

# Nonprofit Board Governance Checklist

*Fingers out. Noses in.*

## PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL

- This checklist helps board members govern well.
- Use it to stay focused on oversight, strategy, and accountability.
- Use it to avoid micromanagement.
- Use it to prepare, participate, and reflect.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

*Use it in four ways.*

- Before every board meeting
- During board meetings
- As an annual governance reset
- As a personal self-check

You do not need to answer every question every time. Pick the questions tied to the decisions on the table.

## ANCHOR PRINCIPLE

### Read this before every meeting.

- Your role is oversight, not operations.
- Fingers out of day-to-day work.
- Noses in strategy, risk, culture, and results.

*If a question pulls you into execution, pause. Reframe it as a governance question.*

# BEFORE EVERY BOARD MEETING

*Use this as meeting prep. Spend 10-15 minutes before you arrive.*

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## Mission and Strategy

*Ask yourself.*

- ❑ Does this agenda move the mission forward?
- ❑ Which items require board judgment versus staff updates?
- ❑ Are we focused on priorities or reacting to noise?
- ❑ How does this align with the strategic plan?
- ❑ What success looks like in 6, 12, 24 months?

## CEO and Leadership Oversight

*Focus on support & accountability.*

- ❑ Is the CEO supported and challenged?
- ❑ Are goals clear and measurable?
- ❑ Are we evaluating performance or managing tasks?
- ❑ What barriers need board backing, not board control?

## Financial Stewardship

*Think trends, not line items.*

- ❑ Do I understand the financial story at a high level?
- ❑ Are revenues diversified and realistic?
- ❑ Are reserves adequate?
- ❑ What decisions require board approval?
- ❑ What questions clarify direction, not transactions?

## Risk and Compliance

*Protect the organization.*

- ❑ What creates legal or reputational risk?
- ❑ Are policies current and followed?
- ❑ Any red flags in audits, HR, safety, or data?
- ❑ What risks are we accepting on purpose?

## Fund development and relationships

*Own the resource role.*

- ❑ Is every board member clear on expectations?
- ❑ Are we building relationships or chasing dollars?
- ❑ Do we steward and thank donors well?
- ❑ Is 100 percent board giving met?

## Equity and Impact

*Govern with values.*

- ❑ Who benefits from our decisions?
- ❑ Who is missing from the table or the data?
- ❑ Are outcomes tracked, not stories alone?
- ❑ Does governance reflect stated values?



## DURING BOARD MEETINGS

*Use this as a real-time filter.*

### Board Composition

- ❑ Do skills match strategy?
- ❑ Are terms enforced?
- ❑ Is officer and committee succession planned?
- ❑ Are new members onboarded well?

### Committees

- ❑ Do charters exist and stay current?
- ❑ Is the focus oversight, not execution?
- ❑ Do committees bring recommendations?

### Learning and Improvement

- ❑ Is there an annual board self-assessment?
- ❑ Is the CEO evaluated annually?
- ❑ Do we invest in governance learning?

## ONGOING GOVERNANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

*Review quarterly or annually.*

### Governance Discipline

*Ask silently or out loud.*

- ❑ Is this strategic?
- ❑ Are we drifting into staff work?
- ❑ Should this live with a committee or staff?
- ❑ Is a vote needed?

### Board Culture

*Model the standard.*

- ❑ Are voices balanced?
- ❑ Is dissent welcomed?
- ❑ Are egos in check?
- ❑ Does this feel like the culture we want?

### Decision Quality

*Slow down when it matters.*

- ❑ What data supports this?
- ❑ What assumptions are we making?
- ❑ What is the downside risk?
- ❑ What happens if we wait or do nothing?

# REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

*Use these in retreats, orientations, or personal reflection.*

## Personal Governance Check

*Do this quarterly.*

- ▣ Three ways I add the most value.
- ▣ Three ways I tend to overstep.

## “Fingers out. Noses in.” Exercise

*Do this in pairs or committees.*

- ▣ Two examples of staff work to avoid.
- ▣ Two strategic questions to ask instead.
- ▣ Reframe one operational comment into a governance question.

## Meeting Prep Reflection

*Answer privately before each meeting.*

- ▣ What decision matters most tonight?
- ▣ What question moves it forward?
- ▣ Where do I need to listen more than speak?

## Annual Board Effectiveness

*Discuss this once a year.*

- ▣ What decisions did we avoid? Why?
- ▣ Where did we add real value?
- ▣ Where did we slow progress?
- ▣ What does stronger governance look like?

## BOTTOM LINE

*Strong boards govern.*

*They ask hard questions.*

*They stay out of the weeds.*

*They keep their noses in the work that matters most.*