Engaging Your Board in COVID-19

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- Principal, Meier and Associates
- Senior Governance Consultant, BoardSource
- C-Suite experience at national nonprofits
- 30+ years in the nonprofit sector
- Corporate experience
- National and local board member and officer experience

Partial Client List:
- American Lung Association
- Annenberg Foundation (and grantees)
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Charter Board Partners
- Feeding America (and food banks)
- National CASA (and chapters)
- NC Council on Nursing
- RMHC Global (and chapters)
- Shedd Aquarium
- Shine the Light
- The Night Ministry
- Together SC
Poll 1

What role best describes you?
Our Agenda and Objectives

**OBJECTIVES**

- Deepen our understanding of how boards can add value during this challenging time
- Explore the kinds of questions the board should be asking
- Learn how to optimize virtual board meetings

**AGENDA**

- What Executive Directors are doing
- How Board Chairs can help
- Adding value as a board
- Questions boards should be asking
- The question of fundraising
- Virtual board meetings
- Q&A
During COVID-19, a Great Executive Director Will...

- Be courageous
- Assess the risk of health and safety of staff
- Take care of yourself first
- Identify his/her thought leadership team
- Stop doing business as usual
- Reduce operational costs
- Understand long-term implications and make decisions today accordingly
- Be clear with the board that this is a really hard, unprecedented time
During COVID-19, a Great Executive Director Will... (cont’d)

- Pursue the potential benefits of the CARES Act
- Develop a contingency plan
- Proactively seek support: know what you most want from your board and from individual board members, and ask for it
- See this as an opportunity to find new ways to reach out and engage both those you serve and your supporters
- Do no harm (respect the CDC guidelines)
- Remember: innovation comes out of crisis
- Engage the board in the most important decisions
Poll 2

How are your board members responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?
Not All Board Responsibilities Are Equally Important Right Now*

Set Strategic Direction
- Determine Mission and purpose, and advocate on their behalf
- Ensure effective planning/Strategy

Ensure Adequate Resources
- Select the chief executive
- Ensure adequate financial resources
- Build a competent board
- Enhance the organization’s public standing

Provide Oversight
- Monitor/strengthen programs & services
- Protect assets/provide financial oversight
- Ensure legal & ethical integrity
- Evaluate & support the chief executive

*BoardSource.
During COVID-19, a Great Board Chair...

- Talks regularly with the ED & works in constructive partnership with the ED
- Understands the ED’s plan, priorities and rationale
- Understands that everything is fluid
- Asks the ED: what do you need from me? and, from the board?
- Listens well and, when asked, provides counsel
- Resists jumping in with resolutions
- Keeps the board informed and invites them to share ideas with the Chair (not with the ED)
As executive director, what do you most want from your board during this time of COVID-19?
During COVID-19, a Great Board ...

- Has 100% confidence in its executive director
- Doesn’t panic - is calm
- Avoids micromanaging
- Asks questions but is curious, not directive
- Resists seeking the *One Right Answer*
- Proactively supports the executive director
- Puts the Strategic Plan aside, for the moment
- Moves to virtual board meetings and holds them as often as needed
Boards Adding Value

- Move awareness into action
- Are willing to step up individually and collectively
- Engage in scenario planning
- Reach out to donors and funders to see how they are doing
- Increase their personal giving
- Operate in a Culture of Inquiry
- Address risk management: what are our organization’s greatest risks right now? How can they be addressed and mitigated?
Ensure ED has a contingency plan (best case scenario, most likely scenario, worst case scenario)

Understand the potential benefits of the CARES Act and support the ED in pursuing them

Use reserves as a bridging strategy to get somewhere

Understand their legal or financial liability if the organization takes on debt and defaults on that debt in the future

Think about the skills sets that will be needed on the board to move forward and into the ‘new normal’

Ask great questions
Questions Your Board Should Be Asking

- “What is the core of what we do that we most need to protect at this time?”
- “How do we balance our mission... with our people?”
- “Are we being as open and as transparent as we can?”
- “What are the hard questions we should be asking?”
Questions Your Board Should Be Asking (cont’d)

- “How are you (the executive director) thinking about _______?”
- “How might we use our reserves during this time of crisis?”
- “How much risk are we willing to take?”
- “What is the board action (or work) that would make a difference in this moment?”
Questions Your Board Should Be Asking (cont’d)

- “Do we need to rethink our priorities?”
- “What assumptions are we making today as we decide how to move forward?”
- “Are we revisiting our assumptions on a regular basis?”
- “Do we need to consider new strategic partnerships and/or a merger?”
Fundraising

- Focus first on relationship-building with funders and donors
- Continue your fundraising efforts but be sensitive & aware
- Ensure current funding partners are aware of your mission and why your work matters in this moment
- Provide every board member with talking points
- Remember that there is now a temporary raise in charitable contribution deduction limits for 2020
- Ask to renegotiate existing restricted grants
- Know many event sponsors are honoring their commitments
- Anticipate and prepare for an increasing trend in digital giving and online giving
Poll 3

How competent are your board members with virtual meetings?
Virtual Board Meetings*

- Use technology that allows everyone to see one another (e.g., Zoom)
- Ensure Board Chair and all members are virtual meeting competent
- Develop a more focused agenda:
  - Ask: What does the ED most need from the board now?
  - Use a consent agenda
  - Cut the fluff
  - Include specific objectives for the meeting
- Implement meeting norms: No repeat rule; no dominance rule
- Post on portal / email all board materials 4-7 days in advance
- Draw everyone into the conversation

*Quick & Dirty: Going Virtual Fast & Well, Cathy Trower
What Will You Do Immediately After This Webinar? Perhaps...

- Take better care of yourself
- Apply for benefits through the CARES Act
- Develop a thought leadership team
- Develop a contingency plan (best case, most likely, worst case)
- Proactively reach out to board members for specific skills that can help you
- Share the responsibility and engage your board in the big decisions
- Renegotiate existing grants
- Show how your work is impacted by the pandemic
- Hold more effective virtual board meetings
Resources

- **BoardSource:**
  - [https://boardsource.org/resources/nonprofit-board-member-respond-covid-19/](https://boardsource.org/resources/nonprofit-board-member-respond-covid-19/)
  - [https://boardsource.org/resources/consent-agendas/](https://boardsource.org/resources/consent-agendas/)


- **Article: Quick & Dirty: Going Virtual Fast & Well, Cathy Trower:** [https://blog.boardsource.org/blog/quick-dirty-going-virtual-fast-well](https://blog.boardsource.org/blog/quick-dirty-going-virtual-fast-well)
Thank you!

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