

IMPROVE GOVERNANCE BY UNPACKING RESPONSIBILITIES AND DECISIONS

This tool helps organizations unpack the broad governance responsibilities, and decisions that need to be made, by their characteristics, so they're clearer and more differentiated. This differentiation provides organizational leaders with valuable information about the kinds of skills, knowledge, experience, and personal attributes that are needed and what processes will get the work done most effectively. Every organization is unique, so descriptions will vary depending on its culture and circumstances.

For example, as a strategic issue or opportunity emerges, it might be:

- Strategic with high risk and many complexities, requiring more formal structures and processes and strong analytic capacity; or
- Complicated, involving minimal immediate risks and can benefit from agile processes that draw diverse stakeholder participation.



At a glance: What this tool makes possible

Create clarity and more refined approaches.



You may find it helpful to start with this [Innovation readiness pulse-check](#).



HOW IT WORKS

The goal is to create more clarity about governance responsibilities, and the decisions that flow from them, to improve governance processes and who's engaged in them. It can be used as governance decisions emerge, or in a more fulsome review of current practices.

The process can be completed by a small working group, which includes people from the board and staff leadership team. It can be completed in a session if there are only one or a few governance responsibilities or decisions that need to be reviewed. A fulsome review may require multiple sessions.

Improve governance by unpacking responsibilities and decisions



DEEPER DIVE: WHAT THIS TOOL MAKES POSSIBLE

- **Create clarity and more refined approaches.** Creating effective governance processes and structures, and deciding who could and should participate in them, starts with intent – what governance responsibility needs to be fulfilled? But sometimes it can be confusing. There are eight core functions of governance, each with corresponding responsibilities. Some responsibilities must be done by the board to meet its legal and legislative requirements, but many can be shared with or delegated to other people. Sorting them by their distinct characteristics will bring clarity and help to design better governance processes.

In some instances, organizations try to accomplish governance responsibilities through a handful of processes or structures. This misses the opportunity to be more targeted, nuanced, and nimble in how governance work is assigned and done, for example, by using more agile work-groups that form and reform depending on what needs to be accomplished.



DETAILED PROCESS STEPS:

1 Do some pre-work to get ready.

- Decide who will participate in the exercise.
- Review [Differentiating governance responsibilities and decisions](#), which breaks down the different ways that governance responsibilities or their corresponding decisions can be differentiated.

2 Express what you are trying to accomplish.

- Use this [jamboard template](#) to capture notes.

Improve governance by unpacking responsibilities and decisions



EXAMPLES

Are you...

- *Faced with a significant opportunity/issue and want to clarify who can and should participate in addressing it and what processes will facilitate it?*
- *Refreshing how governance roles and responsibilities are assigned?*
- *Strengthening the processes you have in place to fulfill governance responsibilities and make decisions?*

3 Choose what you will focus on.

- Name the broad governance responsibility that needs to be fulfilled (e.g., *develop strategic directions and priorities*), or the decision that needs to be made (e.g., *should we expand, contract, or let go of a significant program?*).
- Place the responsibility or decision you decided to work with on the continuums. You can use one, both, or all of them.
- Access some helpful [Facilitation tips](#) to support your conversation(s). These can be used collectively as a group or by an assigned facilitator.

4 Summarize the learnings and decide who to share the information with and how it will be used.

This tool is part of the Reimagining Governance Lab, a virtual hub for governance innovation full of resources, tools, and stories. [Visit the Lab.](#)

We operate under a [Creative Commons License- Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0](#), so you can copy and redistribute the material. We ask that you give appropriate credit: Created by the Ontario Nonprofit Network in collaboration with Ignite NPS. We require that materials and documents be shared in their entirety, and have branding intact.