



# *Practical* Board Self-Assessment

# Agenda

- What
- Why
- When
- How



# What is Board Self-Assessment?

- Objective survey of board members' knowledge, experience and perspective
- Compiles results and reports findings to board for discussion and reflection



# *What is Board Self-Assessment?*

- Efficient structure to identify and prioritize hot topics
- Increases engagement of board members/generations
- Helps in planning for future
- Models best-practice behavior



# Outcomes: What You Can Expect



- Practical, useful results
  - Identify strengths and areas for improvement
  - Prioritizes results
- Sets up the board for productive conversations
  - Leads to greater effectiveness

# Outcomes:

## What NOT to Expect

1. Doesn't replace good conversations
2. Doesn't replace legal advice
3. Isn't an assessment of grants, grantees or impact\*
4. Doesn't compare foundation to peers\*



*\*(unless)*

# Reveal...



- ✓ Strengths of board and foundation
- ✓ Range of perspectives, concerns, values
- ✓ Difficult or unspoken issues in an objective, safe manner
- ✓ Gaps in knowledge or understanding
- ✓ Hopes, dreams, and vision



# *Create an Experience...*



- ✓ **Positive** and collegial
- ✓ Integrates voices **equally**



# *In Order to...*



- ✓ Clarify **focus**: mission, vision, values, priorities, goals, objectives
- ✓ Articulate **roles**, responsibilities, expectations and levels of engagement
- ✓ Fine-tune **governance** and management
- ✓ Become more efficient in **operations** (time and resources)
- ✓ Improve **communication** and therefore relationships
- ✓ Gain a fresh perspective on how we **evaluate** our work

# *When the Goal is Thoughtful Conversations...*

- Regular check-up
  - All is well (confirm or improve)
  - Transition coming up (succession, scaling up)
  - Minor questions
- Extra visit
  - Specific question would like to resolve
  - General sense of a problem
- Emergency room
  - Complex dynamics or barriers making resolution difficult (+ bring in outside help!)



# *Examples:*

- Around strategic planning process or developing focus
- Around bringing in new board members, e.g., next gen
- As kick off to a retreat
- CEO is settling in
- "It's just time."

# Tips for Board Buy-In

- Work with an **ally** who will introduce topic to the board
- Have one-on-one **conversations** with individuals who are reluctant: listen well
- Read and share ASF's **primer** with the board
- **Share stories** of others' experiences
- Discuss motivations, **expectations**, and goals with full board
- Talk to **ASF staff** about your situation

# The Nitty-Gritty of "How"



	1	2	3	4	5	Average	Range	# Comments	
1	2	2			1	1	2.5	4	3
2	2	2	2				2.0	2	1
3	3	3					1.5	1	2
4	2	2	2				2.0	2	1
5	5	1					1.2	1	1
6	3	1	2				1.8	2	
7	2	4					1.7	1	2
8	2	3	1				1.8	3	1
9	1	5					1.8	1	1
10	2	4					1.7	1	2
11									
1	2	4					1.7	1	
2	2	3					1.3	1	2
3	1	3	1		1		2.3	3	2
4	1	3	2				2.2	2	3
5	4	2					1.3	1	1
6	1		2	3			3.2	3	

past; however, the board would likely benefit from taking the time to ensure that these issues are fully worked through and resolved.

- The board sets direction for the foundation.
  - “We have a good strategic framework, but **not universal agreement on proactive versus responsive grantmaking and more visible disagreement on direct service versus thought leadership/policy advancing role** of our philanthropy.”
  - “In the past this has been done by a smaller subset of the board, I think that more recently it has changed.”
- All board members fulfill their responsibilities.
  - “At times some **board members have allowed personal relationships** influence their decisions on board matters.”
- Our board members are able to invest sufficient time to accomplish their responsibilities.
  - “The board members put in a significant amount of time, particularly in this **past two years** when we have had some difficult issues to address.”
  - “All very **committed and responsible**.”

In particular, the board may wish to re-consider its **committee structures**.

- The board makes effective use of committees to fulfill its responsibilities and get work done.
  - “**Almost too many** committees for our relatively small Board, but all seem



# Example: ASF's Survey

## I. Effective Foundation Boards

### A. Roles and Responsibilities

		Definitely Yes	←	→	Definitely No	N/A	
1	Every board member and officer has a written job description. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Board members and officers are clear about their roles and the functions of the position they hold. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Each board member has copies of all of the following: the articles of incorporation and bylaws (or the trust document); past meeting minutes; and board policies. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Our board is familiar with board policies and with the bylaws or trust document. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	New board members and officers receive an orientation to their position soon after they are elected. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	The board has access to competent legal advice when it has questions. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	The board sets direction for the foundation. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	All board members fulfill their responsibilities. <hr/>	1	2	3	4	5	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Example: ASF's Report

1. Context
2. Strengths
3. Opportunities for Improvement/Topics for Discussion (prioritize)
4. Next Steps

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# Choose Wisely...



NATIONAL CENTER

FAMILY  
PHILANTHROPY



ASSOCIATION OF  
SMALL FOUNDATIONS  
*for foundations with few or no staff*



THE CENTER FOR  
EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

  
**BOARDSOURCE®**  
*Building Effective Nonprofit Boards*

## Project Streamline



The Center for Board Excellence™

*...consulting firms ...independent consultants... DIY ...*

# *Consider...Scope & Process*

- Focus or culture of assessment
- Online v. on paper
- Staff support
- Timing: when can you do it; how long does it take
- Is data aggregated or case-by-case?
- What kind of reports are provided?
- What does it cost?

# *Consider...What to Assess*

- Governance; board; legal & tax; financial management
- Grantmaking process/impact
- Topics specific to foundation type (family, corporate, independent, community/public, staffed or unstaffed)
- Board meeting assessment
- Individual board member self-assessment
- Grantee & applicant perception
- Compensation
- CEO or staff evaluation
- Strategy landscape tool
- Foundation strategy, communications, accountability



## **Ruth Masterson**

Senior Program Manager

[ruth@smallfoundations.org](mailto:ruth@smallfoundations.org)

**[www.smallfoundations.org](http://www.smallfoundations.org)**

@ASFphilanthropy

[www.philanthrofiles.org](http://www.philanthrofiles.org)

1720 N Street NW

Washington, DC 20036

888-212-9922