



AMERICAN  
SCHOOL  
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Policy  
Governance  
Toolkit 2.0

# Policy Development Guide

# Important note about using this Policy Development Guide

This Policy Development Guide is a **starting place** – not a comprehensive manual on Policy Governance®. It is designed to provide basic orientation and support for school counselor association (SCA) boards beginning the process of customizing their governing policies. It complements, but does not replace, direct training, coaching or in-depth study.

If your board wants to deepen its understanding of Policy Governance or explore its application more fully, we recommend the following resources:

- Books by John and Miriam Carver, especially “Boards That Make a Difference” and “Reinventing Your Board”
- Caroline Oliver’s “Getting Started with Policy Governance”
- Resources from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), available on the Affiliate Exchange at [schoolcounselor.org/affiliate-exchange](http://schoolcounselor.org/affiliate-exchange)
- Additional workshops or consulting sessions tailored to your board’s structure and experience

Boards benefit most when they pair practical tools like this Guide with facilitated learning and reflection. Strong governance is learned over time – and practiced regularly.

## Strengthening Your Board’s Governance

Congratulations on taking steps to strengthen your board’s ability to govern. Governance can feel daunting, especially in a small organization where board members often wear many hats. This Guide is here to help your board build a clear, functional policy framework.

### Governance Is Not the Same as Operations

Governance is how your board, acting on behalf of members, sets the rules of the game – the policies that:

- define how the board will work together,
- clarify how the board interacts with the person or people handling operations,
- spell out the boundaries for operational decisions, and
- identify the results the organization is expected to achieve.

In contrast, **operations** involve day-to-day work: developing and running programs, sending communications, paying bills and so on.

It's common in small organizations for board members to do both governance and operations. But it's important to keep the two roles clear – even when they're performed by the same people.

## Why Good Governance Matters

Good governance defines expectations up front so those responsible for operations can do their jobs without constantly checking in or seeking approval. That saves time, avoids micromanagement and helps the organization grow. Even the smallest, all-volunteer SCA deserves that kind of clarity.

When a board uses Policy Governance, it focuses on three core responsibilities:

- Listening to members and reporting back on results,
- Creating and updating clear governance policies, and
- Monitoring performance to ensure policies are followed.

## A New Way of Governing

Policy Governance isn't just an add-on to your current approach. It's a new mindset – a way of focusing the board on what only the board can do. Once your new policies are in place, your board can review existing policies and documents and decide what, if anything, needs to be carried forward into the new system. 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, procedures or other governing or administrative guidance into your new framework or paste these new policies into what is now in place.

## Customizing Your Governing Policies

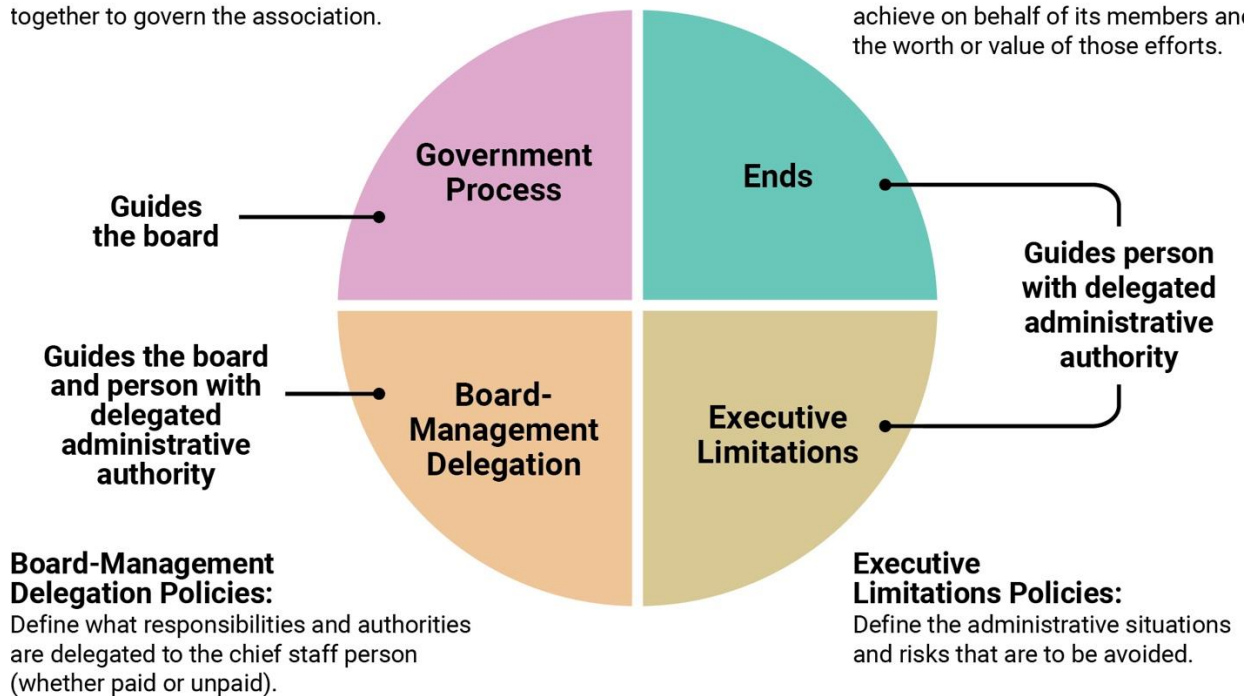
Policy Governance divides board-level policies into four areas. Each plays a distinct role in helping your board stay focused, effective and accountable. This section will help you understand what each area covers and how to tailor the policies for your association.

### **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.



## Governance Process Policies

*How the board organizes itself and behaves.*

This is where your board sets its own expectations – how you'll structure meetings, hold one another accountable, define roles and evaluate your work. These policies go beyond basic bylaws by establishing clear norms and responsibilities.

**Start here.** These policies define how your board will operate. They're the foundation for everything else.

### Steps to take

- Ask board members to read the Governance Process policy templates and related sections in your bylaws.
- Use your next board meeting to walk through the templates, editing only as needed for clarity or relevance.
- Keep it simple – these templates are carefully designed to align with Policy Governance principles.
- When your board later assesses its own performance, these policies are the standards you'll use. No other metrics are needed.



## Board Management Delegation Policies

*Who is authorized to do what – and how they're held accountable.*

These policies outline how the board delegates day-to-day responsibility to a specific person (typically called the executive director) and how it monitors that person's use of authority.

These policies clarify the boundary between governance and operations.

### Steps to take

- If you don't already have someone in the executive role (paid or volunteer), identify that person before activating these policies.
- Customize the templates to fit your structure. If you work with an association management company or volunteer leader instead of a traditional executive director, adjust the titles accordingly.
- Don't worry yet about setting up a full monitoring schedule. You will be better prepared to determine the best timing after you customize your Executive Limitations.



## Executive Limitations Policies

*What boundaries the board sets for operational decisions.*

Instead of prescribing what to do, these policies state what the executive director must avoid – ethical violations, imprudent risks or actions that could harm the association. This gives the executive director freedom to be creative and effective while staying within clearly defined guardrails.

Think of these policies as drawing the sidelines on the playing field. They don't tell someone *how* to run the play – but they do make sure actions stay in bounds.

### Steps to take

- Ask all board members and your executive director to read the policy templates and this section of the Guide.
- Use the templates as your base. Only add new limitations if they address truly critical risks. Remember: You'll be monitoring each one.
- Stick to the negative format (e.g., "The executive director shall not..."). It's more effective and avoids micromanagement.



## Ends Policies

*What results the association should achieve, for who, and at what cost.*

Ends policies define your association's purpose in concrete terms. They name the members (or others) you want to benefit, the specific outcomes you want to create and how much value you expect to get from your resources. These are not about activities. They are about **results**.

### Steps to take

- Don't just re-label your mission or vision. Those are often too vague or activity-based.
- Start by answering these questions:
  1. Who should benefit from the association's work?
  2. What difference should it make in their professional lives?
  3. What level of cost-efficiency is acceptable?
- Gather input from board members and – critically – from your broader membership. This could include surveys, focus groups or informal feedback.
- Draft Ends statements based on what you've learned. Then refine them as a board.

A sample set of Ends is included in this Guide. Use it only as inspiration – not a plug-and-play solution.

# Sample Meeting Sequence for Customizing Governing Policies

## Preparation (Before Meeting 1)

- Share this Policy Development Guide and the Board Governance Manual Templates with all board members.
- Ask board members to review:
  - The Overview of Policy Governance
  - The four types of policies
  - Their current bylaws and any existing policies
- Optional: Schedule a brief orientation or training session on Policy Governance basics.

## Meeting 1 – Understanding Governance Roles (60–90 min)

Goal: Align on why policy-based governance matters and clarify the difference between governance and operations.

- Discuss: What is governance? Why separate it from operations?
- Review: Policy Governance structure and the four policy types.
- Confirm: Who currently holds operational authority (paid or volunteer)?
- Assign homework: Read Governance Process templates in detail.

## Meeting 2 – Governance Process Policies (90–120 min)

Goal: Customize how the board will govern itself.

- Review and discuss the Governance Process templates.
- Edit for clarity or SCA-specific needs.
- Approve a final version or assign revisions for quick approval by email.
- Assign homework: Read Board–Management Delegation templates.

## Meeting 3 – Board–Management Delegation (60–90 min)

Goal: Clarify how the board delegates and monitors operational authority.

- Confirm who the “executive director” is in practice (or assign the role).
- Customize templates based on your structure (association management company, volunteer lead, etc.).
- Identify any areas where delegation is still unclear.
- Assign homework: Read Executive Limitations templates.

#### Meeting 4 – Executive Limitations Policies (90–120 min)

Goal: Define what risks or actions the board wants to prohibit.

- Review templates together.
- Keep only what's necessary to monitor and protect the association.
- Add new limitations only if essential.
- Flag policies that will need monitoring plans later.
- Assign homework: Begin reflecting on Ends (prompt with the three questions).

#### Meeting 5 – Ends Policy Brainstorming (90–120 min)

Goal: Draft the association's Ends based on member expectations.

- Review the three core questions:
  - Who are the intended beneficiaries?
  - What difference do you want to make?
  - What's the acceptable cost/value?
- Share member input (if already collected) or plan how to gather it.
- Brainstorm as a group – no wordsmithing yet.
- Assign a small team to write a draft set of Ends based on the session.

#### Meeting 6 – Finalizing Policies and Enacting Your Manual (60–90 min)

Goal: Adopt the new policy set and formalize the board's shift to Policy Governance.

- Review the draft Ends and make adjustments.
- Confirm edits to any other policy areas as needed.
- Pass a motion to enact the new policy manual (and officially set aside previous policies or directives).
- Assign: Begin compiling all final policies into one governance manual.