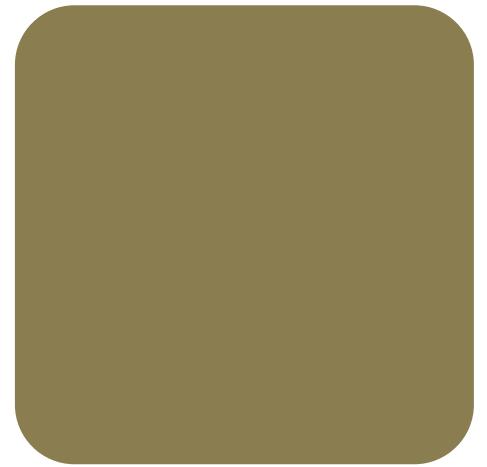


# Policy Governance Toolkit



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# Important note about using this Policy Development Guide

This Guide is designed specifically for School Counselor Associations (SCA) working to review and customize the policy templates\* located in the Board Governance Manual. Here, you will find step-by-step guidance to help your board understand and customize the four areas of governing policies that are unique to a Policy Governance approach to board governance.

Before your board begins customizing its policies, strongly encourage everyone involved to read through this Guide and the following policy templates found in the Board Governance Manual:

- Ends policies
- Executive Limitations policies
- Board-Management Delegation policies
- Governance Process policies

Individual time spent studying the information prior to the group's work sessions will make that time more efficient and productive. Everyone will have a sense of the whole framework and the policies within each area. This will help ensure new policies or provisions aren't developed only to learn that they already exist elsewhere.

There is a growing set of resources available to support your SCA's use of Policy Governance available on the Affiliate Exchange at [schoolcounselor.org/affiliate-exchange](https://schoolcounselor.org/affiliate-exchange).

\*The suggested policies in the template are adapted from *Reinventing Your Board* (Carver & Carver, 2006) and adjusted to meet the concerns and needs typical of SCAs.

# Congratulations on making the decision to strengthen your board's ability to govern!

Board governance can feel overwhelming, especially when you are part of a small organization. The goal of this Policy Development Guide is to make it easier for your board to get its governing policy framework in order.

## Governance isn't the same as operations

Governing happens when an elected group works together on behalf of the association's membership to create a values-based playing field of policies for those fulfilling the association's operations that define:

- how board members are going to work together to lead the SCA,
- the relationship between the board and the person(s) with delegated operational authority,
- the situations the person(s) with delegated operational authority should avoid, and
- the results the association should achieve

To be clear, your association's operations include things like developing and running programs, organizing member communications, and paying the association's bills. Governance is a step removed from this hands-on work even though many boards of small organizations find themselves performing both functions.

Good governance is critical for even the smallest, volunteer-driven organization. It is by governing that boards define organizational expectations so that those who have been granted the authority to achieve certain outcomes can get on with it without constantly having to check in, get the board's permission or be told what to do. That sort of board engagement is a huge waste of time for everyone, and small but mighty associations have no time to waste!

SCA boards governing through Policy Governance believe they have three important jobs that add unique value to the organization:

- linking proactively with their members to hear expectations and report on SCA results,
- crafting and maintaining governing level policies (see list above), and
- monitoring for compliance with those policies.

## Getting started on your policy framework

Policy Governance isn't something board members tack on to existing governing processes. Rather, it is a new way of thinking about and acting upon their responsibilities. Once your new policies are set, you can review your old governing policies or directives and more thoughtfully determine if anything needs to be carried over into the new framework.

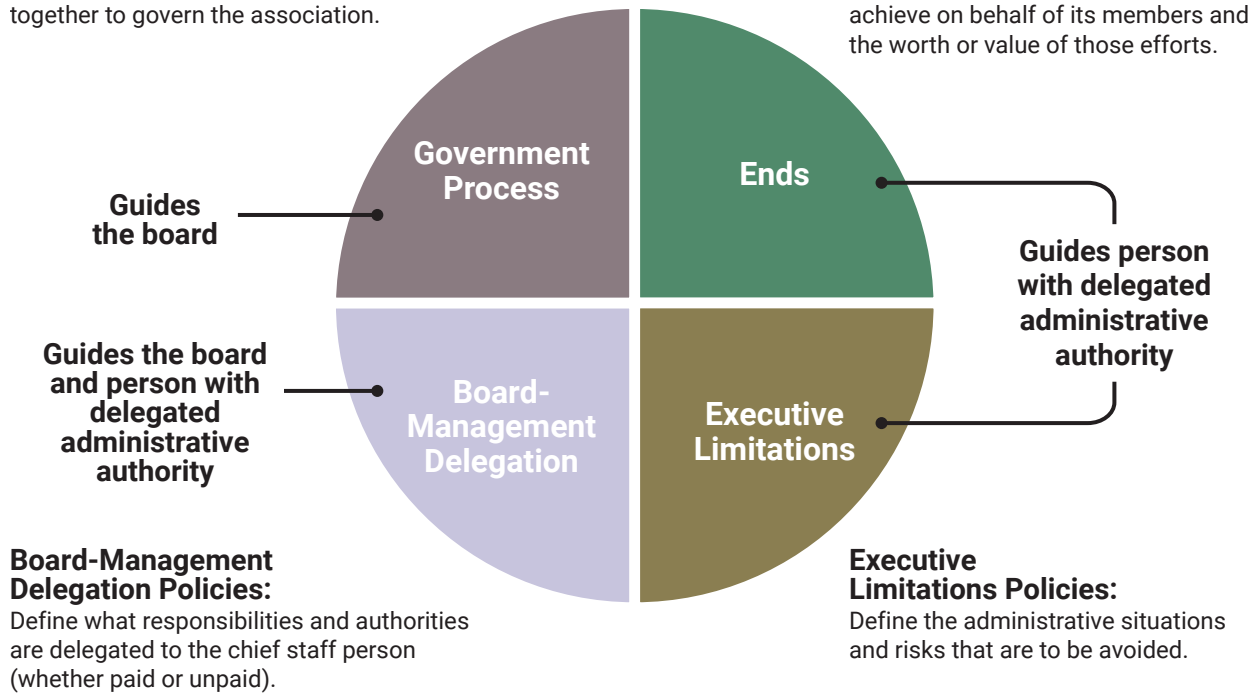
Special note: There may be matters your board wanted to control in previously adopted governing documents that need to be reconsidered. Please resist the urge to carry all your existing policies and procedures or other governing guidance into your new framework or paste these new policies into what is already in place.

**Governance Process Policies:**

Define how board members work together to govern the association.

**Ends Policies:**

Describes what the association must achieve on behalf of its members and the worth or value of those efforts.



Used with permission. Carver, J. (1990). *Boards that make a difference: A new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

**The importance of role clarity**

The majority of SCAs currently operate without a paid operational staff person – typically this role is referred to as an executive director. As an organization with a board that must also carry out the tasks of running the organization, board members may also be involved with planning conferences, managing member needs, and preparing financial reports. Whether serving as chairs for various committees or functioning as a “committee of the whole,” the board must differentiate from its job to govern and its job to keep the organization operational. This creates at least two problematic situations. One, boards often lose sight of their governing responsibilities, given other pressing and more tangible day-to-day operational needs. Two, the board chair is often over-burdened with responsibility for leading the board’s governing responsibilities and managing the other day-to-day work. Neither situation is sustainable or growth oriented.

If your association has the financial resources, hire an executive director (ED) or Association Management Company (AMC). If that is not an immediate option, recruit a volunteer leader to take on the responsibility. Consider a modest financial honorarium if that seems appealing. This will provide critical relief to your board chair and give better attention to the operational functions of the organization. If you have contracted professionals for duties such as bookkeeping or conference planning, those professionals now report directly to the ED or AMC, rather than the board. Also, all committee chairs or individuals developing programs or providing other services report to the ED or AMC. Just imagine how much valuable board time is saved! Not to mention the sanity of your board chair. Committees that help the board get its governing work done, such as a member linkage committee, continue to report to the board.

While it is theoretically possible for a board to govern and fulfill all operational functions using this framework of policies, it is difficult to do well. Your board will need to designate committees or individual volunteers to manage various functions (examples: finances, programs, communications) of the association and hold them accountable for the work just as if they were administrative staff members. Just be sure to change the ED references in this document to reflect your situation. Whether you use an ED or divide and assign those responsibilities, Policy Governance principles and the following policy templates will be helpful. Boards in this situation usually acknowledge that this structure doesn't resolve volunteer burnout or their ambitions for future growth. Best to use this scenario as a pivot to Policy Governance to generate the energy necessary to step up and separate these roles by hiring or appointing an ED.

The remainder of this Guide will make the assumption that you have delegated authority to such an individual and refer to that person as the ED.

## How to understand and customize your governing policies



### Governance Process Policies

A good place to start is by getting your board's own policies in order. This quadrant of policies, starting on page (9) in the Board Manual template, defines how your board works together to conduct its business. Governance Process policies go an important step beyond the requirements found in most by-laws (e.g. quorum, voting rights). This is the place to define your board's commitments and norms including how it:

- organizes its meetings and annual planning,
- ensures board members' good behavior, and
- defines the role of the board, committees, and officers.

What is most important is that your board agrees with their final, customized policies and recognizes them as their official standards of group and individual behavior. When your board assesses its own performance, it will use these policies to guide its self-assessment. No other performance measure is necessary.

### **Governance Process policy development steps**

1. Prior to the board's discussion, require each board member to read through the Governance Process policy templates in the Board Manual Template and the current by-laws sections related to board member expectations.
2. At the discussion, customize and complete the template language as necessary.

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Special note: Use a light touch! These templates are well-crafted and designed to align with Policy Governance principles.

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### **Board Management Delegation Policies**

These policies, found on page (8) of the Board Manual template, outline how the board delegates authority for administrative functions to a specific person and holds them accountable for that authority. This is where the board finally creates governance and administrative role clarity, separating itself from various administrative responsibilities.

As explained in the Getting Started section of this Guide, taking decisive steps to separate governance and administrative responsibilities will have a powerful impact on the growth and success of your association. Whether your board decides to delegate administrative authority to a volunteer, paid executive director, or an AMC might impact what you choose to title this set of policies (E.g. Board-AMC Relationship, or Board-Volunteer Executive Director Connection). The decision may also impact how you customize them in terms of how much authority you delegate versus leaving some with the board.

Specifically, these policies will define:

1. who has what administrative authority,
2. how the board gives direction to that authority, and
3. how and when the board monitors the use of that authority.

### **Board-Management Delegation policy development steps**

1. If not already operating with a paid or volunteer executive director, make arrangements to do so before you activate your new policies.
2. Complete and customize the policies in this section. You can wait on scheduling times to monitor various policies listed in 3.3 until after you have customized your Executive Limitation policies. When you do set up your monitoring schedule, your executive director is sure to have useful perspectives on the best timing for certain reports based on when various types of data might be available.



## Executive Limitations Policies

When developing Ends policies, your board will envision what outcomes are desirable for your members. Through the Executive Limitation policies (see template policies starting on page 6 of the Board Manual template), the board defines what administrative options or situations are out of bounds on the way to achieving those outcomes. Think of it as similar to how the sidelines of a football field define boundaries for the players. (While you are at it, think of your Ends policies as how the association's administration scores points. Touchdown!) Boards define the playing field and monitor performance accordingly. The executive director and volunteers are the ones on the field playing the game.

### Create space for creativity on the playing field

Effective boards want the executive director and their volunteers to have fun and be creative on that playing field by creating their own magic combination of speed, flexibility, adaptability, coordination, collaboration, and innovation to create and implement the programs that achieve powerful end results for your members. The best way of doing that is by proactively defining what administrative options are off the table, what is to be achieved, and then getting out of the way.

The benefit of a good policy playing field is that it proactively grants authority to the executive director while protecting the association from bad situations and decisions. This recalibration of workloads and focus helps everyone achieve a manageable scope of responsibility and creates capacity for the association to grow.

### Executive Limitations policies are written in negative language

At first, the language structure for Executive Limitations can feel awkward because the board is prohibiting certain actions ("Don't do this"), rather than telling the executive director what and how to do the job. But remember, if the board has agreed it wants the executive director and volunteers to make some magic, telling that person how to do it rather takes the fun out of the position! That's why a more effective technique is prohibiting the few critical things that cause the board concern, are unethical, or considered imprudent. Basically, Executive Limitations are a "don't-do-it" list.

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Special note to members who are especially good at worrying: Your board will need to monitor every policy you produce in this section. That takes time and effort on everyone's part. Although you have an obligation to your members to protect the association, you also have an obligation to avoid creating unnecessary work. Only prohibit in policy what is critical and worthy of monitoring.

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## Executive Limitations policy development steps

1. Before the board goes into a session to customize the Executive Limitation policies, ask that all board members and your executive director study the templates and read this section of the guide.
2. Complete and customize your Executive Limitation policies using the templates as your starting point. Discuss whether there are any other situations that the board feels the members should avoid and, using the format of the existing Executive Limitations policies as a guide (titling, numbering, negative language, etc.), add your concerns.



## Ends policies

“Begin with the end in mind” is the second of the seven habits of highly effective people Dr. Stephen R. Covey defines in his bestselling book. Can you think of an SCA example of a desired **end** (a result you would like for your members) and a **means** (a process or activity for achieving that end)? Both concepts put you on the road to understanding Ends policies. Caution: avoid assuming your current mission or vision statement can be re-labeled as your new Ends policies. Such statements are likely either too focused on activities or not complete enough to address the specific concerns of a well-crafted set of Ends policies.

Although it is easy to get caught up in what you do for your members, the board needs to focus on the reason the SCA exists in the first place. To develop your association’s Ends, your board will need to answer the following three questions precisely.

### 1. Whom do you want your SCA to affect?

Of course, your existing members are a straightforward answer and, yes, they are the target beneficiaries of the difference you want to make through the efforts of your association. You might also consider those who are not yet members but who are serving in the profession in your state. Should the association devote any resources for serving them? If the answer is yes, then those people might belong in your Ends policies.

### 2. What difference do you want to make?

The difference Ends policies focus on is the intended difference in your members’ professional lives. It is an outcome rather than a process. What is the impact, difference, change, benefit, or outcome created in your members’ lives? Ends policies do not include effort words like “creating” or “providing” or “developing,” so be sure to strip those out and focus on the results of those efforts.

### 3. What level of cost efficiency do you want to achieve?

This is the value created for the resources (money and people) used by the association. It’s not about fundraising, your financial status, or the cost of a single membership. Cost efficiency is the standard the board is setting to declare the association’s results are worth the amount of resources devoted to producing them. What is the cost/benefit? What is the relative value received for the resources expended?



### **Ends policy development takes time**

Drafting your Ends policies statements will likely require a few rounds of defining, discussing, and redefining as you gain greater clarity on what you want your SCA will accomplish on behalf of members. We offer no standard template for SCA Ends policies in the Board Manual template although there is an example below for educational purposes. The best approach to developing your Ends policies from scratch is to agree on the answers to the three questions posed above rather than wordsmithing during this brainstorming session. After brainstorming, you can assign someone to do the actual writing and share a revised version with the board for discussion and approval or another round of revisions.

### **Collect input**

Before trying to determine or even write your Ends policies as a board, do some individual reflection on the impact you expect the association to achieve, perhaps through a pre-set series of board member questions.

**Secondary research:** Secondary research is information gathered from previously conducted studies. Usually, you will start with research gathered from other sources, such as ASCA. Especially when you are first starting to develop indicators, this type of information gathering is less expensive and less time-consuming than conducting your own research.

**Primary research:** Primary research is information gathered through first-hand, self-conducted methods, such as surveys or focus groups. Sometimes, this work is commissioned through an independent, third party to ensure objectivity, confidentiality to respondents, reliability and validity.

Because one of a Policy Governance board's three jobs is to be accountable to the members, it is logical to add the perspectives of your broader membership to your knowledgebase before you begin drafting Ends policies. Surveys are now much easier to create and administer through various free software tools, Consider surveying or hosting conversations with a broad representation of your membership to collect their responses to the three questions listed above (or a targeted portion of your members focused on a specific topic!).

Do your best to follow best practices in conducting surveys such as:

- **Clearly defining the issues you want to address.**  
Clear definitions will help limit the collection of information to what is necessary to address your compliance indicators.
- **Determine early on if it is necessary to collect personal information.**  
If possible, design a survey so the information collected does not identify individuals or connect them with responses. If your survey research involves personal information, ensure that the respondents' information is confidential and protected or that you have written consent to share it.
- **Decide how you will sample your members.**  
Random or convenience sample? Sometimes surveying everyone will not yield a good sampling. Think this through. If you really want to understand what your members think, you'll need to go a bit in depth. That may mean doing qualitative research that takes more time to conduct and analyze.

Here are two sets of example questions – one general and one topical – to help you get a sense of the questions you might ask when gathering perspectives:

Members' expectations and wishes:

*How are members' professional lives different because of your SCA?*

*What do our members expect from us now in terms of results?*

*What benefits are members likely to want in the future?*

Public policy:

*What would a Public policy environment conducive to school counseling priorities in our state look like?*

*What is our current profession-related public policy environment?*

*What changes to our public policy environment are you observing?*

*What are the probable impacts of those changes to our members' professional practice?*

You can add even more perspectives about the good you expect your SCA to achieve through outside expertise in the form of papers, talks or other consultations.

### **Consider what your SCA can actually and realistically accomplish**

Ends need a long-term perspective and be realistically ambitious. For example, "Schools free of racism and bias" is an Ends but not realistic for an SCA because it doesn't have direct control of school settings, nor can it control the actions of individual students. So, while your SCA may have a passionate desire to see schools free of racism and bias, the statement isn't a reasonable expectation of your association. Here is a sample set of Ends policies that could be seen as appropriately scaled to an SCA:

#### **SCA Ends Policy Example**

The (state or territory) School Counselor Association exists for the cost-effective achievement of our members' professional calling in an environment where key decision makers are knowledgeable and supportive of the school counselor's role in a school setting.

1. Members have access to a full complement of local skills and knowledge development opportunities needed for current and effective school counseling.
  - a. An increasing number of members participate in and benefit from local learning opportunities.
  - b. Growth in rates of participation across various key categories of membership is regularly demonstrated.
  - c. Members are aware of trending changes in the state environment for school counseling and have access to various means for responding to those trends.
2. Members benefit from public policy conditions favorable to their professional success.
  - a. Members value the role of the SCA in creating a professional community.
  - b. Members are knowledgeable of the methods available to communicate the value of the profession to local, state, and national decision makers.
  - c. Members increasingly use available methods to communicate the value of the profession to local, state, and national decision makers.

### **Ends policy development action steps**

1. See page 5 in Board Manual Template for the Ends policies holding spot.
2. Complete individual board member reflection, perhaps with the use of a questionnaire.
3. As a board, plan and execute a strategy for collecting input from your members on what they expect the association to achieve.
4. Consider and collect other useful perspectives regarding possible association results.
5. Have a board member conversation (or a few!) to define your priorities using the three questions at the beginning of this section as a guide to assure you have answered all the parts.

### **Enact your new policies**

Pending completion of a completion of your four types of policies set a board meeting date during which the new policies you recorded in the manual will become effective. Pass a motion stating that, as of (that date), all previous board policies and other decisions are set aside, and your new policies are in effect. This will avoid any conflicts with prior board actions.



### **Compile Remaining Board Manual Materials**

If not already finished, compile your Board's governing manual. This mostly consists of gathering various documents that already exist but may be lurking about in different places. You will all feel much more organized and in control of your responsibilities with everything in one convenient place. Having one compiled manual is also a valuable resource for orienting future board members to their responsibilities.