



A Few Guidelines on Implementing Generative Governance

Bruce Lesley, BoardSource senior governance consultant, offers these pointers on making board deliberations more generative:

- **Find an internal champion.** Some board members are more inclined toward numbers and a fiduciary orientation, while others tend to think more in terms of how-to, Lesley points out.

"A third group," he says, "is always wondering, 'What does this mean?' They're kind of natural generative thinkers." Such a person might serve as an internal advocate who stirs interest in generative governance and keeps it front-of-mind and on track.

- **Design the event.** A portion of every board meeting should be devoted to generative discussion.

"Look at it as an event," Lesley says, "and then plan specific questions you want the board to react to."

- **Be sure to choose a generative issue.** "It should be something new to the board that you haven't talked to death already," Lesley says.

"It should be significant, something having major impact. And it's ambiguous. There's no obvious way to look at it."

- **Keep focused on the generative mode.** "The hardest thing," Lesley notes, "is to design the discussion activity to keep the board focused on 'What does this mean? What are the different ways to frame this issue?'—as opposed to jumping too quickly into the how-to."

- **Commit to the clock.** The board may feel anxious to get to its fiduciary and strategic responsibilities, especially board members who feel more comfortable in those areas. "I think it helps if you say, 'We're just going to take 30 minutes to focus on this generative piece,'" Lesley advises.

- **Wrap up the session.** "At the end, tie the discussion in a broad sense to the board's fiduciary and strategic work," Lesley suggests.

"Ask, 'Is there anything we learned from this discussion that will influence our strategies and thinking as we move forward?'"