



Divisions of Family Practice

A GPSC initiative

Step-by-step Guide – Board Assessment

This guide is presented to help Divisions of Family Practice boards develop an effective approach to board assessment. Our appreciation goes to [Vantage Point](#) for its contribution.

Introduction

Regular assessment of board performance provides a significant opportunity to move the board forward in meeting its governance responsibilities and to effectively engage individual board members. This document provides the division with a sample approach to overall board self-assessment, a template for a board's self-assessment, and a template for an individual board member self-reflection. These three components are key to a comprehensive board assessment process.

Board Self-assessment

The following provides an outline of the primary responsibilities of the board. A board self-assessment tool can be found later in this document with suggested areas to evaluate for each.

Responsibility 1: Determine the division's mission and purpose

One of the board's fundamental responsibilities is to establish the division's mission. The board should also review the mission periodically to ensure it still accurately reflects the division's mandate. The mission statement must be clear and concise, with each member of the board understanding and supporting it.

Responsibility 2: Select and support the staff, and review their performance periodically

Perhaps the most significant decision a board makes is who to select as coordinator/executive director. An effective board will draft a clear job description that outlines the duties of the coordinator/executive director or other staff members, and will undertake a carefully planned search process whenever a position is vacant. In addition, the board will support all staff members by providing them with frequent and constructive feedback and by regularly conducting an evaluation to develop staff members and strengthen his or her performance.

Responsibility 3: Approve and monitor the division's initiatives

As a not-for-profit, each division carries out its mission by pursuing specific initiatives. The board, though not responsible for managing or administering these tasks, is responsible for deciding which member priorities the division should pursue.

Responsibility 4: Ensure effective fiscal management

The board will approve an annual operating budget and then monitor the division's ability to adhere to it. In addition, the board will require an audit once a year by an independent accountant to verify the division is accurately reporting the sources and uses of its funds.

Responsibility 5: Engage in strategic planning

One of the major contributions that a board can make to a division is to consider how its role will evolve over the next three to five years and to recommend stretch goals. As staff must concentrate on day-to-day operations, the board should focus on the future. For example, while the staff is appropriately concerned with an upcoming mailing to members, the board can be considering how the division's education strategy might improve to reflect changes in the local environment. At least every one to three years, the board should engage in a planning process to better understand the fluctuating environment in

which it is operating, and to then decide what changes it ought to make to function more effectively in that environment.

Responsibility 6: Carefully select and orient new board members

A good board is made up of visionary, big-picture thinking individuals who can contribute critical skills, experience, wisdom and time to the division. Because no one person can provide all of these qualities and because the role of a division continually changes, the board must have a well-conceived plan to identify and recruit the most appropriate people to serve on it. Once selected, a board must orient new members to the division. In addition, board terms should be limited to ensure the board can be infused with new ideas without making it so large it becomes unwieldy.

Responsibility 7: Understand relationship between board and coordinator/executive director

One of the most important responsibilities for a board is to define and understand its relationship with the coordinator/executive director. The old dictum that “a board sets policy and the staff carries it out” is oversimplified. An effective board must have a clear understanding of the differences between its role and the role of the staff. Because many important divisional issues require board and staff to move in the same direction, the quality of the working relationship between the board and coordinator must be high.

Responsibility 8: Enhance the division's public image

Board members, coming from various parts of the community or region, can do much to develop the division's image. If a division is successful but its achievements are kept secret, it will not succeed in being effective, attracting new leaders for positions of responsibility on the board and staff, or, most importantly, serving a broad range of people. Accordingly, the board must ensure the coordinator develops a communications strategy. Handbooks and other assistance with communications is available at www.divisionsbc.ca/resources.

In addition, board members must work with the coordinator and periodically seek out key business, government, media, and other leaders to inform them about the activities and plans of the division, and to learn about the external environment. While encouraging board members to spread the word about the division they help govern, the division must also have a policy about who serves as the division's official spokesperson when, for example, a news reporter requests an interview about a possibly controversial issue.

Responsibility 9: Organize itself so that the board operates efficiently

Boards carry out much of their work in meetings. Because meetings of the full board cannot always accommodate in-depth discussion and analysis of key issues, boards often work through task forces. Working groups can draw on a small number of board members and outside expertise to focus on a particular area, such as board education and development.

To make board and task force meetings most productive, board members must understand the bylaws under which they are operating and have the opportunity to review written material related to the agenda several days prior to a meeting. In addition, each task force requires terms of reference, strong leadership, a clear understanding of how decisions are reached, the ability to develop consensus among its members and the opportunity to present its recommendations to the full board.

Responsibility 10: Ensure sound risk management policies

Boards of directors need to reduce, to a tolerable level, the myriad of risks that can beset a division. No division is immune from the possibility of a lawsuit from, for example, a recently dismissed employee or an individual who slips while walking in the hallway. Obtaining the proper kinds and levels of insurance can offer some protection to the board and division. More importantly, appropriate action by the board and staff can reduce the likelihood of accidents or negligent actions.

Board Self-Assessment

All board members may be asked to assess each statement on a scale of one to five (**one=strongly disagree; five=strongly agree**) to identify the board's strengths and opportunities for improvement in each area of responsibility.

Responsibility 1: Determine the division's mission and purpose

1. All board members are familiar with the current mission statement.
2. The current mission statement is appropriate for the division's role in the next two to four years.
3. The board's policy decisions and the division's programs and services reflect the mission.

Responsibility 2: Select and support the staff, and review their performance periodically

1. A written job description clearly spells out the responsibilities.
2. The board respects the responsibilities distinct to the coordinator/executive director.
3. The board conducted its last search for a coordinator in a professional and competent manner.
4. The board assesses staff performance in a pre-determined, systematic and fair way on a regular basis.

Responsibility 3: Approve and monitor the division's initiatives

1. The board is knowledgeable about the division's current initiatives.
2. The board knows the context around each division priority, and can address the strengths and weaknesses of the initiatives under way.
3. The board periodically considers undertaking new initiatives and retiring those which have achieved their objectives.

Responsibility 4: Ensure effective fiscal management

1. The board discusses the annual operating budget of the division before approving it.
2. The board takes advantage of the budget process to consider the most effective allocation of limited resources.
3. The board receives financial reports on a regular basis that are understandable, accurate and timely.
4. The board requires an annual audit and considers all recommendation made in the independent auditor's report and management letter.

Responsibility 5: Engage in strategic planning

1. The board focuses much of its attention on long-term, significant context issues rather than short-term administrative matters.



2. The board has a strategic vision of how the division would be best to be evolving over the next one to five years.
3. The board periodically engages in a strategic planning process that helps it consider how the division could meet new opportunities and challenges.

Responsibility 6: Carefully select and orient new board members

1. The board currently contains a sufficient range of expertise and experience to make it an effective governing body.
2. The board has an effective process to identify the characteristics that new board members could bring to the division.
3. The board regularly identifies candidates who offer the characteristics needed to strengthen board composition.
4. The board provides new board members with a thorough orientation that includes board member responsibilities and important program and administrative information.

Responsibility 7: Understand relationship between board and coordinator/executive director

1. The respective roles of the board and coordinator are clearly defined and understood.
2. A climate of mutual trust and respect exists between the board and coordinator.
3. The board gives the coordinator enough authority and responsibility to lead and manage the division successfully.
4. The board has adopted adequate policies for coordinator selection, training, promotion and conflict procedures.

Responsibility 8: Enhance the division's public image

1. The board has approved an effective communications strategy for the division.
2. Board members talk about the division to key people.
3. The board understands who can serve as the official spokesperson for the division.

Responsibility 9: Organize itself so that the board operates efficiently

1. Board members are familiar with the bylaws.
2. Board members receive clear and succinct agendas and supporting written material sufficiently prior to board and task force meetings.
3. Task force assignments reflect the interests, experience and skills of the board members.
4. Board and task force meetings are well-organized, productive and make good use of board members' time.

Responsibility 10: Ensure sound risk management policies

1. The board has done a risk audit and developed policy to enable the division to manage and reduce risks to a tolerable level.
2. The board has a sense of how they will operate in the absence of a coordinator.
3. The board has a sense of how it will ensure its own continuity of leadership.



4. The board periodically reviews all the insurance carried by the division to ensure it is adequate and competitively priced (e.g. directors and officers, fire and theft, general liability, workers compensation).

General assessment:

1. What issues should occupy the board's time and attention during the coming year or two?
2. How can the board's performance be improved in the next year or two?
3. What other comments or suggestions would you like to offer related to the board's performance?

Individual Board Member Self-assessment

Your name: _____

- Are you satisfied with your performance as a board member in the following areas: (check spaces that apply below)

| | Yes | No | Somewhat |
|---|-----|----|----------|
| Familiarity with the division's mission & vision | | | |
| Attendance at board meetings | | | |
| Participation at board meetings | | | |
| Preparation for board meetings (reading previous minutes, other) | | | |
| Committee participation | | | |
| Community outreach | | | |
| Embodying the values of the division | | | |
| Acting as an ambassador to the division | | | |
| Other – add as necessary | | | |

- What factors contributed to your performance or lack of performance in the areas above? (Please be specific.)
- Have you found your board membership to be stimulating and rewarding thus far? Why or why not?
- On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself as a board member at this time? Why?
- Here's what I would need from the division to maintain/increase my level of board commitment: