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Five Tips for Building a "Dream Team" in Your Organization

[Health Systems Strengthening](#) [2]



Strong, well-functioning health systems need strong leadership, management, and governance. Over the next couple of weeks, leading up to conversations that MSH is hosting at the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research next month in Vancouver, we will be sharing stories and insights about the role of leadership, management and governance in health systems strengthening. This is the third in a series of four blog posts on this topic. [See the full series](#) [3]

In my nearly 20 years of experience in global health, I have seen that leadership and governance often receives little attention, even though it is an essential building block of any strong health system.

This is why LeaderNet ^[4] – an online global community of health professionals – recently hosted a seminar entitled Dream Teams: Bringing Boards and Staff Together for Organizational Success ^[5].

The seminar aimed to bring leadership and governance to the forefront of the conversation, providing a forum for global health professionals to exchange ideas, experiences, and resources about leading teams that work at all levels of health systems around the world.

Here are five tips discussed at the seminar for bringing your organization's board and staff together to create a well-functioning and effective team.

1. Seek diversity

Consider a governing board of approximately 5-11 members, depending on the size of the organization and the range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for the board to contribute to organizational success. Look for diversity in age, gender, expertise, background, and experience. Include people who represent the communities served and your partners. Seek people who are good at dealing with the media, conflict management, fundraising, and who can tap into their own networks. Look for people with an entrepreneurial spirit who are passionate about the organization's mission and values – people who are willing to roll up their sleeves, work well on a team, and value honesty and transparency.

2. Pay attention to barriers

Barriers to realizing your dream team may include problems of leadership, structure, lack of transparency and equity, people serving for personal gain, lack of trust, poor teamwork, and lack of focus. Turn these barriers into solutions. If you are in the building stage, first identify, cultivate, and recruit the right members (as suggested above). More established boards might focus on improving their orientation programs and providing opportunities for continuous governance education.

3. Focus on your board's structure and work

Board structure should be based on the long-term strategies of the organization. Create committees for ongoing tasks such as fundraising, communication, nominations, orientation and education. For activities that have clear end dates, temporary task forces may be more useful. Improve the quality of your board meetings by creating agendas jointly developed by the board chair and CEO, and sharing the agenda and supporting materials well in advance of the meeting. Allocate sufficient time for meaningful discussion, use consent agendas, put important items at the beginning, and review progress on actions taken or recommendations made at past meetings. A board chairperson who is skilled at conducting meetings can ensure time is well used and that all board members participate and contribute freely. Ensure that accurate minutes of the meetings are taken and circulated promptly after the meeting.

4. Foster strong partnerships between your board and your organization's leadership team

A board must build a strong relationship with the CEO. Open and honest communication between the board chair and the CEO is important to understanding the causes of any problems. Clarifying expectations, and documenting roles and responsibilities early on can help set the foundation for a strong relationship. Ensuring that the CEO is keeping the board informed of pertinent issues and that there is full transparency in financial matters are all important to maintaining your dream team. To prevent misunderstandings, ensure that boards are well prepared for meetings, have the information they need to make decisions, and

provide appropriate induction and refresher training for members to ensure they are clear about their roles.

5. Manage risk

Risk is inherent in any organization's strategy. Boards govern and senior leadership manages internal and external risks to protect the organization and its assets. Internal risks can be largely mitigated by enacting and enforcing a code of conduct and ethics. Your organization should have a risk management plan specific to the risks associated with its strategy. External risks are harder to predict and control (e.g. natural disasters and economic shocks). Careful identification of these risks and their impact mitigation should be a priority for boards and management teams. Constitution of a risk and oversight committee, cultivating a culture of risk awareness, identification and management, and teamwork in managing and governing risk are central to risk oversight and management.

For more information, read [Leaders Who Govern](#) [6], where you'll find tools, checklists, do's and don't's, and more tips to start building your dream team.

Karen Johnson Lassner, Susan Putter, Mahesh Shukla, Sylvia Vriesendorp, and Helena Walkowiak also contributed to this piece.

[Leadership Management and Governance \(LMG\)](#) [7], [LeaderNet](#) [8], [LMG series](#) [3], [Leadership Management and Governance for Stronger Health Systems](#) [9]

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