

Board Self-Evaluation

Guide: What – Why – When – Where – Who - How

What Is Board Self-Evaluation?

Board self-evaluation is simply an organized process by which the board regularly re-examines its collective and individual performance, and then reaffirms its commitment by identifying plans for improvement.

What Should You Evaluate?

The content areas for board evaluation should include all aspects of governance. Your Governance Process policies should already have set out your expectations for yourselves. This proactive approach means that you are evaluating yourselves against criteria that you have predetermined.

Why Bother Doing Board Self-Evaluation?

The board needs to be able to show accountability for the organization as a whole. Self-evaluation is a way to assure yourselves and your ownership that you take accountability seriously.

Remember that the purpose of board self-evaluation is not to evaluate individual board members, but the performance of the board as a whole.

A good board self-evaluation should be:

- **Positive** – you should come away with a sense of what the board’s strengths are.
- **Constructive** - you should identify specific changes that need to be made.
- **Educational** – you should identify what you still need to learn about and make plans to learn it.

When To Do Self-Evaluation?

Compliance with all board policies in the Governance Process and Board-CEO Linkages should be evaluated regularly. Some boards prefer to schedule a few policies for self-evaluation at each meeting while other boards prefer to monitor all the policies at one meeting once a year.

Where Should You Monitor?

The regular self-monitoring of a few policies per meeting obviously occurs at the board meeting itself. For the periodic “retreat” approach, it is valuable to get away from your usual setting, to a place where disruptions are minimized, so that you can put concerted focus on the task at hand.

Who Should Be Involved?

It is important that all board members participate in board self-monitoring. This is not a task that can be delegated to a person or a committee, although some aspects may be delegated. The CEO should definitely be included.

How Do We Do Self-Evaluation?

Self-Evaluation does not need to be difficult. There are a few simple steps:

1. **Plan:**
 - a. **End of Meeting Evaluation:** Use simple forms to record examples of when Board has behaved consistently with the style to which it has committed itself and examples of when it has not followed those commitments.
 - b. **Structured Evaluation of All Policies:** Decide whether to schedule some policies for consideration at each meeting. If you go this route, actually develop a schedule. The frequency of your board meetings will influence this decision. Also decide if you will periodically have a “retreat” and delegate responsibility for developing detailed plans to a committee.
2. **Set Performance Targets for the Board:** The best board self-evaluation is based upon criteria that have been set in advance. Simply go to your policies, and ask yourselves questions to determine whether or not you have followed them.

It is important at this point to emphasize that board self-evaluation is not about evaluating whether the organization has achieved its Ends, or whether internal management is consistent with board limitations. That is evaluation of the CEO. Evaluation of the Board focuses on the Board’s own performance.
3. **Gather Information:** Decide on a method of gathering information from each board member regarding the policy or policies being monitored. One method is to structure a set of questions, based on the specific contents of your policies. These questions can be circulated to board members in advance and responses tabulated prior to the discussion.
4. **Discuss and Interpret the Findings:** This is a crucial step in self-evaluation. A common mistake is for boards to gather the information and then simply “receive” it without discussing it or taking action on what has been learned. It is important to discuss your self-observations. This can be done on a policy-by-policy basis. It can also be done in a more comprehensive way at an annual retreat.
5. **Formulate a Board Work Plan (Governance Action Plan)**
 - a. You have planned the evaluation.
 - b. Your policies have set the target against which you measured your performance.
 - c. You have gathered information from board members about how well you have met those targets.
 - d. You have discussed the findings. You will likely have identified gaps between where you want to be and where you are in your board performance.
 - e. Use that gap information to formulate a GAP (Governance Action Plan). This plan should set specific targets for improvement in your board performance including:
 - i. What actions need to be taken
 - ii. Who will be responsible for coordinating them
 - iii. Target date for completion