

A Resource to assist in embedding a mission-focused review of decision making into each Board meeting

During the past 18 months I have spoken with some Ministry Board Chairs about their approach to including a Mission-alignment focus in the Review of each Board meeting so that it becomes a standard Agenda item. Some Boards have existing strategies for reflecting regularly on their decision-making while others are seeking some guidance in order to establish a way of embedding regular mission-focused review into their practice.

In his Keynote address at our inaugural ISMAPNG *Ministry of Governance Week* in October 2020, Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald highlighted the importance of a 'mission-focused' review of Board decision-making, suggesting it can be done very simply if we have appropriate guiding questions. [Click here to access Robert Fitzgerald's address.](#)

This resource has been made available to assist Ministry Boards to establish or enhance their practice in this area. An invitation to share existing strategies and helpful resources with other ministry Boards is also extended to those ministry Boards with an established mission-focused review process. If Boards are willing to share any significant insights they have learned from engaging in regular review of their decision making that would also be appreciated as we can learn a great deal from each other.

As Governance Formation Co-ordinator I would be very pleased to receive, collate and circulate any materials and insights so that all ministry Boards have access to them.

Including a review of decision-making on the Board meeting Agenda

- ✚ As we strive to exercise the ministry of governance ever more effectively, it is important to ensure our governance decisions are authentic, congruent with who we are and what we proclaim. Discernment is crucial and provides the context for any review process we embed into our regular Board practice. Elements of a transparent discernment process include ensuring a breadth and diversity of input into decision making and application of the principle of subsidiarity, making sure that decisions are made at the appropriate level within the organization. Boards need to pay attention to the quality of their decision making and be able to articulate the processes which resulted in particular decisions being made. It is the review of these individual decisions which are the focus of this Resource paper, rather than the discernment process as a whole.
- ✚ Most Boards would situate this 'mission-alignment' review item at the end of the Board meeting Agenda. In doing so, it is important that the item is given sufficient time allocation so that it is not rushed or skipped over, especially if the meeting has gone longer than planned.
- ✚ If this practice is new for the Board, it will be important for the Chair to invite Directors into the process, to explain the reasons for its inclusion and to ensure an appropriate time allocation is given to the review of decision making from a mission perspective. As Catherine McAuley advised, 'a good beginning is of great importance'.
- ✚ If there is already a Standing Agenda item to review Board decision making from perspectives other than 'mission-alignment' (e.g. items to be added to the organization's Risk Register) then discussion can be had with Directors, or the Agenda sub-Committee if one exists, about how best to incorporate into the meeting the 'mission-alignment' aspect of the review of decision making. It could benefit from being an item on its own.
- ✚ As part of Agenda items such as '*Minutes of the previous meeting*' or '*Matters arising from the previous meeting*' issues relating to the mission-focus of a previous decision or deliberations

about an ongoing issue could also arise. It is important to be attentive to the mission-focused aspects of these issues and not sideline the conversation.

Possible focus questions for reflection on the mission-focus of the Board's decisions

The questions below are offered for consideration by the Board Chair, the Agenda sub-committee and Directors. There are various ways of engaging with the issue of reviewing mission-aligned decision making. Our desired outcome is that the awareness of the need to be mission-focused becomes embedded in reflective strategies which are part of regular Board meeting practice. Each Board will decide on how best that can be achieved and will determine an effective way of discerning if the strategy adopted is achieving the desired outcome.

Reflection in light of the organization's purpose as outlined in its Mission, Vision and Values Statements

1. Keeping our core values in mind, how have we applied these values in our decision making today?
2. Are there warning signs of a 'disconnect' between our decision making and our core values?
3. How have we dealt with issues of concern in relation to fidelity to our mission?
4. In what ways are we being called to become more mission-focused in our Board decision making?

Reflection in light of relationships within the organization

1. In whose interests have we acted in the decisions we have made at this meeting?
2. How confident are we that the voices of all those impacted upon by our decisions have been heard?
3. In what ways will people be actually or potentially empowered by the decisions we have made at this meeting?
4. Have we done the right thing in making these decisions?

Resources which may support the meeting review process

- ✚ Easy access to the ministry's Mission, Vision and Values Statements can enable these documents to be used as part of the reflection process.
- ✚ Conversations can be initiated between the person or group preparing the Opening Prayer and Reflection for the meeting and the Chair, or whoever leads the Review of decision making, so that helpful links can be made between the Reflection at the start of each meeting and the review of decision making at the conclusion of each meeting.
- ✚ Decision Request templates, or their equivalent, can be designed so that the mission-focus or mission-alignment underpinning any formal requests to the Board are clearly identified and incorporated into the background briefing papers or Reports provided to the Board.
- ✚ Strategies shared by other ministries can be considered and adapted as appropriate.
- ✚ Governance Formation seminars offered by the Ministry Governance Unit during 2021 explore in more detail some of the concepts referred to in this Resource paper so Directors and Senior Leaders are encouraged to participate where this is possible.

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