

**National SAM Innovation Project (NSIP)
Board of Directors
Evaluation Session Protocol**

Purpose: The following session protocol provides a method to be used by the NSIP Board of Directors to structure reflective conversations about the collective effectiveness of the board. This protocol is not structured to dictate what the specific concerns of the board should be, but instead to help the board to:

- a) Focus on keeping its work directed toward areas the research shows are the focus of effective boards, and
- b) Be thoughtful about their levels of effectiveness relative to their chosen goals and priorities as stated in the mission and vision and other relevant documents created by the NSIP Board.

Protocol for Board Member Participation:

1. Prior to meeting:

- a. **Review relevant documents** – agendas, meeting minutes/notes/transcripts, reports and any other sources that might document:
 - i. Issues, topics, projects, etc. on which the board has been spending its time, and
 - ii. The board’s progress – or lack thereof – toward meeting its official goals for the period covered by the annual evaluation.
- b. **Complete the online self-evaluation survey** – each member of the board evaluates the actions of the board through an online survey.
- c. **Prepare for Shared Learning** – board members prepare to engage in some type of shared learning (article, video clip, etc.) to build mutual understanding on the purpose of the board and role of its members.

2. Participate in Shared Learning – board members participate in some type of shared learning (article, video clip, etc.) to build mutual understanding on the purpose of the board and role of its members

3. Review Board Self-Evaluation Results – compiled data from the online board self-evaluation are provided to each board member for their review.

4. Participate in a reflection session – using the results of the Board’s self-evaluation and each board member’s personal reflections, each board member participates in a reflection session with the other board members for the purpose of improving the efforts of the board.

- a. Designate a session facilitator
 - i. This may be a neutral, outside facilitator or a board member, a staff member, or some other trusted “friend of the board”
 - ii. The facilitator should stay personally neutral, keep the group focused on task and steadily progressing toward achieving the session’s goals, and make sure that all participants get roughly equal “air time.”
- b. Designate a session recorder
 - i. This individual will be responsible for recording the important points made during this session.
- c. Analyze the board’s ongoing work, its vision and mission and how each member’s perception compares to the results of the self-evaluation data

- i. Individual Work – Working quietly and independently, each board member writes answers to the following questions:
 - 1) Are the board’s actions and its focus consistent with the shared learning in item #3 and Focus Areas on page 3 of the protocol? Explain.
 - 2) In what areas from the self-evaluation data does it appear the board is functioning most effectively?
 - 3) In what areas from the self-evaluation data does it appear that the board is ineffective or that there appear to be inconsistencies?
 - 4) What changes should the board consider based on the data so as to better accomplish its vision and mission?
 - d. Sharing and discussion:
 - ii. The facilitator works through each of the questions – one at a time – allowing for input from each of the board’s members on each of the questions.
 - 1) *Notes on Feedback: Feedback should be general, directed toward the work of the board as a whole and not to any individual member of the board. The facilitator must not allow the board to assume that they have said everything that needs to be said and move on – often the most meaningful feedback comes after participants have given all the “easy” initial feedback and had to struggle with uncomfortable silences.*
- 5. Establish Area(s) of Focus** – Review potential work areas for the board. Consider the following areas when establishing an area(s) of focus.
- a. Clarity of purpose
 - b. Connection to the SAMs community
 - c. Appropriate delegation of authority
 - d. Role of the executive director relative to the focus area
 - e. Process for monitoring and acting on performance
 - f. Active responsibility for itself
 - i. Which area or areas does the board collectively agree should be an area of focus for the upcoming year?
 - ii. What types of actions should the board consider taking in these areas?
- 6. Plan the board’s work for the next year ahead** – based on the collective agreements from the previous section, what will be the specific actions to be taken and evidence of success?
- a. Which of the work areas of the Board will be an area of focus?
 - b. What specific actions does the board intend to take in each selected area?
 - c. What will be the evidence of success for each of these actions?
- 7. Debrief the process** – The facilitator then leads a short debrief on the process the board has just experienced. Options for this debrief include:
- g. A short time for open and unstructured comments from board members (best used with experienced and effective boards); or
 - h. A structured feedback time with each board member providing input; or
 - i. A structured process that takes place after the session, perhaps with board members submitting written comments to the facilitator, who then uses those comments to prepare a debrief report for the board.

Focus Areas of Effective Boards

Effective Boards:

- Set the philosophical tone for the organization
- Set expectations / goals / targets for the organization, but leave implementation and management to the executive director and staff
- Work at the policy level, not at the management level, and watch to assure that board policies foster the conditions necessary for success
- Monitor the organization's progress toward achieving the expectations / goals / targets set by the board
- Work through the executive director and hold the executive director accountable for achieving the expectations / goals / targets set by the board
- Understand and use data as a basis for their decision-making