

The Strategic Board Assessment II

ISM has completed a two-year analysis of the relationship between ISM's long-established Strategic Board Assessment instrument¹ and the six ISM Stability Markers that are largely determined and driven by Board decisions and policies.² We now offer this update and revision of the original instrument. With one exception, the items are the same as in the first iteration, but the scoring of the instrument has been altered dramatically so that Board leaders can prioritize and focus structure and function with more precision.

As Board President or Chair of the Committee on Trustees, begin using this second-generation instrument in your annual or twice-annual administration of the Strategic Board Assessment, both as an independent measure of your Board's strategic orientation and as a critical self-scoring component in the ISM Stability Markers. The instrument's revised scoring system yields a single 24-point total. That total comprises your Board's score on the governance portion of the ISM Stability Markers.

Use this updated instrument and its revised scoring system as soon as practical, to establish a fresh baseline for scoring the

Strategic Board Assessment. You will not be able to compare your scores on this revised instrument to your scores on the first-generation instrument, since this data-based overhaul of the scoring system makes such comparisons meaningless.

In developing your Board's strategic orientation, place early emphasis with your Trustees on the items weighted most heavily in ISM's statistical analysis, since those are the items with greatest impact on your school's long-term strategic strength, i.e., items No.1 and 11, and, secondarily, items No. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 15. The remaining items should still receive your attention; make your Trustees aware that those items will impact your Board's ability to influence strategic excellence in a tertiary fashion. That is, changes for the better on these items are not going to result in direct, immediate impact on the school's stability. Instead, they will support improvement on the primary and secondary items. 

¹ See "Strategic Board Evaluation," *Ideas & Perspectives*, 26-4-13.

² See "The ISM Stability Markers: The Fourth Iteration," *I&P*, 39-8-29.

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Date/Year: _____					
This instrument is designed to be completed by Trustees at least once a year. The Committee on Trustees (COT) normally administers and scores the instrument. The COT then includes an analysis of its tabulation as part of the annual (or twice-annual) Board self-evaluation.					
For Boards just beginning to move in the direction of the strategic Board, the initial self-score serves as the foundation for a Board development plan, fashioned by the COT for Board consideration.					
Individual Trustees: Please circle a number to represent your impression of your Board on each of the 15 items below.					
1. Our Trustees focus on the strategic, long-term impact of issues and decisions.	0	1	2	3	4
Rarely					Always
2. We have developed a planning document that is simultaneously visionary, practical, and financially feasible.	0	1	2	3	4
No planning document					Exemplary planning document
3. Each spring/summer, we create our annual Board agenda using items derived explicitly from our planning document.	0	1	2	3	4
No planning document				Board agenda derived explicitly from planning document	
4. Our Committee on Trustees creates a Board profiles (a list of descriptors or characteristics aligned with the planning document) and cultivates potential Trustees with the profile as guide.	0	1	2	3	4
No profile					Thorough profile-specific cultivation

5. Our full-Board meetings are organized around one major action item on which a vote is taken or a consensus is reached during the meeting.	0	1	2	3	4
Meetings not organized on this basis					Meetings organized on this basis
6. “Current day-to-day events” discussions do not dominate our full-Board meetings.	0	1	2	3	4
Current events dominate					Strategic/long range issues dominate
7. There is a Head Support and Evaluation Committee (HSEC), or its equivalent, which assists the Head, when appropriate, in handling “current events issues” and which is the only forum for Head evaluation.	0	1	2	3	4
No HSEC exists			HSEC operates effectively (handling “current events issues” and evaluation)		
8. Our Board committees are given explicit charges each year.	0	1	2	3	4
No charges					Annual charges for all committees
9. Our Committee on Trustees evaluates the Board based on the Board’s fulfillment of its annual Board agenda (which is, in turn, derived annually from the planning document), and the Board takes action.	0	1	2	3	4
No Committee on Trustees evaluation				Comprehensive formal evaluation followed by appropriate action	
10. Our Board has instituted a major gifts program/committee in which potential major donors are continuously cultivated year after year, regardless of when (or if) the next campaign is scheduled to begin.	0	1	2	3	4
No major gifts program/committee				In place and effective major gifts program/committee	
11. There is depth of leadership on our Board (i.e., a number of individuals whom one can readily imagine in the Board presidency and/or holding critical Committee Chair positions).	0	1	2	3	4
No leadership depth					Great leadership depth
12. There is a high level of mutual trust between our Board and our School Head.	0	1	2	3	4
No level of mutual trust					Very high level of mutual trust
13. Our Board places great emphasis on its annual new-Trustee orientation and on its continuing education process.	0	1	2	3	4
No education of any kind				Great emphasis on orientation and on continuing education	
14. Our Board committees regularly tap the expertise of non-Trustees, using them as committee members, committee guests, or unofficial “consultants.”	0	1	2	3	4
No use of non-Trustees				Appropriate use of non-Trustees by Board committees	
15. One-hundred percent of our Trustees take their “due diligence” seriously (i.e., preparation for meetings; on-time attendance at all meetings; full participation in meetings; personal financial contributions promptly made in support of all fundraising goals; serious commitment to the confidentiality of Board matters; enthusiastic support publicly for the school, its faculty, its Head, and each Trustee’s own Board colleagues).	0	1	2	3	4
None					100% of our Trustees

Scoring: The Strategic Board Assessment generates 24 possible points in the scoring of the 147-point ISM Stability Marker array; the scoring approach shown below conforms to that number (i.e., 24 possible points).

1. Average the participants' scores for numbers 1 and 11; multiply by 4 (range 0–16).
2. Average the participants' scores for numbers 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 15; multiply by 2 (range 0–8).
3. Sum these two (range 0–24).
4. Do not include items 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 14 in the tabulation.

The items just listed in No. 4 above are included because they represent good practice in operating a “strategic” Board of Trustees. Thus, ISM recommends that the Committee on Trustees include these seven items in its annual analysis of the Board’s strategic orientation. (This would mean, for example, reporting to the Board on mean scores for items 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 14, just as on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 15.)

The items listed in No. 4 do not, however, correlate strongly with the ISM Stability Marker outcomes and, thus, do not play a role in determining your school’s score on the Stability Markers. Use only the items in No. 1 and 2, above, in computing your Board’s self-score on the governance portion of the Stability Markers.