirteen years, if Kindergarten is included) of effort and commitment to their schooling. Showing a concern and commitment to helping students achieve graduation must start with creating the conditions for success during students' first year of schooling, and not just during their final graduating year. For the school board, this requires that it establish a strong foundation of elementary schooling.

With its goal of a 100% graduation rate, the board must have a clear communication with the principal about what happens when children fail or experience difficulties in their schooling. In this regard, the board and the principal become a team closely monitoring student successes and what happens with those students who experience difficulties. Students who might otherwise eventually drop out must be encouraged to stay at school and complete their education. Although the school did not yet have a secondary school component, the principal was challenged by the board to work with the elementary school's staff to identify those actions that could help build a foundation of successful school experiences for students during their elementary school years.

### **Summary**

Goalsetting is a strategy that enables a board to work gradually and systematically towards its vision. With a clear vision, the board can plan, make decisions, and take specific actions that will move the organization closer towards that target.

An organization's board-approved vision statement should be broken down into its component parts, with goals developed that link to each of these statements. A schedule should be established to determine which are short-term and which are long-term goals. Collectively these goals become the

basis for actions that will move the organization forward towards the board's vision.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness**  
**– Setting Purposeful Goals**

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- The board, after its review of the vision statement, has created a series of short and long term goals which, when pursued, will lead the board closer to its vision of the desired future.
- The board's plan indicates what actions will be taken in the short-term that will move the organization towards the board's vision.

 **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. How ambitious is the board's goalsetting program for the upcoming year?
2. Do each of the board's goals link directly to the vision statement?
3. How do the board's short-term goals link with the board's long-term goals?

# Chapter 5

## Key Policies for Board Approval

### **What is Policy?**

Policy defines the board's direction to guide the operation of a non-profit organization. It is set by the organization's governing body, the board, subject to any limitations imposed on the board as stated in its Terms of Reference. The board's policies define what it wants done, what is allowable and not allowable, and to what degree.

The board's policies have legal implications for the organization. Should the organization experience an incident that results in a legal action, the board can expect that its policies will be reviewed. For example, if an accident occurs within a facility owned or operated by a board and a lawsuit is the result, lawyers may want to review what policy had been provided by the board. What direction had been provided to staff? What safety provisions had been directed by the board? Does any of the policy suggest board direction that might have minimized or prevented such an accident from occurring? Might the chances of an accident have been minimized or prevented if the board's expectations for safety had been more clearly stated?

Board members should take care to ensure that what the board means to say in its policies is in fact exactly what the board has stated. In legal situations, confusion or ambiguity in wording or intent may work against the interests of the board.

Policy, along with the board's goals, is a mechanism for defining the board's direction. It transforms decisions of the board into statements of direction, intended to guide the future decisions and actions of the board and staff. Not all decisions of the board become policy.

*The board's policies have legal implications for the organization.*

*Board members should take care to ensure that what the board means to say in its policies is in fact exactly what the board has stated. In legal situations, confusion or ambiguity in wording or intent may work against the interests of the board.*

Policies give guidance to the board and staff for future action. When problems arise, the board's policies provide a reference to guide the board and staff through their decision-making processes.

### **A Board Test for Effective Policy Development**

*On governance boards, the Policy Committee meets regularly and issues are discussed in their policy context.*

By analyzing the policy focus of a board, one can quickly determine if the board has a governance focus. On governance boards, the Policy Committee meets regularly and issues are discussed in their policy context. A policy-focused board strives to predict future challenges and, through the policies it establishes, give guidance as to how organizational matters might be handled.

Governance boards take a proactive approach to board leadership and make policy development a priority. Their policies are organized into a policy manual regularly accessed by the board. This policy manual is a living document that is regularly reviewed and updated.

How often does your board discuss policy? Are references to policy only made in passing as board members seek to justify their arguments? Or is it the basis of board decision-making, with board members calling on their policies to give them objective guidance during controversial and emotionally charged discussions and debates?

### **Proactive and Reactive Approaches to Policy Development**

*Boards with clearly defined policies are clear about their expectations for board and staff action.*

Proactive boards use policy to facilitate the work of board and staff, not to control it. Their policy direction is enabling - written to facilitate both the board's work and the staff's work. Boards with clearly defined policies are clear about their expectations for board and staff action. The more the board's expectations are clearly defined, the freer the board is to give attention to its other governance responsibilities.

Reactive boards seldom have a policy focus. On a reactive board, board members find their attention focused to current issues. If the board has a policy manual, it may be outdated. Its policy direction may be restrictive, meaning that, for the most part, it defines limitations to what the board and staff can do, and to what degree. If they have policies, these reactive boards may not follow them, preferring to deal with each situation and circum-

stance as it arises. This usually means that policy is referenced when it suits the pleasure of the board, and ignored when it does not. This causes difficulty for the administration and staff who find they cannot count on the board to follow its own directives when difficult or controversial matters arise. As a result, an administrator working with a reactive board predictably ends up taking management matters to the board for discussion.

Because their focus is primarily with management issues, reactive boards give little attention to policy development and review. They may have good intentions, but their priority is giving attention to more immediate and urgent matters.

Which best describes the policy focus of your board - proactive or reactive?

### ***Approving Policy – Our Governance Planning Example***

School board members agreed that as the first board, what it did, where it focused its attention, and what it defined as its priorities, would set the tone for the future conduct of board business. Early in its deliberations, the board decided that it would make policy, along with planning, a primary focus. At an early Policy Committee meeting, board members discussed a plan for addressing policy matters through its first term of office.

Because this was a new area for most of the board's members, they asked for board training in policy development. They wanted their policy development process to be consultative, allowing for input and comment from staff and constituents. And they wanted to be seen as being proactive, and not reactive, in their policy development. They agreed that they would identify, in advance, those policy areas that required direction from the board.

These areas included:

- Board governance (to assert the board's commitment to a governance approach)
- Strategic planning (to assert the board's ongoing commitment to strategic planning and to describe the process it would undertake)
- Conduct of board business (to explain how the board would conduct itself in its various meetings)

- Policy development (to define the board's process for developing and approving policy and to allow for comment and input during the draft stage of a policy)
- Finances and Budgeting (to define parameters for setting the budget and monitoring the organization's finances)

This latter concern for financial controls was an area of particular policy concern. The board shared the concern of Chief and Council that school board finances be tightly controlled. After a series of discussions, the board agreed to give attention, through the Policy Committee, to four areas of financial concern: the budget development process; financial reporting; the spending authority of the administrator; and the board's desire for an annual audit. These policies are discussed in Chapter Six.

### **Why Board Policies are Important**

*A board that wants to know every little detail about any and every matter affecting the organization will become so absorbed in detail that it will lose its focus.*

The board is ultimately accountable for everything that happens within its organization. Obviously, the board cannot be expected to know about every detail, nor can it do everything itself. Nor should it. Contrary to the wishes of some board members, the board doesn't have to know everything. A board that wants to know every little detail about any and every matter affecting the organization will become so absorbed in detail that it will lose its focus. It will not be able to see the forest for the trees.

The board's task is to determine what it wants done. It hires an administrator and staff to implement its direction. The more the staff can take care of details, and do so effectively, the more the board's time is freed up for its governance responsibilities.

*The purpose of policy is to give guidance and direction to board members and staff.*

Policies define the board's expectations. The purpose of policy is to give guidance and direction to board members and staff. This promotes consistency in the conduct of the organization's business. Effective policy development prevents confusion about who should do what, when and within what guidelines.

The school board in our example committed to governance planning as its key process for determining board direction. It wanted various steps of the planning process to happen automatically, without the board having to repeat its direction each year. It wanted its plan updated at the same time



every year. It wanted planning to occur prior to the finalization of the budget. In this way, the budget could be directly related to the board's current goals, and not vice versa. It wanted regular meetings with the principal to ensure that the board's directives were being implemented as intended.

As the board discussed its expectations for governance and strategic planning, the principal translated board member's comments from Policy Committee meeting discussions into draft policies for board consideration.

### **POLICY TOPIC: BOARD GOVERNANCE**

*Rationale: According to Terms of Reference established by Chief and Council, the school board is expected to take a governance approach to board leadership.*

### **POLICY**

The board commits to a governance approach to board leadership with primary attention focused toward setting a clear and purposeful direction for the First Nation school system, and to the seven key responsibilities of a board, specifically:

- defining the school's vision;
- setting strategic direction, including the definition of a school mission, values and goals;
- hiring and monitoring the performance of the school principal;
- approving an annual budget that includes the funding necessary to operate the school, and which shows commitment toward achieving a long-term vision;
- focusing on results, specifically student learning and student achievement;
- advocating for students; and
- communicating with the board's various constituents.

**POLICY TOPIC: PLANNING STRATEGICALLY**

Rationale: *Under its Terms of Reference, the school board is required to file a governance action plan annually. The governance plan sets the direction for the board's work – for the long-term and for the short-term.*

**POLICY**

The board commits to an ongoing governance planning process as the basis for its work. Governance planning will be a topic for board discussion at its November meeting annually. The board's governance plan, to be approved in February of each year after a consultative process involving input from staff and constituents, will be published and communicated to staff, constituents and others as appropriate.

The governance plan will be the primary document used by the board in its preparation of its budget for the subsequent school year. Meetings will be held quarterly with the school principal to review the board's progress with the plan.

By December 31st annually, the board will publish a report detailing its success in achieving predefined goals set for the previous school year. Included in this report will be an explanation of the board's progress towards achieving its desired future and its long-term goals.

Policies need not be elaborate or lengthy. Generally, a few sentences or paragraphs are sufficient to communicate the board's intent on any matter. This policy's three short paragraphs say much about the board's governance planning process. It says that the board is committed to governance planning as the foundation for all that the board does. It says that the board will begin discussions of the subsequent year's plan starting in November and will approve a finalized plan by February annually. It says that the board's vision

will be reviewed and its goals set before it considers a budget for the next budget year, and further, once the plan has been finalized, it says that the board will meet at least once every three months with the school principal to discuss its progress with the plan.

This is clear direction to the board, administration, staff and constituents that the board is very committed to governance action planning. It is in writing for everyone to see. This policy process increases the board's accountability. Constituents, the staff, and board members can now watch to determine if the board actually does what it says it intends to do. They can check the board's success, as described in its annual report, against those goals that the board published for the previous school year.

#### **POLICY TOPIC: DEVELOPMENT OF BOARD POLICY**

*Rationale: The school board desires that constituents have opportunity for input and/or comment on board policies prior to their final approval by the board. The board's goal in policy development is to ensure that board policy provides clear direction to the board and staff as they undertake their work.*

#### **POLICY**

Generally, the board's policy development process will include the following:

- publication of a list of priority policy topics at the start of each school year;
- formulation of a policy draft for discussion at a Policy Committee meeting;
- approval-in-principle of the draft policies by the board at a regular board meeting; and
- circulation of the draft policies for one month prior to the board giving final review and final approval of a policy at a subsequent board meeting.

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In emergency situations, the board reserves the right to make policy as required, without requiring these policy development steps.

**POLICY TOPIC: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE BOARD'S MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS**

*Rationale: Under its Terms of Reference, the school board is to give primary and ongoing attention to its approved statements of mission and vision.*

**POLICY**

At least once annually, normally during the month of November, the school board will formally review its current mission and vision statements. The board will comment regarding its commitment to these statements. An opportunity will be provided for members of the community, and the school's staff, to ask questions of the board.

**Mistakes Boards Make in Policy Planning**

The most common mistake boards make in their policy development is taking a reactive versus a proactive approach to policy development. Does the board simply list its current issues or wait for problems to occur, and then suggest that policies be created to establish how such matters should be addressed in the future? This is yet another example of the 'fire station' approach to board leadership as described in Chapter One.

The best policies are those that are created proactively, in anticipation of issues that might arise. This allows the board to discuss matters objectively, without the emotions that are sometimes evident when a matter is discussed after the fact.

A proactive approach to policy requires that the board be future-focused, anticipating challenges and problems that could arise as the organization forges on with its programs and services to constituents.

Another common mistake board members make in the development of their policy is feeling that a policy is necessary for everything. School boards in particular are notorious for wanting to create policy every time an issue arises. Big, heavy and cumbersome policy binders rarely provide the direction intended. Generally, the bigger the binder, the less chance there is of the policies being read and followed. Long and detailed policies are often a reflection of the board's desire to maintain control.

*Another common mistake board members make in the development of their policy is feeling that a policy is necessary for everything.*

Policy that is stated briefly and succinctly is more often read, understood and applied. Better to have a few key policies that are well understood, and that state the board's expectations, than to have many lengthy policies that try to anticipate any and all circumstances that might occur.

*Long and detailed policies are often a reflection of the board's desire to maintain control.*

### **Key Policies for Governance Boards**

Following are areas for policy consideration by the board.

- Board Bylaws
- Role and Responsibilities (Terms of Reference) for the Executive Director
- Planning and Goalsetting Processes
- Program Reviews
- Policy Development and Approval
- Budget Planning (Criteria, Process, Schedule)
- Requirements for Communications
- Code of Ethics
- Receiving Delegations

### **Summary**

Proactive boards commit significant time and attention to the policy development and approval process. They work to anticipate issues and potential problems, and focus their efforts to policies that will give clear guidance regarding the board's expectations for future action. Their members read, understand, review, refer to, and debate policies on a regular basis.

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*Board members should receive individual copies of the policy manual.*

Not all decisions of the board become policy statements. Those that are developed as policies are organized into a manual readily available to staff and constituents. Board members should receive individual copies of the policy manual. Additional copies are normally available for staff and for perusal by the organization's constituents.

The First Nation school board in our example put its initial efforts into establishing policy processes and a strong foundation for the work of the board and staff. Announcing a list of policy areas at the start of the year was an indication of the board's foresight in attending to basic board policy needs.

## **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness** **– Key Policies for Board Approval**

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- The Policy Committee is an active, leadership committee of the board.
- The board proactively discusses issues identified for board attention and direction.
- The board has defined processes for developing, approving and updating policy.
- The board's policies are organized into a manual regularly referenced by the board and staff as the business of the organization is conducted.
- Updated policy manuals are readily available for handy reference by staff and constituents.

## **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. Are the board's policies a true reflection of its direction and expectations?
2. Do the board's policies indicate a desire to facilitate the work of the organization, or do they suggest a desire to manage and control the staff?
3. Are the board's policies stated clearly and concisely?
4. Does the board follow and support its stated policies?





# Chapter 6

## Linking the Budget to the Board's Vision

Typically, non-profit boards find it a challenge to expand their operations and support new initiatives. This is particularly true for government supported organizations that may receive startup funding, but with the expectation that the program or service will become self sufficient within a few years' time.

For many non-profits, simply finding or maintaining the funding necessary to continue the organization's current operation into the next budget year is difficult. Depending on the leadership style of the board, this leads to one of two quite different approaches to finance and budgeting.

Reactive boards, preoccupied with their current circumstances, find their budget focus is directed toward maintaining existing programs and services. The more severe their funding shortfalls, the more challenging it is for them to plan for their organization's long term future. They are hesitant or unwilling to undertake any significant planning, or make any firm commitments, until their budget is known.

*Reactive boards, preoccupied with their current circumstances, find their budget focus is directed toward maintaining existing programs and services.*

On a reactive board, the budget comes first. Any consideration of new programs or services is discussed in the context of available funding. Often there is an unwillingness to meaningfully discuss the possibility of new or expanded programs or, for that matter, anything about the budget before anticipated revenues are clarified.

Planning on proactive boards starts with a review of the organization's stated mission and vision. This immediately focuses the board's attention

*Proactive boards acknowledge their financial reality and financial limitations, but refuse to let issues divert their attention away from their target - their vision of the desired future.*

toward its desired future. With a proactive approach, the board's attention shifts away from its present circumstances and current challenges towards what all have agreed is important to the organization's long-term success. Proactive boards acknowledge their financial reality and financial limitations, but refuse to let issues divert their attention away from their target - their vision of the desired future.

Interestingly, boards that take the proactive approach to board leadership quickly discover that there is more than just one way to achieve a goal, and they may find that additional finances are not always needed. In our example, the First Nation school board's plans for improving communications with constituents and staff resulted in many positive changes that did not require additional funding.

For proactive boards, vision-setting and goalsetting come before budget discussions and considerations. The budget is discussed in the context of goals. Members on reactive boards challenge this approach as being unrealistic, particularly if the organization is already suffering from financial shortages. Proactive boards accept that they may not have, or may not be able to raise the funds they ideally require, but they are proud of their strategy to start first with their aspirations and then pull back accordingly. Their commitment to their vision motivates them, not the budget. They argue it is better to aim high and have to pull back, or make adjustments, than to aim low and hit the mark.

### **Strategic Planning – Our Example**

Our example of a board defining its strategic plan is that of a First Nation school board with limitations to its financial authority. As discussed in Chapter Two, Chief and Council clarified, in the Terms of Reference document, that the school board was not a totally independent agency. It was accountable to Chief and Council for certain aspects of its financial operations. Chief and Council expected that the board would properly manage its financial operations and raise additional revenue beyond what was provided in annual grants.

The more the board discussed finances, the more it shared the concerns of Chief and Council for financial accountability. Board members agreed that the school board should put in place some very clear guidelines and expect-

tations for the financial operation of its school. The board agreed that, through the Policy Committee, it would define a series of key policies to alleviate its concerns in matters of budget and finance.

Following are four simple but key policies the board approved to help ensure that the organization's finances were properly managed. These are policies that any non-profit might establish to demonstrate board accountability and the board's supervision of finances.

- Budget Development – Process, Criteria and Schedule
- Financial Reports to the Board
- Authority of the Principal to Expend Funds
- Annual Audit

**POLICY TOPIC:  
BUDGET DEVELOPMENT  
– PROCESS, CRITERIA AND SCHEDULE**

*Rationale: The board's strategic planning process reflects the board's commitment towards achieving an educational vision supported by the community. Each year the board will commit to a series of goals that it feels will best move the organization forward towards its vision. The board will seek to secure the necessary funding to support progress towards these goals.*

**POLICY**

By November 30th annually, the board will define and publish its criteria, process and schedule for budget planning. The budget development process will be open and highly consultative. Opportunities will be provided for community members to provide input and to comment regarding the board's projections for programs and services for the following school year. The board's primary consideration in its budget development will be the support of goals that lead toward the achievement of its vision.

**POLICY TOPIC:  
BUDGET REPORTS TO THE BOARD**

*Rationale: The board wants ongoing assurance that funds are being expended as projected in the budget document, that acceptable accounting practices are being followed, that any significant variations in expenditures come to the attention of the board, and that the board receives timely status reports regarding the financial operation of the school system.*

**POLICY**

The Principal will provide a monthly report to the board outlining expenditures by budget category, with an indication and explanation of any matter that might significantly impact the budget, or lead to a significant variation in any budget category.

**POLICY TOPIC:  
AUTHORITY OF THE PRINCIPAL TO EXPEND FUNDS**

*Rationale: The board wants assurance that revenues are received as anticipated, that expenditures occur as authorized, and that the system's finances are being handled according to acceptable accounting practices.*

**POLICY**

The principal is authorized to expend allocated school funding as defined in the board's approved annual budget. Generally, the board will allow variations in expenditures by category as long as the total school budget is not exceeded. The principal is to report any significant varia-

*cont'd...*

tion of expenditure, \$3,000 or greater, by category, to the board at the earliest opportunity.

Equipment and other major purchases in excess of \$5000 per item are to be brought to the board for approval.

**POLICY TOPIC:  
ANNUAL AUDIT**

*Rationale: The board wants assurance that financial operations of the school are undertaken in an efficient, cost-effective manner, according to commonly accepted accounting practices.*

**POLICY**

An annual audit will be conducted of the system's finances, to be completed by August 31st. The board will meet with the auditor's representative following receipt of the auditor's summary report. The auditor's report is to include comment on the organization's financial practices and include suggestions for improvement as appropriate.

The auditor's contract will be as approved through Chief and Council.

With these four policies in place, the board can be assured, as much as is reasonably possible, that its initial concerns for the management of school funds will be addressed.

Although these policies are just simple statements of board direction, they convey a proactive approach to supervision of the organization's finances. The school board is now obligated to review its budget processes annually

since, by board policy, it must publicize the budget process, budget criteria and budget schedule by November 30th annually. Note that the policy requires the board to predefine how it will plan for its next year's budget. The actual budget does not need to be finalized and approved until several months later. With a policy statement confirming an open and consultative approach, the board is obligated to actively seek input into the development of the budget.

The board policy clearly communicates to the principal that it does not want any budget "surprises". It expects to be informed, at the earliest opportunity, if there is an awareness of any factor that could significantly impact the budget. If anticipated revenues are not received as expected, or if there are unexpected increases in costs, the board has made it clear that it wants to be informed. With this direction, it would not be appropriate for the principal to report to the board prior to the end of the budget year that needed funds were unavailable because of overspending earlier in the budget year. The fact that the board asked for monthly reports, indicating percentages of expended funds, is yet another board check that the system's finances are being handled properly and are being expended according to plan.

*Requiring an audit of the system's finances is simply good accounting practice.*

Requiring an audit of the system's finances is simply good accounting practice. If anything improper is occurring, an audit should bring it to the board's attention. Board members should be aware that many audits take only a random sampling of the system's financial operations. An audit requiring that all accounts, invoices and claims be checked is an expensive undertaking and may be beyond the financial resources of the board.

### **Summary**

*Proactive boards review and confirm their mission, and set their vision and goals, before they begin their budget discussions.*

The organization's budget does more than support the system's continued operation. It is also a strategy for achieving the board's mission and vision. Proactive boards review and confirm their mission, and set their vision and goals, before they begin their budget discussions.

Reactive boards, preoccupied with their current reality, find it difficult to project beyond their present challenges. Their members want to know exactly what funds they have available before setting any goals. They are

unwilling to set direction and commit to action until they have a funding commitment. Often, their challenge is with maintaining their current funding levels and carrying existing operations into the next budget year.

Proactive boards seek to link the budget directly to their organizational vision and goals. Commitment to the vision, over the long-term, comes first. Finding the funding is not their sole priority. They understand that when the belief in the vision is strong, the means for achieving it will emerge.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness**  
**– Linking the Budget to the Board's Vision**

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- The board starts its budget planning with a review of the organization's vision statement.
- The board gives clear policy direction regarding its expectations for budget criteria, the budget process, and the budget schedule.
- The board's vision and goals drive the budget, and not the reverse.
- The board carefully monitors the expenditure of the organization's funds.

 **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. Is financial information reported to the board in a way that is easily understood by all board members?
2. What policy direction has the board given regarding financial operations?
3. To what degree does the final, approved budget support the board's predefined goals, and its commitment to achieving its vision?
4. What effort has the board made to secure the funding required to pursue its vision?
5. How does the board monitor the expenditure of funds?
6. What budget training is provided to board members?



# Chapter 7

## Planning for Results

Effective boards focus on results. They are clear about what they want to happen, they define their expectations in writing, and then they set on a course of action to achieve their desired results. Regardless of the obstacles they will no doubt encounter, many of which are predictable – funding shortfalls, budget challenges, legal issues, and unexpected setbacks – they are on a mission.

*Effective boards focus on results.*

Their strategic planning reflects this focus. Their vision of their desired future is clear. After a review of its vision, the board has defined both long-term and short-term goals. The board has taken care to explain why these goals are important.

Ineffective boards are not results focused. They never fully clarify, in a clear and concise way, their expectations. The only way a board can expect to achieve desired results is to be clear about the results it expects.

This clarity of focus is an integral part of strategic planning. Strategic planning requires a clear and purposeful target – the board's vision. All of the available resources of the organization should then be mobilized towards the achievement of this vision. The board sets out on a mission, from where it is today, to where it wants to be in the future. This is the board's purpose.

*The board sets out on a mission, from where it is today, to where it wants to be in the future. This is the board's purpose.*

Boards will often report their successes in some form of annual report. Reactive board members tend to reflect back to what their board has accomplished over the previous year. They measure their board's success by what actually happened, and a reflection back on what has changed. This approach to annual reporting is not the result of effective planning. Rather,

it is the board's attempt to justify whatever decisions it made and actions it took during the previous year.

*Proactive boards clearly indicate what it is they expect to achieve and make happen, then they set about doing those things that will bring about the intended result.*

Proactive boards state their goals upfront, and direct their ongoing attention towards their achievement. They report their successes on the basis of what they announced they would achieve at the start of their budget year. They clearly indicate what it is they expect to achieve and make happen, then they set about doing those things that will bring about the intended result. This reflects an effective planning process.

The old adage that “We get what we expect” is true. Only when a board clearly defines its expectations, and predetermines measures for success, can it then focus on results.

### **Effective Time Management**

It is not uncommon for one or more board members to argue that they are prepared to give time to setting a vision and subsequent goal setting, but only after the board's more pressing and urgent issues have been addressed. This attitude reflects a preoccupation with the present, the immediate and the urgent. It's another sign of the reactive approach to board leadership.

Proactive board members work to shape the organization's future. They want to make certain predictable things happen. They understand that a measure of what the board declares to be important is the time it is prepared to commit to its achievement. Analyze the agendas of your past board and board committee meetings. From a time management perspective, the topics listed in these agendas are what the board considers important. If there were other matters that were more important, the board would have found the time to effectively deal with them.

### **Our Strategic Planning Example**

The First Nation school board wanted to be perceived as having accomplished something significant during its initial term. It wanted to be able to look back at the end of its term and to be able to list as successes those things that happened because the board intended for them to happen.

As the school board members discussed and debated their expectations for their term of office, they focused on the importance of reading as a foun-

dation skill for students. It was clear to the board that for students to truly be successful in their schooling, they would have to become literate and develop the ability to read effectively. They wanted assurance that students would be taught the skill of reading.

This is a topic that school board members are often reluctant to tackle, primarily because they feel intimidated, rightly or wrongly, by the educators, whom they respect as the experts in their field of study.

Rarely will board members have specific skills in reading instruction or in discussing a reading curriculum, nor are they expected to. What is reasonable is that board members have expectations about students being able to read, and this is where they need to frame their questions and direct their attention.

As they discuss their goals and aspirations, it is important for board members to move away from concerns about how things might happen to what it is that they want to happen – that is, the end result. For example, it is reasonable for board members to expect that children will be able to read, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness, at some grade in their elementary schooling.

*As they discuss their goals and aspirations, it is important for board members to move away from concerns about how things might happen to what it is that they want to happen – that is, the end result.*

What is this grade level? It will vary according to the local situation and to those debating the arguments. Children do learn at different rates and in different ways. Not all children will learn to read with the same proficiency and in the same way.

Regardless of that reality, if board members feel strongly about a matter, they will have to be definitive about what they expect. For example, if they expect that students will be able to read by the end of say, Grade 4, then they should consider creating a goal, and a specific policy, that reflects this expectation.

When the board makes its expectations clear about its students having the ability to read, it must then consider two follow-up questions. First, how will it know if children can read by the end of Grade 4? One strategy is for the board to direct that students' reading abilities be regularly tested. Again, board members do not have to be experts in reading instruction or assessment for this to occur. The board can task the principal with investigating,

on behalf of the board, what tests or measures might be available for this purpose. Finally, there is the issue of resources and follow-up. What resources will the board provide to assist the school in achieving this goal? As importantly, what resources might the board have to provide to assist those students who, for whatever reasons, are having difficulty achieving this specific goal?

These are difficult questions, questions that are not easy to resolve. And one difficult question will lead to another. But reading is a fundamental skill in the learning process for students. Those that master the skill of reading will have a much greater opportunity to learn the curriculum and enjoy their schooling experience. Those that don't learn to read often find that schooling is a frustrating and demoralizing experience.

After extensive debate, the school board created a policy clearly indicating that the board had high expectations for students being able to read, and to have acquired basic reading proficiency by the end of their Grade 4 year. They tasked the principal with investigating measures of reading proficiency and directed that all students be assessed during the spring of their Grade 4 year to determine their individual reading levels. Further, this policy directed that assistance be provided for those students who were experiencing difficulty with reading and that the board would support supplementary reading programs – such as daily, sustained silent reading, and the provision of reading resources for home and family use.

**POLICY TOPIC:  
STUDENT PROFICIENCY IN READING**

*Rationale: The board appreciates that reading is a fundamental skill in the learning process, and desires that all students learn to read successfully during their elementary schooling.*

**POLICY**

The board expects that all students will develop a basic proficiency in reading, as measured by a reading test given to all students during the spring of their Grade 4 year. This reading test, recommended by the principal and approved by the board, will provide both an indication of the success of the school's reading programs and instruction, and individual student results. Individual student's results are to be shared only with parents/guardians and the school's teachers.

The principal will report the test results to the board by June annually. Remediation will be provided to those students who, in the judgement of staff, require additional assistance in mastering the skill of reading.

The board will support the provision of supplementary reading programs that enhance students' reading skills.

**Summary**

Results-focused boards are proactive in their approach to planning. They define their intentions in advance and publicize these intentions for all to review.

The board has an obligation to its principal, staff members and constituents to ensure that its expectations are clear and well defined, and that there are measures in place to determine the relative success of the organization's programs and services.

*Effective board members are not intimidated by the knowledge, skills and expertise of their administrator, staff members or constituents.*

Effective board members are not intimidated by the knowledge, skills and expertise of others. They are respectful, they listen to their input, then make decisions based on what they feel is important and right for the organization. They learn to ask the right questions – those questions that help move their organization closer towards the desired future.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness**  
**– Planning for Results**

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- The board has clarified its expectations for the long term, through its definition of a vision and, for the short term, through its goals and policies.
- Constituents and staff understand and are committed to the board's vision and goals.
- The board's expected results are measurable.

 **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. What processes does the administrator, supported by the board, have in place to both monitor and measure the success of the programs and services that the organization provides, and to achieve the most effective staff operations?





# Chapter 8

## Advocating for Constituents

Advocacy is an important role of a board. Ideally it is, on behalf of the organization's constituents, a positive process of leading, influencing, and lobbying others toward the board's vision of its desired future. An effective board proactively advocates for its community, based on its mission and vision.

*Advocacy is an important role of a board.*

The effective board keeps the needs of its constituents as its primary focus. This focus is always directed outwards, toward the members of its community, the organization's constituents. A proactive board, strongly focused and committed to its vision of the ideal future for its constituents, will find this easier to achieve than a reactive board. A reactive board, if it becomes preoccupied with the organization's activities and the efforts of staff, will find its attention continually drawn inward toward current organizational issues and the needs of staff. The needs of staff are important and, along with organizational issues, must be considered and addressed, but it is the needs of constituents that must always be the primary focus of the board's attention.

*The effective board keeps the needs of its constituents as its primary focus.*

When the board advocates, it expresses its values – what it considers to be important. A board without clearly defined values, a vision and mission, will find it difficult to express and explain its advocacy role, other than to say that it “desires improvements” for its constituents.

### **The Board Member's Role as an Advocate**

It is unreasonable to expect that board members will always agree on every matter before them, nor should they. An effective board allows for the

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*An effective board allows for the expression of differences of opinion and for disagreement.*

*Disagreement among board members is healthy and should be welcomed and encouraged.*

*When board members disagree, they need to discuss and debate their respective thoughts and opinions to arrive at decisions and actions that best benefit the organization they represent.*

expression of differences of opinion and for disagreement. Disagreement among board members is healthy and should be welcomed and encouraged.

The alternative is “groupthink” – a situation where a board’s members all think and agree similarly. Where groupthink exists, leadership is, for the most part, unnecessary since all board members generally agree on strategy and courses of action.

Leadership develops out of adversity and disagreement. When board members disagree, they need to discuss and debate their respective thoughts and opinions to arrive at decisions and actions that best benefit the organization they represent. This is all part of the advocacy and the communications processes.

During these debates, it is the duty of board members to represent their constituents, but in the context of the total community. For example a board that allows for Elder representation is acknowledging a specific voice for the Elder group. Similarly, a board member who represents a specific geographical area may be expected to speak for those in that particular geographical area. Regardless, their goal should always be the betterment of life for **all** of the organization’s constituents. This dual role of simultaneously representing a specific subgroup of the organization’s constituents, along with their duty to work for the betterment of all, can sometimes create tension and frustration for board members.

Board members must represent their constituents on the basis of what they believe is right for their community. They must be true to their beliefs about what is right and wrong, and what they feel will best benefit their constituents. In the eyes of their constituents, board member success is very much determined by this ability to advocate on their behalf.

The more strongly individual board members feel about an issue, the more they believe in a particular course of action, the more individuals may strive to share their opinions. Ideally, a board’s members will maintain an attitude of respect and integrity as they discuss and debate issues. This process of sharing views openly should be viewed as a positive and necessary part of the advocacy process.

The responsibility of board members is to listen carefully to all points of view, and then collectively to make a decision based on their interpretation of all available information. For this reason, often the most effective board members are those that continually ask searching questions. The answers help everyone to process information and determine appropriate courses of action.

*The responsibility of board members is to listen carefully to all points of view.*

### **The Advocacy Role of the Executive Director**

For the most part, the wise executive director, while maintaining a key leadership role within the organization, works diligently to be seen as apolitical, regardless of her personal beliefs. This may be a difficult challenge for a strong-minded executive director who considers herself a key member of the board's leadership team.

*The wise executive director works diligently to be seen as apolitical.*

Note that the executive director is not normally a member of the board. As such, her task is to implement the board's direction. This does not mean that the executive director cannot be influential in helping to guide the board's decisions and actions. Quite the opposite. But she should do so cautiously.

The wise executive director is a strong advocate for the organization, is seen as supportive of the board's direction, and speaks positively for the staff.

It is not uncommon for the organization's executive director to be enticed, willingly or unwillingly, into the board's debates and discussions. This is unfortunate and will lead to board-administrator tension and conflict.

### **Our Strategic Planning Example**

Boards will often perceive that anything they do on behalf of their constituents is an expression of their advocacy. This is understandable. But only when the board is properly focused toward its governance responsibilities is it most effective in its governance role. The best expression of board advocacy is the board's continued commitment and support for its vision.

The First Nation school board in our example decided that it could best fulfill its advocacy role by committing to a governance approach that would

result, in the long-term, in the achievement of a vision determined and embraced by the membership.

To achieve this effectiveness in governance, the First Nation school board first committed to a program of ongoing professional development. Board members were encouraged to attend regional, provincial and national conferences – events that not only provided education in governance, but also which debated issues in First Nations education. Board members reported at board meetings about the knowledge they gained from these conferences.

### **Summary**

Advocacy is an important role of the board. It demands that board members speak both for their constituents and the total community. Strong advocacy requires that board members strive to influence others towards what they feel is right and best for the organization's future.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness  
– Advocating For Constituents**

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- The board understands, and is committed to, its role as an advocate for its constituents.
- Each board member actively participates in discussions and expresses a point of view on matters before the board.

 **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. In what ways does the board advocate for constituents?
2. To what degree do constituents and staff perceive the board as a strong advocate?



# Chapter 9

## Communicating the Board's Plan

Building effective two-way communications is an ongoing challenge for any board.

Regardless of the board's efforts to communicate with its various publics, it will inevitably find that there are those who feel uninformed, and those who feel that their input has been insufficiently heard, understood, or considered. The board must work diligently to share information as widely as possible.

The board's communications, to be effective, must be two-way, both disseminating information and seeking input and feedback. Various strategies for communication, and a multi-faceted approach, are required. Seldom will individuals feel informed and included if the board has only one, or just a few, methods of reporting out information.

Reporting out to constituents may involve such communication strategies as newsletters, media releases, posters and individual letters. Constituent input and feedback processes may include such ideas as surveys and questionnaires, telephone and in-person interviews, general and personal invitations to board-sponsored events and activities, and invitations to board meetings and forums.

### **Communicating Effectively - Our Strategic Planning Example**

The First Nation school board, having received some initial criticism from constituents for not including them in the development of the school board's mission, worked diligently to involve the community in the strategic planning process. A series of well publicized forums were held to ensure

*The board's communications, to be effective, must be two-way, both disseminating information and seeking input and feedback.*

that all members of the community had opportunity for input into the development of the school's vision statement. Notices made it clear that all in attendance would be heard, and could express their viewpoints regarding the desired future of the school. Board members made a special effort to be visible at these forums, and they listened first-hand to the comments of the various speakers. A secretary was on-hand to record this input for subsequent review by board members.

The draft of the board's vision statement was circulated throughout the community for review and feedback. Once the vision statement had been finalized and approved by the board, professional, framed posters were distributed throughout the school and community for posting in building hallways, classrooms, offices – anywhere that community members and others could observe firsthand the school's statements of mission and vision. These colorful posters instilled pride in belonging to a system that had a clear direction and sense of purpose.

In addition to publicizing its meetings, invitations were sent out, on behalf of the board, by the board chairperson, inviting parents and others to visit the school, and to attend a board meeting at the school building. Those that accepted the invitations were acknowledged on-site for their attendance and interest, and were later sent thank you letters, inviting them to return for a future visit.

### **Communications with Constituents**

The First Nation school board felt that its greatest obligation for its communications was with constituents, and particularly with parents and guardians of children enrolled at the school. The board quickly realized that building the school's enrollment, enlisting parent and community support, and striving for a full K-12 system on-reserve required strong two-way communication with the total community.

The board's initial strategy was to identify all school age children in the community. Personal letters were sent to parents of these children encouraging them to enroll their children at the new school. Parents and other interested members of the community were then invited to a series of informational meetings to: meet the school board; meet the principal and staff; tour the school facility as it was being constructed; and review the board's



strategic plan which provided details for the long range development and expansion of the school.

### **Communication with Elders**

The board made a special effort to communicate with Elders. Elders not only had the respect and support of the community, they also understood the value of a good, broad-based education. When they realized the efforts being made by the school to develop a comprehensive First Nations curriculum that emphasized their history, culture, traditions, and language, they expressed more interest in becoming involved in the schooling of the children and spoke positively about the school's program.

### **Communications with the Media**

The various media serving a community can be an excellent resource for communicating information.

Boards can quickly find that there is a down side to dealing with the media. For example, two First Nation school board members found themselves in conflict with the rest of the board for speaking to the media about an alleged incident involving an employee and a student at the school. A reporter had phoned a board member for a comment, and the board member did so without checking any facts. The board member found that his comments were taken out of context. His comments as reported were basically accurate, but the reporter had edited and omitted much of the conversation. The reporter chose to use those comments that best fit the slant he wanted to give the story.

When the reporter contacted a second board member and quoted some of the comments of the first board member, the reporter received an angry response, much of which regrettably was also printed. This only inflamed the situation. Neither board member was happy with the reporter's resulting story, and neither felt that they had been accurately or properly quoted.

Other board members felt embarrassed by the story. The two board members quoted in the story were themselves embarrassed and expressed annoyance at the way in which the story was reported.

After discussing the situation, board members agreed that not only would the board chairperson be the spokesperson for the board, they also further agreed that board members individually would not speak directly to the media, unless authorized to do so by the board. The board asked that a policy be developed and included in the policy manual to help prevent such a situation from recurring. The board also agreed that it would prepare its own media releases for matters that warranted a board response.

Board members felt pleased that what had started as a negative situation had resulted in the board addressing broader communication issues. They felt good that they had come to agreement on strategies for dealing effectively with the media.

When the time came to communicate its strategic plan, the board's strategies included: a series of carefully prepared media releases to build community support for the strategic plan; interviews with the board chairperson, who had been designated as the board's spokesperson; and a one-page summary of the strategic plan posted in various locations around the community with copies available for anyone interested in receiving one.

### **Communications with Staff**

Strategic planning offers the board an opportunity for effective two-way communications with the organization's staff.

For the most part, communications between the board and the school's staff were channeled through the principal. In this way, the principal was kept informed regarding issues of concern to the board and to the staff. The principal was careful to ensure that she properly channeled communications, and that she was not preventing the communication flow between the two groups.

The school's staff members were perceived as valuable allies of the board in the strategic planning process. The staff's direct input had been sought into the development of the school's vision, values, goals and policies. Drafts of board goals and policies were circulated to staff. This provided staff members with an opportunity to make individual comment prior to the board giving them final approval.

Once the strategic plan was drafted, a copy was sent to the principal with instructions to discuss it with the school's staff and inviting comments or a response prior to its finalization and approval by the board. The board demonstrated its willingness to listen to those who took the time to read, study and analyze the document. Feedback from the staff was considered by the board, and appropriate changes were made. The staff members felt that their voice had been heard and appreciated the opportunity for input.

### **Summary**

Proactive boards build strong two-way communications with their publics. Their communication plans are multifaceted, and give ongoing attention to reporting out to constituents, and to seeking their input and feedback.

A well developed communications plan gives strength to the strategic planning process. Various ideas about how to communicate the organization's mission, vision, values, goals, policies, and achievements, invariably lead to a multitude of communication approaches and strategies.

*A well developed communications plan gives strength to the strategic planning process.*

Few boards overcommunicate. Many undercommunicate. Each board must find its own balance as it strategizes various communications.

 **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness  
– Communicating the Plan**

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- The board has developed a communications plan.
- The board's communications are directed at its various publics, with particular emphasis toward the board's constituents.
- The board regularly invites feedback.

 **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. Is information shared freely and equally among board members, and with constituents?
2. What different strategies are used by the board to communicate with its various publics?

# Chapter 10

## An Example of a Governance Action Plan

### **The Board's Governance Action Plan**

When they took office, the school board members in our example clearly understood that the community desired a comprehensive, on-reserve school that met the long-term needs of the community. Community members wanted an emphasis on First Nations culture, traditions, history and language. Most importantly, it wanted a school that would guide First Nations students toward successful educational experiences, whatever their definitions of success and achievement.

The board understood that such a system would not evolve by accident. It would happen only if the board created the conditions that would make it happen. The board's members began with the attitude that the responsibility of creating an innovative, successful school rested firstly on the shoulders of the school board. If it was going to be, it was up to board members collectively to begin doing specific things that would lead them in the direction they desired. What they chose to do, what decisions they made, what actions they took would, for the most part, determine whether or not they achieved their dream for the community's young people and for the First Nations' long-term future.

The community wanted board members who were committed to success, whose influence could bring about desired change, and who would instill a sense of pride and accomplishment for the education of community members.

*The board's members began with the attitude that the responsibility of creating an innovative, successful school rested firstly on the shoulders of the school board.*

During its first eighteen months in office, the board, with its commitment to a governance approach to board leadership, was able to develop and approve mission and vision statements to guide the future actions of the board. This, along with the mandate statement, set the foundation for the board's work.

*The school board  
committed to a discussion  
and review of the action  
plan at least once  
quarterly.*

This governance action plan, designed by the First Nation school board to guide its operations through the remainder of its first term of office, reflects the board's commitment both to a governance approach to leadership and to a strategic planning process. The school board committed to a discussion and review of the action plan at least once quarterly.

The board's governance plan consists of five key components: the mission statement; the vision statement; goals; both long-term and short-term; areas for policy focus; and the board's mandate (attached as an appendix A).

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the First Nation school is to provide educational opportunities that lead to student success and achievement, and that instill student pride in their First Nations heritage, culture, traditions and language.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

### **The Educated Student**

The educated student shows a curiosity about life and the surrounding world. S/he shows pride in heritage and respect for nature, the land, and the environment. S/he is able to function effectively in both the local community and the broader society. S/he strives for personal excellence in all s/he aspires to attain. S/he demonstrates self-respect through positive attitudes towards personal health – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. S/he is honest, shows integrity in one's actions, and is respectful, tolerant, and compassionate towards others. S/he is a lifelong learner.

### **Vision of the Desired School**

The First Nation offers a K-12, on-reserve school widely acknowledged and commended for its educational opportunities, programs and services.

The school's programs give emphasis to the development of the whole child. Care is taken to positively develop all aspects of a child's development – mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Teachers modify programs and vary their instructional methods to respond to students' individual needs.

The school is alive with programs, cultural events and artwork that reflect the school's First Nations curriculum and culture. The curriculum focuses attention to First Nations history, heritage, culture, and traditions. As a result of the school's language program, all students become fluent in their native language.

Students feel welcome, safe and happy at the school. They enjoy school, approach their learning enthusiastically, and comment positively about their teachers and programs. They

*cont'd...*

show high levels of respect and tolerance towards adults and their fellow students.

Students are well supervised. Students, parents, staff, and community members alike are proud of their school and the success and accomplishments of its students. Students actively participate in the school's curricular and extracurricular programs.

The school's staff includes First Nations teachers who work diligently to promote student excellence and high standards of achievement in all aspects of student life. The school's teachers see themselves as role models for children, and conduct themselves accordingly.

The school's goal is a 100% graduation rate. Assistance is provided to students with learning difficulties who are not experiencing success. Graduates reflect back on their time at the First Nation school as a positive, enjoyable and rewarding experience. They report that their schooling properly prepared them for their post secondary education and training programs, for their future employment, and for their service as a contributing citizen of the community.

The school has become the center of the community. Community members of all ages feel welcome at the school, visit it regularly, and take an active interest in student programs and progress in school. The First Nation is proud of the school's teachers and students, and of their accomplishments, and comment positively about the school, the staff, and the students. Elders are visible at the school interacting positively with students. The community is pleased that visitors from other communities comment that they wish their children were able to attend this school.



**LONG-TERM GOALS**

1. Develop a comprehensive, K-12, on-reserve school.
2. Develop a strong First Nations curriculum that builds student pride in their First Nations heritage – history, culture, traditions and language.
3. Give attention to the development of the whole child – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
4. Focus on literacy.
5. Build staff and student pride in the school and in the successes of its students.
6. Create a safe and happy environment where students eagerly participate in an active curricular and extracurricular program.
7. Strive for a 100% graduation rate.
8. Provide assistance as appropriate for students who encounter learning difficulties, or who have difficulty adjusting to the school environment.
9. Demonstrate that graduating students meet the community's definition of "The Educated Student."
10. Build the school as the focal point of the community.

**SHORT-TERM (UPCOMING YEAR) GOALS**

- Increase student enrollment in the school
- Build a school staff committed to the community's vision of the desired future
- Begin development of a curriculum rich in its emphasis on First Nations history, culture, traditions and language.
- Provide services to students who have special needs and/or have been experienced difficulties adjusting to the school environment.
- Actively involve parents and other community members in the school's programs.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

The board is committed to the development of written policy to guide the future actions of the board and staff, and to inform the board's publics regarding board directives. At the start of each school year, the board will publish a list of topics for policy discussion and development.

Following are the topics of policy focus for the upcoming year.

- Board Governance
- Planning Strategically
- Conduct of Board Business
- The Policy Development Process
- Annual review of the Board's Mission and Vision Statements
- Role and Responsibilities of the Principal
- Board Communications
- Program Reviews
- Board Code of Ethics
- Receiving Delegations
- Finance and Budgetting, including
  - Budget Development – Planning, Criteria and Schedule
  - Financial Reporting to the Board
  - Authority of Principal to Expend Funds
  - Annual Audit
- Media communications

# APPENDIX A

## FIRST NATION SCHOOL BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE EXAMPLE

### **Formation of the School Board**

Chief and Council authorize the formation of a school board to govern the operation of the First Nations school.

### **Composition of the Board**

The board will consist of 7 members, specifically:

- four (4) community members elected at large
- two (2) Elders
- one (1) member appointed from the Chief and Council

### **Appointment/Election of the Board**

Members of the first school board shall be appointed for a three-year term. Subsequent boards shall be elected for a two-year term, with elections of members coinciding with those for Chief and Council.

### **Governance Role of the Board**

The school board is expected to take a governance approach to its role and responsibilities. Subject to limitations stated in these Terms of Reference, the school board will set the direction for the future of the First Nations school, approve and commit to a vision supported by the First Nations membership, and supervise the development, operation and expansion of the school. The mission and vision approved by the school board for the

school must be consistent with the mission and vision approved for the First Nation by Chief and Council.

### **Governance Responsibilities of the Board**

The school board has seven major governance responsibilities.

#### **1. Define the School Vision Statement**

The primary task of the school board is to create a school that provides positive educational opportunities and successful experiences for students. This requires that the board first define its concept of ‘The Educated Student’ and create a clear vision for the school. Chief and Council expect that the school board will seek broad-based community input into the development of the vision statement.

#### **2. Set Strategic Direction**

The school board must develop and commit to a strategic plan, and to developing the knowledge and skills that will enable the board to sustain it. Strategic planning requires that the board clearly set its direction, define its expectations, and align and coordinate its planning, policies and resources towards the achievement of its vision.

The board’s planning must give priority attention to short and long-term goals, and to those policies that will assist the board and staff in carrying out their respective roles and responsibilities.

#### **3. Hire and Monitor the Performance of the Principal**

The principal, hired by the school board, implements the direction and decisions as approved by the board. The principal manages the school’s daily operation and directs the school’s staff. It is not expected that the board become involved in the daily operation of the school.

The principal is the key communications link between the board and the school’s staff and students.

The board will monitor the performance of the principal, meet with the principal on a regular basis, and conduct an annual performance review, based on criteria and a process developed jointly by the board and the principal.

#### **4. Approve the Budget**

Subject to limitations to the board's financial authority as stated in these Terms of Reference, the school board shall assume responsibility for the financial operation of the school including: approving policies directing the financial operation of the school; developing the annual budget; securing supplemental funding; and monitoring the school's finances. Funding received by the First Nation in support of K-12 schooling will be transferred to the control of the school board to support the operation of the school.

Funding available through Chief and Council may at times be perceived as insufficient to sustain the school board's progress towards its vision. The school board is encouraged, in consultation with Chief and Council, to investigate and seek out additional sources of revenue. All applications for supplementary funding from external agencies must be submitted through Chief and Council.

Chief and Council expect that the school board will be diligent in monitoring the school's financial operations.

#### **5. Focus on Results**

The school board must be clear in defining its expectations for student learning and student success.

The school board will submit, by October 31st annually, a report to Chief and Council commenting on the operation of the school for the previous school year. This report is to include: student achievements; progress towards the board's vision; success in achieving pre-established goals approved by the board at the start of the school year; and a summary of the board's financial operations.

## **6. Advocacy**

Along with parents and guardians, the school board is a primary advocate for the educational success of the community's students. Chief and Council expects that the school board will strongly advocate, at the local, provincial and national levels, for opportunities and conditions that result in success and achievement for the First Nation's students. This requires that school board members become knowledgeable about First Nations educational policies, issues, trends and challenges.

## **7. Communications**

The school board is expected to develop strong two-way communications with its publics – including Chief and Council, Elders, parents, the school staff, students, and other community members. In addition to keeping community members informed about the school, the board's communications must include strategies for seeking input and feedback from the community.

## **Limitations to the Board's Authority**

Chief and Council desire that the school board operate as a self-governing body, except in matters of finance and budgeting, where it shall operate as a special committee of Chief and Council.

Chief and Council will accept the final budgetary recommendations of the school board, provided they are within the scope of financial planning as authorized by Chief and Council.

## **Summary**

Strategic planning requires that the board first review the board's mandate - its authority and terms of reference, and the organization's mission - the reason for its existence.

In our example of a board devising a strategic plan, Chief and Council have authorized the formation of a school board to oversee the schooling of the community's children. Chief and Council provide their direction to the school board through a mandate document called Terms of Reference. The mandate document defines the role and responsibilities of the school board,

the structure of the board, the process for board appointments, the election of board members, desired relationships, financial responsibilities and limitations to the board's authority.

After a review of its mandate, the board approved both mission and vision statements: the mission statement to clarify the organization's purpose, and the vision statement to define direction towards the board's desired future for its school system.

With a clear vision of the desired future, the board defined a series of long-term goals that would lead the organization towards its vision. Board policies were then developed that provided direction to the board and staff as they carried out their mandate.



### **Indicators of Governance Planning Effectiveness** **– An Example of a Board’s Governance Action Plan**

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- The board has reviewed, and clearly understands, its mandate.
- The board has reviewed and clearly understands its mission. This mission is understood, accepted and internalized by constituents, and by staff.
- A board vision has been defined that describes the desired future for the organization.
- Both long-term and short-term goals have been set that are consistent with this vision.



### **Questions For Board Reflection**

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1. Does the board have a policy or process that requires a regular review of the board’s mandate and the organization’s mission?
2. Has the board established a schedule for ongoing review of the governance action plan?



# Chapter 11

## A Governance Planning Checklist

The following checklist will assist the non-profit boards in attending to their governance responsibilities.

	Yes	No
1. The respective roles and responsibilities of both the board and the administrator have been defined, and have been clearly communicated to all those involved in the strategic planning process. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The board has formally reviewed its mandate, that is, the terms of reference or constitution, and the organization's purpose, as defined by its mission statement. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. An individual has been designated to lead the action planning process. This individual's authority, responsibilities and duties have been clearly defined and communicated. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The board has a clearly stated vision that reflects the desired future for the organization. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The board has established written, long-term goals that set direction toward the board's vision statement. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
6. The board annually approves a series of short-term goals that focus attention to the intentions of the board over a one-year period. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The resources of the organization, including the budget, are directed primarily towards the achievement of its mission, vision, goals and policies.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The board has defined policy topics that will be considered by the board over the upcoming year. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The board has defined strategies for communicating with its various publics, and particularly with constituents and staff.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The board's communications plan includes strategies for seeking input and feedback from constituents, and for reporting its success in achieving predefined goals.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The board has established a review process and a schedule for regular meetings with its administrator to discuss progress with, and to up-date, its action plan. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. The board celebrates, with staff and constituents, its successes as it works toward the achievement of its organizational vision. ....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Our Strategic Planning Example

As the term of office for the First Nation school board neared its end, the board members reflected on their successes and accomplishments. A strategic plan is in place that can be used as a guide by the incoming board. A vision and long-term goals have been set that have the strong support of the community. A competent principal has been hired who motivates the school's staff towards excellence.

The expectations of the school board are clearly defined. There is a commitment from both the board and the school's staff to continue the development of a curriculum that gives emphasis to First Nations' heritage, history, culture, traditions and language.

The board has met regularly with the principal to discuss progress with the strategic plan. As a result of some changing conditions and unexpected events, some minor modifications to the plan were made after these discussions. When surveyed, constituents reported that they felt heard and understood regarding their expectations for the school. The community is proud of its school, the staff, the students and their achievements.

### **Dreaming the Dream**

It's been said that one has to have a dream to make a dream come true. The size of the board's dream, its vision, will be directly proportional to the size of the board's thinking.

What is your dream, your vision for your community's future? Begin your board service with the attitude: "If it's going to be, it starts with me."

When you serve as a board member for a non-profit organization, you have the opportunity to influence your board's decisions and actions. Your task, along with your fellow board members, is to work diligently to improve the lives of your organization's members. Whatever your dream, share it with your fellow board members and constituents. Project the attitude: "Where there's a will, there's a way." Ultimately it is the direction set by the board, and the board's subsequent actions, that will make the difference. Communicate the board's agreed-upon vision to staff and constituents. Get people excited about creating the desired future!



# Glossary

**Budget** - The board-approved level of funding, determined in advance, deemed necessary for the operation of the organization over a defined time period.

**Goal** - A statement of direction and priority, describing an intention for future action.

**Governance** - The process by which the board of a non-profit organization sets direction toward the desired future of the organization.

**Governance Action Planning** - A strategic planning process for shaping an organization's future that links planning directly to the governance role and responsibilities of the board.

**Mandate** - The terms of reference that define the existence of an organization, and which describes its structure and purpose.

**Mission** - The organization's purpose, the reason for its existence.

**Mission Statement** - A description of the organization's purpose, defining the reason for its existence, usually stated in a single sentence.

**Policy** - A decision of the board, stated as direction to the board and staff as a guide for future action.

**Planning** - The process used by a board for defining and creating the desired future.

**Strategic Planning** - The process of transforming an organization from its current reality toward its desired future – its vision, undertaken in an atmosphere of conflict and change.

**Terms of Reference** - The organization's mandate.

**The Administrator** - In a non-profit, the senior individual responsible to the board for the effective daily operation of the organization, and for staff leadership.

**Value** - A statement of something deemed to be important, and which is to be considered in the daily operation of the organization.

**Vision** - The board's "target", describing the desired future for the organization.

**Vision Statement** - A written description of the ideal future as desired by the board.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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- The meaning of board governance
  - Focusing on results
- Conducting effective meetings
  - Chair of the board
- Conducting a board self-evaluation

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