Board Workshop

Village of Oak Park

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Deming Cycle

Why Is Having This Board Workshop Important?

No matter how innovative the latest management trend is—whether it's "high-performance organization," "six sigma," or "priority-based budgeting"—none of it truly matters if the governing board is not performing effectively. The workshop is about getting back to the foundation and fundamentals of good governance: **How do we become a truly high-performing board?**

In this Workshop I will share a simple roadmap developed from years of firsthand consulting and management experience—that focuses on four critical factors for high-performing boards: **teamwork**, **clear expectations**, **strategic focus**, and **evaluation of our own effectiveness**.

Together, we'll talk about the real challenges you face as a board, from trust and communication to clarifying roles and setting expectations with your executive leadership. Most importantly, we'll look at some specific **Tools** to strengthen how you work together—because great governance doesn't happen by accident.

By the end Workshop, you'll leave with clear ideas, shared understanding, and concrete next steps for moving your board—and your organization—closer to high performance.

Let's get started.

Overview of the Workshop Agenda and Workbook

Development of the Board Workshop Agenda was a collaborative process with the Board, Village Manager and Deputy Village Manager. A confidential online survey was sent to each Board Member to get their input on two general categories of questions:

Board Operations- What does the Board see as its role and issues that may impede its effectiveness?

Board Teamwork: Does the Board work effectively together and address any issues that impede their teamwork?

The summary results of the survey will be presented during the Workshop. In addition, five tools will be introduced for improving governance. Some of these tools may be used by the Board right away, while others require additional workshops for full implementation. Below is a brief overview of the four tools that will be shared at the Workshop (Note Pages: 11-20 for more details on each Tool).

Tool 1: Integrated Strategic Planning

The successful execution of a strategic plan relies on its integration into the daily operations, decisions, and culture of the organization. A plan that is fully embedded into budgets, departmental work programs, performance evaluations, and governance processes becomes a living roadmap rather than a static document. Through an Integrated Strategic Planning approach, financial resources and human capital are aligned with organizational priorities, ensuring that employees see the direct connection between their work and long-term goals. This creates a cycle of accountability and continuous improvement, where performance is measured, lessons are applied, and strategies are refined to remain relevant, effective, and impactful.

Tool 2: Governance Expectations

This tool emphasizes the importance of clearly defining and mutually agreeing upon the roles and expectations between a governing board and its chief executive. When these roles are vague, friction and inefficiency can arise, undermining teamwork and service delivery to the community. By developing and sharing explicit expectations, boards and managers create a collaborative framework that guides how the organization is managed, how board members should conduct themselves, how services are provided, and how the public is engaged. This clarity ensures that leadership, management, and policy implementation work in harmony.

Tool 3: Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Based on Patrick Lencioni's well-known model the third tool addresses the common barriers that prevent teams from functioning cohesively. It outlines five core dysfunctions: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to collective results. When teams fail to tackle these issues, individuals hold back their best ideas, avoid difficult but necessary debates, fail to fully buy into decisions, don't hold each other accountable, and put personal recognition ahead of shared goals. By courageously and consistently confronting these dysfunctions, boards and leadership teams can build trust, encourage healthy conflict, commit to decisions, maintain accountability, and focus on delivering results.

Tool 4: WIRE Dialogue

The fourth tool, WIRE (Why, Issues and Information, Response, and Execution), provides a dynamic and flexible framework for meaningful governance dialogue and problem-solving. Unlike static decision-making processes for study sessions, WIRE is an iterative cycle that helps boards and managers clarify the purpose behind an issue, identify and address information needs, evaluate responses, and set clear expectations for execution. By looping back when needed, WIRE ensures

that decisions are well-informed, that all concerns are addressed, and that staff and board members remain aligned.

Tool 5: Board Meeting Discussion Template

The fifth tool is a structured discussion template designed to keep board meetings productive and focused, especially in an era where divisiveness can derail effective governance. The template guides board members to engage in discussions by clearly stating their support or non-support for an issue (with reasons), asking thoughtful questions to understand the issue fully, and clarifying any ambiguities to ensure everyone shares the same understanding. This balance between constructive debate and efficient decision-making helps boards develop sound policies, give clear direction to staff, and avoid the frustration and inefficiency that often arise from unfocused or overly politicized discussions.

This Workbook is designed as a guide for the Workshop and the material that will be discussed. I encourage you to read and reflect on the items that are covered in the Workbook. This Workbook will provide information for you to be fully informed and ready to engage in the Workshop.

Workshop Agenda

Agenda Items	Time
Dinner	5:30-6:00 pm
Welcome Remarks- **Village Board Chair and Village Manager**	6:00-6:15 pm
Overview of the Agenda and Outcomes for the Day- **Mike Letcher**	6:15-6:30 pm
Short Overview and History of Council-Manager Plan- **Mike Letcher**	6:30-6:45 pm
Review and Discussion on Board Survey Results- **Mike Letcher and All**	6:45-7:15 pm

Agenda Items	Time
Board review and Discussion on Tools- **Mike Letcher and All**	7:15-8:45 pm
Break	As Needed
Next Steps-**Mike Letcher and All**	8:45 pm
Board Protocols	9:00-10:00 pm
Closing Remarks- **Village Board Chair and Village Manager**	10:00 pm

High Performance Board Overview ©bridgegroupllc

The key to starting the board on its journey toward better performance is by providing a simple but effective roadmap that guides your efforts. Over the last decade, while working with governing boards across the country, I have identified four key factors that contribute to developing high-performance boards (HPBs): teamwork, expectations for executive leadership and operations, strategic focus, and evaluating board and executive effectiveness and results. Let's explore these factors and why they are essential.

Teamwork is essential for any elected board to work together effectively. From my experience, it's illuminating to see how boards lack trust in some members, leading to a cascading set of issues that result in avoiding conflict, not holding each other accountable, and other problems, which are covered in Patrick

Lencioni's book, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team.* When confidentially surveyed, the boards I have worked with over the years have provided a litany of issues and opportunities to improve their teamwork. Once any issues or impediments to their effectiveness are identified, the hard work of addressing them starts.

For some organizations, the roles of the board and manager become unclear and difficult to define. The lack of clarity within these roles can result in a disconnect that impacts teamwork and the ability to deliver results for the community. The ideal role of the elected public board is to develop public policy while leaving the implementation of that policy and the responsibility for day-to-day organizational operations to the manager.

So, why does this create friction between the roles?

The answer is simple: friction occurs when we've neglected to establish the expectations that the board has for its manager. How can any employee function effectively if they don't know what their supervisor expects of them? Conversely, the supervisor should know what the employee expects of them to perform their job. It is this shared set of expectations that provides the clarity needed for teamwork. Oftentimes, the charter does not define how the board and manager can set these expectations to work together more effectively. In our experience, once clear expectations on the outcomes of the roles of the board and manager have been set, boards begin to recognize the value proposition of letting the manager do his or her job.

"Managing the horizon" is a beautiful phrase coined by Peter Senge in his bestselling book, *The Dance of Change.* So, who should set the strategic direction to manage the horizon, the board or manager? In my consulting journeys, we've found push and pull between the manager and the board over this simple question. In some cases, the manager drives strategic plans entirely, while in other cases, the board plays a pivotal role. The key is to focus on the interdependence

between the board and management. It's all about developing and adopting a strategic plan that aligns the priorities of both.

Figure 1 shows four characteristics that we have determined that high-functioning boards have in common: teamwork, expectations, strategic focus, and evaluation. The chart serves as a compass for your board to evaluate the four characteristics of HPBs based on their current state and what desired future state they would like to achieve. Once any deficits are identified, the board can develop plans to move toward improved governance.

High Performance Board	High Performance Board Characteristics	Present Situation	Desired Future State	Deficiency	Action Plan/Steps
Teamwork	The Board works effectively together and addresses any issues that impede their teamwork.				
Expectations for Executive Leadership, Operations and Board Support	The Board has identified key day to day and leadership expectations for the manager and how they will support the manager.				
Strategic Focus	The Board, in collaboration with the manager, has developed a strategic plan.				
Evaluate Board and Executive Effectiveness and Results	The Board annually evaluates its HPB efforts and, if necessary, makes any adjustments to improve governance.				

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Being a High Performing Board Survey

The common denominator for most governing board members is the desire to serve and make a difference in their community. To accomplish this, they must collaborate with other members of the governing board. The High-Performance Board (HPB) questions below that were used in your survey are designed to assist the Board in determining how they can be more effective working with each other. The results of the survey will be discussed during the Workshop.
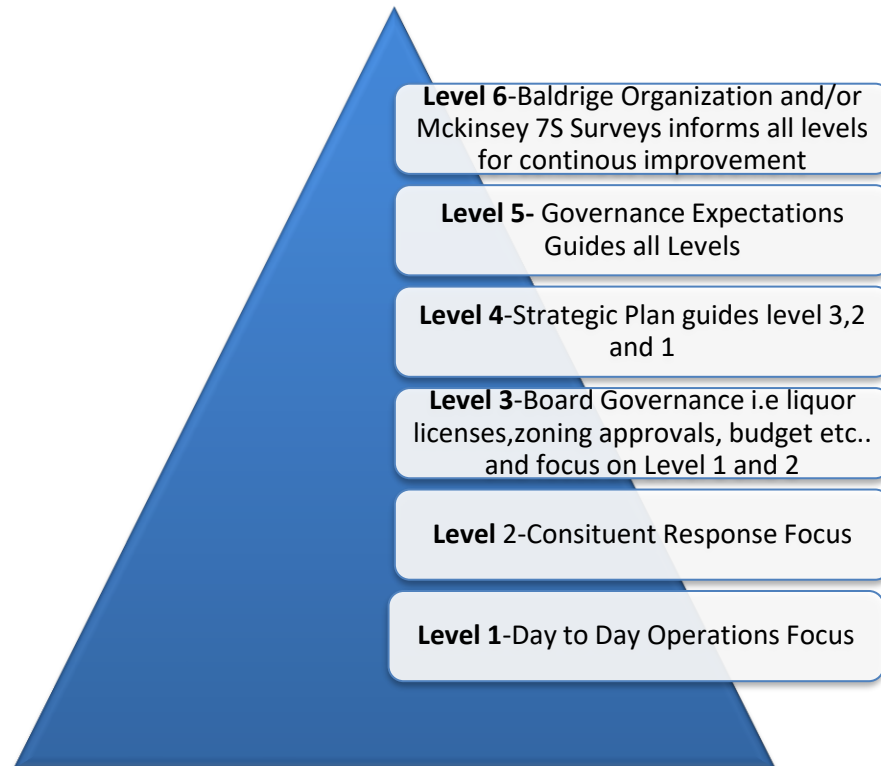
Board Operations

- o **Question** -Do you make decisions based on rational approach or emotional approach?
- o **Question** -Are you engaged or disengaged during meetings on critical issues?
- o **Question** -Does the corporate good of the Village or constituent feedback drive your decision making?
- o **Question** -What should be the major focus of the Board? (***This question will be based on Level 6 Governance which is outlined below on page 10***.)

Board Teamwork

- o **Question**- Are you comfortable with voicing your concerns or opinions in board discussions?
- o **Question**- Do you feel there is trust among board members?
- o **Question**- Do you think the board avoids conflict instead of addressing it directly?

Level 6 Governance ©bridgegroupllc

Level 6-Baldrige Organization and/or Mckinsey 7S Surveys informs all levels for continous improvement

Level 5- Governance Expectations Guides all Levels

Level 4-Strategic Plan guides level 3,2 and 1

Level 3-Board Governance i.e liquor licenses,zoning approvals, budget etc.. and focus on Level 1 and 2

Level 2-Consituent Response Focus

Level 1-Day to Day Operations Focus

What do all these levels mean in the chart above? Improving Board Governance is a journey. The chart identifies six (6) levels Boards can operate at during their journey of improving the governance of their communities. The Board's leadership determines what level their organization is operating at on a day-to-day basis. Most municipal Governing Boards operate at Level 3. The focus is on day-to-day operations. They love "being in the weeds" and the details of day-to-day operations that ideally should be left to the manager and staff. Their Board meetings are focused on doing the routine business of government. Very little focus is paid to strategically planning for the future of the community or improving their effectiveness in governing.

In moving to Level 4, they develop a strategic plan that not only guides the priorities at Levels 1-3 but opens their organization up to work on opportunities for the future.

Along the way, the Board decides it would be good to look at developing expectations for each other and the manager. Is it really that simple? Yes, it is that simple. By developing expectations for the Board and Manager, you can move beyond the stage of relying on the rules of the Village Code or State Statute in defining the relationship. While these rules are important, they do not give you a playbook for ongoing governance improvement.

<u>Tool 1: Integrated Strategic Planning ©bridgegroupllc</u>

The successful implementation of any strategic plan depends on how well it is integrated into the organization's everyday operations and decision-making. A plan that sits on the shelf quickly loses value; one that becomes embedded in budgets, work programs, and evaluation processes has the power to transform an organization. Strategic plans are most effective when they are directly linked to key governance and management systems, such as the board agenda processes, annual budgets, departmental plans, employee evaluations, and performance measurement systems. In this way, the plan serves not only as a vision but also as a roadmap that guides day-to-day actions. By tying the outcomes of performance measures to ongoing plan revisions, the organization can ensure that its strategy remains current, responsive, and measurable. This creates a cycle of continuous improvement: performance is monitored, lessons learned, and adjustments are made to better achieve the long-term goals.

The Integrated Strategic Planning approach provides a practical framework for aligning financial resources with human capital. This alignment ensures that employees understand how their daily work contributes to organizational objectives and that financial investments support strategic priorities. When both people and resources are intentionally focused on shared goals, the organization maximizes efficiency, accountability, and overall impact.

Tool 2: Governance Expectations ©bridgegroupllc

The roles of a governing board and its chief executive are often clouded and

difficult to define. It is this lack of clarity within the roles of manager and Board that can result in a disconnect that impacts teamwork and the ability to deliver results for the community. Ideally, the role of the elected public board is to develop public policy while the implementation of that policy and the responsibility for the day-to-day organizational operations belong to the chief executive or Village Manager. So, why does this create friction between the roles?

"Governing boards have been known in one form or another for centuries. Yet throughout those many years there has been a baffling failure to develop a coherent or universally applicable understanding of just what a board is for."

Carver's Policy Governance Model in Nonprofit Organizations
By John Carver and Miriam

The answer is often simple; we've neglected to establish expectations that the Board has for their manager. How can any employee function effectively if they don't know what their supervisor expects of them? Conversely, the supervisor should know what the employee expects of them to perform their job. It is this shared set of expectations that provides the clarity needed for teamwork. To improve your governance effectiveness, we suggest boards develop expectations.

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Shared expectations will provide general guidelines for how the organization will be managed, the expected conduct of the Board, the way services will be provided and opportunities for engagement with citizens. The key here is the partnership/collaboration between the Board and the Village Manager in setting clear expectations on how the organization will operate. This concept can be viewed as a series of interconnected gears that drive the organization, its management, and its leadership priorities.

The shared expectations are designed to improve the relationship and effectiveness between the Board and the Village Manager while setting benchmarks for annually evaluating the efforts of the Board and the Village Manager. These shared expectations can always be adjusted over time.
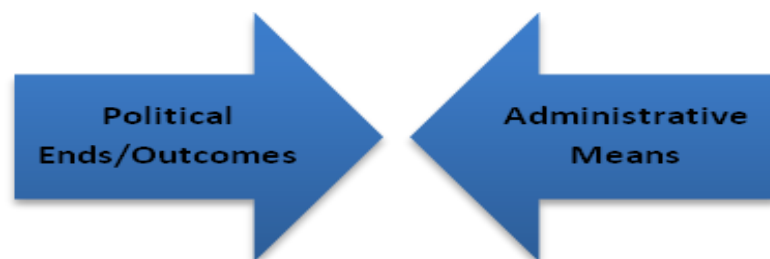
Having shared expectations will also define the results (ends/outcomes) that the Village Board wants to achieve and at the same time leaving the execution (how/means) or the implementation of the work to the Village Manager and staff.

Using the John Carver Governance Model, effective Boards focus on the results (goals) they want to achieve, i.e., improving the Village's financial transparency, citizen engagement, constituent response time etc. and they leave the implementation of those goals and the day-to-day management to the manager.

Tool 3: Five Dysfunctions of a Team

The power of teamwork is great. The founder of a billion-dollar company best expressed that power when he once said, "If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time." Whenever a group of leaders hears this adage, they immediately nod their heads, but in a desperate sort of way. They seem to grasp the truth of it while simultaneously surrendering to the impossibility of making it happen. Fortunately, the causes of dysfunction are both identifiable and curable. However, they don't die easily. Making a team functional and cohesive requires extraordinary levels of courage and discipline. This starts with identifying The *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* listed below.

ABSENCE OF TRUST
This occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another, and are thus unwilling to admit their mistakes, acknowledge their weaknesses or ask for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, a foundation of trust is impossible.

FEAR OF CONFLICT
Trust is critical because without it, teams are unlikely to engage in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues. This creates two problems. First, stifling conflict increases the likelihood of destructive, back-channel sniping. Second, it leads to sub-optimal decision-making because the team is not benefiting from the true ideas and perspectives of its members.

LACK OF COMMITMENT

Without conflict, it is extremely difficult for team members to truly commit to decisions because they don't feel that they are part of the decision. This often creates an environment of ambiguity and confusion in an organization, leading to frustration among employees, especially top performers.

AVOIDANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

When teams don't commit to a clear plan of action, peer-to-peer accountability suffers greatly. Even the most focused and driven individuals will hesitate to call their peers on counterproductive actions and behaviors if they believe those actions and behaviors were never agreed upon in the first place.
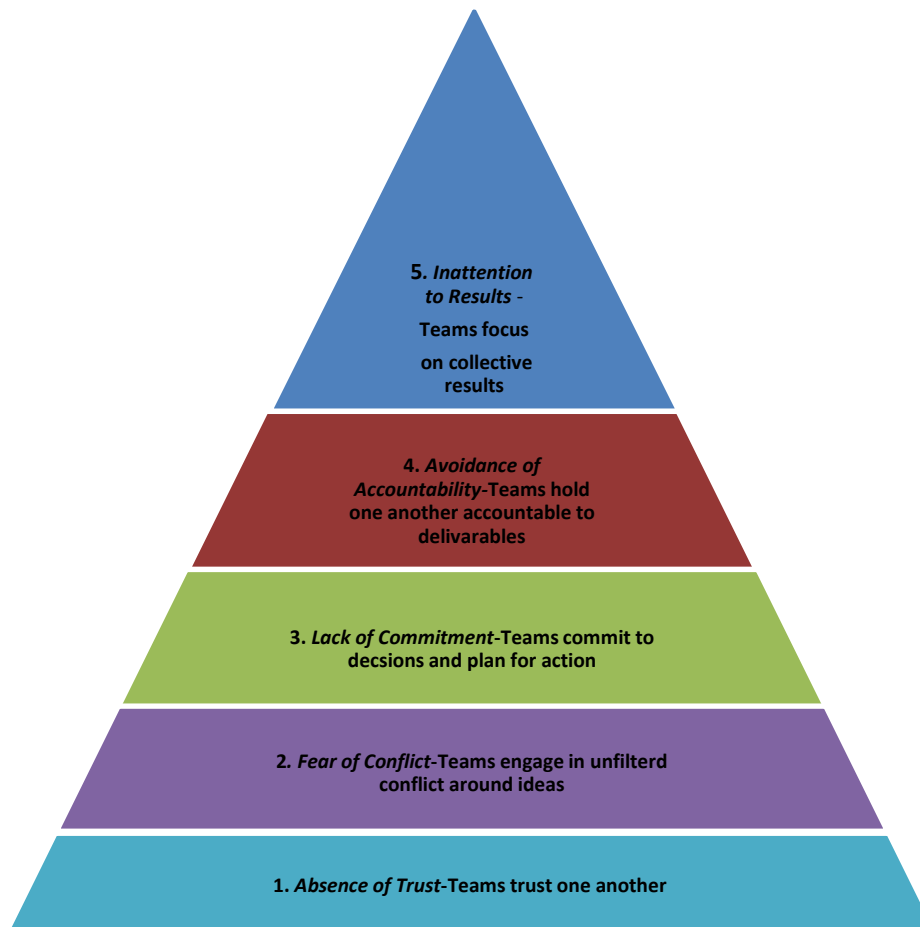
INATTENTION TO RESULTS

When team members are not holding one another accountable, they increase the likelihood that individual ego and recognition will become more important than collective team results. When this occurs, the business suffers, and the team starts to unravel.

Pyramid diagram (bottom to top):

1. *Absence of Trust*-Teams trust one another
2. *Fear of Conflict*-Teams engage in unfilterd conflict around ideas
3. *Lack of Commitment*-Teams commit to decsions and plan for action
4. *Avoidance of Accountability*-Teams hold one another accountable to delivarables
5. *Inattention to Results* - Teams focus on collective results

Tool 4: WIRE (*W*hy, *I*ssues and *I*nformation, *R*esponse and *E*xecution) Dialogue ©bridgegroupllc

The WIRE framework departs from traditional static and linear decision-making models **used in study sessions.** Instead, it embraces the interconnectedness and fluidity of modern governance. Living on the WIRE demands active participation, adaptability, and a willingness to navigate uncertainty with purpose and resilience.

A persistent challenge for governing boards and management is the lack of a comprehensive methodology to foster meaningful dialogue and effectively address complex governance issues as they arise. Traditional approaches often fail to provide a holistic understanding, leading to reactive rather than proactive strategies.

WIRE resolves this by offering a structured yet flexible framework that supports both proactive anticipation of challenges and retrospective problem-solving. By integrating diverse perspectives and utilizing advanced analytical tools, WIRE empowers organizations to:

- Anticipate potential challenges,
- Identify innovative solutions, and
- Strengthen overall resilience.

In a world where governance demands agility and insight, living on the WIRE transforms passive management into a dynamic force for progress and sustainability.

How Does It Work?

1. Why do it?

- Responsibility: Staff
- Purpose: Staff needs to explain the rationale or the "why" behind the issue or decision.
    - This provides context and a foundation for the Board's understanding.
- Goal: Ensure clarity on the purpose or importance of the issue.

2. What are the Issues and Information?

- Responsibility: Board Members
- Purpose: Board members articulate their concerns, issues, and information needs.
    - This step encourages board members to express what they need to understand fully or address the issue.

- Goal: Collect feedback and identify gaps in understanding or information.

3. Do the Responses Address My Issues and Information Needs?

- Responsibility: Both Staff and Board Members
    - ○ Staff: Respond to the board's issues and provide the requested information.
    - ○ Board Members: Evaluate whether the responses satisfy their concerns and needs.
    - ○ If not, board members must clarify why the responses provided are insufficient.
- Goal: Ensure that all questions are adequately addressed so board members can make an informed decision.

4. What are My Expectations for Executing This Issue?

- Responsibility: Staff
- Purpose: Staff should address any concerns the board has about implementation.
    - ○ This includes clarifying expectations and resolving execution-related challenges.
- Goal: Align expectations and address execution concerns to move forward effectively.

Cycle Continuity:

- If any stage is incomplete or unsatisfactory, the cycle may loop back to a previous step to resolve outstanding issues or needs.
- This iterative approach ensures a thorough and informed decision-making process.

Tool 5: Board Meeting Discussion Template: Enhancing Effectiveness and Outcomes ©bridgegroupllc

Across the country, local boards are shifting from collaboration to divisiveness, often driven by national and state party priorities. In this environment, maintaining effective governance requires a structured framework to keep

discussions focused during meetings. Many boards rely on guidelines like Robert's Rules of Order, parliamentary procedure, or consensus models. However, in my experience working with boards nationwide, these systems often lack the necessary structure to guide members through meaningful discussions on agenda issues, leading to inefficiency, frustration, and potential conflict.

Engaging in meaningful Board discussions on issues is essential for developing sound policies and providing clear directions to staff. However, striking a balance between constructive deliberation and over-discussion is crucial. When does Board discussion add value, and when does it hinder progress? The key is to have the Board focus on three key dialogue points regarding their discussion on issues:

1. **Support or Non-Support of the Issue** – Encouraging members to explicitly state their support or non-support with reasoning.

2. **Understanding the Issue** – Emphasizing the importance of asking questions to fully understand the issue.

3. **Clarifying the Issue** – Aiming to clarify ambiguous information to ensure shared understanding among all members.

The following is an example of a Board Discussion Template based on this approach:

1. Statement: Support or Non-Support of the Issue

- **Purpose**: The statement from a Board member should clearly articulate their position on the issue (support or non-support).

- **Criteria**: Does the statement:

    o Express agreement or disagreement with the issue being discussed?

    o Provide a rationale or evidence to substantiate their position?

    o Offer constructive feedback or alternatives if in non-support?

- **Goal**: To establish transparency and create a foundation for informed decision-making.

2. Understanding the Issue

- **Purpose**: A Board member should aim to fully understand the issue through thoughtful and relevant questions.

- **Criteria**: Does the Board member:

  - Pose questions to gain deeper insights into the issue's background, context, and implications?

  - Seek to understand the impact of the issue on stakeholders, resources, and the organization's mission, strategic priorities etc.?

  - Demonstrate a willingness to listen and consider multiple perspectives?

- **Goal**: To ensure Board members have a comprehensive understanding before forming opinions or making decisions.

3. Clarifying the Issue

- **Purpose**: Board members should aim to clarify specific aspects of the issue that may be ambiguous or misunderstood.

- **Criteria**: Does the Board member:

  - Identify and address areas where information is unclear or insufficient?

  - Request detailed explanations or data to validate assumptions.

  - Help streamline the discussion by eliminating confusion or conflicting information.

- **Goal**: To bring precision to the discussion and ensure that all members have a shared understanding of the issue.