

Association Leadership 2020 Phase 3: Research

A recent study of 600 elected volunteers, CEOs, and emerging staff leaders validated the need for new governance models to enable associations and non-profits – and their missions – to thrive in a world that is becoming more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Board and staff leaders will need to think and act differently in order to promote clarity, alignment, and value creation.

Key Points

Today's leadership and governance models operate on a continuum where the primary responsibilities for boards and staffs are well defined. Generally speaking, today's "optimal" boards:

- Determine direction
- Provide adequate resources to accomplish the organization's goals
- Ensure that sufficient progress is being made toward goals and objectives
- Ensure alignment with mission and values and compliance with relevant laws and regulations

The scope of shared responsibility between leadership often depend on industry/professional culture, board development, and mutual trust. This often includes strategic planning, fundraising, innovation, and operational level risk-taking. While a welcome evolution from the previous model of "board decides and staff executes," its shortcomings are increasingly evident as the speed of change increases.

Globalization and technology are rapidly redefining today's business environment. Significant strategic shifts are transforming the playing field.

Vast opportunities for growth are emerging at the same time that industries, professions, products, and services are being disrupted. Those associations and nonprofits who can adapt to the rapid pace of change, anticipate market needs, and take the lead in developing innovative strategies for the future will likely be tomorrow's winners in sustaining their profession, industry, or cause.

Successful association leaders must shape their organizations to be more nimble, less hierarchical, and more networked – in short, better organized to efficiently deliver value. The focus should be on key emerging business revolutions: agility, authenticity, talent, transparency, and sustainability.

What Needs to Change?

Association Leadership 2020 focus groups identified several areas in need of re-examination with the most critical being the role of, and relationships between, the CEO and Board. The quickening pace of change, increasing complexity of the business environment, and growing limitations on access to volunteer time and talent underscore this need.

We seek a research partner to help deepen understanding of emerging governance challenges for associations and nonprofits and lay the groundwork for the creation of new models to help leaders bring about needed change.

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