

Desired Attributes for Members of Health System Boards (N.S.)

To execute the Board's responsibilities, members of health organization boards should **ideally** possess certain characteristics and traits:

Strategic and Systems Thinking

- A board's focus should generally be forward-looking and at a "framework" or "big picture" level versus being pre-occupied with the current day-to-day operations. Board members should have the ability to think conceptually and futuristically about their health organization and its inter-relationship with other parts of the health care system. Board members with a strategic and systems orientation are assets to any board.

Business Acumen and Informed Judgement

- The ability to provide wise, thoughtful counsel on a broad range of issues ranks high among the qualities required in board members. They must develop a depth of knowledge of their health organization's business, in order to understand and question the assumptions upon which the strategic and business plans are based, and to form an independent judgement as to the probability that such plans can be achieved.

Integrity and Accountability

- Board members must demonstrate high ethical standards and integrity in their personal and professional dealings, and be willing to act on – and remain accountable for – their boardroom decisions.

Financial Literacy

- A very important responsibility of the Board is to monitor financial performance. To do this, **at least some board members should have a working level** of financial literacy. They should know how to read financial statements, and they should understand the use of financial ratios and other indices for evaluating organizational performance.

Teamwork and Sense of Humour

- The ability of any given board member to function well as a member of a decision-making body is essential to the effective performance of the Board as a whole. Respect for group decision-making processes and the need to support board decisions, once made, is an essential attribute for any board member.

- Board members who value Board and team performance over individual performance, and who possess respect for others, facilitate superior Board performance.
- Board members who are able to have fun and demonstrate a good sense of humour – i.e. who take their role as a board member seriously but not themselves too seriously.

Mature Confidence

Communication

- Openness to others' opinions and the willingness to listen should rank as highly as the ability to communicate persuasively. Board members should have the ability to approach others assertively, responsibly and supportively, and be willing to raise tough questions in a manner that encourages open discussion.

Track Record and Experience

- Board members should bring a history of achievement that reflects high standards for themselves and others. Past experience on other boards and a demonstrated record of community involvement and commitment are desirable evidence of this.
- It would be considered an asset for board members to have some knowledge or experience in the health sector, or at the very least to have an interest to learn about the health sector.
- Board members should also bring an understanding of and appreciation for the public policy environment and the role of publicly-funded organizations in our society.

Commitment

- Board members who are committed to the work of the Board and who understand the responsibilities that come with being a director and are prepared to devote the time and energy required.
- Board members who support the Mission and Vision and demonstrate the Values of the organization.