

# BOARD OPTIMIZATION PLANNING

**DEVOS INSTITUTE**  
OF ARTS AND NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT

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## Introduction

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Led by Brett Egan, President of the DeVos Institute of Arts and NonProfit Management, the Board Optimization Planning process is a high-intensity offering designed for advanced boards seeking to maximize their effectiveness.

This initiative creates consensus around current areas of effectiveness and equips boards with strategies to further align governance practice with organizational priorities.

Through rigorous analysis and expert facilitation, the program addresses governance structure, culture, composition, engagement, financial expectations, and self-regulation.

Each process is tailored to the participating organization's unique context yet proceeds in a principled, time-sensitive, efficient manner to ensure strategy is developed in five key areas defined by the Institute through decades of experience in governance strategy development.

# Scope

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This program supports high-performance boards in celebrating successes and refining, as necessary, their fiduciary, ambassadorial, and fund-development roles, establishing clarity and consensus in five critical areas:

## 1. Culture

- How decisions are made, who is involved, and the level of transparency expected.
- Embedding organizational values into board actions and policies.
- Defining expectations for board-staff leadership and establishing mutually-respectful methods to ensure accountability.
- Board meeting leadership, structure, tone, and expectations.
- Roles of the Chair, Executive Committee and Staff leadership in promoting a high-performance culture.

## 2. Composition

- Determining the ideal board size, member affiliations and expertises in alignment with the organization's strategic direction.
- Strategies for recruitment, onboarding, and meeting representation goals.
- Committee subjects, charters, and structure.
- Evaluation and refinement of (or need for) Affiliate boards or governance groups (e.g. Advisory or Emeritus).

## 3. Engagement

- Identification of under-activated energy and resources within the current board.
- Methods to activate board members' full potential through participation, committee service, and tools to support their contributions.

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## Scope

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### 3. Engagement (Cont'd)

- Leveraging diverse backgrounds and assets to meet organizational goals.
- Methods to assess and encourage active engagement.
- Creating plans for transitioning, as appropriate, certain current members into roles better suited to their interests or capacities, such as advisory boards, to preserve goodwill and institutional knowledge.

### 4. Financial Performance

- Setting clear expectations for financial contributions at both the individual and aggregate levels.
- Respectfully balancing varying financial capacities of board members.
- Aligning financial contributions with strategic organizational needs.
- Creating a five-year roadmap for both annual and capital expectations.

### 5. Maintenance

- Establishing protocols for Board self-regulation, governance, and replenishment.
- Methods to transition members to advisory or non-fiduciary roles when appropriate.
- Developing performance review processes and accountability measures.
- Bylaws review and identification of items requiring modification due to the planning process (or de facto practices pre-existing the planning process).

# BOARD OPTIMIZATION PLANNING

# Planning Process and Timeframe

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The planning process spans approximately six months, conducted via monthly, two-hour meetings between Brett Egan and the Planning Committee. The planning process includes the following phases:

## 1 Pre-Planning

- Completion by the participating organization of an Information Request to gather essential governance, operational, and fundraising data.
- Forming an Internal Working Group to guide the process and provide feedback.
- An initial meetings with Brett Egan to review data, finalize scope, and develop strategies for board buy-in.

## 2. Interviews and Environmental Analysis

- Board Interviews: Here the Institute conducts in-depth interviews and/or surveys with all board members to understand their perspectives on current governance practices, responsibilities, and engagement opportunities. Topics include impressions of current expectations, perceptions of board culture, and ideas for improvement.
- Staff and Stakeholder Interviews: The Institute engages senior staff (and key external stakeholders such as alumni, emeritus members, and key donors if deemed helpful by the participating organization) to gather insights into the relationship between the board and the organization.
- Benchmarking Analysis: The Institute studies comparable institutions to evaluate best practices in governance, financial performance, representation, culture, and engagement. This includes analyzing their structures, giving models, and strategies for fostering alignment between boards and staff leadership.
- Internal Review: The Institute examines historical data, financial contributions, attendance records, and committee performance to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

# Planning Process and Timeframe

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## 2. Interviews and Environmental Analysis (Cont'd)

- Internal Review: The Institute examines historical data, financial contributions, attendance records, and committee performance to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

**3. Strategy Development**, in each of the five areas detailed above.

## 4. Preparation and Delivery of Final Draft Materials

Following Board and Planning Committee Feedback, the Institute Prepares the draft final Deliverables including:

- A comprehensive, actionable plan for achieving the "Ideal Board" in each of the five areas.
- A revised Board Charter of Expectations.
- Revised, or renewed, Committee Charters.
- Recommendations for revisions to the Bylaws.
- Recommended definition of key Board roles as well as succession strategies for Board leadership including Committee chairs.
- A financial document detailing the vision for individual and aggregate giving (and "getting") for the five-year period.
- An implementation plan detailing steps toward the implementation of the plan, including assignments for board and staff leadership, as well as the chairs of subcommittees.

## 5. Final Edits and Approval

Once more, feedback from the Internal Working Group and board members are integrated into the final deliverables.

# BOARD OPTIMIZATION PLANNING

## Summary

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The Board Optimization Planning and Services program is a high-intensity initiative designed to elevate advanced boards to their maximum potential. By addressing culture, composition, engagement, financial performance, and governance maintenance, this service delivers a comprehensive, actionable framework tailored to the specific needs of each organization.

Key deliverables include an updated onboarding process, a revised board charter, and a strategic roadmap for achieving an "Ideal Board" over five years.

Guided by Brett Egan's unparalleled expertise and the DeVos Institute's proven methodologies, this program equips boards with the tools and strategies needed to excel in their roles and advance organizational success.

## About Brett Egan and Leadership of the Initiative

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Brett Egan, President of the DeVos Institute of Arts and NonProfit Management, leads the planning process and serves as the primary author of the plan.

Egan has dedicated his career to strengthening nonprofit boards and organizations, working with Board Optimization Planning with such organizations as the National Public Radio Foundation, Sundance Institute, MacDowell, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the Apollo Theater.

His leadership extends to the DeVos Institute's renowned training programs and the development of over 400 strategic plans, each embedding a tailored board plan.



## Contact

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