

# Dealing with resistance to BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

**Board self-assessment is a process whose objective is to help the board improve its own work.** Its purpose is to allow board members to understand better their own roles and responsibilities and how they can fulfill their obligations effectively. The process can develop the board's team building skills, provide structure for problem solving, and increase accountability within the organization.

Performance evaluation often is conceived as a threatening exercise. This is not true only with employee performance evaluations but equally applies to boards' self-assessments. Resistance to evaluation is often tied to fear of negative judgment, apprehension about the process and ultimate consequences, and uneasiness about often inevitable change. Individual board members may fear a loss of confidentiality and being unfavorably compared to peers. This happens when the purpose of assessment is not understood. Self-evaluation has a negative undertone when it is not used to build positive outcomes.

## OBSTACLES

Without addressing the real or perceived obstacles to the self-assessment process, it may never get off the ground or turn into a constructive exercise. Here are some common barriers that prevent the board from seeing the benefits of self-evaluation.

- Board members do not understand the purpose of the activity. They do not see the link between their collective performance and the performance of the organization.
- There is no consensus among board members on the necessity or the method of carrying out this activity.
- Board members feel that they are doing a great job. They have already proved their worth. Evaluation would be an unnecessary waste of time.
- Board members fear upsetting the present balance and conviviality.
- There is a dilemma between wanting to know how you are doing but not wanting to be blamed for poor performance.
- The board does not know how to do it.
- The cost seems prohibitive.
- It is difficult to find the time from busy schedules to fill out the questionnaires and to attend a retreat afterwards.
- The board is struggling with a crisis that demands its full attention. The timing is not good for another big project.
- The board has done it before and nothing seemed to change.

## HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

Planning and understanding the benefits of self-assessment are keys to its success. Here are some strategies for defeating obstacles.

### **Commitment**

- Get each board member's buy-in. Make this a true group effort. Without consensus you risk non-participation.
- Ensure confidentiality to encourage honest responses.
- Understand that the objective is not to be punitive but to improve future performance.

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## **Process**

- Determine together which tool is acceptable. Fine-tune the tool to address issues and questions that are important to your board.
- Determine how to include individual evaluation for the purpose of self-reflection.
- Address general resistance to change. Change does not have to mean that everything from the past will be judged unacceptable.

## **Planning**

- Devote adequate time to planning.
- Start planning well ahead of time to include the essential steps in every board member's calendar.
- Schedule a special retreat to discuss results.

## **Competency**

- If this is the board's first self-assessment effort, form a task force to explore how others have done it.
- Learn how to give feedback constructively.
- If possible, bring in an outside facilitator.

## **Cost**

- Research foundations that fund board development activities.
- Include the expenses in the budget.

## **Follow-up**

- Make sure that the final recommendations will be implemented. Ensure follow-up.
- Provide board members possibilities for self-improvement.
- Clarify expectations and overall duties of board service.
- Commit to repeat the process.

Resource: [Board Self-Assessment](#)