

Policy Governance

Redesign of a board's job

Traditional Nonprofit Boards	Policy Governance Boards
Each trustee or director wields power individually; uses the power of their personalities and/or their connections to others. Puts executives in the position of having X number of bosses.	Trustees speak with one voice through written policy. Board officers exist to help the board do its job (never powers unto themselves). The chair's job is to ensure the integrity of the board's process; the secretary's job is to ensure the integrity of the board's records.
Individuals never have to come together as a governing group. May or may not operate as a group, depending on personalities present.	Governance method forces and helps trustees to deal with being a group whose job it is to envision the future of the organization along with the stakeholders.
Board's job unclearly defined, often resulting in management of the organization vs. governance of the organization and often degenerating into micromanaging staff.	Board's job is governance, not management of the operational functions (only management task is to monitor Executive Team's performance vis-à-vis stated ends and limitations).
Staff's agenda often sets board's agenda.	The board, which holds trust for the stakeholders, leads through policy. Sets own agenda focusing on three main job products: (1) linkage to stakeholders, (2) creation of policy as needed, and (3) monitoring Executive Team performance.
Stakeholders tell board members their concerns. Board members "run interference" on behalf of stakeholders about "means" issues. May result in competing, mutually exclusive directions to executives; executives thus walks on eggshells. Stakeholders thus remain dependent on others to represent their concerns. Puts too many people in the loop; creates fuzzy boundaries.	Stakeholders tell board members their concerns. Board members listen, help sort out who are appropriate individuals to talk to, and encourage stakeholders to do so. Board members follow up with stakeholders. If the expressed concerns are about violations of written governing policy, the board reviews the concern and takes appropriate action as needed. Good boundaries.

Developed by Debbie Sheets and Ellen Green for the 2001 Unity Church-Unitarian board retreat and Taking Care of Business workshops.