



# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH NEW SCHOOL BOARDS MEMBERS

Prepared for Washington Association of School Administrators



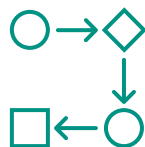
# INTRODUCTION



The Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) is working to support member superintendents in building relationships with new school board members after the November 2021 election. To support this need, Hanover Research (Hanover) prepared the following presentation on establishing and maintaining positive relationships with new school board members. This presentation includes details on the following topics:



## Establishing Relationships



## Setting Group Norms & Communication



## Defining roles and responsibilities

While the primary audience for this presentation is superintendents, certain slides are designed to be shared and used by superintendents with their respective board of education members.



*The orange lock icon in the top right corner indicates slides intended for superintendents only.*



*The blue group icon indicates slides with material or activities that superintendents may choose to share with school board members*

This document is designed to function as a presentation and tool for starting conversations between superintendent and school board members. Some activity slides include additional details in the Notes pane below. Please reference prior reports and resources from WASA and Hanover Research for additional background context, such as the Research Brief on [Effective Superintendent and School Board Collaboration](#).

# ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS



# SCHOOL BOARDS IN HIGH ACHIEVING DISTRICTS



## What sets high achieving districts apart?

- More likely to engage in **goal setting** and **monitoring their progress**
- Increasingly data savvy—**identifying** student needs and **justifying** decisions based on **data**
- Possess **detailed knowledge of their district**, including initiatives to jump-start success
- Craft **working relationships** with superintendents, teachers, and administrators based on **mutual respect, collegiality** and a **joint commitment to student success**



# CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARDS



**Defines clear goals toward high student achievement and quality instruction**



**Shares beliefs that all students can learn, and that the system can teach all children at high levels**



**Driven by accountability, focusing on policies to improve student achievement**



**Establishes strong communication structures with all stakeholders to achieve district goals**



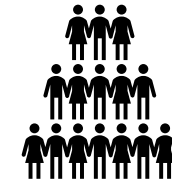
**Embraces and monitors data to drive continuous improvement**



**Aligns and sustains resources to meet district goals**



**Leads as a unified team with strong collaboration and mutual trust**

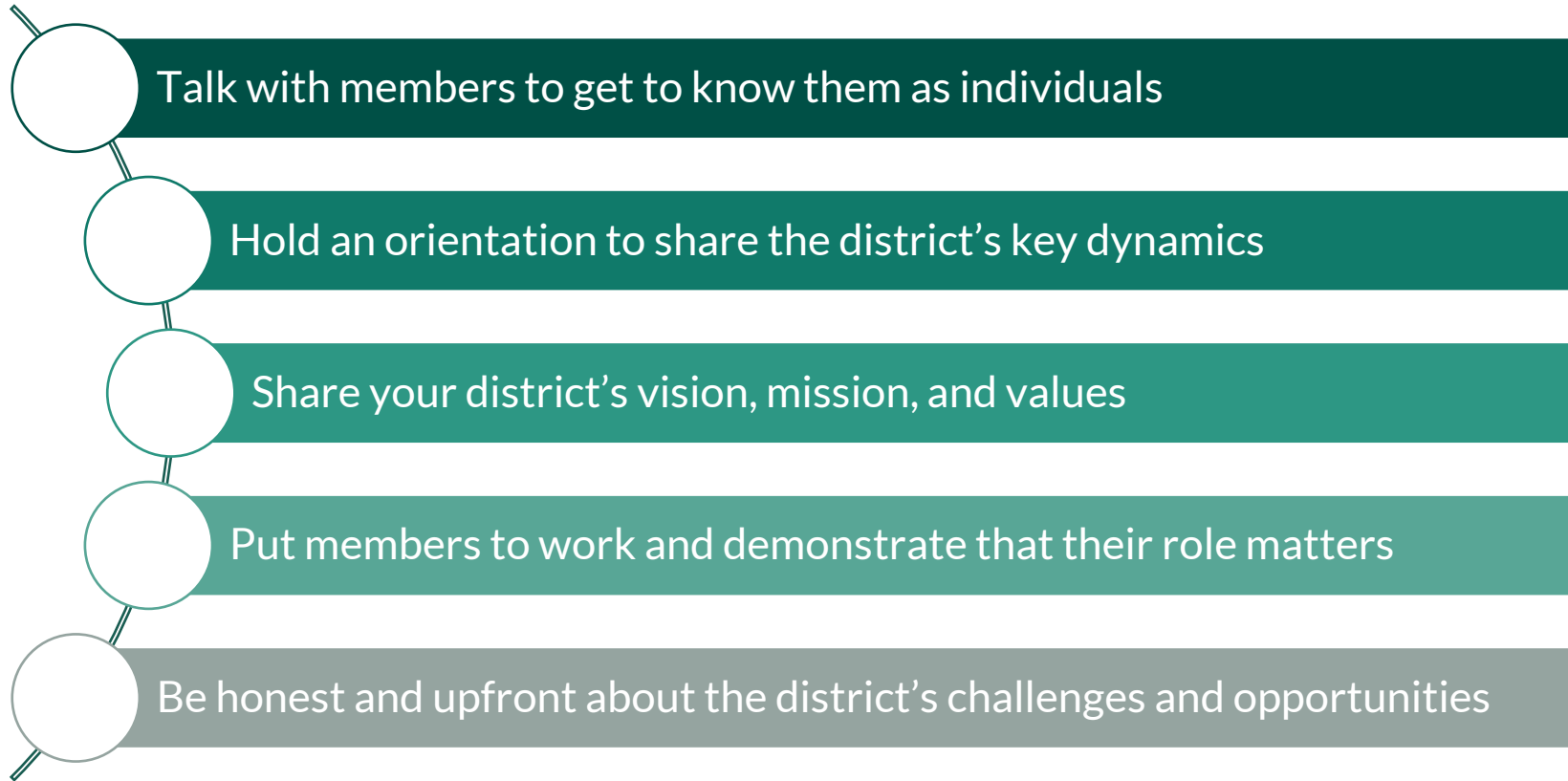


**Embraces team development to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments**

# GET TO KNOW YOUR BOARD MEMBERS



**“It is better that you be seen as a team member and an ally than an impediment to their goals.”**





# ACTIVITY: DESIGN A MEETING AGENDA FOR ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS WITH SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS



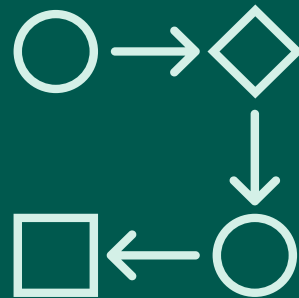
**Meeting Purpose:** To establish a positive relationship with the school board member, to provide background context on the district, to gain an understanding of the school board member's priorities and goals, to brainstorm strategies and preferences that will support an effective working relationship.

**Activity:** Create a draft meeting agenda for one-on-one meetings with school board members.

1. Craft several questions designed to elicit board members' purpose, vision for an ideal school system, major concerns about the current state, priorities for the coming school year, and longer-term priorities.
2. Draft an email message to invite individual school board members to one-on-one meeting. Describe your intended purpose for the meeting, share the above questions in advance, and outline your intended outcomes.
3. Create post-meeting reflection questions or statements that will help you summarize the meeting, describe any lingering concerns, and outline next steps.
4. Schedule your one-on-one meeting with each school board member.

Board members should come away with an understanding that there is a **vision** that guides and governs the district and your decision making and start to see how their priorities can align and work within this vision.

# SETTING GROUP NORMS, PROCEDURES, AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS







## Negative Relations:

- Overload of information
- Too much board involvement in administrative matters
- Lack of board independence from superintendent
- Haste by superintendent to resolve issues too quickly



## Positive Relations:

- Respect
- Trust
- Confidence
- Support
- Open communication

# SUCCESSFUL SUPERINTENDENT/SCHOOL BOARD RELATIONSHIP



## Equal Treatment



Treat all school board members equally

- Consistently communicate with all board members

## Processing Time



Provide adequate processing time up front

- Establish a process to discuss initiatives
  - Discussion
  - Processing time
  - Q&A
  - Reflection

## The Friday Update



Ongoing and frequent communication to all board members

- Highlight major events and issues addressed that week
- Meetings led or attended (to highlight district initiatives)
  - Be sure to provide a confidentiality disclaimer at the end of the email

# ESTABLISHING MEETING NORMS



**Why create norms?**

A light green silhouette of a person's head and shoulders is positioned to the left of a large, light green thought bubble. Inside the bubble, the text "Why create norms?" is written in a bold, dark green font.

**“To increase its collective performance through healthy debate and clarity of purpose and roles.”**



**Supports interpersonal board development**

Three light green rectangular boxes are stacked vertically on the right side of the slide. Each box contains a white text label. The top box is labeled "Supports interpersonal board development", the middle box is labeled "Cultivates appropriate board decorum", and the bottom box is labeled "Establishes critical expectations".

**Cultivates appropriate board decorum**

**Establishes critical expectations**

# INTRO: FIVE STEPS TO CREATING MEETING NORMS



## 1. Identify successful norms based on your experience

- Think back to when a team worked well and identify 1-3 norms that contributed to this success

## 2. Break down the norms into behaviors

- Turn your list into measurable behaviors
- Ask what this behavior may look like

## 3. Commit to five norms or fewer

- Prioritize what to tackle first

## 4. Create a recurring plan

- Include owners and timelines for how to follow through on each norm

## 5. Create a system of mutual accountability

- Discuss how you will hold each other accountable if you don't practice the norms you've agreed to

## 6. Renew this process as new members join



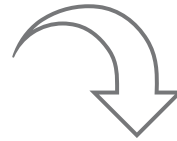
# ACTIVITY: CREATING MEETING NORMS

## STEP 1: REVIEW CURRENT NORMS

- Review already established norms if they exist
- Discuss current norms as either productive or non-productive
- Identify areas for needed change or improvement

### What are Our Productive Norms?

*Explicit and accepted by all group members*



### What are Our Non-Productive Norms?

*May not serve our group or purposes*



### Reframe Non-Productive Norms by Asking:

*What are alternative ways to approach the norm that will positively impact our group?*



# ACTIVITY: CREATING MEETING NORMS

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY BOARD BEHAVIORS

After reviewing current productive and non-productive ways of working, identify the behaviors that must be exhibited by the team. Frame as “we” statements, as shown below. *These will become your norms.*

“We \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.”

“**We** model and encourage a culture of respectful feedback **by** respectfully and professionally presenting an alternative view and/or recommended action when opinions or views differ from a colleagues.”

### Possible Norms for Discussion

- Time
- Listening
- Confidentiality
- Decision Making
- Participation
- Expectations



# ACTIVITY: CREATING MEETING NORMS

## STEP 3: ACHIEVE CONSENSUS

- Work to reach consensus and finalize the group norms for adoption.



*Consensus isn't voting. A majority isn't enough to declare victory and move on; **what matters is the will of the entire group**. Because of this, true consensus means there aren't winners and losers. Instead, consensus asks all participants to consider and eventually affirm three points:*



*My voice has been heard*



*I understand the proposal*



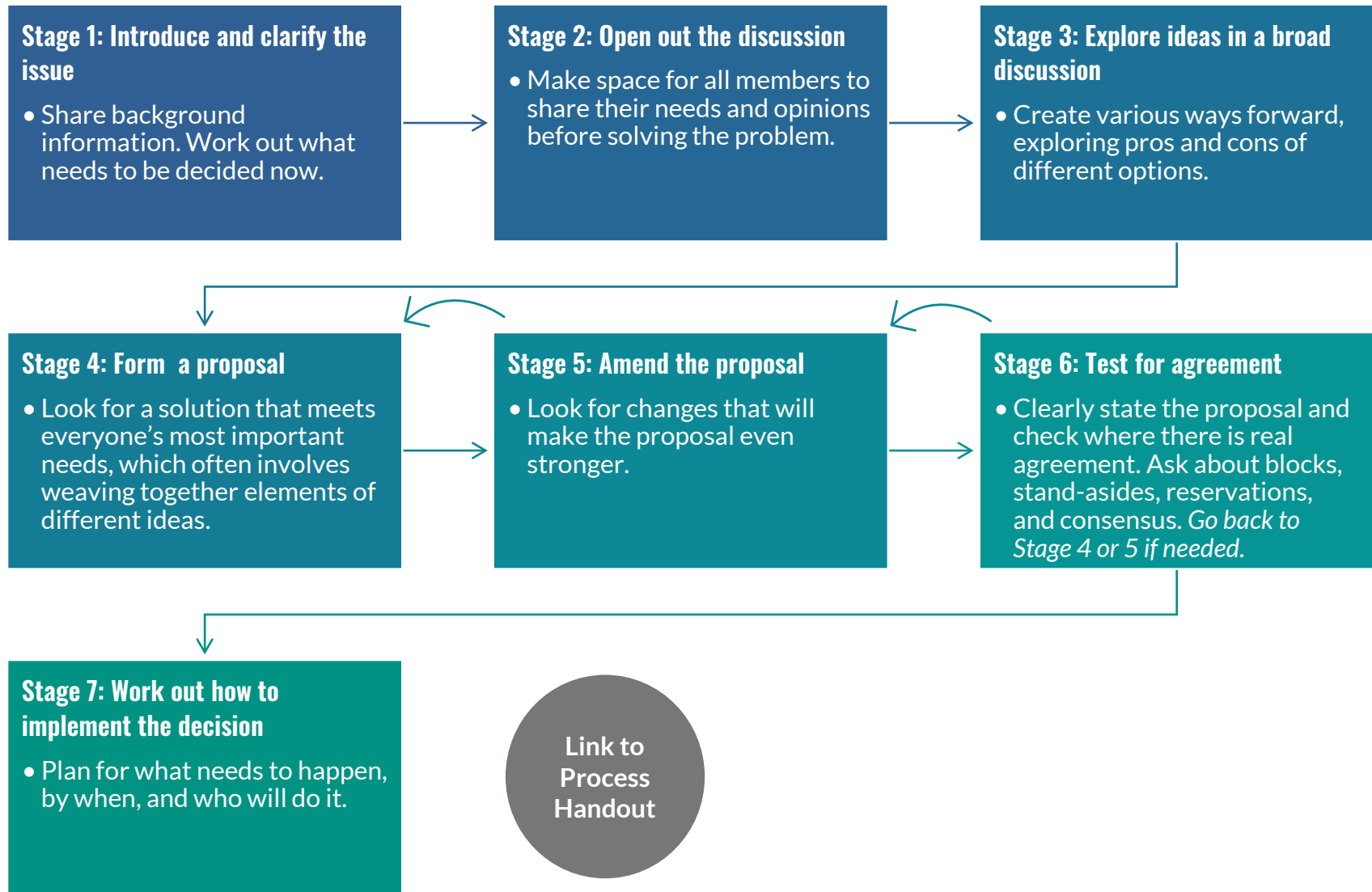
*It's clear to me that the will of the group has emerged around this proposal*

**Steps for Achieving  
Consensus on Next Slide**





# STEPS FOR ACHIEVING CONSENSUS





# ACTIVITY: CREATING MEETING NORMS

## STEP 4: DETERMINE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Discuss the use of feedback to hold people accountable for norms.
- Establish process for accountability to group norms



*How will members speak up if they see a norm being violated?*



*How will members hold each other accountable?*



# DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



# BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



## Duty of Care:

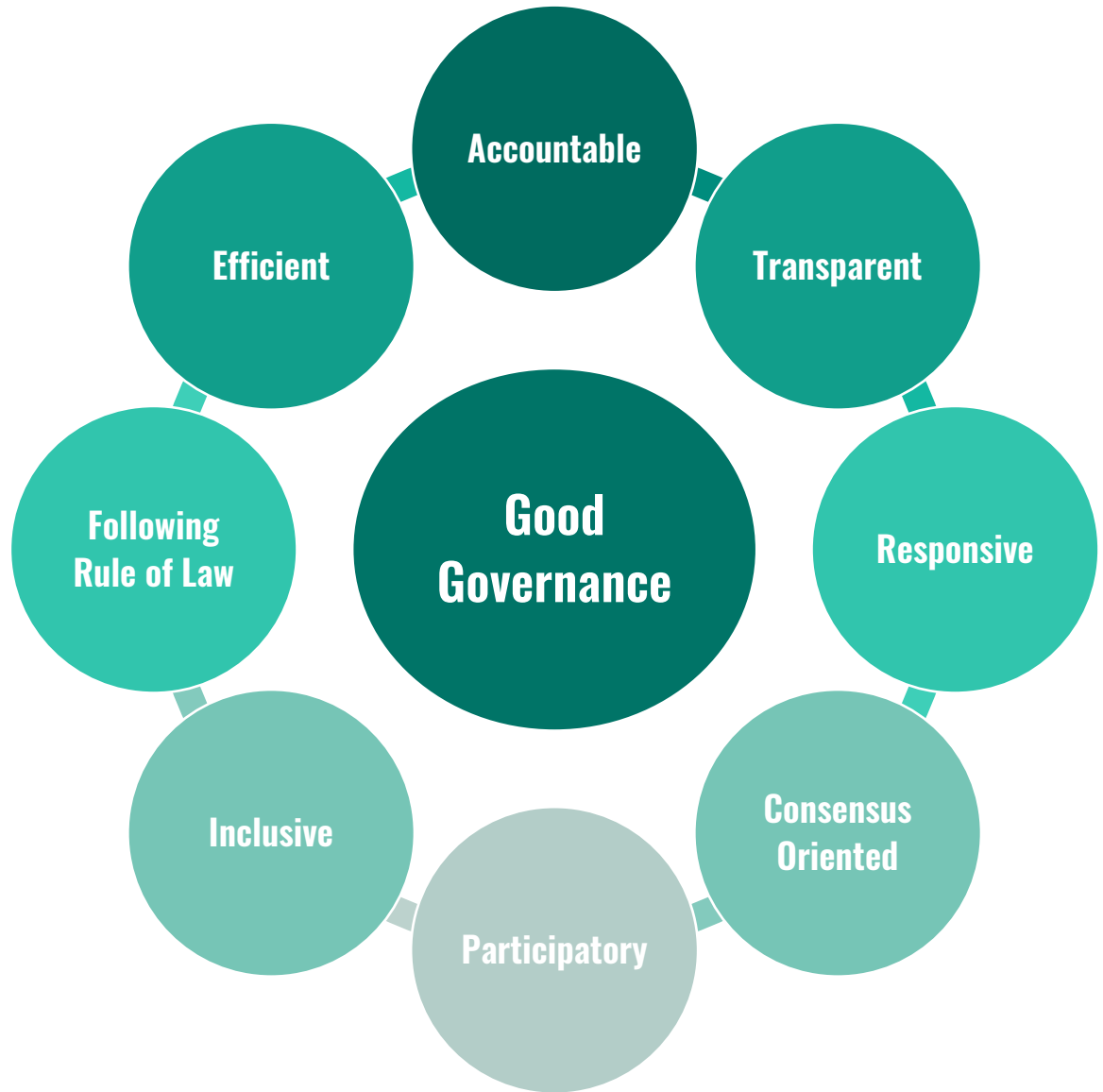
- Ensure prudent use of all assets, including facility, people, and good will

## Duty of Loyalty:

- Ensure activities advance the district goals
- Recognize and disclose conflicts of interest
- Make decisions in the best interest of the district

## Duty of Obedience:

- Obey applicable laws and regulations
- Follow all board bylaws
- Adhere to the district's vision/mission



# IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING ROLES



**Less duplication of effort**

**Less confusion,  
disappointment,  
frustration**

**Greater Productivity**

**Look beyond their individual positions to  
understand, respect, and value group  
contributions**

**Recognize overall  
team success**

**Shared Responsibility  
and Ownership**



By focusing not only on what each team member must do as individuals, but also on what team members can count on from each other, you build trust and develop an accountable culture.

- Susan Mazza, “How to Define Roles and Responsibilities to Increase Accountability”

Source: NIC



# ACTIVITY: DEFINING ROLES WITH A RACI CHART

- Individually, consider the following questions about your role.
- Overlaps, if found, revise as necessary to avoid unintentional overlaps.

## Responsible

- What work do you need to do to complete your tasks?

## Accountable

- In your role, how do you hold others accountable for their responsibilities?

## Consulted

- What parties will you typically consult in your role?

## Informed

- Who do you need to keep in the loop on the progress of projects?

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Thank you.

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