



# **Recruit and Manage Your Board**

**THE CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE GUIDE**

**Grøw  
Schools**

# Your Resource for Building an Effective Governance Board for Your School

This guide, created in partnership with BoardOnTrack, covers best practices for charter school governance, including the essential roles and responsibilities on your school's governance board, how to recruit the right people, and governing for growth at every stage.

Having a strategic board that works closely with your management team can make a significant impact on your school's outcomes. Creating such a board requires more than enthusiastic volunteers who believe in your mission. In this guide, you'll get tips and strategies for recruiting the right people with the necessary skills, experience, temperament, and time to govern a multimillion-dollar enterprise. You'll also learn the essential roles and responsibilities of your governance board, as well as how to govern for growth at every stage.


At the heart of it all, great boards partner with the CEO or executive director and the management team to develop a shared vision of excellence, work towards near-term goals, and create realistic plans for the future. We hope this guide will help you build a board that can do just that.





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# **Charter School Governance as a Team Sport**



# Charter School Governance as a Team Sport

Charter school governance is a team sport. Like the offensive and defensive units of a sports team, board members and managers have different strengths and responsibilities, but everyone is focused on the same goal: the success of your organization.

To achieve this goal, it's essential for the board team (led by the chair), and the management team (led by the CEO or executive director), to work collaboratively and develop a supportive, constructive relationship. By working together, they can create a shared vision of excellence, establish near-term goals, and develop realistic plans for the future.

## Board

**BOARD CHAIR, VOTING TRUSTEES,  
AND THEIR DESIGNEES**

Includes non-voting committee members



## Management

**CEO/ED & THEIR DESIGNERS**

Includes operational and strategic staff  
such as CFO, Chief Academic Officer,  
and Development Director

### TERMS DEFINED

#### Board Chair

The board chair is a player who leads by example. As the chief volunteer leader, the chair is responsible for facilitating and empowering the rest of the board. The chair shouldn't be expected to have any more power or responsibility than other board members.

#### Chief Executive Officer / Executive Director

The CEO/ED is the person at the top of the organizational chart, who is responsible for running your organization day-to-day. Your CEO/ED reports directly to the board, while the chief financial officer, development director, academic head, and all other staff report up to the CEO/ED.

*Note: At some schools, the CEO is referred to as the executive director (ED), school leader, or school superintendent. We refer to them interchangeably in this guide.*

## Board Governance Team

Like the players on any athletic team, everyone on your board governance team knows what position they're playing, including where their roles and responsibilities begin and end. For example, board members can feel accountable for fulfilling the work they have agreed to do while at the same time resisting any impulse to micromanage.

In addition to the chair, the board comprises voting trustees, including committee chairs, as well as non-voting committee members. The best board members are people who work well on a team, in addition to the other skills and areas of expertise they bring to the group. Committee chairs should also have an inherent sense of boundaries—they'll establish the right protocols for interacting with staff and help committee members navigate the tricky role of working directly with C-suite managers.

## C-Suite or Management Team

On the management side, the CEO/ED is supported by senior managers who lead the day-to-day functioning of the school and drive to execute the vision of the board. For example, a school's chief financial officer, budget director, or business manager should work closely with both the board and the CEO/ED on financial oversight.

All of these individuals—paid staff members and volunteer trustees—make up a charter school's governance team and play a central role in its stability and growth.

### BEST PRACTICE

The relationship between board members and managers is always evolving, so it requires ongoing nurturing. This work is vital. The health of your school depends on it!



## The Charter School Leader's Definitive Guide to Budgeting Best Practices

Learn how to manage your school's budget more strategically, plan for long-term financial health, understand key financial metrics to watch, and tips on cashflow planning.

Download it here: [growschools.com/budgetguide](https://growschools.com/budgetguide)

# The Management Balancing Act

## CEO/ED

CEO devotes time to grow and sustain governance team

## C-Suite Support & Leadership

Staff assigned and clear on their roles to support and sustain effective committee work.

Chief Academic Officer /  
Dean of Academics /  
Principal

CFO / Business Manager

Development Director,  
Community Relations,  
Grants, etc.

# The Role of the CEO

The CEO/ED walks a tightrope. In addition to reporting to the board, the CEO/ED is responsible for growing and sustaining the entire governance team. It's crucial for this person to be the leader of the organization and to know when to be led by the board. This is a difficult balancing act, especially for an emotionally invested CEO/ED who has built a school from the ground up, including recruiting the founding board and rallying them to the cause. They must easily transition from the role of visionary leader to the role of a business manager who must take direction from the board.

It's safe to say that the chief executive is indeed the most challenging position on the entire governance team. That's why the most effective CEOs delegate committee liaison work to senior management staff, especially as the organization grows. The amount of delegation often depends on the size and stage of the charter school organization. For single-site schools just getting started, it's typical for the CEO to dedicate a significant amount of time to the work of the board. As the school grows and becomes more complex, a CEO can rely on their management team to advance the board's goals.

## TERMS DEFINED

### A BoardSavvy™ Charter CEO/ED

An effective charter school organization hinges on a strong partnership between the board and its CEO/ED. The CEO/ED guides the board in developing the strategic direction and in prioritizing resources (financial, human capital and time). Yet, many charter school leaders have very little governance experience. Being new to a board does not have to hold you back from leading a wildly successful organization. Working with your board is a skill that you can learn. And it's what we call being a BoardSavvy™ CEO.

## BEST PRACTICE

The difference between a board with an involved CEO/ED and a highly effective governance team is the involvement of staff.

The CEO/ED can help managers succeed in their work with the board by:

- ✓ Helping them understand how vital their engagement is to the school's long-term sustainability
- ✓ Making their committee participation expectations clear.



# Governance Tips for the CEO/ED

- 1 Partner closely with the board chair to provide leadership, without overstepping into board governance.
- 2 Know when to lead the board and when to follow.
- 3 Delegate senior staff to support the work of high-functioning board committees.
- 4 Ensure the C-suite is trained in their roles and understands the expectations involved in working with board committees.
- 5 Ensure that committees understand their role vis-à-vis staff interactions.
- 6 Set and achieve management goals, as well as supporting the board in achieving its goals.



# Board Membership and Committees

When it comes time to establish a board, or if you need to recruit new members, think about the diverse set of skills and experience the board needs in order to meet its strategic goals.

For example, if your school's five-year plan includes buying or building a new facility and increasing enrollment by 50%, you may want to focus on recruiting trustees with expertise in commercial real estate and marketing.

Effective board chairs can come from a range of backgrounds, but they should know how to lead efficient meetings and mediate among strong personalities. They should also excel at inspiring and motivating people to work together toward a common goal.

Like the chair, members who head committees should also have strong group facilitation skills. They should feel comfortable giving directions and holding committee members accountable. Great committee chairs work proactively to develop strong working relationships with the relevant management staff, and they're careful not to overstep boundaries.

## The Board

- Full voting board members
- Large enough to do substantive committee work between full board meetings
- Committees are aligned to strategic goals
- Non-voting members on committees

## Board Leadership

- Board Chair
- Chair of Governance Committee
- Committee Chairs

### BEST PRACTICE

Keep in mind that your board can include more than voting board members – it can also include non-voting committee volunteers. This can be a great way to recruit, foster, and evaluate prospective board members.

# Five Key Committees

Committees are the engine of any charter school board. Their success depends on good leadership by committee heads and direct, expert support from management. It also depends on sufficient staffing – plan on having three people per committee, at minimum. The highest achieving charter school boards have five key committees that are responsible for essential tasks.

## 1 Finance Committee

### ESSENTIAL TASKS

The finance committee works closely with the chief financial officer (CFO) or finance director to set and track annual budget goals and oversee the organization's finances. The finance committee may also educate fellow board members on proper financial oversight, create annual reports, and commission third-party audits. Then, they check in on the school's financial health on a monthly basis. This includes comparing the budget to the actuals to see if everything is on track and making adjustments as needed.

### KEY SKILLS

The finance chair should be a finance professional, such as an accountant or budget director, or a company director who has successfully managed budgets of similar size in the past. Finance committee members should speak the same language as the school's CFO, including a strong knowledge of accounting terms and the ability to produce and interpret financial spreadsheets and other documents.





## 2 Academic Excellence Committee

### ESSENTIAL TASKS

The academic excellence committee works closely with the school's academic director to set clear goals regarding academic performance expectations. They work with the school staff to make sure that the right curriculum, pedagogy, and learning approaches are being developed. Then, they meet monthly to evaluate performance progress and determine whether to allocate more resources or arrange for any necessary training.

### KEY SKILLS

The academic committee chair should have a background in education, research, or pedagogy. This person should have a mutually supportive working relationship with the academic staff. The committee should view themselves as a resource for the board and leadership staff.

## 3 Fundraising or Development Committee

### ESSENTIAL TASKS

Charter schools almost always have goals that require fundraising – a new facility, better technology, playground or music equipment, or supplementary programs. The development committee works closely with the finance director and other relevant staff to meet those goals. It's not just about fundraising, though. Development also includes the school's image and standing within the community – public relations is often central to the development committee.

### KEY SKILLS

The development committee chair should have strong experience leading successful nonprofit fundraising campaigns, both in terms of specific tactics and knowing how to motivate people to action. People with backgrounds in marketing and PR can be great additions to the development committee.

## 4 CEO Support and Evaluation Committee

### ESSENTIAL TASKS

The CEO support and evaluation committee is responsible for one of the most vital roles of a charter school board: selecting, supporting, evaluating, and holding accountable its executive director. The support and evaluation committee conducts the annual CEO/ED evaluation, but the committee should also be there to support this person throughout the year. They make sure that everyone is clear on the executive's goals and progress. If the school's goals change mid-year, the support and evaluation committee should make sure that the CEO/ED's goals change accordingly.

### KEY SKILLS

Members of the CEO/ED support committee should have experience managing teams, coaching employees, employee/human relations and obtaining resources and training to help people succeed.



## 5 Governance Committee

### ESSENTIAL TASKS

The governance committee is responsible for maintaining a healthy and sustainable governance team and keeping the rest of the board focused and tracking toward their goals. They assess the capabilities of the board several times per year in order to determine what's going well, what needs improvement, and what the board should be doing differently. The governance committee is also in charge of succession planning and strategically recruiting new members.

### KEY SKILLS

Governance committee members should have experience liaising among multiple leaders and departments, tracking metrics, a strong sense of process, and strategic communication skills.



#### FAQ: HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD BE ON A BOARD?

- It depends on the size of the charter organization and the stage of growth.
- A founding board must have no fewer than 5-7 trustees – that's the minimum for achieving quorum and holding public board meetings. As a school matures, 11-15 trustees will ensure that all five committees are sufficiently staffed to carry out their work.
- Committees don't need to be staffed entirely by voting trustees. For example, if a board has nine trustees, they can look to non-voting committee volunteers and C-suite staff to round out committee numbers.

# Fostering Teamwork

It bears repeating: excellent charter school governance teams are the result of the board and the C-suite working closely together. Each side has distinct, yet overlapping responsibilities for ensuring the success of the organization, and that can be a tough balance to strike.

## PITFALL TO AVOID

It can be easy for a charter school board to become insular. They know that the CEO/ED and their team are off doing great work and advancing the school's mission, but they may not feel very involved in supporting that work. Conversely, the C-suite may feel removed from the work of board committees. This can be alienating and counterproductive for everyone. Both sides should feel that they're working together to achieve the organization's goals.

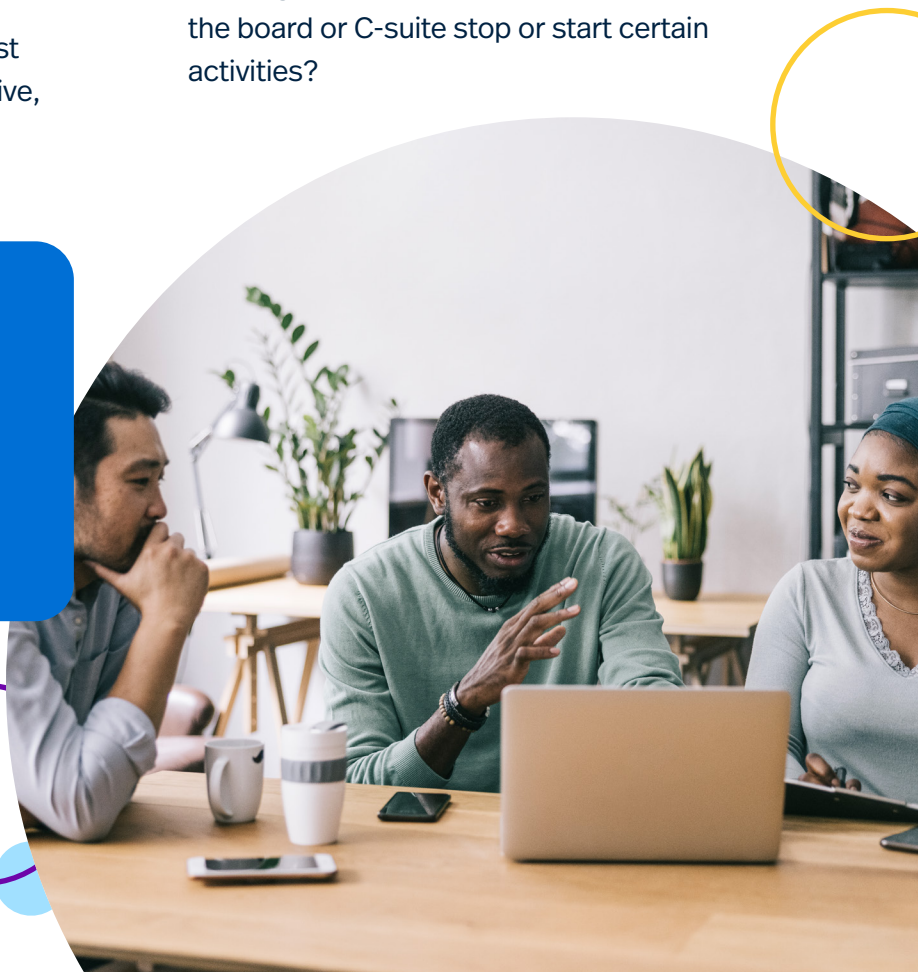
Avoid this pitfall by forging a strong partnership between the board chair and the CEO/ED. A functional, productive relationship doesn't just happen – it's the result of an ongoing, proactive, methodical approach on both sides.

During regular check-ins, the chair and the CEO/ED should ensure the following:

- **PROGRESS** – are the committees tracking toward their goals?  
Do they need additional support or expertise?
- **DELEGATION** – is the CEO/ED effectively delegating tasks to the management team?
- **RESPONSIBILITIES AND BOUNDARIES** – is the C-suite contributing actively to board committees? Are committees overstepping their boundaries?
- **TRANSPARENCY** – is everyone aware of key metrics, financial actuals, and any unexpected challenges that have come up?
- **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT** – what's working well? What can be improved? Should the board or C-suite stop or start certain activities?

## BEST PRACTICE

Great governance teams find an appropriate balance between the board and the C-suite and continue to foster that relationship over time.



# Teamwork in Action



Say that at the summer board retreat, the academic committee presents on an achievement gap they have identified as well as a plan to solve it. The new programming will require an additional \$30,000. This is a perfect opportunity for collaboration between the board and the C-suite.

Rather than putting the onus entirely on the board to fundraise or on the CEO/ED to seek grants, the two sides should cooperate. Perhaps the board will agree to set a goal to raise \$10,000 in small donations, and the C-suite will raise \$20,000 through public grants and institutional donations. Everyone should understand what they are responsible for – individually and collectively – and check in regularly on the group’s collective progress.

## TEAMWORK CHECK

- Who did most of the talking?
- Were presentations driven primarily by the CEO/ED?
- Were board members presenting committee reports or updates?
- Has the C-suite team been involved? For example, were budget reports presented solely by the CEO/ED, or were they delivered in collaboration between the finance committee chair and the finance director?



# **Recruiting Board Members**







## Recruiting Board Members

Exceptional boards are made up of exceptional people. Your charter board is more than a group of well-meaning volunteers. Rather, it's a highly effective team, strategically assembled, to bring the skills, expertise, temperament, and time, to govern a multi-million dollar organization.

To return to the sports team analogy, a charter school's governance team needs to be looking at the players they'll need to succeed years from now – even as they work toward this year's goals. They can look to their own bench (non-voting committee members) as well as to the draft (i.e., the wider community).

Building a deep bench assures that the board has enough people in voting, non-voting, and officer roles so that there are always people who are next

in line and ready to jump in, from first-term trustee to chair.

It's important to remember that a charter school is a large, multimillion dollar organization. In order for the board to govern responsibly, they need expertise to accomplish the school's most pressing near-term goals. At the same time, they need a plan to recruit new members with the skills and experience they'll need down the road.

As mentioned, a founding board can get started with no fewer than five to seven members. The CEO/ED and the board typically work very closely in this phase, painting library walls one day and discussing cash flow the next - whatever it takes to get the school up and running.

As the school transitions out of the startup and into the growth phase, it's time to expand and diversify the board to fully staff committees and enable the school to meet its goals.

So, how do you recruit the right people to your team? It's crucial to align board membership with the challenges your school is facing and the goals it wants to achieve. Skills and experience are important, but they aren't the only attributes to look for.

#### BEST PRACTICE

Be sure to have enough people on the board so that you can staff out committees. Committees should meet between regular board meetings in order to make progress.



## Best practices for every stage

Whether you're just beginning the process of starting up a charter school, looking to expand, or trying to prioritize your next steps, download our **Charter School Growth Guide** to get expert tips and pitfalls to avoid as you grow.

Download it here: [growschools.com/growthguide](https://growschools.com/growthguide)





# Six Essential Factors to Consider When Recruiting New Board Members

## 1 Skills

Consider your board's goals and whether you have the right people – with the right skill sets – to actually accomplish those goals. To return to the fundraising example in the previous section: If the school has a fundraising goal of \$30,000 and nobody on the board has ever undertaken a fundraising campaign, a capital campaign, or a public affairs campaign, then it's time to actively recruit a board member with development experience who can create a path to success.

## 2 Size

A charter school board comprises volunteers with a huge amount of responsibility. That can be a recipe for burnout without enough hands to reasonably tackle all of the work that needs to be accomplished. We mentioned earlier that committees are the engines of a charter school board, carrying out its goals and working closely with the management team. This means there needs to be enough members to adequately staff out committees. A five-person board that has identified the need for five different committees will have a difficult time making progress.

## 3 Culture

It's important for your members to have the skills needed to further the board's work, but it's key that they believe in your mission and vision. In addition, consider whether potential board members will work well with your team's culture. Do they have a similar work ethic? Are they good at compromise? Will the personalities mesh? Understand that your board members will spend a lot of time together and will need to be able to work well with each other.

## 4 Time

Serving on a charter school board is unpaid, but it's often a similar time commitment to a part-time job. Ensure that potential board members understand the time commitment required up front. Does this individual truly have the time and willingness to participate as a voting board member and lead a committee?



## 5 Representation

A board should also reflect the school community it serves. Does the makeup of the board reflect the kids and families? Does it reflect the broader tax base? Does it reflect the community as a whole?

## 6 Succession Planning

Once you have a board membership that can effectively accomplish immediate goals, it's time to get strategic. Look at your charter and your school's five-year plan. What skills and experience will you need on your team to achieve the next phase of your school's growth? Are any of your current members likely to resign, or will you need to add additional members to meet your long-term goals?



### BEST PRACTICE

## Create a Three-Year Recruitment Plan

It's a common problem: facing low membership, board members and CEOs beg friends and neighbors to join, anything to fill seats. Make it your goal to have a three-year recruitment plan, with a strategy to find and recruit people who fill specific gaps based on skills, demographics, and term limits. Using a tool such as BoardOnTrack can help you understand the strengths of your board today and get stronger in the future.



# Governing for Growth



# Governing for Growth

Governing for growth means different things for different schools. Some schools aspire to become charter management organizations with multiple locations in several states. Others are committed to serving a single community by adding grade levels, academic programs, a new facility, or services through partner organizations. No matter what your growth path looks like, make sure that the board has bought into it.

Regardless of your organizational aspirations, the C-suite and the board should work together to develop a vision of excellence. How will you meet or exceed your charter promises? Then, continue to partner to develop and achieve near-term and long-term goals that map toward that vision of success.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- Do you have the right governance team now?
- Are you building the governance team you'll need in the future?

## BEST PRACTICE

Make sure that everyone on the board understands the three- to five-year plan and your vision of excellence. What are the goals we want to achieve five years from now? What do we need in order to achieve them?





Effectively governing for growth means being realistic about what the current governance team can accomplish. As we've mentioned, most charter school boards get started with just five to seven members – the bare minimum needed to achieve quorum. In the early stages, that lean team may get a lot done and achieve all their goals. But as the school moves into the growth phase and becomes more complex, they'll need to specialize in their efforts in order to address a wider range of challenges by creating committees. At this point, if not managed well, burnout can become a risk as people expend more time and energy and potentially get less done.

It's the job of the entire governance team to regularly review the charter and do what it takes to stay on track, whether it's adjusting the budget, fundraising, increasing enrollment, or recruiting new board members.

#### KEY QUESTIONS

- How effective is our governing team?
- What do we need to get done this year?
- Do we have the expertise needed to do the work?
- Do we need to recruit different types of people?



# Who is Responsible for Making Growth Decisions?

When considering expansion, which decisions should the board make and which decisions should be left up to management?

The board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organization. If the charter organization is expanding or changing its mission – to serve a new grade level, population, or additional location – the board will need to vote to approve the change. If the proposed expansion is already within the scope of the charter, the board’s formal approval may not be required, but the CEO will still need their buy-in to be successful.

There may also be the question of how to expand. For example, a charter school may face the choice to either build another middle school to reduce the wait list or to build a high school in order to continue serving the current students in the years to come. It’s the board’s job to make this type of strategic decision.

In any case, the CEO and management staff will be doing the majority of tasks required for expansion. It’s up to the C-suite to educate the board and bring options to the table. The C-suite will tour new facilities or building sites and evaluate their potential. The board will likely make the final decision, at the recommendation of the CEO, and ensure that there’s sufficient financing available.





# Five-Star Boards and the Five Ps

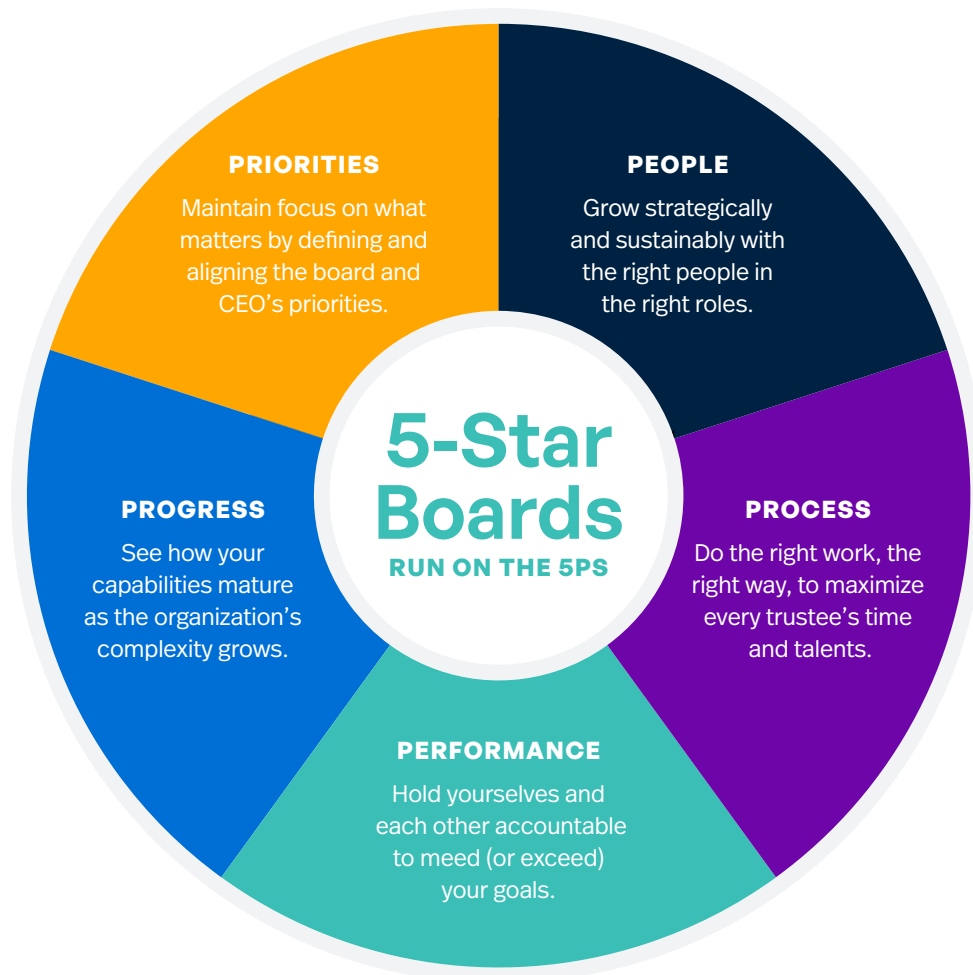
Exceptional charter school boards have the right skills to accomplish agreed-upon goals with efficiency and transparency – and a continuous eye on the future. Focus on mastering these five areas:

## 1 Priorities

Strong boards that consistently meet and exceed their charter promises have clear goals for the CEO as well as for trustees. Are the C-suite and the board maintaining focus on what matters most? Time-consuming distractions not only keep everyone from their most important tasks, they can also lead to burnout. Setting priorities can help ensure that your board is at its most effective and efficient.

## 2 People

Recruiting the right people to a charter school board is the result of a strategic plan that aligns potential members' skill sets to the school's goals and challenges. Remember: it's a privilege to serve on your board. Aim to be in a spot where non-voting committee members and people in the community are working to earn a spot on your board.



### 3 Process

Process is all about doing the right work in the right way in order to maximize the board's time and talents. For a charter school board, good process includes regular and robust attendance, complying with your state's open meeting law, taking clear minutes, and assigning a board member to be in charge of operational excellence. Process can also mean building the school's institutional memory, including a system of record for organizing and accessing bylaws, governing documents, and financial documents.

### 4 Performance

For a charter school board, performance comes down to accountability, for both the board members and the CEO. For example, if a board has a goal to fundraise \$10,000, is each person assigned a specific task? Has each person contributed, either personally or through fundraising, to achieve that goal? The board should assign the CEO three to five clear and achievable goals for the school year. Pay special attention to priorities that directly affect the charter application or renewal, including closing achievement gaps, retaining teachers, maintaining and/or increasing enrollment numbers, and closely monitoring attendance.

#### BEST PRACTICE

You can only contribute if you show up. The most effective charter school boards have attendance policies that require voting members to attend at least 80% of meetings.

### 5 Progress

Mastering progress can be challenging for a charter school board. It means keeping an eye on the future at the same time as you work toward achieving this year's goals. It means understanding that the board will continue to evolve from year to year. Ideally, the governance committee analyzes the board's governance capabilities each year and sets goals to recruit new members or to train and coach existing members to improve in needed areas.



# About BoardOnTrack

BoardOnTrack is an intuitive, easy-to-use, all-in-one online board management platform designed specifically for charter school boards.

Most volunteer trustees are well-intentioned, but face a lot of uncertainty about how to meaningfully contribute to the board with the little time they have. BoardOnTrack removes that uncertainty by assessing your strengths and areas to improve, and then providing you with the right actions to take, based on the data – not a best guess.

BoardOnTrack helps charter school boards deliver exceptional results, measure performance through data, and govern for growth at every stage, from startup through charter management organization. We empower every member of the charter school governance team with access to the BoardOnTrack platform, from trustees to the CEO, from management staff to non-voting committee members.

And we're here to help you with a personalized walkthrough of the platform and resources to share in advance of your next board meeting.

## For more information, get in touch with BoardOnTrack:

### LIVE CHAT

[boardontrack.com](https://boardontrack.com)

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