



## **How Does Your Board Stack Up?**

### **A Self-Assessment Tool For Aboriginal Boards**

**Much of the development work in the creation of this tool was done under the  
auspices of the Institute On Governance**

## **About Patterson Creek Consulting Inc.**

John Graham is the President of Patterson Creek Consulting Inc., which specializes in issues relating to Aboriginal Governance. Services include facilitation, policy research, evaluation, professional development courses, and governance workshops. These workshops focus on a variety of topics ranging from strategic planning to board governance to policy development.

Mr. Graham defines governance as a system consisting of structure, processes and rules that determine how families, organizations, governments and global entities make critical decisions. Governance determines who the decision makers are, whom they engage, and how they are held to account.

Good governance is a journey not a destination and revolves around five principles: legitimacy and voice, strategic direction, accountability, fairness, and performance. These principles are neither absolute nor watertight and are shaped by history, culture and technology in particular contexts.

Using these principles and linking them to day to day practice, Mr. Graham has conducted over 350 governance projects for a wide variety of clients including

- Inuit, Métis and First Nations organizations and governments
- federal, provincial and territorial governments
- industry associations
- school boards, and
- not for profit organizations

He has over 40 years of experience working in the public, private and not for profit sectors. He is a graduate of Queen's University with a honours degree in mathematics and economics and holds an MBA from York University.

## How Does Your Board Stack Up?

Using the description of the 11 characteristics of high performing boards, fill out the rating form, which follows.

In displaying the results, it useful to show not only the average rating for each characteristic but also the range of scores. Further it is sometimes revealing to indicate the scores of board members versus those of staff.

**1. They develop & maintain a longer term vision and clear sense of direction by**

- having mission & vision statements; longer term plans; clear priorities; updating process

**2. They respect Aboriginal values and worldviews and apply these in the operations of the board and in the organization as a whole through, for example,**

- encouraging participation of Elders and youth
- adopting decision-making processes based on consensus
- developing staff policies that take into account traditional practices
- designing programs and delivery systems relevant to their Aboriginal clientele

**3. They ensure the prevalence of high ethical standards and understand their legal obligations**

- encouraging transparency & openness; adopting a written code of conduct; appointing & overseeing key managers; ensuring ethical treatment of staff
- being aware of and respecting duty of loyalty; duty of care; statutory obligations

**4. They ensure effective performance through sound information by**

- focusing on results or outcomes (as opposed to activities);
- having a good sense of their information needs
- instituting approaches to develop performance information through evaluations, performance indicators and other means

**5. They ensure the financial & organizational health by**

- focusing on long term sustainability (expenditures & revenues; asset management);
- exhibiting macro level concern with the quality of management, staff morale etc.

**6. They ensure sound relationships with their key external bodies including**

- funders, National Aboriginal Organizations, regional and local Aboriginal bodies, universities, associations

**7. They ensure sound relationships with their members and clients and provide opportunities for them to influence key initiatives by**

- working with and respecting local Aboriginal bodies and Aboriginal clients
- ensuring high quality and timely services
- providing opportunities for their members to participate in important decisions affecting the organization
- having an effective and well publicized complaints process

**8. They manage risk effectively by**

- identifying, assessing, mitigating & monitoring critical developments with uncertain outcomes

**9. They are accountable through**

- a significant emphasis on transparency
- publicly available information (financial, results achieved etc.); audits & evaluations; outreach activities
- public engagement practices
- redress mechanisms.

**10. They ensure the soundness of the governance system by**

- evaluating the performance of the Executive Director
- having an effective relationship with staff and managing this relationship on an ongoing basis
- monitoring contemporary developments; evaluating their collective performance and that of individual board members; adopting an ethic of continuous improvement
- having and respecting a comprehensive set of policies and/or bylaws including one that deals with member complaints and requests
- instituting sound board recruitment & training practices

**11. They have effective meetings of the Board and its committees through**

- a sound relationships between the Chair and the executive directors and senior staff;
- effective chairs, who manage time effectively through well-crafted agendas among other things
- a positive culture based on members listening to and respecting one another, resolving conflict creatively, and ensuring all Council members are valued and participate to the best of their abilities
- periodic evaluations of meetings followed by corrective action

# Assessing your Board's Performance

How well does your Board conform to each of the characteristics of high performing boards?

Rating Scale				
No Conformance	Weak Conformance	Some Conformance	Strong Conformance	Exceptional Conformance
1	2	3	4	5

## Your Board or Council

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Develops and maintains a longer term vision and clear sense of direction | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. Respects and applies Aboriginal values and worldviews                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. Ensures the prevalence of high ethical standards                         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Ensures effective performance through sound information                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. Ensures the financial and organizational health of the organization      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. Ensures sound relationships with key external bodies                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. Ensures Sound Relationships with clients and members                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. Manages risk effectively   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. Is accountable   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Ensures the soundness of the governance system                          | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. Has effective meetings of the board and its committees                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |