

## The Best of Policy Governance

### PG BRINGS CLARITY, EFFICIENCY TO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

By Susan McGillicuddy, Supervisor, Meridian Township, Michigan, USA



**W**e adopted Policy Governance with effect from August 22, 2001. The board was concerned that our new policies did not encompass all

of our old policies. However, after a few months of operating under Policy Governance, it became evident that indeed all our previous policies were covered and in a more succinct manner.

As an elected Township Board Trustee, I had thought that, if I were elected Supervisor (the equivalent of Chair), I would eliminate many of our subcommittees and work sessions. Having been a Trustee for the previous four years, I had witnessed our government bogged down by too many subcommittee meetings that wasted staff time, my time and generated a lot of paper. I was introduced to Policy Governance through a conference presentation on board effectiveness by Sue Stratton and then read a few of the books.

After I was elected Supervisor, I asked our Manager (our CEO) to read about Policy Governance too and to let me know what he thought. I also asked our township attorney to make sure it was legal for us to operate this way under Michigan law. I then asked the board to consider adopting Policy Governance.

I told the board during our workshop that if one member objected to Policy Governance after the workshop we would not change the way we functioned. The entire Board participated in the workshops. After the creation of our Ends, all were willing to adopt Policy Governance.

The first challenge for the board was approving our budget. It had been common in the past for board members to meet with the staff and decide who would receive money for new equipment and whether or not the equipment was needed. Under Policy Governance, the budget is delegated to our manager and he makes those decisions. Having our policies spelled out helped me to remind the board the terms under which the budget is delegated to our manager.

We have also come to grips with monitoring ourselves. At first, I tried to use a generic monitoring sheet as shown in one of the books. However, it did not reflect our particular policies. I then began using our own stated policy criteria and that has helped us refocus on what our jobs are and how we work together as a board.

Our Manager immediately found that Policy Governance gave him clearly stated responsibilities and goals to work toward — things which were not clear before. However, at first, the rest of the management team had trouble understanding Policy Governance and our Manager has had to do a lot of educating. Now they are all on board. Every year, the Ends “goals” are reflected in the budget as well as within the individual departments. The monitoring reports have helped our Manager make adjustments in the way the staff operates and have given the board criteria against which we can measure success.

The benefits for us as a board include substantial time saving — the endless subcommittee and work sessions are gone. We now spend our time being more productive, creating for our community those benefits that we believe are essential for the quality of life that we want for our residents. We have created a

Greenspace Plan for our community which is a system of linear natural corridors throughout our community; created a mixed use ordinance allowing for a blending of residential, office and commercial area in the same space, and a lighting ordinance that protects our dark skies from the glare of commercial lights. In the past, none of the above would have gotten beyond a few subcommittee meetings. It has helped to unify the board consensus.

We have become a more efficient government. We are the first government in our state to have yearly meetings with our neighboring governments (city, township, and county) as well as well as our own appointed and elected boards. These meetings have opened the door of communication. Our Ends have benefited all our appointed commissions by providing a unity of purpose and a guide.

For the five years we have used PG, we have not changed the policies. We did insert a word or two and that is it. I see our board achieving everything that we have in our stated Ends. We have achieved many of them already and it has been extremely rewarding.

I would advise all boards to begin monitoring themselves against their own policies right away. Keeping the policies in front of the board helps everyone realize that, if Policy Governance is going to be successful, the burden is on board members’ own shoulders.

To other boards considering Policy Governance, I would say do not waste another minute thinking about it. Have a workshop and explore it.

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# Hot Tip!

## WAYS TO CONVEY PG PRINCIPLES

By Stacy Sjogren, Out of the Woods Consulting

**N**ews Flash! Most people are not highly stimulated by the notion of learning about effective governance.

Granted, most of you reading this article are likely to share with me this quirky obsession for all things governance. I adore the hunt for the perfect word in a new limitations policy and find spending an afternoon reconciling old bylaws with new policies rather comforting. So, knowing that all of humankind doesn't share these pleasures is vaguely depressing.

This sad reality means that, if we want to be effective Policy Governance communicators, we must spice up the learning lest we numb both the minds and butts (bums for you Brits) of our fellow board member, seminar or client learners. After all, most adults will only listen for basic understanding up to 90 minutes at a stretch and for retention up to 20 minutes. It may be helpful to think about designing your presentation with the following 90/20/8 concept in mind:

- 1) keep learning modules to 90 minutes or less
- 2) change your teaching approach (lecture, small group discussions, worksheets, etc.) every 20 minutes and,
- 3) involve participants (through role-playing, sharing experiences, etc.) every 8 minutes

The good news is that spicing up your training is not difficult and a great deal more rewarding for you and your participants!

To give you some new ideas to consider, I contacted a few colleagues to see what they were doing to heighten the learning experience of their clients. Why not give some of these techniques a try?

### To highlight the benefit of brevity:

Ask everyone to practise the brevity that a board needs by expressing what they want out of the workshop in three words *only*. It's amazing how much you can learn from such a few words.

### Explain the use of negative language and the power of creating limitations:

Have the group think about the endless directions parents give trying to get teenagers to keep their rooms clean. Ask participants to create a short list of three "essentials" for their teen prefacing the list with the phrase "whatever you do in your room is your business, just don't fail to ... 1, 2 and 3." Then spend a few minutes rounding up all the possible answers. You will find that each person has different levels of tolerance. This opens the group up to the concepts of negative language in limitations policies and the role of the board defining the extent or depth of those limitations.

### To illustrate the principle of One Voice:

Ask for a volunteer to step outside the room for a moment. Explain to the group that you will have the volunteer do a series of simple tasks, like pick up a glass, carry the glass to another part of the room, then return to a seat and sit down, but the only clues will be the ringing of a bell, similar to the "getting hotter/getting colder" game. Ask the group how long they think it will take the volunteer to perform the three tasks. Usual responses run from 10 minutes to an hour.

Then ask the volunteer to come back into the room and explain the game to them. Some people get confused and stand still so be ready to tell them to keep moving and to try going in all directions. As they move about the room, ring the bell softly, louder, or not at all, depending on whether they're warmer or colder. They usually complete all tasks in less than 2 minutes. The group is pretty impressed!

Then ask the volunteer to step back outside and bring out a second bell and recruit a volunteer bell ringer. Come up with two sets of three different simple tasks, just like individual board members giving staff differing interpretations and instructions of what they want. With both bells ringing at different times and strengths, the volunteer wanders about in confusion and increasing frustration. After 2-3 minutes, the room is laughing and you've made your point.

### To check a group's understanding of Policy Governance principles:

Create and print out one question about Policy Governance per participant in the session. Create questions that should have participants thinking, such as, "What is the 'reasonable interpretation' rule and how does it work?" or "What is the difference between Ends and means?" or "Why does Policy Governance have boards develop policies from broad statements to specific?" etc. Hand out the questions, asking each participant to ask their question of three other participants in the room, jotting down the answers they receive.

Lastly, debrief the group as a whole, asking participants to share the answers they received, listening for wide variations in responses and gaps in understanding. The workshop leader can then review key Policy Governance principles wherever gaps appear, and/or move forward when the group's understanding seems solid.

*Special thanks to Larry Hermen, Bill Charney, Jim Hyatt, Caroline Oliver and Susan Mogensen*

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## What's New and Exciting

- IPGA members, colleagues and clients can now register to attend IPGA's third annual conference, *Responsible Governance: The Power of Accountable Boards*. Highly advantageous rates are available for groups of three or more from one organization and for IPGA members, and "extra early bird" rates as low as \$479 per person are in effect until January 31, 2006. To register, go to [www.regonline.com/85609](http://www.regonline.com/85609) or visit [www.ipgaconference.org](http://www.ipgaconference.org).
- IPGA is pleased to announce that Dr. Gar Alperovitz has been chosen to make a keynote address at its conference in San Antonio next June. Dr. Alperovitz, Lionel R. Bauman Professor of Political-Economy at the University of Maryland, is a former Fellow of Kings College, Cambridge University, of the Institute of Politics at Harvard, of the Institute for Policy Studies, and a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution. His most recent book *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty and Our Democracy* was published in late 2004, and his presentation at the IPGA conference is titled, "Ownership, Community and Democratic Governance: The Emerging Possibility of a Transformative Moment."
- A Dutch language version of the Policy Governance Source Document has just been released. The Policy Governance "Bronddocument" can be downloaded from the main page and the "news" page of the IPGA website. Thanks go to Jan Maas and Helmie Smole van Ravestein for their generosity in translating this critical Policy Governance document into Dutch.

# And Another Thing...

## ARE YOU READY FOR SAN ANTONIO?

Caroline Oliver, General Editor



Let's take a moment to ponder the fact that we are only six months away from the third annual conference of the International Policy Governance Association. How time flies!

What will our 2006 flagship event achieve? How will we use this opportunity to grow our personal capacity for realizing the value of Policy Governance? Can we make it a major leap forward in the capacity of our association, IPGA, to blaze the trail towards owner-accountable effective governance? What are we each going to do to turn the possibilities into reality?

How about getting ahead on your New Year's resolutions? How about:

- w Making it a habit to talk to everyone you meet about the most exciting, innovative, creative event in the international governance calendar – it's all happening in San Antonio, Texas, in June 2006.

- w Setting yourself a mental target for how many people you would like to have there from your world and start visualizing them being there with you.
- w Deciding what reminders you are going to send out, when and to whom and putting the dates in your calendar.
- w Considering using the conference as an opportunity to get together with your whole board or the others interested in governance in your industry or region.
- w Thinking about what you can share at the conference and how.

Time flies – let's use it to make 2006 the best year for Policy Governance yet!

You can contact Caroline at [coliver@policygovernanceassociation.org](mailto:coliver@policygovernanceassociation.org)

### Submissions Welcome

To submit an item for *Governing Excellence*, please contact Caroline Oliver, General Editor, at: [coliver@policygovernanceassociation.org](mailto:coliver@policygovernanceassociation.org)

## About IPGA

Launched in June 2001, the International Policy Governance Association (IPGA) is a not-for-profit corporation with 501-c(3) status committed to owner-accountable, effective governance.

## It pays to join IPGA

In addition to being part of a growing, thriving community dedicated to owner-accountable, effective governance, IPGA members receive the following benefits:

- Save 10% on IPGA's annual conference registration fees
- Full Members save 10% on seminars and courses offered by Carver Governance Design, Inc.
- Receive a 40% discount on a subscription to Board Leadership
- Save 10% on designated On Target Governance events
- Members have access to a "Members Only" section of the IPGA website at [www.policygovernanceassociation.org](http://www.policygovernanceassociation.org)

## Three Ways to Join IPGA

- 1) Phone Susan Mogensen at (613) 833-3644
- 2) E-mail us at [info@policygovernanceassociation.org](mailto:info@policygovernanceassociation.org)
- 3) Join online by visiting: [www.policygovernanceassociation.org](http://www.policygovernanceassociation.org)

## Welcome to IPGA!

New member

- Association for Play Therapy (Bill Burns, Fresno, California)

## Contact IPGA

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# Reasonable Interpretations

## LET'S GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

Susan Mogensen, IPGA CEO



Walking past meeting rooms in major hotels these days, you are bound to catch interesting snippets of presentations and conversations: “We really need to set the tone at the top,” you hear from a meeting of corporate compliance officers. “The key is shifting from a rules-based to a values-based culture,” says someone else. “A principle-based approach is the answer,” emanates from another room. “We must democratize the ownership of wealth,” says another, while

“The power is in the process” can be heard coming from the last room at the end of the corridor.

Maybe it's just me, but it sounds as though everyone is talking about the need for Policy Governance. Okay, they might not know it yet, but you need not spend too much time at any major gathering of executives before hearing suggestions that relate closely to the underpinnings of Policy Governance.

IPGA's challenge is to seize opportunities to increase awareness of Policy Governance, and

one key strategy is to put Policy Governance on the agenda of conferences and events being held around the world. IPGA and its members are making great strides in this area, and continue to seek new venues to connect with people. If you know of any conference or event where our message and ideas would be relevant, please let IPGA know. So many conference-goers are already talking about Policy Governance. It's just up to us to make sure they know it!

You can contact Susan at [info@policygovernanceassociation.org](mailto:info@policygovernanceassociation.org)

## Policy Governance Seen and Heard

### Events

At the CCCC (Canadian Council of Christian Charities) Conference, in September 2005, Caroline Oliver presented two workshops: The Board's Role in Evaluating Ministry Effectiveness and Board Dynamics or Board Dynamite!

At the Convention of Dutch Catholic Schools, on November 3, 2005, Jan Maas was interviewed about if and how boards represent owners, and why owners are the legitimate “source” of any organization.

At the Christian Community Development Association Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, from November 16-20, 2005, Glen Peterson presented a workshop on Policy Governance®.

At the Crown Corporation Governance Conference in Ottawa, Ontario on November 30, 2005, Susan Mogensen presented a workshop on Policy Governance®.

### Articles

*Criterion*, a magazine for governors, managers and teachers in Dutch Reformed Schools, interviewed Jan Maas in November 2005.

Board Leadership: Policy Governance in Action Volume 2005, Issue 81, Sept./Oct. features the following articles:

The Meaning of Constituency by Caroline Oliver

On a Personal Note — How Do We Assess a Charity's Worthiness? by Miriam Carver

Ends That Make a Difference: Boldly Creating the Future by John Carver

FAQ — Why all the fuss about the peculiar Policy Governance ends concept? by John Carver

Board Leadership: Policy Governance in Action Volume 2005, Issue 82, Nov./Dec. features the following articles:

Why the Unique Approach to Measurement and Monitoring Under Policy Governance® by Dr. Richard M. Biery

On a Personal Note — Policy Governance Conferences, Academies, and Seminars Policy Governance and “Best Practices” by John Carver

News Reports Through Policy Governance Eyes by John Carver

FAQ — Why does the word monitoring have such a restrictive definition in Policy Governance literature? by John Carver

“From the Wrong End of the Telescope” by Caroline Oliver was published in Governance Matters, Issue 4, 2005. Governance Matters is a newsletter for healthcare boards and senior managers in the U.K. and around the world. For further information, see [www.witherbys.com](http://www.witherbys.com)

### Coming soon

Susan Mogensen will present a workshop on Policy Governance® at the Integrated Risk Management in the Public Sector Summit on February 17, 2006 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

## And I Quote...

“Bad administration, to be sure, can destroy good policy; but good administration can never destroy bad policy.”

— Adlai Stevenson, U.S. politician and presidential candidate (1900-1965)