

ASAE Foundation advances knowledge in association management and nonprofit leadership; and sponsors and conducts research in an array of areas, the breadth and depth of which no single trade or professional association would likely be able to undertake on its own. The foundation has a balanced and multi-dimensional portfolio of research initiatives that are designed to 1) advance a body of knowledge, 2) define and inform effective practices, and 3) provide outcomes that lead to data-driven predictions and decision-making.

***Board Selection Processes:
Effective Selection and Change Practices for Associations***

I. Description of Research to be Funded

A. Background

Boards of directors serve as associations' governing bodies responsible for providing strategic direction. Therefore, an effective board is critical to an association's health and ability to fulfill its mission. Like all organizations, associations must adapt to new internal and external influencers, disrupters, and trends in order to thrive over time. In addition to any new developments that create pressure for associations to adapt, the organizations' boards of directors turn over regularly, by design. In sum, change is constant. Therefore, activities such as developing board talent pipelines, carrying out elections or appointments, educating board members about their service, and supporting boards' work are critical to the ongoing work of association leaders and their ability to serve effectively. Leaders must ensure this work is done responsibly and efficiently, and be prepared to adapt appropriately as circumstances change.

It should be acknowledged that [BoardSource](#) has generated resources on a broad variety of topics related to governance best practices, including the study *Assessing Board Performance*, which was completed in partnership with ASAE (Dignam and Tenuta, 2013). But effective selection and change practices remain an area largely unexamined in existing research.

This research is intended to build on previous governance research supported by ASAE Foundation. Past ASAE Foundation research developed a set of common characteristics of high performing boards, published in the 2013 study *What Makes High-Performing Boards* (Gazley & Bowers). That research found that the most successful boards have a strategic focus; they have a culture of learning, self-assessment and accountability; and they have developed effective recruitment and development practices.

Several studies indicated that board diversity is important for organizational growth and success. ASAE Foundation's study *Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in Membership Associations* found associations that emphasized diversity and inclusion also had a high level of comfort with change, conflict, and empowerment of others. That study also found that associations' elected and volunteer leaders have important influence on the effort put into diversity and inclusion at board, membership, and staff levels (Leiter, Solebello, and Tschirhart, 2011). In order to effectively represent their industry, many boards and executives intentionally promote and develop diverse leadership. In *What Makes High-Performing Boards*, Gazley and Bowers reported 31 percent of member-serving organizations imposed diversity or representational requirements on board membership, including diversity requirements for race, gender, and sexuality. They found that the organizations that were most successful in meeting these requirements were the ones that reported their goals and progress to their membership and to the broader public (Gazley & Bowers, 2013). To help associations apply these findings to their own work, ASAE created the Association Inclusion Index, a tool for associations to evaluate the role of the board as well as the role of their organization in supporting and representing diversity and inclusion against community standards.

Foundation research has also shed light on what drives successful board transformation. *Transformational Governance* identified two key elements: committed change agents and a thoughtful change management process. Change agents can get necessary stakeholders on board with the transformation, while a change management process ensures that all stakeholders are heard and supported during the implementation of the transformation plan (Gazley & Kissman, 2015).

After examining concepts around the characteristics of successful, highly functioning boards, and making positive board transformations, the foundation has turned its attention to other questions of governance—specifically around processes for board selection. In 2015, ASAE members brought to the foundation their discussions and questions on the topic of managing changes in board selection processes—and how changes to those practices are carried out. At the time, several members were managing international expansion and other internal and external influencers that impact organizational governance, in general, and board selection in particular. It was suggested that valid and reliable evidence might be of value to association leaders who face challenges in establishing and guiding board selection processes—and in refining or modifying those established processes, particularly when internal and external variables influence the viability and effectiveness of the association's policies.

In response to the aforementioned inquiries and conversations, the foundation convened two focus groups with ASAE members to better define the nature and extent of the current challenges in board selection, and to determine the utility of the evidence that might emerge from a research endeavor on such a topic. It quickly became clear that the focus group participants valued ASAE's support in exploring this topic, and providing evidence-based tools and resources that could guide their efforts in managing the board when establishing or modifying processes for board selection were warranted. Eight in-depth interviews were subsequently conducted to learn which topics represented key areas of priority, and to

determine the range of resources members currently use—and would be of value to have in the future.

The qualitative research (i.e., focus groups and in-depth interviews) identified myriad internal and external factors that may present challenges to the selection practices, and that may prompt change in the composition of (or processes for selecting) board members. These factors may be internal, associated with the state of the board or the direction of the association, or external and associated with such issues as the state of the economy or industry.

Examples of internal factors that influence change include

- A board needs more diversity—e.g., racial/ethnic diversity, gender diversity, diversity from within the field (i.e., needing more students or professionals at different levels), or geographic diversity (i.e., needing representation from outside the United States).
- A board is too large to be nimble.
- Some needed competencies are not available within the group.
- Revenue is down and a board change may help.
- Association members feel disenfranchised and representation on the board should change.
- An association is striving to expand the market.
- An association is branching out internationally.
- An association is taking a step in its lifecycle—such as moving from a board of initial founders to a community-connected board or beyond that to a fundraising board.

Examples of external factors that may influence change include

- Economic factors (e.g., the number of chapters diminish in a poor economy).
- Generational differences affecting demands/needs (e.g., millennial vs baby boomers).
- Time poverty of volunteers.
- Industry trends or events (e.g., mergers/acquisitions, industry decline or growth).

When change is warranted, oftentimes boards and CEOs are in accord; but not always. In qualitative discussions, ASAE members indicated that some complicating factors are common regardless—such as, the human tendency of board members to prefer tradition and historical methods of operating, as well as the fact that questioning “the very process that installed *me*” on the board can be inherently awkward.

The exploratory research process yielded three guiding elements for the next phase of inquiry:

- 1) A set of four relevant tasks associated with board selection that serves as a framework for organizing the planned research;
- 2) Guidance on framing the need for change; and
- 3) Guidance on implementing the change.

As shown in Figure 1, the aspects of the board selection process that are relevant to the current research initiative include the following:

- 1) Developing a pool of potential board members;
- 2) Applying effective practices in selecting from that pool;
- 3) Developing mechanisms to support the work of the board members (once selected);
and
- 4) Applying effective practices in modifying the process, when warranted.

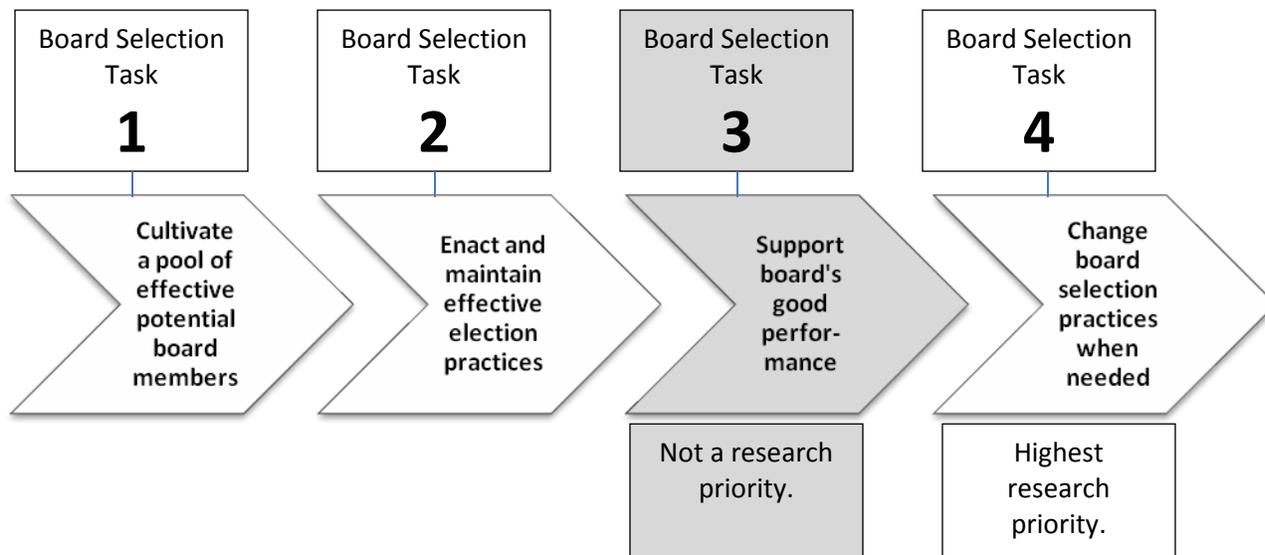
Figure 1. Board selection tasks association leaders oversee that are relevant to this research project



B. Research Program Objective

This research is intended to help association executives proactively anticipate and minimize or eliminate challenges associated with the board selection process, and reactively manage or resolve problems that arise associated with the board selection process. Indeed, resources exist to help executives effectively populate and manage boards. However, there appears to be a gap in available resources to aid association executives in managing board change. Data gleaned from this research effort will offer guidance to association executives in determining when change in board selection processes is warranted; and when warranted, effective approaches to implementing that change. Figure 2 depicts priorities for the purposes of this research effort.

Figure 2. Research priorities among the board selection tasks.



The goal of this research is to provide guidance and resources that association leaders can apply in the context of their organization to assist with

- 1) Cultivating a pool of highly effective board members;
- 2) Enacting and maintaining election practices that contribute to ensuring effective boards; and
- 3) Modifying selection processes in a timely and efficient manner when internal or external forces dictate change.

Identifying and applying strategies to enact the latter is the highest priority. Results of the qualitative research suggest that fewer resources are available on this topic. Tasks 1 and 2 are included as these may be foundational to seating an effective board and to being able to manage change well when the need arises.

It should be noted that, although the topic of support for—and transformation of—high performing boards is *not* a focus of the current research (as the foundation has reported findings on this topic and resources are fairly abundant), insights in this area may serve as the basis for executing the objectives of the stated initiative. A selected list of ASAE publications on this topic is affixed to this RFP (See Attachment A), as it may be of value to applicants in the preparation of the research proposal.

The outcomes of the research are to

- Identify internal and external forces that spur changes to board selection processes;
- Describe effective methods for addressing changes to board selection processes;

- Produce resources that association executives can easily access and integrate (e.g., models, samples, expert guidance, peer guidance) for effective and efficient change management; and
- Provide case examples from the association community that can serve as exemplars to demonstrate effective change management.

The qualitative research yielded the following research questions:

<p style="text-align: center;">TASK 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cultivate a pool of effective potential board members among association membership.</p>	<p>RQ1. What are the core competencies needed on a high-performing board that hold true across associations? RQ2. What are effective practices for identifying <i>other</i> unique core competencies that a <i>specific</i> organization’s board should have?</p> <hr/> <p>Key Question: What models for developing a leadership pipeline enable association leaders to bring good members onto the board?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">TASK 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Enact and maintain effective election practices.</p>	<p>RQ1. How are boards selected across the association space? RQ2. What patterns exist among board selection approaches and associations’ characteristics?</p> <hr/> <p>Key Question: What are the strengths and weaknesses of each board selection approach that an association should know when considering each approach?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">TASK 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Support board’s performance.</p>	<p><i>These questions are shown for context only and are not a priority for the project outlined in this RFP.</i></p> <p>RQ1. What onboarding practices are used across the association space? RQ2. What onboarding practices are perceived as most helpful to later performance? RQ3. What exit practices are used across the association space? RQ4. What exit practices are perceived as most helpful to a board’s performance?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">TASK 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Change board selection practices when needed</p>	<p><i>These questions are the highest priority for the project outlined in this RFP.</i></p> <p>RQ1. What are effective practices for assessing a board’s effectiveness, including self-assessment? RQ2. When organizations have changed approaches, what has been the impetus? RQ3. For organizations that have changed their practices, what positive and negative outcomes do they attribute to the</p>

	<p>change?</p> <p>Key Question 1: What are the known, common challenges to changing board selection practices?</p> <p>Key Question 2: What change practices have proven useful to associations (so that those currently needing change learn from those who have undergone it)?</p> <p>Key Question 3. What change practices are useful for overcoming each known, common challenge?</p>
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C. Research Methods and Desired Outcomes

This research is intended to rely upon both secondary and primary research methods. Applicants are welcome to describe work to be completed in multiple phases. As stated above, the anticipated outcome of this research is the accumulation and/or production of resources that association executives can easily access and integrate (e.g., models, samples, expert guidance, peer guidance) for effective and efficient change management.

Secondary Research: Literature Review/Environmental Scan

Given the availability of helpful information, this research project must include a comprehensive literature review and an environmental scan—that is, a collection and curation of the scholarly and trade material currently available to aid association executives in the three tasks shown in the framework. This phase should address each research question using existing materials and expertise, thereby highlighting the remaining questions on which primary or association-specific research is needed.

The non-proprietary, shareable materials collected in this phase will ultimately be made available to member associations. Thus, needed permissions to use them must be secured by the research team. Models, tools, and actionable guidance among the curated works should be stored in an organized, accessible way that links them to the research questions they help answer. This collection may include some dynamic sources such as blogs.

It is expected that the award recipient will synthesize secondary research findings for four purposes:

1. To begin to identify internal and external forces that spur changes to board selection processes and describe effective methods for addressing changes to board selection processes;
2. To identify gaps and make recommendations for primary research (relative to such association-specific variables as size, sector, and type);
3. To offer preliminary guidance based on secondary findings; and
4. To assemble valuable tools and resources for associations.

Primary Research: Quantitative and/or Qualitative Approaches

The research questions—or aspects of them—that are not sufficiently answered through secondary sources shall be addressed in a primary research effort. The design the applicant proposes can make use of quantitative and qualitative research conducted among ASAE members and non-members, experts (e.g., on board selection, management, change practices), or others the research team identifies as relevant. In addition, this phase should include collection of sample materials from ASAE members, if needed to fill gaps that remain after the secondary research phase.

D. Deliverables

Secondary Research Phase

1. Collected materials, curated and organized such that ASAE can easily determine which among them warrant sharing as tools for members. Selected useful priority items (e.g., tools, models, summations of advice) appropriate for sharing in the near-term must be identified.
2. An expanded report for the ASAE research committee that outlines a recommended research plan for primary research.

Primary Research Phase

Deliverables for this phase will be defined by the secondary research. The research team will be expected to make recommendations based on findings and their knowledge of the association community. While applicants are encouraged to think creatively about how research findings can be integrated into resources for the association community, at a minimum, deliverables should include:

1. Collected materials (selection document, process models, and samples) from ASAE members and from secondary sources collected during the secondary phase of research. Written permission to share items provided by ASAE members must be secured.
2. Case examples from the association community that can serve as exemplars to demonstrate effective change management
3. A report on secondary and primary research findings designed to help guide ASAE members in their board selection and change work.

II. Eligibility Information

Eligibility for this award program is unrestricted. However, applications are encouraged from qualified investigators representing organizations (e.g., for-profit, nonprofit, trade, professional), institutions of higher education (e.g., public, state, and/or private), and

consultants with interest and research expertise in the area of study outlined in this Request for Proposal. Multidisciplinary and collaborative teams are encouraged to apply given the varied expertise required to execute the research and develop deliverables.

Ideal applicants will have knowledge of the nonprofit (specifically, professional and trade associations) community; have demonstrated prior research on related topics; and have the ability to bring diverse academic and theoretical perspectives to the understanding of board selection. Experienced staff or consultants with specific board selection and/or association leadership backgrounds is not required, but considered beneficial. Demonstrated research experience is required.

Deliverables (e.g., the executive summary, research report, publications or products specifically geared towards the association management practitioner and ASAE members, and other derivative or transformative works) produced under this award are considered “work-for-hire,” and as such, the copyright for the deliverable defined by this award agreement is presumed to be owned by ASAE Foundation. The grantee may, at his/her own discretion, use the results of the completed work for other scholarly activities (e.g., future publications supporting tenure and academic publication that do not injure or impede the sale of a publication produced as a deliverable of this study), with proper acknowledgment of the foundation.

Affiliated organizations or institutions must assure commitment to and support for the proposed program of research (e.g., provision of adequate staff time, facilities, and resources). Indirect costs shall not be included for this awarded project.

III. Application and Submission Information

The applicant must provide a description of the *Proposed Program of Research* that incorporates the desired elements of interest outlined above (See Section I). The *Proposed Program of Research* must not exceed 10 pages (single-spaced, 12-point font); and must include project title, specific aims, research design, projected timelines, and expected outcomes.

In addition to the *Proposed Program of Research*, the applicant must also include the following documents (which are not counted toward the 10-page limit):

- *Project Abstract* (not to exceed one page)
- *Project Timeline* (include both secondary and primary research with timing detail on the tasks proposed for each—e.g., literature review, curation of samples, survey design and pretesting, data analysis, report preparation).
- *Budget* (with accompanying justification that is consistent with proposed plan of work)
- *References*
- *Biographical Sketch* (not to exceed one page each) of all project personnel, focusing on research experience
- *Example of Previous Work*

Submission Deadline.

The completed application must be submitted on or before 11:59pm ET, **July 1, 2016**.

Completed proposals should be submitted electronically to:

Kresenda Keith
Manager, Industry Research and Statistics
kkeith@asaecenter.org

ASAE Foundation
1575 I Street NW; 11th Floor
Washington, DC 20005-1103

Completion Deadline.

Appropriate interim deadlines for completion of each activity of the project will be established depending on the nature of the proposed work. However, all work described in the Proposed Program of Research should be completed within 18 months, but no later than March 1, 2018, with the submission of a comprehensive Research Report summarizing the findings and implications, which may be published by the foundation.

Letter of Intent.

A letter of intent is requested, as it allows ASAE Foundation staff to estimate the potential review workload and plan the review accordingly. The letter of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not influence the review of an application.

By May 27, 2016, prospective applicants are asked to submit a letter of intent, including the following information:

- Brief description of proposed research
- Name, affiliation, and contact information for point-of-contact
- Name(s) of collaborators

The letter of intent should be submitted electronically to:
Kresenda Keith (contact information above)

IV. Application Review Information

A. Review Criteria

Overall Impact

Reflects an assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert an impact on the area of research outlined in this announcement, taking into account the relevance of the project focus and the potential value to the association community of the proposed research deliverables.

Theoretical Application	Reflects an assessment of the application of the proposed methodology and approach to testing the research questions as they relate to association management. Considers the extent to which the proposal is grounded in theory or a robust rationale for its particular approach, and applies that theory or rationale to association management in potentially impactful and novel ways.
Approach	Reflects an assessment of the extent to which the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses are well reasoned, thoroughly explained, and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project and the extent to which the deliverables are appropriate and sufficient.
Project Personnel	Reflects an assessment of the extent to which the researchers are capable, appropriate (experience level and background), and well suited to carry-out the proposed work. If multiple personnel, reflects an assessment of the collaborative, complementary and integrated expertise available to lead/execute the proposed work.
Organizational Commitment	Reflects an assessment of the extent to which there is organizational/institutional commitment to ensure probable success of completing the proposed work.

B. Review and Selection Process

The deadline for receipt of applications is July 1, 2016. Notification of award status will be completed on or around August 30, 2016, followed by the signing of a contractual agreement, with the award period commencing immediately thereafter.

Attachment A

List of the ASAE Foundation's Key Works on Topics Related to Governance, Board Performance, and Board Selection

Dignam, Monica and Rosemary Tenuta. *Assessing Board Performance: An Analysis of ASAE-BoardSource Board Self-Assessment Results*. Washington, DC: ASAE Foundation, 2013.

Gazley, Beth and Ashley Bowers. *What Makes High-Performing Boards: Effective Governance Practices in Member-Serving Organizations*. Washington, DC: ASAE, 2013.

Gazley Beth and Katha Kissman. *Transformational Governance: How Boards Achieve Extraordinary Change*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and ASAE, 2015.

Leiter, Jeffrey, Nicholas Solebello, and Mary Tschirhart. *Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in Membership Associations*. Washington, DC: ASAE Foundation: 2011.