

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN ASSOCIATION GOVERNANCE THESE DAYS?

HERE ARE FIVE TRENDS THAT ARE EMERGING IN ASSOCIATION GOVERNANCE. MAYBE SOME OF THEM ARE RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION.

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Smaller Boards

From a process standpoint, it is clearly easier for 12 people to agree on a course of action than for 30 people. Although the average board size in ASAE's (www.asaecenter.org) survey has remained 27 since 1991, more associations seems to be recognizing the problems inherent in large boards. In many cases, however, reducing the size of the board means dealing with issues such as representation of certain constituencies. If your association creates avenues of two-way communications for all its members, then having designated representatives for certain groups becomes less critical and less controversial. Alternatively, associations with large boards are delegating more work to their executive committees to speed up decision making.

More Ad Hoc

To accommodate the compressed time of our elected leaders, associations will continue to move away from bylaws-mandated standing committees in favor of ad hoc task forces. One reason our volunteers become disillusioned with committee service is that the tasks they are given are, frankly, a waste of time. It is infinitely easier to recruit a volunteer for a task force with a specific charge and a limited service commitment. Once the job is completed, the task force disbands and the members earn a sense of accomplishment.

Leadership Development Committees

As boards recognize that they need ongoing



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attention for peak performance, nominating committees are becoming 'leadership development committees'. Instead of just getting together to propose a slate of nominees, these broader committees have the responsibility to identify and nurture future leaders and to help the board assess and improve its operations.

Public Members

Boards facing complex issues can benefit from an outside perspective. One innovative way to accomplish this is to add a 'public' member

(that is, someone outside your industry or profession) to the Board. The American Academy of Ophthalmology added its first public board member (and non-physician) in 1992. According to David Noonan, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, the addition has been a success. *'No matter the sophistication of the leaders involved, group-think enters all deliberative process. The inside 'outsider' keeps you looking at the big picture and often lends a cooling affect to an otherwise hot issue.'* Noonan explained. *'Public members help keep you from taking everything too seriously. They do tend to see the forest and the tree.'*

Faster Succession

Those same volunteers who are frustrated by cumbersome procedures will not hang around for 10 or 12 years (ore more) to 'earn' their place in the association's leadership. One of the challenges for board development committees is to define an appropriate leadership path that can be completed in a reasonable amount of time. What's 'reasonable'? Well, it's probably not six years on the board then another four years moving through the chairs. In some associations, there is only one chair, president-elect. Comprehensive orientations, ongoing training and written policy manuals provide Board members with the in-depth understanding of the association that they formerly obtained only 'on the job'. How can your association incorporate some of these trends? Perhaps this article can serve as a springboard for discussion at a board or executive committee meeting.

GinCommGroup provides consulting and training that helps associations succeed in leadership development, strategic planning, and membership marketing. www.gincomm.com