

## **Field Guide: Using EL Monitoring Reports as the Basis of a Strategic Conversation**

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This process is a variation of the one described in the “Boards Acting on Ends Reports” Field Guide. Not all limitations monitoring reports will warrant this extra attention, but sometimes this approach can elevate the board’s monitoring work from basic fiduciary oversight into a more meaningful strategic conversation. Along with determining whether the report demonstrates reasonable accomplishment, the board can use a structured process like the one described here to transform any report into an opportunity for building board wisdom.

### **A Focused Conversation About a Limitations Report**

#### **Part 1: The Process**

- Each director should receive and read the full monitoring report well in advance of the board meeting. Come to the meeting prepared to act, specifically regarding question #4 (next page).
- In addition, each director should be assigned and focus on a specific section of the report. Use questions #1-#3 to help prepare your thoughts for a brief oral report. At the meeting, these reports should take no more than 2-3 minutes per section, so please give some thought as to what to share.
- Following the brief reports on each section, the whole group then walks through the process outlined in #4, culminating in a board decision regarding accepting the report as reasonable demonstration of progress.
- Finally, take time to hear everyone’s thoughts on questions #5 and #6. You can do this immediately or at a follow-up meeting.

## **Part 2: The Questions**

1. When you read the section, what stood out to you? What are the major points being made in this section? What parts really caught your attention? What is the same as or different from the last version of this report you received?
2. What were your reactions to the section (and report)? What situations were you reminded of? What part of the report excited you? What part left you skeptical or frustrated?
3. What are the implications for us of the section you read? What relationships do you see between various parts of the report? What are the main points the report is making?
4. Decisional questions required to act on the Ends report (Remember: all directors are responsible for reading the full report and answering these questions.)
  1. Use the Decision Tree to answer
    - a. Are the operational definitions (or interpretations) reasonable?
      - i. How does the GM know if an expectation has been accomplished?
      - ii. What data will the GM use to demonstrate accomplishment of the board's expectations?
      - iii. Why that methodology and data? Is there support for this approach?
    - b. Is there adequate data?
      - i. Does the data directly relate to what is called for in the operational definitions?
    - c. Does the data demonstrate reasonable accomplishment?
      - i. Since we have data and a context for considering the data, this question should be straightforward.
  2. Directors are asked for a motion affirming the board's decision based on the above questions.
5. Decisional questions: member engagement  
What part of the report might be useful to use for member engagement focused on...
  - ...exploring benefit and value produced on behalf of members?
  - ...exploring a shared vision of the future of the organization?
6. Decisional questions: Ongoing learning
  - a. What long term strategic questions come up for you based on information in the report?

## **Resources**

- Chait, Richard P, William P Ryan, Barbara E Taylor. Governance as Leadership. Reframing the work of non-profit boards. Wiley, 2004.
- Goehring, Mark. "Monitoring the Manager." Cooperative Grocer, Mar-Apr 2006.
- Sherwood, Art. "Cooperative Strategic Leadership." Cooperative Grocer, Nov-Dec 2011.
- Stanfield, R Brian, ed. The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace. The Canadian Institute for Cultural Affairs, 2000.