

STEWARDSHIP

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

With a disciplined focus on the future, you ensure your association will be prepared for whatever comes next.

BY JEFF DE CAGNA, FASAE

AS THE POWERFUL and relentless forces of societal transformation irrevocably reshape every field of human endeavor, it will be the capacity for stewardship—the deep commitment to leave the organization better than how it was found—that will determine whether associations will be able to anticipate serious challenges, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and build themselves, their stakeholders, and their fields to thrive over the next decade and beyond.

Board stewardship must focus on the future. Rather than adopt a short-term ownership perspective that may reject transformation, resist innovation, and reinforce the status quo, boards must strive to view themselves as forward-looking investors. Boards need to work collaboratively over time to grow the tangible and intangible value of their associations as assets that belong to all stakeholders and exist for their shared benefit.

To make their stewardship real, boards must connect “governing intent”—the critical outcomes they are seeking to achieve through the work of stewardship—with their organizations’ larger purpose and strategic intent for stakeholder value creation. By adopting this approach, boards will be able to more easily situate complex

and increasingly difficult choices in their real-world contexts, prioritize the pursuit of learning, and steer clear of decisions based on myopia, nostalgia, orthodoxy, or denial.

Boards can make plain the connections among purpose, governing intent, and strategic intent by developing a “stewardship statement.” This statement crystallizes the deeper significance of a board’s work and helps to nurture a shared sense of responsibility for stewardship. While boards are their organizations’ primary stewards, all association stakeholders should be asked to participate in the work of stewardship by making small yet meaningful contributions that cumulatively can have a signifi-

cant beneficial impact both inside and beyond their organizations’ traditional boundaries.

The pace of our world’s ongoing transformation will not slow anytime soon. Now is the time for association boards to prepare their organizations, their stakeholders, and their fields for a full range of plausible futures (especially the unfavorable scenarios they may face) by embarking on the work of stewardship in a thoughtful, open, and inclusive way.

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A STEWARDSHIP STATEMENT

This example of a stewardship statement has been edited to remove specific association references:

As its primary stewards, the board of directors ensures that the association’s day-to-day activities connect with the long-term evolution of the profession. The board supports staff’s efforts to create distinctive and meaningful value for all stakeholders through its thoughtful oversight, ongoing strategic thinking and foresight, and consistent investment in innovation. The board also strives to ensure that its work, as well as the work of other association contributors, embodies a shared commitment to collaboration, passion, and professionalism.