

**Fall Executive Committee Meeting
October 25-26, 2014, Chicago**

Topic: Helping the board with big picture thinking

Background: At the Executive Committee's meeting after the Board's meeting in Las Vegas, a discussion arose around board members and big picture thinking. As YALSA enters a strategic planning cycle, board conversations regarding the accomplishments, direction, and mission of the association are vital to future success. Board members must be looking at the governance of the association, not mired in management of the members. Chris Shoemaker has provided some information below for the board's consideration.

Action Required: Discussion

One of the greatest assets that YALSA has is the board of directors and the variety of experience they bring to discussions and decision making. Sometimes it can be difficult for the board to take advantage of that knowledge base when smaller day to day operational issues overtake strategic discussions. In addition, board members may feel more confident addressing concrete problems and immediate needs instead of unknown future situations. A key role of a YALSA board member is to conduct association governance. Great governance happens when the board focuses on higher level, future-oriented matters of strategy and policy and performs its oversight responsibilities in a rigorous but highly efficient manner. Governance happens when the board is focused on big picture thinking.

Big picture thinking is often framed in similar terms as strategic planning, with questions such as:

- Where are we today?
- Where do we want to be in the future?
- What should we be focused on today, to increase the probability of success in achieving our desired future state?

Big picture thinking best practices recommend creating a theme for the organization, and communicating it simply to members. In order to identify a theme, the board must be able to access and synthesize data. The key skills to data analysis are:

- Identify the overarching patterns and themes in the world outside the organization
- connect all the dots' to see strategic insights
- Develop the right responses to grow the association.

Questions to Consider:

- How can we organize board meetings so that they support big picture thinking and strategic discussion?
- What sort of training do board members need in order to be well-positioned to think broadly and to embrace generative thinking?
- Do the ideals of YALSA and board members match the day to day reality of what’s going on in libraries? If not, what is needed to bring the two into alignment?
- Is there additional data that board members need in order to look at big picture trends and issues?
 - Would adjusting the management report assist in providing more big picture data?
 - Does the current standing committee and committee report structure focus enough on goals, rather than the steps needed to get there?
 - Should chairs include the action plan steps accomplished, as well as strategic goals?
- Are mega issue discussions taking place often enough? Do we need to move more meeting content virtually in order to better take advantage of face to face discussions?
- How does the board move away from “crisis” discussion / reactive mode into a focused strategy board?
- While YALSA’s current strategic plan is focused around 5 general themes, do those coalesce into a larger theme? Is it one that can be easily articulated?
- Where does YALSA look to for precedent or consequences? How can we model or predict these?

What Might Next Steps Be?

Based on how the Executive Committee answers the questions above, possible next steps could include:

- Leverage board development chats to focus on building big picture thinking skills and/or strategic discussions
- Revamp board training to include larger focus on big picture thinking and skills
- Recruit board members with background in strategic planning
- Budget for and utilize consultants for big picture thinking exercises
- Other?

Additional Resources:

- “What do you talk about in your board meetings”
<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/governancevoice/21574-what-do-you-talk-about-at-your-board-meetings.html>
- “Setting the stage for non-profit boards to focus on the big picture”
<http://axiomcp.com/blog/setting-stage-non-profit-boards-focus-big-picture>
- “A small scale approach to big picture thinking” <http://associationsnow.com/2013/10/a-small-scale-approach-to-big-picture-strategy/>
- “The Big Picture Board” <http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ISMagazine/Pages/The-Big-Picture-Board.aspx>

- Six thinking hats by Edward De Bono http://www.amazon.com/Six-Thinking-Hats-Edward-Bono/dp/0316178314/sr=1-1/qid=1159212338/ref=pd_bbs_1/002-9997290-7305659?ie=UTF8&s=books#
- “Big picture Board” <http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/AMMagArticleDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=9387>
- “12 ways to think big picture” <http://www.sitepoint.com/how-to-think-big-picture/>