Good governance involves constantly striving for better results and improved effectiveness. This section explores the need for and nature of continuous self-assessment and performance improvement in all governance practices and support systems. The section also presents principles and activities in the nine topics shown in the menu on the left of this page that will help you develop plans for continuous governance improvement.

**The Challenge**

You are a schoolteacher asked to chair a taskforce to design ways to continuously improve the work of your governing body for a “food for families” program for the 20 schools in your school district in Haiti. How would you create the conditions in which annual plans for continuous improvement in governance processes are developed? How would you establish policies and processes to assess progress in governance on an annual basis? How could you tell if governance was improving?

Good governance is dynamic, always seeking ways to improve the performance of the four essential practices: cultivate accountability, engage stakeholders, set shared direction, and steward resources. Those who govern must make both an individual and a collective commitment to continuously enhance the strategies and structures of the governing practices. Experience in the health sector of low-
and middle-income countries shows that the task of continuous governance improvement requires the nine strategies listed in the topics section above.¹

In the following paragraphs, we will explore actions that governing body leaders can take and adapt to their unique realities to continuously improve governance in their organizations. As an example, we define practical ways in which a governing body can develop the confidence and competence of its members and continuously improve the systems for good decision-making. Leaders who govern need to make certain attitudinal and behavioral shifts to govern well and continuously improve their governance effectiveness. Consider the ones in Figure 15.1. To what degree are these shifts being made in your organization?

CULTIVATE GOVERNANCE COMPETENCIES

Good governance is both an art and a science. Studies of high-performing governing bodies show their passion to identify, and then support the development of a set of essential knowledge, skills, practices, and attitudes. High-performing governing bodies succeed by having members with an optimal mix of competencies, experiences, and perspectives. No single member will have all of the competencies needed to protect and pursue the mission of the organization, but the governing body as a whole should encompass most of the competencies. Of the competencies found in Table 15.1, which do you believe are the most important ones for governance success in your situation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal capabilities</td>
<td>Ability to lead change; accountability; achievement orientation; collaboration; community orientation; impact and influence; information seeking; innovative thinking; management of complexities; organizational awareness; professionalism; relationship building; strategic orientation; talent development; team leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Ability to run effective meetings; continuous quality and process improvement; financial planning and management; general business and finance; health care delivery and performance; human resources; trust building among stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Healthcare Governance, *Competency-Based Governance: A Foundation for Board and Organizational Effectiveness* (Chicago: American Hospital Association, Health Research & Educational Trust, and Hospira, 2010).

Responsible governing body members should be able to:

- ensure that the style of their communication with governing body colleagues and with the organization's management is constructive;
- support, thank, encourage, and motivate staff;
- work to build consensus among fellow governing body members;
- trust and be supportive of the work of committees;
- enhance the quality of the work of the committee on which they serve;
- frame disagreements in a constructive manner;
- look for partnerships and networking opportunities to enhance their ideas and effectiveness;
- remember that they are serving the community's health and health care needs;
cultivate their listening skills to hear what people are really saying;

- promote the accomplishments of the organization to nurture a good image and morale inside and outside the organization;

- be knowledgeable about recent developments in the health field;

- contribute information that supports the governing body’s decision-making.

Reflect on your areas of strength and weakness in governance competencies. In view of the items listed above, how will you build your own governing competencies and governance competencies in which your governing body is deficient?

BUILD DIVERSITY IN THE GOVERNING BODY

The needs of the people whom you serve should drive governance for health. To make sound decisions about what their health needs are and then establish policies, plans, and programs to meet those needs, good governance requires the engagement of diverse stakeholders who reflect the age, gender, racial, ethnic, and religious characteristics of beneficiaries. It is particularly important for women to be well represented in the governing process because they usually comprise a significant proportion of the recipients and providers of health services.

Of the possible ways to support and enhance diversity in your governing body listed below, which do you believe are the two or three most important in your situation?

1. Define “diversity” for the governing body of your department or organization. Have in-depth conversations about diversity.

2. Make a commitment to diversity in your governing body. Draft a simple diversity statement and fulfill your commitment.

3. Have your mission statement reflect your commitment to serve ethnically and culturally-diverse people.

4. Identify and remove barriers that may prevent ethnically and culturally diverse groups from becoming governing body members. In selecting new members, consider representatives from the ethnically and culturally diverse communities you serve. Ensure that the governing body membership reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of your community.

5. Welcome individuals of diverse backgrounds. Give responsibilities to every new member of the governing body. Give equal respect to all governing body members and have equal accountability.

6. Keep the governing body large enough to offer a diversity of views, yet small enough to be efficient in operations.
7. Maintain a skills profile for the governing body. Recruit new members based on the needed skills and characteristics that are lacking in the body as a whole. Use a tool such as governing body composition matrix to record the skills profile.

8. Develop a competency-based selection process that is matched to the strategic needs of the governing body. The process should ensure the selection of diverse, well-qualified, and dedicated people.

9. When conducting recruitment for the governing body, consult individuals, groups, or organizations that represent ethnically and culturally diverse people. Consult with your stakeholder constituencies about who might best represent their interests.

Now that you have identified the two or three most valuable ways to enhance diversity in your governing body, what steps will your governing body take to improve its diversity? How will you be effective in recruiting and engaging diverse stakeholders in your governance work?

**Organize Governance Orientation and Continuing Governance Education**

Wise, effective, and efficient governance does not just happen. Those who govern must invest individually and collectively to continuously improve their knowledge about how their health system or organization functions and how governance can be continuously improved. Expanding your knowledge is not a one-time effort. Your effectiveness and sense of satisfaction that your time and talents are being well used are functions of your willingness to participate in a well-designed orientation covering your role and responsibilities (your job description), followed by periodic participation in educational activities focused on governance. All governing bodies need continuing education and development of their competencies.

There are many ways to organize governance education opportunities for busy leaders. Which of the following do you believe are the two or three best ways to enhance your knowledge and effectiveness in governance?

1. There is both a formal orientation program and ongoing education program for the governing body.

2. The orientation program covers topics related to the organization (for example, the services it provides, its strategic direction, organizational structure, roles, and finances) and topics related to the role, responsibilities, and accountabilities of the governing body and its members. New members receive a thorough orientation before attending their first governing body meeting.
3. The organization’s strategic challenges are what drive the ongoing education program. Each meeting of the governing body includes an education component. Governing body leaders can bring in expert consultants and facilitators to conduct educational sessions during governing body meetings. The leaders can set aside time during a meeting to discuss a publication on a topic in which the governing body may be particularly interested or a publication about an area in which the governing body lacks sufficient knowledge. Governance education should help to fill the knowledge and skill gaps in the governing body, as seen in governance self-assessments.

4. The governing body has a written policy and budget for its education and development and has an annual education plan that is reflected in the organization’s budget for governing body activities and support.

5. The chair of the governing body seeks opportunities to educate the governing body and develop its leadership capacity. Committee membership and committee chair roles are used as an opportunity to build the leadership capacity of governing body members. Committee membership is reassigned after specific intervals. The position of the governing body chairperson is periodically rotated. The chair or governance committee investigates individual member’s governance education or leadership development interests and provides them with corresponding opportunities.

You have identified the two or three best ways to enhance your knowledge and effectiveness in governance. What steps will your governing body take for the orientation and continuing education of its members?

DEVELOP A MENTORING PROGRAM

The governing body should have a peer-to-peer mentoring program. In such a program, an experienced member of the governing body takes responsibility for mentoring a new member. Box 15.1 contains tips for establishing a mentoring program.
BOX 15.1  Tips for establishing a mentoring program

1. Consider assigning an experienced senior mentor to existing governing body members who are serving their first term or who are not performing their roles and responsibilities well.

2. Identify the mentor and pair him or her with his or her mentee by assessing the skills and expertise of both. Identify the governance education needs of the new governing body member and include them in your pairing methodology.

3. The mentor must be sensitive to the governance education needs of the new member, specifically, what governance competencies he or she needs in order to be effective on the governing body. With a good grasp of the new member’s education needs, the mentor will not appear patronizing.

4. Most new members have a wide range of knowledge and experience outside of your organization. Mentors should acknowledge this and find ways to capitalize on such assets for the benefit of the full governing body.

5. The mentor helps the new governing body member get to know his or her governing body colleagues by reviewing their individual strengths, personalities, contributions, and idiosyncrasies.

6. The mentor guards against inserting his or her personal bias into discussions about colleagues.

7. Sometimes the relationship with the mentor may not meet the needs of the new governing body member. In such a case, the new member should inform the governing body chair that the mentoring process is not working, and perhaps a new mentor can be assigned.

8. The mentor can accomplish a great deal in educating a new member by providing a context for most issues.

9. When mentoring is complete, both the mentor and the new governing body member evaluate the process.

Source: Adapted from The Governance Institute, Elements of Governance: Board Mentoring (San Diego, CA: The Governance Institute, 2008).

PERFORM REGULAR GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENTS

An objective and structured evaluation of how well you are performing, as well as how well the governing body and its various decision-making processes are performing, encourages continuous governance improvement. Performance reviews strengthen your capacity for continuous governance improvement.

Of the following activities, which do you believe are the two or three most important for periodic governance assessment for your governing body?

1. Continuously improve performance by conducting an annual assessment of individual members of the governing body and using the outcomes in re-appointment decisions.
2. Conduct a formal process in which the governing body evaluates its own performance. The governing body as a whole, its committees, the chair of the governing body, committee chairs, and individual members all conduct annual self-assessments.

3. Carry out periodic external or third-party assessments of the performance of the governing body.

4. Conduct one or more of the following types of assessments.
   - overall governance risk assessment
   - governing body 360° assessment (i.e., a process in which all important stakeholders give feedback about the performance of the governing body)
   - chief executive performance planning and assessment
   - surveys of overall organizational performance such as physician and health worker satisfaction survey
   - workforce satisfaction survey
   - managers’ performance assessment
   - patient satisfaction assessment
   - community perception survey
   - stakeholder satisfaction survey

5. Use the assessment process to identify specific improvement opportunities for members, define specific governing body performance improvement goals, and include them in an annual plan for improvement.

You have identified two or three of the most important activities for continuous governance improvement. What concrete steps will your governing body as a whole take to assess its own performance?

Refer to Sections 16 and 23 for details about governance self-assessments.

**RUN EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS**

Governance is largely conducted through meetings. Poorly designed, ill-managed, and unnecessarily long meetings will waste the time and talent of, as well as frustrate, the governing body members, most of whom are volunteers. The disadvantages of ineffective meetings include not only the loss and frequent turnover of good governing body members, but also the waste of scarce resources, and in some cases, the loss of good managers if a governing body is ineffective. Chronically ineffective meetings can also create a breeding ground for poor leadership behaviors, including corruption by those who govern, lead, or manage your health system.

Which of the strategies to improve meeting effectiveness (see Box 15.2) do you believe would yield the greatest value for your governing body meetings?
BOX 15.2 Strategies to improve the effectiveness of meetings

1. Prepare a yearly calendar to show when the discussion of major topics and decision-making about them will take place.

2. Ensure that approximately 80% of the meeting focuses on future and strategically important items, and 20% on a review of historical information. Governing body meetings are more effective if participants look at future critical issues and develop strategies for dealing with anticipated problem areas.

3. Use dashboards and graphics to review performance data. Regularly review strategic goals, to which five to seven key measurements are linked.

4. Encourage members to review materials for the governing body meeting prior to the meeting. Send minutes, committee reports, financial reports, quality reports, etc., to governing body members a few days before the meeting so they have time to review the materials. This will avoid unnecessary presentation of the content of such reports during the meeting and allow more time for discussion and planning. Use new technologies to improve the flow of ideas and information among all members and the senior management team.

5. Maintain a clear-cut purpose for each meeting through careful planning so objectives can be achieved in a limited amount of time. Circulate a well-defined agenda before every meeting and ask members at the beginning of the meeting if they have any additional items for the agenda.

6. Deal with routine matters efficiently; for example, use a consent agenda, which reserves time for the most important agenda items.

7. Have a management liaison present issues from management’s perspective and its specific recommendations.

8. Schedule a short period at the end of the meeting to enable governing body members to express their views about the work they are doing. Vary the formats of meetings in order to maintain members’ interest.

9. Make sure committee reports have an “easy-to-read” format, with a one-page executive summary. Fewer lengthy reports will leave more time for discussion and planning.

10. Solicit views from health workers (nurses, physicians, etc.) on the quality of staff, morale, adequacy of personnel, and new programs. Occasionally schedule presentations from people such as a patient, community leader, or competitor organization.

11. Have the governing body chair manage the progress of the meeting against the agenda and limit extraneous input, comments, and personal agendas. Build question-and-answer sessions into the agenda to get governing body members involved.

12. Educate governing body members about the fact that they have a fiduciary responsibility to act and make decisions based on what is best for the community, and not individuals or themselves. Encourage all of the members to listen, be prepared to exchange ideas, and then make decisions.

13. Include recommendations about effective and efficient meetings in the orientation and education program for governing body members.

Source: Adapted from Integrated Healthcare Strategies and the Governance Institute, Governance Enhancement Plan: Fresh Thinking for Improved Effectiveness & Efficiency in Our Board Work (Minneapolis, MN and San Diego, CA: Integrated Healthcare Strategies and the Governance Institute, 2008.)
For the strategies you selected, what specific steps will you and your governing body take to make your governing body meetings more efficient and productive?

Refer to Section 25 for a detailed description of how to make governing body meetings more productive.

DEVELOP AND DOCUMENT GOVERNANCE POLICIES

Just as the design, delivery, and financing of health services are complex undertakings, so too is good governance. Effective governance is guided by clear and sensible policies and procedures, which are documented in a policy manual that is easy to understand and readily accessible to governing body members (see Figure 15.2).

FIGURE 15.2. Policies highlighted in this book. The governing body can set the stage for good governance by enacting governance policies in key areas.

The policy manual should be drafted by the governing body members in a consultative manner. It should cover the following topics:

- role of the governing body with regard to strategic visioning and planning, quality assurance, fiscal health, management, stakeholder relations, interface with the Ministry of Health, and governance effectiveness
- position description and performance expectations for the chair of the governing body
- position description and performance expectations for the members of the governing body
- role and description of committees and advisory bodies
- position description and performance expectations for committee chairs
- annual work plans of committees
- annual meeting calendar for the governing body
- examples of governing body meeting agendas
- periodic governance assessments
- plan for continuous governance improvement

The manual should also contain policies on the following topics

- conflict of interest policy for the governing body and the staff
- code of ethics and conduct for the governing body and the staff
- whistleblower protection
- confidentiality
- record retention and document destruction
- governing body member expenses
- budgeting
- capital expenditures
- financial control policies
- investments
- financial audits
- risk management
- governing body fundraising
- sexual harassment
- nepotism

From the content lists above, which documents do you have and which do you need to prepare? What steps will your governing body need to take to draft, approve, and adopt these basic policies and procedures for governance?

Several of these policies are highlighted in other sections of this book.

**USE APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE TECHNOLOGIES**

Several technologies are available that can help governing bodies practice effective and efficient governance. Many governing bodies are adopting dashboards and balanced scorecards (see Section 11 on cultivating accountability). Performance dashboards can be used for management and governance in low-resource settings. Review the examples described below and identify practical activities you can undertake for your governing body.
Governance Dashboards

Dashboards are helpful for monitoring an organization’s progress in fulfilling its mission and meeting its goals. Most governing bodies receive an integrated quarterly report covering program, operations, and financial issues. First, a brief narrative summarizes the past quarter’s performance and directs attention to noteworthy trends. An overall dashboard report shows key indicators of financial performance, operations, service to patients, human resources, quality of care, customer service, and patient safety.

Governing body members who want more detail about a specific indicator can turn to a page in the report that shows a simple but accurate definition of the measure, an explanation of how the target was set, and another display comparing current and year-to-date performance against the target. Many indicators, such as overall patient satisfaction, are essential to performance measurement. Figure 15.3 illustrates the patient satisfaction section of a governance dashboard. This example is color-coded to show whether performance is better than expected (blue), as expected (green), or worse than expected (red).

**Figure 15.3  Patient Satisfaction Dashboard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Year-to-date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inpatient satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpatient satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Detailed Patient Satisfaction Dashboard Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Q3 Year-to-date</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Inpatient satisfaction | | Measure of patient perception of the quality of care and satisfaction with inpatient services. Score represents the mathematical mean (average) for all questions asked on the survey. Benchmark (80% and above) represents the score recommended by the ministry as indicative of high performance.

In this case, patients’ satisfaction with the outpatient department is scored using the method described above for inpatient satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Year-to-date</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Outpatient satisfaction | | In this case, patients’ satisfaction with the outpatient department is scored using the method described above for inpatient satisfaction.

**Key**

- Better than expected
- Expected
- Worse than expected
- Not applicable

Web Portal for a Governing Body

Governing body members need timely and convenient access to meeting-related materials. A web portal is an online website where all the materials governing body members need are stored, using high security and restricted access. The portal offers many benefits, including time savings (for example, there is no need to print voluminous materials prior
to meetings), cost savings, a better-prepared governing body because of the round-the-clock access to relevant information, and a better-educated governing body since the portal can provide access to many helpful resources.

In addition, the portal enables governing body members to communicate and share documents, and create topic-specific workspaces. It helps the governing body to perform its oversight function more efficiently. Rapid document updates are possible. The committees may also find the portal to be useful and convenient for the same reasons. The portal helps to improve the quality and timeliness of the information flow between governing bodies and the management staff they oversee. It streamlines governing body work and reduces risk by providing governing body members easy yet secure access to important information. It helps the governing body’s members to communicate and collaborate effectively, improving the efficiency of the governing body’s work.

The following content may be stored on the governing body web portal for easy access and use by the members.

**TOOLS FOR GOVERNING BODY MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

- governing body member competencies
- competency mapping process to guide recruitment and governing body development
- governing body member orientation program
- governing body member mentoring program
- governing body member customized individual education plans
- governing body education plan and budget
- digital reference library on governing concepts and practices
- eLearning resources

**TOOLS FOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNANCE**

- governance overall risk assessment
- governing body overall performance self-assessment
- governing body member 360° assessment
- chief executive performance planning and assessment
- physician and health worker satisfaction survey and workforce satisfaction survey
- managers’ performance assessment
- patient/client satisfaction assessment and community perception survey

**GOVERNANCE MONITORING**

- governance performance indicators and metrics
- governance dashboard design and development, and design of governing body information system
Establish Continuous Governance Improvement

Good governance requires an interest in and commitment to continuous improvement. For this to happen, the governing body should pause at least once a year and assess its own performance and that of its chair, committees, committee chairs, and individual members. This periodic self-assessment will motivate the governing body and its members to continuously improve their governance performance. This assessment process and the action plans that result from it will enable the governing body to identify critical gaps and fill them. The process should facilitate the development of a governance improvement action plan (see Figure 15.4) that includes responsibilities, timeframes, and projected outcomes.

**Figure 15.4** Continuous governance improvement process. The governing body should assess its own performance every year. This assessment will help to identify and fill critical gaps in governance by formulating and implementing governance improvement plans.

Which of the following strategies do you think will foster continuous improvement in the performance of your governing body?

1. Governing body members commit to being continuously educated on priority issues and come well prepared for governing body meetings and interactions.
2. The governing body assesses the organization’s bylaws and structures every two or three years.
3. The governing body uses competency- and diversity-based criteria when selecting new members. A process for removing non-contributing governing body members exists and is documented.
4. Governing body members review the responsibilities of the governing body, indicate whether they think the governing body currently performs well on each responsibility or whether performance needs to improve, and identify how improvements could be achieved.

5. The governing body uses a formal process to evaluate the performance of individual members.

6. At least once a year, the governing body organizes a retreat that provides time for brainstorming and relaxed, thoughtful discussion about organizational and governance challenges, plans, and progress. The governing body reflects on its past performance and plans for improvements in the future.

7. The governing body establishes performance requirements for member re-appointment.

8. The governing body has a mentoring program for new members.

9. Governing body chair or the governance committee organizes training sessions and workshops for governing body members.

10. The governing body uses an explicit process of leadership succession planning to recruit, develop, and choose future committee chairs.

11. The chair is a champion of governing body improvement and acknowledges and celebrates good governing practices and behaviors by members, committees, task forces, and the governing body as a whole.

12. The governing body holds open discussions about plans, progress, options, and issues. Data are transformed first into information and then into intelligence for the strategic thinking and decision-making needed for bold initiatives.

13. The governing body promotes what is best for the overall integrity and vitality of the health system and its stakeholders. It maintains a focus on strategic “dashboard”-type measures of performance in areas of service quality and finance.

You have identified strategies that will help foster continuous governance improvement of your governing body. What steps will your governing body take to implement these strategies?
APPENDIX 15.1

Resources for Further Study

CDC Local Public Health Governance Performance Assessment


Center for Healthcare Governance


Effective Governance for Quality and Patient Safety in Canadian Healthcare Organizations


Good Governance Institute


Governance Centre of Excellence

Ontario Hospital Association, Governance Centre of Excellence [website]. Available at: http://www.thegce.ca/Pages/default.aspx#5

Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership

Healthy NHS Board


Institute for Healthcare Improvement


IPPF Code of Good Governance


IPPF Governance Handbook


Management Sciences for Health

MSH, Continuous Governance Enhancement for Health Systems Strengthening (Medford, MA: MSH; Leadership, Management, and Governance Project, 2014). Available at: http://www.lmgforhealth.org/content/governance-guides-and-handbooks

MSH, Pharmaceuticals and the Public Interest: The Importance of Good Governance (Medford, MA: Management Sciences for Health; Strengthening Pharmaceutical Systems Project, 2011). Available at: https://www.msh.org/resources/pharmaceuticals-and-the-public-interest-the-importance-of-good-governance

World Health Organization