

# FORESIGHT IS **THE FUTURE** OF GOVERNING

*Building Thrivable Boards, Stakeholders  
and Systems for the 21st Century*

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**FORESIGHTFIRST**

in collaboration with **AssociationAdviser** a Naylor Publication

# Six Quotes to Inspire Your Future Thinking

Visuals created by Lucinda Levine of [InkquiryVisuals](#)

FOR ALL OF ITS  
UNCERTAINTY,  
WE **cannot** flee  
THE **FUTURE**  
- BARBARA JORDAN

We are called  
TO BE **ARCHITECTS**  
OF THE **FUTURE**,  
**not**  
its victims.  
- R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

~~THE~~ **PAST**  
cannot be changed.  
~~THE~~ **FUTURE**  
**is yet**  
**IN YOUR POWER**  
- MARY PICKFORD

WE **GROW**  
in time to **trust**  
THE **FUTURE**  
**for our**  
**ANSWERS**  
- RUTH BENEDICT

The past has been  
**given to us!**  
THE **FUTURE**  
MUST BE **built**, AS  
others have built our past  
- GLADYS HASTY CARROLL

~~THE~~ **FUTURE**  
**is always**  
**BEGINNING**  
**Now**  
- MARK STRAND

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# ***The Future of Governing Must Be Different***

## Key Points Summary

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- The future of governing can be different from both its past and present by focusing board attention on the future.
- Associations are not ready for the powerful forces of societal transformation that are reshaping every field of human endeavor.
- Governing is a form of work that is critical to the future thriving of associations, stakeholders and the systems in which they participate.
- Associations must design and implement a future-ready approach to governing that also helps strengthen board performance.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

***The future  
of governing  
must be  
different.***

These seven words are the central argument of this eBook, and should become a fundamental principle of action for board officers and directors, chief staff executives and all association decision-makers who are ready to rethink and remake the traditional work of governing. While associations have great reverence for history, now is the time to acknowledge that the past is over and it makes little sense to continue to govern our organizations based on outmoded beliefs and practices ill-suited to the new world unfolding before our eyes.

Creating a different future of governing means focusing the work of governing on the future. Associations need their boards, with the support of their staff partners and other contributors, to focus their attention on understanding, anticipating and preparing for a complex and uncertain future for their organizations and stakeholders, as well as the broader systems of connections, exchanges and relationships in which they participate and through which they also derive value.

# ***Associations are not ready for the future.***

Associations decision-makers may find this statement hard to accept, but for more than two decades, powerful forces of societal transformation have been reshaping the world in which we live, including every field of human endeavor their organizations serve. These potent cultural, demographic, economic, environmental, political, scientific, social and technological forces combine to operate at an exponential pace of transformation, not the slower linear pace of change with which we are more familiar and comfortable. As this pace continues to accelerate, the disruptive impact of transformation grows more real and intense.

While the wide-ranging transformation of our society has been happening for some time, we are still much closer to the beginning of this process than the end. The next 48-60 months will be a time of considerable upheaval for many industries, professions and fields as we begin to experience more serious effects from forces that have been building for years, including the continued adoption of automation/AI, an aging workforce and other demographic shifts, economic inequality and global climate change.

# ***Governing is a critical form of work.***

At a time when the conversation about the future of work is front and center in business books, management publications and the media, association decision-makers must embrace governing as a critical form of work that requires its own process of reinvention. While the traditional work of governing still must be handled with care, it is now less important than understanding the full extent and impact of societal transformation and, in that context, making substantial and constructive contributions to addressing the challenge of nurturing future thriving in their associations, stakeholders and broader industry and professional systems.

The board's staff partners and other contributors can provide vital support to the work of governing, but the board is the only group in every association that has the combination of responsibility, authority and opportunity to undertake the most challenging work of stewardship. Boards need to step back from routine matters that can be handled in other ways and focus their attention on the future as they strive to make sense, make meaning and make decisions around the increasingly complicated and complex issues they must confront.

# ***Associations must strengthen board performance.***

To take the work of governing to a higher level of impact, associations must help their boards move to a higher level of performance. This process begins with every director accepting personal responsibility for their individual performance and collaborating with every other director to strengthen the board's collective performance. Among all directors, it is the board presiding officer (BPO) who is charged with ensuring high board performance, although many association chief staff executives (CSE) find it necessary to take on this role instead. CSEs must provide support to their board presiding officers in fulfilling these responsibilities, but they cannot continue to pursue them on their behalf.

A common explanation for why association boards underperform is that they are populated by volunteers. The fact that association board service typically is performed on a voluntary basis is a secondary consideration. Directors make a choice to serve on their boards and that choice is an explicit acceptance of the serious responsibilities the come with stewardship.



# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- What is your association's board prepared to do to create a different future of governing?
- How is your current approach to the work of governing preparing your association, stakeholders and the systems in which they participate for the challenges of societal transformation?
- How can you reinvent the work of governing to help your board fully embrace its stewardship responsibilities?
- What steps will you take to inspire your board to strengthen its performance?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using [#futureofgoverning](#).

# ***Questioning the Orthodox Beliefs of Association Governing***

## Key Points Summary

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- Orthodox beliefs are the deep-seated, invisible and mostly unexamined assumptions we make about how the world works.
- As legacy groups, associations are unusually susceptible to the hidden and detrimental influence of orthodox beliefs, including on the work of governing.
- Orthodox beliefs touch every aspect of association governing, including governing structures, the way associations manage board meetings and the role of the board presiding officer.
- Association boards and chief staff executives must work together to think and act beyond orthodoxy by questioning outmoded beliefs and replacing them with next practices.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***Orthodox beliefs exert considerable influence on governing.***

Orthodox beliefs are the deep-seated assumptions we make about how the world works. Over many decades, these invisible and mostly unexamined assumptions have been deeply embedded into how associations conduct their business and exert formidable hidden influence over all conversations and decision-making. While every organization operates based on some set of enduring orthodox beliefs, associations are legacy groups that are unusually susceptible to their impact. In this context, orthodoxy functions as an even more significant barrier to the generative process of learning with the future.

Orthodoxy knows no boundaries and touches every aspect of association work, including the work of governing. The current governing approaches pursued by most associations are based on numerous orthodox beliefs that are profoundly detrimental to creating a different future of governing and strengthening board performance. To help boards jump-start the process of questioning the orthodox beliefs of governing in their associations, we will consider three examples.

# ORTHODOXY 1

## ***Association governing should be based on a government/political model.***

Many U.S. associations have taken inspiration from our country's federal government in organizing their governing structures: a "chief elected officer" at the top, other officers in the line of succession and overall board composition determined by the competitive election of local, state or regional representatives. Larger boards may have the equivalent of a "cabinet" of senior officers who hold specific functional portfolios, such as education, meetings or membership. Other associations operate with a separate "legislative branch" in the form of a house of delegates or general assembly, and some groups spell out the details of their structures in a "constitution."

Despite its pervasiveness, this orthodox belief suffers from an inescapable flaw: associations are not governments. Associations differ from governments in every respect, including their reasons for being and the substance, scope and scale of their activities. Indeed, any similarities between associations and governments exist only because we have created them. Instead of perpetuating this orthodoxy, associations should reject bureaucratic and insular government-style structures and embrace open, inclusive and flexible governing next practices that accelerate learning.

# ORTHODOXY 2

## *Time is the board's most precious resource.*

There is a widespread view that association board meetings should be as short as possible, even if it means conducting more than a few meetings each year. The underlying basis for this view is the orthodox belief that time is the board's most important and precious commodity and should not be wasted.

While most directors are busy people with genuine time constraints that must be respected, it is the board's collective attention on the work of governing that is the inherently scarcer and more valuable resource. For most directors, their attention, i.e., the capacity to provide sustained concentration, is highly fragmented due to their many personal and professional commitments, a condition often exacerbated by the constant use of mobile devices and other technology tools. To create a different future of governing, associations must do more to eliminate distractions and keep the focus of board attention on critical stewardship responsibilities.

# ORTHODOXY 3

## ***Board presiding officers are more important than other directors.***

On most association boards, the board presiding officer (BPO) role holds specific authority under the bylaws and is assigned significant responsibilities. These tasks typically include direct oversight of the chief staff executive, the opportunity to represent the organization to external audiences and the ability to shape both board and organizational activities based on personal priorities. The privileged status accorded to the individuals who occupy these roles can convey the impression that BPOs are the first among equals on their boards, and other directors should defer to their wishes.

Subscribing to this orthodox belief is anathema to effective governing, however, since all directors are stewards, not just their presiding officers, and have an equal claim to shaping the direction of that stewardship. Indeed, as part of their unique roles, BPOs must operate as the primary champions for collective stewardship and challenge their boards to embrace shared responsibility for learning with the future to build thriving associations, stakeholders and industry and professional systems.

# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- What orthodox beliefs of association governing exist in your association?
- How is orthodoxy exerting a detrimental influence on your association's approach to governing?
- What additional questions about orthodoxy do the three examples inspire for you?
- How will you work with your association's board to question orthodoxy and implement next practices?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***A New Definition of Governing***

## Key Points Summary

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- To create a different future of governing and nurture board performance in the context of societal transformation, associations need to look differently at what it means to govern.
- Sustaining thriving systems is a critical stewardship responsibility and an essential outcome of governing for association boards in the months and years ahead.
- Boards can contribute to making a strong link between coherence and capability by clarifying governing intent, i.e., a specific expression of the outcomes the board will strive to achieve through stewardship.
- Boards can help build continuity by embracing intentional learning with the future, i.e., the work of foresight, as the central imperative of stewardship.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.



# ***Associations need to look at governing in a new way.***

To create a different future of governing and nurture board high performance in the context of societal transformation, associations need to look differently at what it means to govern. Instead of placing their primary emphasis on *the traditional activities of governing*, such as financial oversight, legal compliance and policymaking, boards should concentrate on pursuing *the essential outcomes of governing*. To crystallize this vital shift in both thinking and practice, I suggest a new definition: ***governing is an intentional and dynamic process for enabling the coherence, capability and continuity of the system.***

This new definition challenges associations to abandon orthodox beliefs about governing that no longer make sense in a complex and uncertain environment. It also will help association boards, chief staff executives and other governing contributors adopt a fresh perspective on the profound importance of stewardship and create a more purposeful frame within which to prioritize board capacity-building. We will examine this definition more closely in the next few pages.

# ***The work of governing must include the broader system.***

To approach governing as an intentional and dynamic process for enabling the coherence, capability and continuity of the system, we first must consider the implications of the final word in our new definition. A system is a group of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole. In this context, the use of this word is intended to include all types of association structures, as well as the broader industry and professional systems in which all associations and their stakeholders participate.

As powerful forces of societal transformation reshape every field of human endeavor, established industry and professional boundaries are being blurred, if not completely erased. Instead of construing governing in narrowly traditional terms, boards must adopt a more expansive view of the plausible impact of disruption on the entire system of connections, exchanges and relationships in which their associations participate and from which they derive value. Sustaining thrivable systems is a critical stewardship responsibility and an essential outcome of governing for association boards in the months and years ahead.

# ***Boards must help make the connection between coherence and capability.***

As we continue to explore the new definition of governing, let us next consider the important concepts of coherence and capability. Coherence means the system has a robust understanding of its reasons for being and the outcomes it intends to achieve, while capability means the system can take effective action to make progress toward achieving those outcomes. Association boards can help make the connection between coherence and capability by being vocal champions for bold value creation initiatives and enthusiastic investors in the human and technology capabilities required to realize their full potential.

Boards also can contribute to making a strong link between coherence and capability by clarifying their governing intent. Governing intent is a specific expression of the outcomes the board will strive to achieve through stewardship that is also known as a stewardship statement. By establishing their governing intent, boards can help all stakeholders understand the deeper sense of purpose that animates the work of governing and enables action consistent with that intent.

## ***Boards also must ensure the continuity of the system.***

In addition to coherence and capability, our new definition of governing requires boards to focus on the challenge of continuity, a word that is open to possible misinterpretation. Given what we know about both associations and their boards, it might be reasonable to assume that continuity implies optimizing and maintaining the status quo for as long as possible. In this context, however, continuity is about ensuring the system can thrive even as it confronts the disruptive impact of societal transformation.

Boards can help build continuity by embracing intentional learning with the future, i.e., the work of foresight, as the central imperative of stewardship and implementing next practices that maximize their ability to understand, anticipate and prepare for a full range of plausible futures. By integrating foresight into governing intent, boards can make an explicit commitment to ensuring the coherence, capability and continuity of the systems for which they are responsible.

# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- What is your reaction to the new definition of governing?
- What contributions can your board make to building a stronger system for your industry or profession?
- What is your board's governing intent?
- What are the challenges you see to the continuity of the systems in which you participate?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***The Board's Duty of Foresight***

## Key Points Summary

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- The duty of foresight is a shared commitment that association boards make to learn as much as possible with the future.
- For boards, embracing the duty of foresight is nothing less than a matter of ethical and moral obligation to the stakeholders and systems they serve and on which they depend.
- Learning with the future must be a focused and disciplined effort that boards pursue using a simple learning cycle of sense-making, meaning-making and decision-making.
- Boards will need to learn how to unlearn, learn and relearn as they strive to strengthen their performance over time and collaborate to build a consistent practice of foresight.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***Association boards have a duty of foresight.***

The duty of foresight is a shared commitment that association boards make to learn as much as possible with the future, While the duties of care, loyalty and obedience will continue to matter, the past and present orientation of these accepted responsibilities does not challenge association boards to focus their attention on pursuing the learning they need to build thriving systems and stakeholders in a world experiencing accelerating and intensifying transformation. Not only does the duty of foresight create the impetus for boards to build a consistent practice of foresight, it fully integrates with our new definition of governing.

Through the practice of foresight, association boards can cultivate stakeholder trust and increase the resilience required to provide coherent stewardship. Foresight enables boards to act as responsible investors and champions by making it easier to anticipate the evolving mix of capabilities that will be required to create thriving systems for the future. Finally, the work of foresight helps ensure continuity by sharpening board readiness for learning and action even under the most difficult conditions.

# ***The board is the only group in the association that can perform the work of foresight.***

The comprehensive and unforgiving nature of societal transformation has created an important moment in human history when understanding, anticipating and preparing for a complex and uncertain future must be the central imperative for all decision-makers. Consistent with the stewardship responsibilities of association boards, embracing the duty of foresight is nothing less than a matter of ethical and moral obligation to the stakeholders and industry professional systems they serve and on which they depend.

The duty of foresight belongs to boards to uniquely because they are the only group in every associations with the combination of responsibility, authority and opportunity to perform this work with the depth of commitment it requires. Boards are widely recognized to be responsible for their organizations, have the authority to make decisions and have regular gatherings every few months during which they can focus their attention on intentional learning with the future. Other governing contributors can support and participate in the work of foresight, but they cannot undertake the duty of foresight on behalf of their boards.



# ***Learning with the future must be a focused and disciplined effort.***

Fulfilling the duty of foresight requires more than reading books and blog posts or watching TED talk videos. While these inputs can be useful, learning with the future must be a far more focused and disciplined effort on which association boards and other governing contributors collaborate repeatedly using a simple learning cycle that connects the essential practices of:

- 1 sense-making**
- 2 meaning-making**
- 3 decision-making**

Learning with the future begins with sense-making, a practice that focuses boards on developing a rich and nuanced understanding of how plausible futures could unfold in the years ahead. The practice of meaning-making involves boards connecting their intellectual understanding of the positive and negative implications created by plausible futures with an ethical and empathic understanding of their potential effects on stakeholders and systems. The practice of decision-making brings this integrated intellectual and human thinking on the future to bear on the present-day choices that boards make to anticipate and prepare for these plausible futures, which is the essence of foresight.

# ***Intentional learning with the future will never end.***

The duty of foresight is a serious and crucial commitment for association boards to make, and one that cannot be fully realized without genuine dedication to the work of foresight. Societal transformation demands intentional learning with the future, and as transformation continues to accelerate and intensify in the months and years ahead, the substance of that learning will grow in complexity and its implications in consequence. ***The need to learn with the future will never end and association boards must prepare accordingly.***

To make the work of foresight sustainable, every director on every board will need to learn how to unlearn, learn and relearn as they strive to strengthen their shared performance of the connected practices of sense-making, meaning-making and decision-making. Over time, boards must collaborate effectively to build consistent practices of foresight that can nurture the future thriving of stakeholders and systems. Reaching this level of performance will require focused attention, energy and support from boards, chief staff executives and other governing contributors.

# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- How can your board begin to embrace its duty of foresight?
- What steps can your board take to begin performing the work of foresight?
- How can you help your board implement the connected practices of sense-making, meaning-making and decision-making?
- What can you do to support every director on your board as they learn how to learn with the future on an ongoing basis?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# *Designing the Director Experience*

## Key Points Summary

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- Governing is a critical form of work for associations, which makes designing a robust director experience (DX) that helps strengthen overall board performance an immediate priority.
- The fundamental purpose of designing a robust director experience is to achieve interdependent performance and intentional learning is essential to making progress toward that outcome.
- By clarifying governing intent, boards create an invaluable context within which they must situate the design of the overall director experience.
- Association boards can no longer ignore the absolute need for greater diversity among their directors and greater inclusion of the ideas and experiences of all stakeholders.

### *What are your key points?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***Creating high-performing boards begins with designing a better director experience.***

Over the last two decades, we have learned much about the unique and compelling contributions that experience makes to creating distinctive value for customers (CX) and technology users (UX). In this same time, the discussion about creating meaningful experiences has expanded to include employees, patients and physicians in healthcare, donors in philanthropy, tenants in commercial real estate as well as stakeholders in other fields. Governing is a critical form of work for associations, which makes designing a robust director experience (DX) that helps strengthen overall board performance an immediate priority.

Designing an integrative director experience will help associations develop a more holistic perspective on strengthening board performance that begins at the time of director identification, recruitment and selection and continues through every subsequent phase of board service, including retirement. In addition, a compelling director experience can move boards to embrace their critical stewardship responsibilities, including the duty of foresight, and inspire all directors to find deeper meaning in their board service.

# ***Interdependent performance begins with intentional learning.***

The fundamental purpose of designing a robust director experience is to achieve interdependent performance, a powerful team dynamic in which the performance of every director exists and flourishes in relationship to the high performance of every other director. By adopting this way of thinking, associations can build boards composed of talented contributors who make a voluntary choice to collaborate with one another and other governing contributors on crafting a more generative integration of governing, foresight and stewardship.

The commitment of every director to intentional learning is essential to making progress toward interdependent performance. Through an integrative director experience, associations can take steps to seat directors who are (or demonstrate a clear willingness to become) curious and insatiable learners capable of deep reflection, empathy, listening, questioning orthodoxy and self-directed inquiry within the board's team dynamic. Intentional learning is the foundation of a robust and enriching director experience, and indispensable to creating a different future of governing.

# ***The director experience must be situated in the context of governing intent.***

When association boards clarify their governing intent—a specific expression of the outcomes the board will strive to achieve through stewardship—they create an invaluable context within which they must situate the design of the overall director experience. This design process involves making three critical connections:

- 1 the connection between director motivation and board expectation**
- 2 the connection between the board's orientation and director contribution**
- 3 the connection between director attention and the board's efforts to enable the creation of new value.**

The director experience must connect directors' motivations for board service with clear expectations of that service to limit unproductive friction, build trust and nurture a more resilient team dynamic. It must develop orientation as a shared social process that establishes the common context in which all directors are able to make responsible contributions to the board's work, and it must increase the readiness of every director to focus their limited and precious attention on the challenging conversations that will determine how the board will enable the creation of more thrivable stakeholders and systems.

# ***Association boards must act to become more diverse and inclusive.***

Any serious discussion of the director experience must address the disquieting lack of diversity on association boards. The beneficial impact of the experience that boards design and implement will depend on the directors' commitment to and ability to pursue intentional learning. Greater board diversity along all dimensions, including (but not limited to) age, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status, will increase the richness of that learning for all directors and help strengthen overall board performance.

After decades of pleas for action, association boards can no longer ignore the absolute need for greater diversity among their directors and greater inclusion of the ideas and experiences of all stakeholders. As a critical stewardship responsibility, association boards must take immediate action to break through the legacy barriers embedded in governing documents and orthodox beliefs, and begin seating more diverse boards of directors without delay.



# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- What words and phrases would your board use to describe their current director experience?
- How can your board build toward interdependent performance through intentional learning?
- What steps can you take to make the three critical connections in your director experience?
- What will you do to challenge your board to seat a more diverse board of directors in 12 months or less?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using [#futureofgoverning](#).

# ***Foresight is The Future of Governing***

## Key Points Summary

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- To make foresight the future of governing, association boards first must carefully examine the impact of orthodox beliefs, including their own, on the current work of governing.
- Association boards must reject the tendency toward short-termism present in corporate governance and adopt a long-term perspective consistent with the duty of foresight.
- The still-unfolding implications of comprehensive societal transformation demand that association board service be the beginning of learning and not the end.
- Foresight as the future of governing affords today's association boards an extraordinary opportunity to reinvent governing and themselves.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***Association boards must think and act beyond orthodoxy.***

To make foresight the future of governing, association boards first must carefully examine the impact of orthodox beliefs, including their own, on the current work of governing. It is impossible to overstate the extent to which these deep-seated assumptions, embedded in traditional practice and reinforced in board conversations and decision-making, are responsible for the profound dysfunction that undermines association governing today. With few exceptions, orthodoxy is the noise of the past, a dissonant echo of a world that no longer exists.

As an invisible yet always-present belief system, orthodoxy creates counterproductive constraints that limit our imagination about what governing can be and is the primary source of the inertia that prevents most boards from implementing next practices to create a different future of governing. It is a critical stewardship responsibility for boards to think and act beyond orthodoxy on an ongoing basis as part of a deliberate practice of unlearning that is an essential companion to the board's intentional learning with the future through foresight.

# ***Association boards must focus on the long term.***

It is vital that association boards reject the tendency toward short-termism present in corporate governance and adopt a long-term perspective consistent with the duty of foresight. The choice to focus on the long term does not imply that current matters are unimportant, only that they can be handled with the involvement of different people and by using different approaches. Instead, it is a strong and positive statement that governing to ensure the coherence, capability and continuity of both stakeholders and systems demands a steadfastly future orientation.

The purpose of focusing board attention on the future is not to turn directors into futurists. There are many excellent futurists who provide invaluable ideas and insights from which boards can learn. By asking boards to take the long view, however, we are challenging directors to become more confident decision-makers, more capable stewards and more compassionate people who can help their associations find their way through the complexity and uncertainty of societal transformation.

# ***Association boards must make learning with the future their most important work.***

The invitation to association board service is a significant career highlight in which all directors should take justified pride. The still-unfolding implications of comprehensive societal transformation also demand that board service be the beginning of learning and not the end. In a time when there are real-world concerns about what's next for associations, stakeholders and broader industry and professional systems, intentional learning with the future through foresight is the antidote to the ignorance and paralysis that unreasoned fear can arouse in all of us.

Crafting a more generative integration of stewardship, governing and foresight means giving boards more generative work. The work of foresight, pursued with focused attention and great care through disciplined sense-making, meaning-making and decision-making, will enable boards to reflect deeply on the most critical questions and issues they must confront and inspire directors to collaborate, with the support of other governing contributors, in exploring how to nurture thriving associations, stakeholders and systems.

# ***Association boards must use foresight to reinvent governing and themselves.***

Reinventing governing through foresight affords today's association boards an extraordinary opportunity on which their predecessors failed to capitalize: designing and implementing a holistic approach and enriching experience for doing meaningful work that can have a beneficial impact on others, that demands high performance and that promises all contributors the chance to realize their full potential. It is a compelling legacy for every board and every director to leave behind.

There should be no illusions about the difficulty involved in designing a different future of governing. There will be entrenched resistance to any shift away from the status quo, but the greater concern is the contributors who are intrigued by the concept of foresight as the future of governing and yet exhausted by the constant need to push back against orthodoxy and the problems it creates. ***We need to help our colleagues overcome this inertia by keeping the focus on why the future of governing must be different: our associations, stakeholders and systems need to be ready for societal transformation, and they are not ready today.*** Foresight is the future of governing and now is the right time for bold collaborative action to create it.

# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- How can you help your board embrace thinking and acting beyond orthodoxy as part of a deliberate practice of unlearning?
- What steps does your board need to take to reject short-termism and focus on the long term through foresight?
- How will your board make learning with the future its most important work?
- What is your association's board prepared to do to create a different future of governing?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.

# ***Call to Action for Board Officers and Directors***

## Key Points Summary

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- Board presiding officers (BPOs) are the temporary occupants of a very challenging office that has a serious responsibility at its core: strengthening board performance.
- Other board officers can work in collaboration with their BPOs and chief staff executives to make unique contributions to strengthening board performance through a robust director experience.
- Integrating stewardship, governing and foresight demands real collaboration among all contributors to ensure the board is applying its authority and attention in service of the future.
- Each director must make the voluntary choice to serve on the board and bring their best possible performance every day of their term.

### ***What are your key points?***

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using **#futureofgoverning**.



## ***Board Presiding Officers: Concentrate on board performance.***

On behalf of everyone involved in your association, thank you for agreeing to serve as your board's presiding officer (BPO). You are the temporary occupant of a very challenging office that has a serious responsibility at its core: strengthening board performance. ***No single person serving on or working with your board is more responsible for board performance than you.*** Building board capacity is a challenging task that will require your full concentration, great empathy and endless patience. It is frustrating yet rewarding work that your board peers need you to do, even though they may suggest otherwise.

There are significant and detrimental orthodox beliefs about association BPOs, including that they are more important than other directors, that they are the chief staff executive's boss and that serving in this role grants them special privileges. To maximize the impact of your service, reject orthodoxy, partner with your association's chief staff executive (CSE) to build a high-performing board and create a positive legacy of stewardship for your successors to follow.

## ***Other Board Officers: Create a robust director experience.***

As an officer partnering with the board's presiding officer and the association's chief staff executive, you can make important contributions to strengthening board performance by helping to create a robust director experience. If you are the immediate past or deputy board presiding officer, for example, you can support the BPO by modeling high performance in your own service. As the deputy BPO, you should coordinate the process of identifying, recruiting and selecting directors who are capable learners and will fully embrace foresight as the future of governing.

As secretary, you can look beyond taking the minutes and enable sense-making, meaning-making and decision-making by reinventing how critical information is shared with the board. In your role as treasurer, you can work with the CSE and finance staff to implement more effective practices for managing financial oversight to maximize the board's attention for the work of foresight. These and other contributions made by board officers like you can help create better experiences for all directors, as well as stronger and more focused boards.

## ***Boards: Collaborate with officers, staff and other governing contributors.***

Your board must remember that its governing authority belongs to the entire group rather than by any single director, including the board presiding officer. A truly generative integration of stewardship, governing and foresight demands real collaboration to ensure your board is applying its authority and attention to the complicated challenge of understanding, anticipating and preparing for the future. This collaborative effort involves the officers and directors, as well as the staff and other governing contributors who inform and support the board's work. Strengthening your board's performance requires an inclusive approach to building the team dynamic.

Making collaboration happen takes a meaningful investment of time and energy to initiate, and sustained care on the part of all collaborators over the long term. When your board embraces its responsibility for strengthening performance, nurturing collaboration becomes a shared priority, an essential part of the director experience and a powerful resource for intentional learning.

# ***Directors: Commit to board service every day.***

The board presiding officer role is primarily responsible for building a high-performing board, other officers have important contributions to make to that work and the entire board must accept its responsibility for high performance. At the most fundamental level, however, your board is composed of well-intentioned directors like you each of whom has made a personal and voluntary choice to serve in this critical role. It is a choice you should expect to make again and again every day of your term.

As a director, your commitment to always delivering your best possible performance is essential. This commitment includes accepting and applying feedback from your BPO, other officers and other directors while providing feedback to them in return. Your performance exists in relationship to every other director. The help and support you provide to your peers (and they to you) will contribute to building your board's team dynamic, confirm your commitment to high performance and validate your choice to serve.

# *Key Questions for Association Decision-Makers*

- As your board's presiding officer, what will you do to keep your focus on building a high-performing board throughout your term?
- As a board officer, what unique contribution will you make to strengthening board performance by creating a robust director experience?
- As a board, how will the group make initiating, nurturing and sustaining collaboration a shared priority?
- As a director, how will you validate your voluntary choice to serve on your association's board by always delivering your best possible performance?

## *What are your key questions?*

Please share them on LinkedIn and Twitter using [#futureofgoverning](#).

# ***Foresight is The Future of Governing Resources***

The following is a list of resources on stewardship, governing and foresight. If you have any resources to share, please contact Jeff De Cagna via [online chat](#).

[The 3 Most Common Challenges Faced by New Directors by Paul Smith](#)

[ASAE ForesightWorks](#)

[Association Adviser, a Naylor Publication](#)

[Board Forward \(SmithBucklin\)](#)

[Companies Are Filling Their Boards With Newbies by Jeff Green](#)

[Developing a Foresightly Perspective by Jeff De Cagna \[PDF\]](#)

[Fast Company: Co-Design](#)

[Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity: The Unacknowledged Drivers of Governance Strategy by Judith Millesen and Eric Martin](#)

# ***Foresight is The Future of Governing Resources***

[How Demographics, Automation, And Inequality Will Shape The Next Decade by Ben Schiller](#)

[How to Be a Good Board Chair by Stanislav Shekshnia](#)

[Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices \(BoardSource\)](#)

[Medium \[lots of great content on a variety of topics\]](#)

[The One Thing That Most Surprises New Board Members by Bonnie Gwin](#)

[The role of AI and machine learning in the boardroom by Henri Eliot](#)

[Thinking and Acting Beyond Orthodoxy by Jeff De Cagna \[PDF\]](#)

[Trust-Thinkers by Rachel Botsman](#)

[What Stewards Do by Jeff De Cagna \[PDF\]](#)

# About Jeff De Cagna FRSA FASAE



*Jeff De Cagna FRSA FASAE is executive advisor for Foresight First LLC, located in Reston, Virginia, and a respected contrarian thinker on the future of associating and associations.*

Jeff is an author, speaker and advisor for associations and non-profit organizations across North America and around the world. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (UK) and a Fellow of ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership. Jeff served on the ASAE Board of Directors from 2007-2010, is a member and past chair of ASAE's Key Consultants Committee. He also served on the RedRover Board of Directors from 2011-2013, including terms as both board chair and vice chair during that time. Jeff writes the monthly column, "The Duty of Foresight," for Association Adviser, a Naylor publication.

A graduate of the Johns Hopkins and Harvard universities, Jeff has pursued executive education at the MIT Sloan School of Management, Oxford University and Harvard Business School. He holds two BoardSource certificates (the Leadership Certificate for Nonprofit Board Chairs and the Certificate of Nonprofit Board Consulting), the Design Thinking and Innovation Specialization from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business and has completed Foresight Practitioner Training at the Institute for the Future.

## **From the author**

Jeff would like to thank Meeghan Donahue De Cagna for being his bride, his love and his witness.

Jeff would like to express his sincere appreciation to Kelly Clark of Naylor Association Solutions and Mark Rogan of Teaglebee Digital Marketing for making this eBook happen.



# *About Foresight First LLC and Naylor Association Solutions*

## **FORESIGHTFIRST**

Foresight First LLC was founded as Principled Innovation LLC in 2002, and then rebranded and refocused in 2017. The purpose of Foresight First LLC is to strengthen the performance of association and non-profit boards through the consistent practice of foresight.

Please visit Foresight First LLC at [www.foresightfirst.io](http://www.foresightfirst.io).



Naylor Association Solutions builds strong trade and professional associations by delivering solutions that engage members and generate non-dues revenue. Our expertise and breadth of services help us see opportunities others miss, and our commitment to excellent customer service fuels our passion to help associations achieve more success.

Visit Naylor Association Solutions at <https://www.naylor.com> for more information.

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Foresight is The Future of Governing.

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