GOVERNANCE INNOVATION READINESS
A pulse-check

While governance innovation can feel daunting, it's really about doing things **differently. It could be a small shift**, which makes a big difference, like a switch from formal committees to a more agile way of doing governance; **incremental changes over time that shift things**; to a **full shake up or transformation** of how governance is done.

This quick pulse check will give your organization a sense of its readiness to embark on reimagining governance. Taking the time to check in before launching into change can reduce the chances of resistance down the road.

Innovation is messy, and there aren't clear or defined lines. It calls on the organization to challenge assumptions and experiment. There will be discomfort and ambiguity as well as 'aha' and 'oh no' moments. But **messiness is the magic sauce** that enables innovative thinking to happen. It prompts breakthroughs and sparks new ideas, enabling organizational leaders to grow, stretch, and dream bigger.

People will have different comfort levels with the messiness of innovation. It can be helpful for a small group of people who are more comfortable with ambiguity and complexity to help champion the upfront work, while looping the rest of the team in along the way.

The first step is to bring the questions below to key people in your organization who are directly involved in governance. It might be helpful to share **Why Reimagine?** as you consider the responses.

REIMAGINING
GOVERNANCE

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☑ **Is there a clear and shared understanding about our motivations for reimagining governance?**

Identifying the organization's motivations for change is a critical first step. Those motivators, and the vision they inspire, will be an important guiding star for the board and staff leadership team throughout the reimagining journey. It also helps the process to focus on 'what is to be achieved and why' before getting into how it's done. Finding different ways to do governance work doesn't mean your current governance is broken and needs to be fixed; it's about grabbing hold of the opportunity to create better, or more intentional ways of working.

If there aren't some inspiring reasons to make shifts, bring about change and do things differently, then this might not be the right time to reimagine. **Explore some of the motivations for reimagining governance** from other nonprofits and charities.

☑ **Do you have leaders who can champion the work of reimagining?**

Reimagining governance is only achievable if people are brought along the journey; change rarely happens when it's imposed. One of the success factors is having a group of champions that can steward the process, communicate effectively, and see it through into action. These champions should at least include the CEO/ED and board chair, as well as some board and staff leadership team members. Without these key people's buy-in to do things differently, action will stall.

Many of the processes in the Lab can be held by a smaller working group who act as a bridge between the work and others who are participating in governance. However, it's important to keep power dynamics and culture in mind so the work is a shared pursuit.

If there aren't currently enough people that can champion the work and guide the process, then step back and see if you can bring more people into this important work. This may also indicate that there isn't a shared understanding about why change is valuable.

Do you currently have the time, resources, and capacity to think about doing governance differently?

Think about whether the organization is currently able to allocate enough time to reflect, challenge, debate, and deepen understanding about governance as well as see the process through to action steps. This work can't be rushed and needs deep and shared motivations to be sustainable. It also needs support, like note-taking, synthesizing of information and conversation facilitation.

Timing is key. The work of reimagining governance needs to realistically fit into the current workflows. If your organization is facing some crises or choppy waters, you probably don't have the time or capacity to take risks and experiment.

Do you have an internal environment and culture that can support innovation?

Innovation work is supported and fuelled by organizational cultures that demonstrate deep trust, an enthusiasm for learning and inquiry, and a commitment to good relationships.

Some characteristics and approaches that are helpful to change-work include:

- Comfort and experience with conversations about complex issues that don't necessarily have immediate, clear answers or actions.

- Comfort with self-reflection and willingness to explore personal mindsets and biases.

- Belief that real change requires shifts in personal ways of thinking and behaving.

If the organization is struggling internally or needs to do some work in some of these areas, it may be worth pausing to invest in creating the right kind of environment to reimagine. Learn more about culture and how it manifests in the resource, **_Governance culture in a nonprofit organization._**

Can you let go of your current ways of doing things?

Finding new and more intentional ways of doing governance means challenging the status quo. To do this, it's important to uncover collective and personal assumptions and beliefs about how governance must or should be done. It helps to explore who and what may be holding the status quo in place, and ask with curiosity whether that is real or perceived, and if they are surmountable. Letting go of old ways of doing things necessitates asking bold and brave questions, so you don't keep arriving at the same kinds of solutions. Questions like "*Why do we think that?*" or "*What could be possible if we did things this way?*".

Most importantly, it's necessary to give yourselves permission to experiment and try new ways of working. It can help to get away from your normal routines and seek

out spaces and practices that spark inspiration. It can also be helpful to experiment with a few areas rather than try to do everything at once.

If most people directly involved in governance feel things are working "just fine" and there's not a lot of room for improvement, then you may want to encourage people to take some time for people to explore the **Lab resources** and foundational work to inspire them.

This resource is part of the Reimagining Governance Lab, a virtual hub for governance innovation full of resources, tools, and stories. **Visit the Lab.**

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