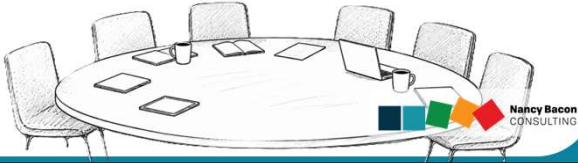


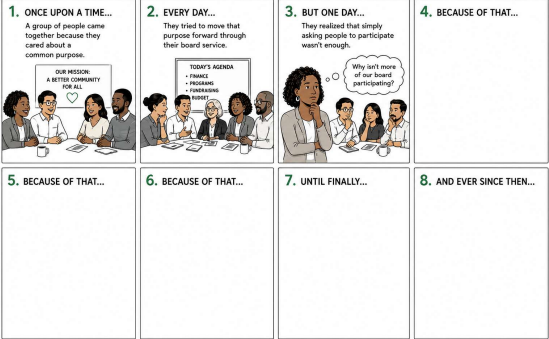
# Why Won't They Engage?

A different way to think about board participation

Nancy Bacon  
nancy@nancybacon.com • nancybacon.com • nonprofitlearning.center



1



2

## Our Goal

Create board experiences where board members can contribute with joy, confidence, and meaningful results.

## Our Plan

1. Reframe the question
2. Understand the system
3. Diagnose your board
4. Design for engagement

3

Nancy Bacon  
www.nancybacon.com

We help nonprofit leaders turn learning into action

NONPROFIT LEARNING CENTER  
www.nonprofitlearning.center

The Trainer Academy

THE NONPROFIT BOARD CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

LET'S TALK MONEY

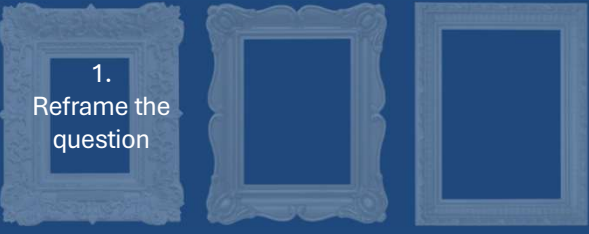
Podcast: Nonprofit Radio Show

### Recent clients



4

# 1. Reframe the question



5

# Why won't my board members engage?



6

“Don’t ask how you motivate other people.  
That’s the wrong way to think about it.

Instead, ask ‘**How can you create the conditions within which other people will motivate themselves.**’”

Edward Deci (2012)

7

“Feed the soil, not the plants.”

-Farmers



8

**Why won't my board members engage?**

**What conditions make participation easier—or harder?**



9

#### Your Turn

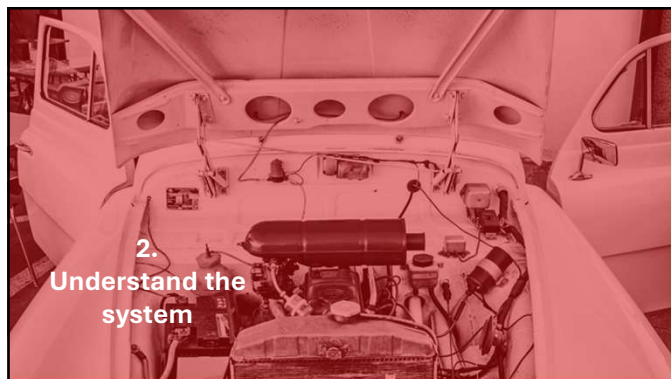
What do you want board members to do more consistently?

How might you reframe the question from “Why won't they \_\_\_?” to “How might I (we) \_\_\_?”

10

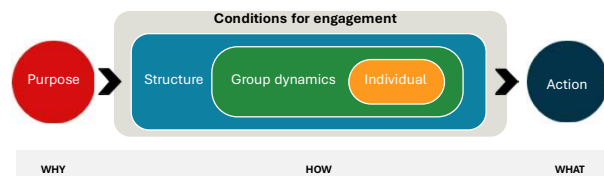
2.

**Understand the system**



11

#### Looking under the engagement hood



12

**Purpose** ➔

**Why are we here?**

**What does our organization exist to make happen?**

**What are we governing?**

13

➔ **Action**

**What are we trying to accomplish together?**

**What does it mean to govern?**

**What does that look like in our organization?**

14

**Conditions for engagement**

Structure Group dynamics Individual

**STRUCTURE**  
What we intentionally create

Roles  
Meetings  
Onboarding  
Information  
Opportunities  
Decision processes

*What is expected of me?  
How do decisions get made?  
What information do I need?  
When and how can I contribute?  
How is the work organized?*

**GROUP DYNAMICS**  
What emerges when people work together

Identity  
Trust  
Belonging  
Norms  
Influence  
Support

*Who are we?  
Can we rely on one another?  
Do I feel included?  
How do we work together?  
Whose voices shape the conversation?  
How do we help each other succeed?*

**INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE**  
How people experience these conditions

Competence  
Agency  
Connection

*Can I do this?  
Do I feel confident doing this?  
Do I feel my actions make a difference?  
Do I feel connected to the work?  
Do I feel connected to others?*

15

**Each reinforces the other**

STRUCTURE What we intentionally create

GROUP DYNAMICS What emerges when people work together

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE How people experience these conditions

16

**The world around us influences how we work**

COMMUNITY NEEDS POLICY & SYSTEMS

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

**Conditions for engagement**

Structure Group dynamics Individual

FUNDING TECHNOLOGY HISTORY & CULTURE

17

**Your Turn**

With a partner, think about our engagement framework.

Answer the questions in your workbook.

Where you would start to influence engagement in your organization?

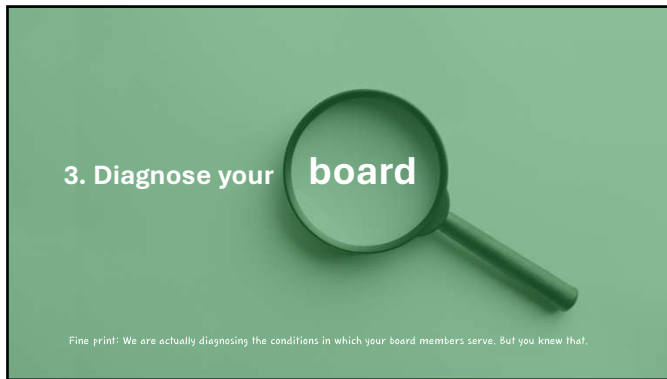
1. Where would you put this?  
Board members don't help with key tasks (i.e., sales meetings).  
Board members are disconnected by two people.  
Members receive (and don't read) a lengthy board packet.  
A new member says, "I don't know enough to contribute."

2. What's the connection...  
How does structure influence group dynamics?  
How does group dynamics influence how individuals experience participation?

3. Where would you start in your own organization? (What can you influence?)

| Structure | Group | Individual |
|-----------|-------|------------|
|           |       |            |
|           |       |            |
|           |       |            |

18



19



20

### Two approaches to identifying potential and interference

**Routine Check-Up**  
Identify strengths and barriers.

**Diagnose a Problem**  
Start with a real challenge and investigate the conditions that might explain it.

21

### Let's get sleuthy.

| Symptom                                                     | Possible explanations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Our board members aren't participating in fundraising.      | <p><b>Purpose:</b> Do they understand why fundraising is essential to achieving the mission?</p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Have we clearly defined what fundraising means and what is expected?</p> <p><b>Group dynamics:</b> Is fundraising something only a few people do while others stay quiet?</p> <p><b>Individual experience:</b> Do board members feel confident, capable, and supported in fundraising conversations?</p> |
| Meetings are quiet. The same three people speak every time. | <p><b>Purpose:</b> Are meetings connected to meaningful decisions, or are they mostly reports?</p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Does the agenda create opportunities for discussion?</p> <p><b>Group dynamics:</b> Have people learned that it's safer to stay quiet?</p> <p><b>Individual experience:</b> Do members feel prepared, valued, and able to contribute?</p>                                                               |

22

### Your Turn

What is one thing you are observing with your board?

What are possible explanations?  
(Purpose, structure, group dynamics, and individual experience)

23



24

How do we intentionally design environments where people can do their best work together?

25



We test ideas and see what happens.

26

### Plan your approach

1

Return to your possible explanations



2

Narrow down your ideas to a few (considering additive and subtractive solutions)



3

Get specific on next steps



27

### Make It Stick

Where will this fit into your existing work?

What obstacles should you plan for?

How will you gather feedback and adjust?

Who else should help lead this effort?

28

### Your Turn

What is one idea that you want to test to increase engagement?

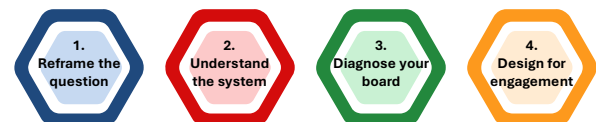
How will you make it stick?

29

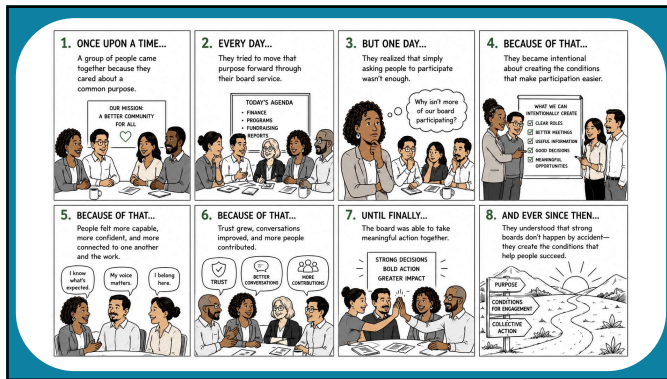
### Our Goal

Create board experiences where board members can contribute with joy, confidence, and meaningful results.

### Our Plan



30



31



32