

Key Tips for the Healthy Functioning of a Governance Team

The following tips may support the healthy functioning of a governance team:

1. Clarity

Speaking in his podcast “Leading Through – Part 3”, Andy Stanley says: “You cannot lead a strong organization without extraordinary clarity” and “Our mandate, as leaders, is to be clear even when things are not certain”.

A Governance Team should be clear about:

- The provisions in the church’s constitution
- Its role and responsibilities
- Its reporting requirements to church members
- The purpose, values, and vision of the church
- The church’s strategic plan
- Its relationship to the Senior Pastor/Pastor including the delegated* authority that person has, their reporting requirements, and how they will be reviewed
- How any conflicts of interest will be managed

* It is common to think in terms of five different levels of delegation:

Level 5: The Senior Pastor/Pastor is empowered to fully decide and act in an area of church life. The Governance Team would only expect a report at its regular meetings but not at other times. Members of the Governance Team do not get involved in decision making in this area. E.g. Running Sunday Services

Level 4: The Senior Pastor/Pastor is empowered to decide and act in this area of church life however the Governance Team would expect to be notified immediately a decision was taken or implemented in this area. The Governance Team does not decide but does need to be informed. E.g. Dealing with a staff conflict, child safety issue, significant pastoral matter, or certain risks.

Level 3: The Governance Team would expect the Senior Pastor/Pastor to raise the issue with them, to discuss it and seek their advice on it but, in the end, would grant the Senior Pastor/Pastor the capacity to make the decision on what should happen. The Governance Team would expect open conversation E.g. Adopting a new program that fitted well with the existing church vision and strategic priorities, or a proposal about a teaching program.

Level 2: The Governance Team would expect the Senior Pastor/Pastor to raise the issue with them, to discuss it and bring a recommendation of a way forward. However, all would agree that this decision is really a governance level decision and needs to be made by the Governance Team. E.g. Adopting a new program that the church has not been involved in before.

Level 1: All recognise that this decision belongs with the Governance Team and the Senior Pastor/Pastor may need to abide by the decision. E.g. Establishing a review process for the Senior Pastor.

This framework is useful when clarifying the role, responsibilities, and authority of the Senior Pastor/Pastor. It is equally useful when clarifying the roles, responsibilities and authority of others who minister in the life of the church.

“R.A.C.I.” is another tool that many Governance Teams use to support clarity. It stands for Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed. For more information enter RACI in your web based search engine.

2. Membership

Membership of a church Governance Team should not be open to anyone but rather those who have been tested and affirmed by the church. It is important that all members of a church Governance Team:

- Understand the role, responsibilities, and commitment involved (Ensuring this may require potential nominees to meet with the current chairperson, or the Senior Pastor/Pastor, to understand the workings of the Governance Team.)
- Affirm the Church’s Statement of Faith
- Support the Church’s vision
- Are of good character
- Testify to a sense of call
- Are appointed as per the rules in the Church’s constitution

3. Appointment

Baptist churches are free to make appointments to their Governance Teams as they see fit. Some churches encourage Church Members to prayerfully consider who should be appointed and submit nominations accordingly. Nominees are then voted on at a Church Members’ Meeting.

Other churches will also require that nominations are processed and affirmed by the current Governance Team, or by a Nominations Committee, before being voted on by Church Members.

It is not the role of the BA to stipulate how its member churches should elect their Governance Teams. However, the BA does call for processes that are prayerful, well-considered, and that aim to involve all Church Members. Examples of appointment processes may be found in the Sample Constitutions that form part of the Guidance for Baptist Churches when Drawing Up or Revising a Constitution, which is available in the Resources & Tools section.

All Baptist churches should have role descriptions for the members of their Governance Team. It is recommended that anyone who is approached about being nominated speak with the Senior/Sole Pastor, or the chairperson of the Governance Team, about what is involved before allowing their name to go forward.

Some Baptist churches invite prospective appointees to join the Governance Team in an observer capacity. The parameters for such an arrangement differ from church to church. Normally observers are entitled to contribute to Governance Team discussions but may not vote on decisions to be made. Such “internships” could run for six, or twelve, months so providing prospective nominees with firsthand experience of what is involved.

Many Baptist Churches have introduced limits on the number of terms a person can serve on a Governance Team before having to take a break. This is important both for the person, themselves, and for the church. Providing for a sabbatical allows the person who has been serving to rest and be refreshed. It also allows others in the church who may be called and gifted to serve.

4. Induction Process for New Members

A Governance Team will find it helpful to develop a simple induction process for new members. Joining a Governance Team can be a little intimidating, especially if the other members are longstanding. While new members should have been introduced to the workings of the Governance Team when they were contemplating allowing themselves to be nominated, a meeting with the chairperson, or Senior Pastor/Pastor, is a good opportunity to revisit how the team functions and answer any questions the new members have. Introducing a new member to a team of any sort invariably affects the dynamics. Bruce Tuckman’s stages of group development is a classic articulation of this – “forming-storming-norming-performing”. All team members would do well to acquaint themselves with these dynamics.

For more information on stages of group development visit:

<https://www.wcupa.edu/coral/tuckmanStagesGroupDevelopment.aspx>

5. Team Covenant

The members of a Governance Team may agree a covenant with one another to support the healthy functioning of the team. Such a covenant will be prayerfully and thoughtfully agreed by the whole team. It will articulate various elements that team members believe are essential to working well together. Team members will agree to abide by the standards represented by the covenant and give the others permission to hold them to account.

It should be noted that such a covenant belongs to the team that agreed it. When new members are added to a team then it should not be assumed that the covenant continues but rather a new covenant should be agreed by the new team.

6. Consensus & 'Cabinet Responsibility'

The way in which a Governance Team makes decisions, and the way in which such decisions are communicated, will undoubtedly affect church health.

Taking time to build consensus is vital for unity, shared understanding, and clear direction. Ensuring that all voices are heard, and that all views are well-understood, will help towards decisions that members of the team will feel they can support. Spreading discussion over multiple meetings may allow members of the team to hear God's voice; and saturating difficult decisions in prayer will always be essential.

Once consensus has been reached then it is incumbent on all members of the Governance Team to support the consensus publicly, even if they took a different view in the discussions that led to the decision that was made. Horror stories about Governance Team recommendations being brought to church members' meetings for approval and then members of the Governance Team speaking against them are all too commonplace and are precisely that: horror stories. That is no way for a Governance Team to operate and any member who in all good conscience does not feel able to support a recommendation should resign from the Governance Team before speaking against it at a Church Members' Meeting.

7. Meetings

A Governance Team will need to meet for prayer, discussion, and to make decisions. Important considerations for meeting together include:

- Frequency of Meetings
How often will the team meet, and when will the meetings take place?

Establishing a regular rhythm is helpful e.g., the Governance Team will meet on the first Monday evening of each month from 7:30pm – 10pm.

- **Length of Meeting**
The chairperson should ensure that meetings finish at a reasonable hour! A good guide for an evening meeting is that no item on the agenda should be started after 10pm.
- **Chairperson**
One of the Governance Team should act as chairperson and steer the meeting through the agenda.
- **Formal versus Informal**
It can be tempting for members of a Governance Teams to adopt an informal approach to team business. While a certain amount of informality is welcome a Governance Team must never forget that it fulfils a very important role in the life of a church. Every effort should be made to ensure that it does this effectively. Team members should be provided with an agenda well in advance of the meeting and come having prayerfully considered the contributions they want to make. Accurate minutes of meetings should be made, circulated to all members of the Governance Team, and kept on file for future reference.
- **Conduct**
The Governance Team of any church is on holy ground and members must conduct themselves accordingly. Candour is important and all team members should be encouraged to speak the truth, but only ever in love. Confidentiality is important and some matters are to remain between team members. Consensus is important and, having reached consensus, all team members must support it publicly.
- **Prayer**
Prayer must saturate the work that a Governance Team does. Team members must be people of prayer themselves, and generous amounts of time must be given to praying together. Some Governance Teams have found it helpful to build time for prayer into each meeting. Others have structured meetings in such a way that time is given to business at one meeting and exclusively to prayer at the next.
- **Agenda**
Any meeting of a Governance Team should work to a clear agenda that has been provided to team members well-enough in advance for them to come prepared.
When drawing up the agenda the person responsible should be careful to include standing items as well as invite items for

consideration from team members.

Standing items may include the following:

- Vision and strategy, including setting the overall direction of the church, developing and monitoring strategic directions, ensuring healthy change management, etc
- Fiduciary responsibilities, including finances, property, risk management, legal compliance, safe church, etc
- Church program responsibilities, including evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of church ministries
- High level problem solving, including crisis management
- Supporting, empowering, and reviewing the Senior Pastor
- Assessing the Leadership Council's own effectiveness

- Conflicts of Interests

A Governance Team may find it helpful to develop a Conflicts of Interests policy. Sample policies are available in the Tools & Resources section.

- Minutes

Accurate minutes of meetings should be made, circulated to all members of the Governance Team within a week of the meeting taking place and kept on file for future reference.

It may be helpful for the minutes to highlight the actions points arising from each meeting along with the people responsible.

Minutes should be approved at the next meeting of a Governance Team and any matter arising reported on until it has been resolved.

8. Communications

Good governance is founded on trust. When people trust their leaders then they are more inclined to follow their lead. A Governance Team can help build trust by ensuring honest and timely communications in the life of the church.

Communication is two-way and at the same time as being careful to provide relevant information to the church a Governance Team must be careful to collect relevant information from the church. Providing people with appropriate opportunities to feedback on important matters is wise. Surveys, forums, comment groups, focus groups, and a multitude of listening exercises can all be used to facilitate this.

In some circumstances engaging external facilitators to oversee the collection of feedback is helpful and the BA has a team of consultants who can assist. For more information email health@nswactbaptists.org.au

Healthy Functioning Reflection Tool

Each member of the Governance Team should rate the following statements and then the whole Team should compare answers and reflect on where improvements could be made

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Governance Team is clear about each of the bullet points listed in section 1, above (p18)					
The appointment process for members of the Governance Team considers each of the bullet points in section 2, above (p19)					
The appointment of members of the Governance Team involves church members in a prayerful and well-considered process					
There is an induction process for new members of the Governance Team					
The Governance Team has an up-to-date Team Covenant					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
The practices of the Governance Team help to build consensus					
Once consensus has been reached all members of the Governance Team support it publicly					
Governance Team meetings are well-run					
The Governance Team gives adequate time to prayer					