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[Board Cafe](#) ^[1] • By Jan Masaoka • November 13, 2011 • [Email](#) ^[2] [Print](#) ^[3]



*In the last issue of Blue Avocado, we discussed how board evaluations of executive directors (CEOs) are different from all other performance evaluations in the organization. These differences -- including the limited ability of board members to observe the executive -- are also among the reasons why **45% of executives have not had a review in the last year** (CompassPoint's [Daring to Lead 2011](#) ^[4] study). In this article we draw on that discussion and on the submissions of dozens of Blue Avocado readers to propose a process and an evaluation instrument.*

(At the end of this article is a link to download the survey form in Word to make it easy for you to modify.)

When we reviewed various the dozens of evaluation instruments sent in by Blue Avocado readers, we found that nearly all of them had these attributes in common:

- Most reviews used a checklist form (rather than narrative)
- Most focused on ED's actions and behaviors (rather than on organizational performance)
- Most relied on input from board members only (rather than include input from others such as staff, funders, clients, art critics, etc.)

Although we feel that evaluations that are narrative, focus on organizational performance and contain elements of a 360 degree evaluation are better ways to evaluate executives, we also realize:

- Without a checklist of some kind, the ED evaluation most likely won't take place
- Evaluation of organizational performance is complex and is more likely to arise *from* executive evaluation than to occur *before* it, and
- Input from others in and outside the organization is more appropriately focused on organizational assessment, not as narrowly as on ED evaluation.

Most importantly: despite the fact that board members may have little to go on and not much experience with ED evaluation, it's still important to have the evaluation.

Perhaps the most important thing we learned from executive directors about the value that did emerge from evaluations is that the discussions -- if held in good faith -- result in better-aligned expectations and goals for the organization and for the executive.

As a result, we adapted instruments to:

- Give board members the chance to reflect (and discuss) not only on the executive's performance but on the performance of the board and of the organization
- Spark discussions between the executive and the board (rather than to sum them up)
- Give the executive the opportunity reflect and learn (if so inclined)
- Provide a basis for salary and fire/keep decisions,
- Lead to alignment and clarification of goals and expectations.

Process

A. The board should assign a small group or one person to managing the ED's evaluation. This can be the officers, or a task force created for the job.

B. The ED should go over the process and instrument(s) with that committee prior to the start. This can be as simple as an email or as deep as a group discussion about goals of the evaluation.

C. The board can collect the information from respondents. Rather than compile an "average," it's important to report how many board members marked "outstanding," how many marked "needs improvement," and so forth. Having all board members mark "fine" is quite different from half of them marking "outstanding" while another half mark "improvement needed."

D. An executive session of the board (perhaps 1 hour without any staff present) to discuss the survey results and comments in general.

E. Relaying the information to the executive: by the board chair or another assigned member or two.

F. The executive's chance to respond (in person or in writing) to the full board.

G. The review and the response (if there is one) are placed in the executive's personnel file.

Tip: Involve HR to make sure the review takes place. Most supervisors would not complete reviews of their staff if there were not someone from HR reminding and nagging them. An HR or finance staffperson can keep reminding the board officers that a review must be completed for the executive's personnel file and that salary documentation must be provided.

Please do not use any of these templates "as is." Instead, use them as a basis for forms that are relevant to your organization's circumstances:

1. Overall organizational performance	
a. Works with the board and management staff to develop strategies for achieving mission goals and financial viability.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
b. Appropriately provides both support and leadership to the board.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
c. Demonstrates quality of analysis and judgment related to progress and opportunities, and need for changes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
d. Maintains and utilizes a working knowledge of significant developments and trends in the field (examples: AIDS/HIV, environmental law)	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
e. Builds respect and profile for the organization in its various constituencies. Supports the overall field/movement in which the organization works.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
f. Establishes ambitious goals for excellence and impact and initiates, maintains, and adapts programs with excellence and impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
g. Comments on overall organizational performance:	

2. Community leadership	
a. Serves as an effective spokesperson. Represents the organization well to its constituencies, including clients/members/patrons, other nonprofits, government agencies, elected officials, funders, and the general public	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
b. Establishes and makes use of working relationships with organizations and individuals in the field.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
c. Sees that communication vehicles are developed and utilized well.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
d. Comments on community leadership:	

3. Administration and Human Resources	
a. Establishes and leads an effective management team	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
b. Recruits and retains a diverse staff (as the organization has identified diversity)	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
c. Maintains appropriate balance between programs and administration	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
d. Ensures that procedures and organizational culture maximize volunteer involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
e. Ensures compliance with relevant workplace and employment laws	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
f. Sees that employees are licensed and credentialed as required and that appropriate background checks are conducted	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
f. Ensures that job descriptions are developed and that regular performance reviews are completed and documented	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
g. Leads staff in maintaining a climate of excellence, accountability, and respect.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
h. Comments on administration and HR:	

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4. Financial sustainability and mission impact	
a. Assures adequate control and accounting of all funds, including maintaining sound financial practices	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
b. Sees that programs and activities are developed, executed, modified and dismantled to maximize mission impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
c. Works with the staff, finance committee and the board to prepare budgets, monitor progress, and initiate changes (to operations and/or to budgets) as appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
d. Sees that official records and documents are retained; sees to compliance with federal state and local regulations (examples: Form 990, payroll withholding)	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
e. Develops realistic, ambitious plans for acquiring funds	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
f. Jointly with the president and secretary of the board, conducts official correspondence for the organization, and jointly with designated officers, executes legal documents appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
g. Successfully involves others in fundraising and in earned income generation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
h. Establishes positive relationships with institutional funders such as foundations, government agencies, churches, corporations, and so forth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
i. Establishes positive relationships with individual donors.	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
j. Comments on financial sustainability and mission impact:	

5. Board of directors	
a. With the board chair, appropriately involves/does not involve board members in decisions	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
b. Provides appropriate leadership to the board	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
c. Sees that board members are kept fully informed in a timely way on the condition of the organization and important factors influencing it	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
d. Sees that board committees are appropriately supported	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
e. Works with the board officers to ensure that the board's is effective as a body and that recruitment, involvement and departures of individual board members are effective	<input type="checkbox"/> Outst <input type="checkbox"/> V Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fine <input type="checkbox"/> Impr Needed <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
f. Comments on the board:	

6. Are there additional comments you wood like to make that are not within the above categories?

Senior Staff on Executive Director Review
Please help the board of directors conduct its review of the executive director's performance over the last year by sharing your thoughts. Your comments will be shared with the members of the board of directors, but your name will not be identified with specific comments. Please submit this to _____ via _____ by _____ date.
1. Overall organizational performance
2. Community leadership
3. Administration and HR
4. Financial sustainability and mission impact

5. Board of directors
6. Miscellaneous
7. Are there any specific suggestions for professional development or individual workplan that the board might consider recommending to the executive director?

What about 360 degree evaluations?

Every few years it's very helpful for a board to get a sense of how its executive -- and the organization as a whole -- is experienced by volunteers, visitors, patrons, clients, members, funders, collaborative partners, and others. A 360 degree evaluation takes a good deal of time (not only from the board but from everyone who is asked to give input), and it makes the most sense to use the opportunity not only to learn about the CEO, but about the organization.

Please [click here to see a Blue Avocado article on 360 degree organizational assessments](#) [5].

Other data

Many organizations also have established goals and objectives for the year, such as number of enrollments, visitors to the art gallery, decrease in euthanized animals, and so forth. There may also be data available such as average rating score for workshops conducted by the organization, ticket sales, attendees at annual fundraising lunch, etc.

Measuring organizational performance against such benchmarks is tremendously helpful, as is measuring performance against an updated job description. However, there are limitations to over-relying on such benchmarks:

- There may be external reasons why performance did not meet benchmarks, and those gaps may be more productively addressed in a broader context than the annual review of the CEO.
- A great many organizations do not have such organizational performance benchmarks, nor does the executive have a recently-updated job description. It's necessary to have an evaluation tool that does not require these to be in place.

The role of judgment

No one every has enough information to do a perfectly informed, "objective" evaluation of anyone.

If an executive evaluation results in substantive discussion about organizational goals, organizational values about how work is done, and how the board and executive can both do better, then the evaluation "worked."

Click below on the Attachment to download the form in Word to make it easy to modify.

Our thanks to the many anonymous Blue Avocado readers who contributed to this article, as well as to Nancy Aleck, Kathy Booth, Steven Bowman, Marsha Caplan, Douglas Ford, Krista Glaser, Amy Heydlauff, Lyn Hopper, Trudy Hughes, Jeanette Issa, Shalom Black Lane, Kristen Larsen, Peggy Liuzzi, Dan Lozer, Diane May, Pat Moore, Paul Rosenberger, Erin Ryan, Penelope Sachs, Kate Stephenson, Lynda J. Timbers, Connie Zienkewicz. I hope we didn't miss anyone! Special thanks, too, to reviewers of this article: Trish Tchume (Young Nonprofit Professionals Network), Liz Heath (Sound Nonprofits), Rick Moyers (Meyer Foundation) and Tim Wolfred (CompassPoint Nonprofit Services).

Jan Masaoka is editor of Blue Avocado, and author of the Best of the Board Cafe, [available here from Amazon](#) [6]. She has been an executive director and board member and experienced both bad and good evaluations from both ends. And lived to tell the tale.

See also in *Blue Avocado*:

- [Evaluating the Executive Director](#) [7] (Part 1 to this article)
- [Firing the Executive Director](#) [8]
- [How Much to Pay the Executive Director](#) [9]

Attachment

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