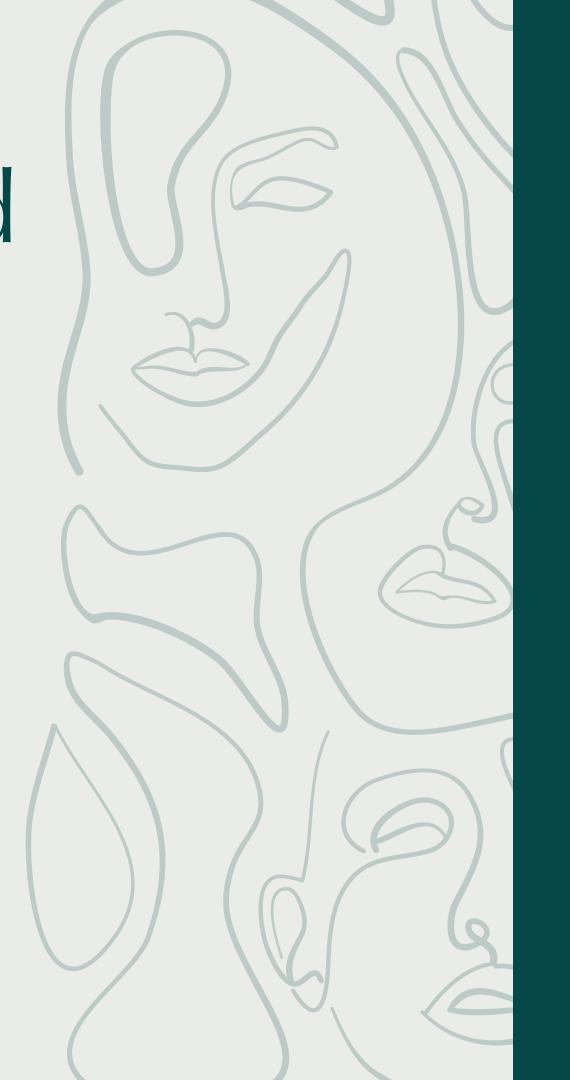
Navigating Board Governance Across the Nonprofit Lifecycle

Aligning Board Practices with Organizational Growth & Change





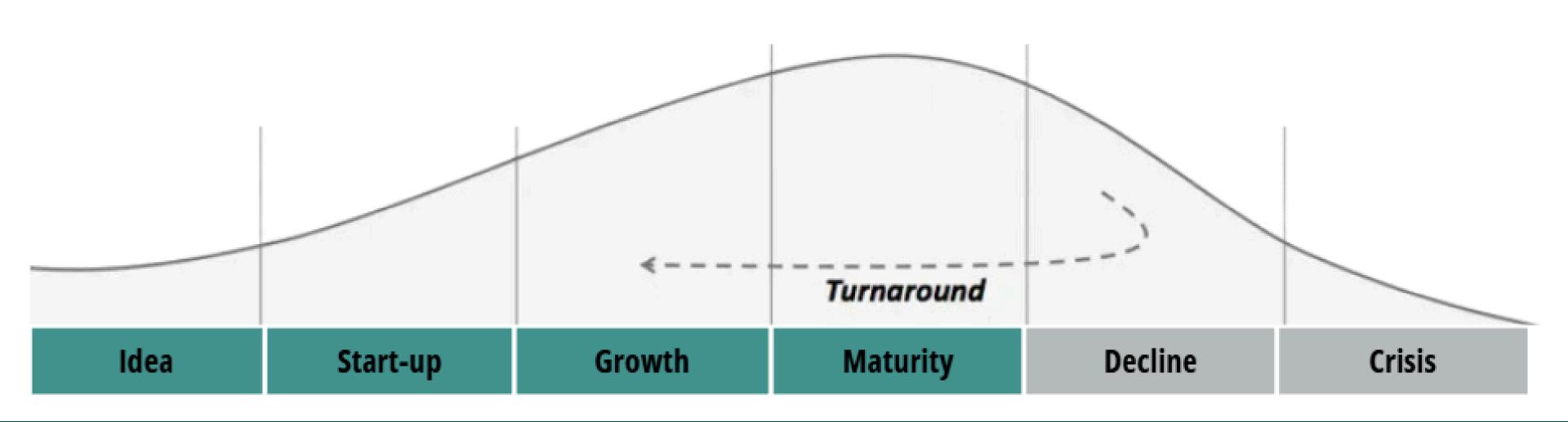


#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1. Understanding the characteristics and governance needs of each lifecycle stage.
- 2. Strategies for transitioning boards from one stage to the next.
- 3. Tools for assessing and improving board performance.
- 4. Best practices for maintaining board engagement and effectiveness throughout the lifecycle.
- 5. Practical examples and templates for implementing governance improvements.



## The Nonprofit Lifecycle





					50 FI	1.	
				<	Turnaround		
		Idea	Start-up	Growth	Maturity	Decline	Crisis
lmpac		Informal - Need established, best ractices integrated, pilot launched	Pilot successful - Lessons integrated into design; Measurement starts	Established in marketplace - Strong results, partner-of- choice & consistent delivery	Consistent results through robust evaluation; Focused on continuous improvement, scale, system-building	Need exists, but nonprofit isn't partner-of-choice; Market duplication from other orgs	Demand near zero; Intense competition for resources & energy
Brand	d	Not utilized	First official PR materials; Primary method of marketing is work-of- mouth	Build-out of marketing & communication need, including public & media relations	Sophisticated marketing & comms plan using multiple channels; Everyone equipped to tell the story	Decreased public interest; Issue are not discussed in the media	Unable to attract media or public attention; Messaging does not resonate with public
Revenu	ue	Most are in-kind	Limited financial resources; hand-to-mouth	More diverse financial resources with established relationships with funders, but still unpredictable	High financial diversity with established relationships with multiple funders; Endowment exists; High financial predictability	Funders are not renewing contracts; Low cash reserves; Decreasing donor retention & loyalty	Cash reserves insufficient to cover operating expenses; Long-time donors tapped out
Operation	one.	Entrepreneurial founder using olunteer resources for guidance	Flat organization - decisions are likely made by founder; Volunteers needed for hands-on support	Founder has hired or becomes ED and is key decision- maker with board guidance; Volunteers used as resources	Leadership is often 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>nd</sup> generation from founder: Clear division of labor & accountability among staff	Increasing turnover; Decreased ability to attract top talent	Inability to fill key roles
Cultur	ne Cu	ulture is defined by the Founder	Culture is action- oriented	Increased division of labor & accountability as staff is hired; Culture is results-oriented	Culture is well-defined and serves as a competitive advantage; Volunteers seen as ambassadors	Decreased transparency	High contention & division among staff; Mistrust of leadership
Governa	ince	Not yet developed	Formal governance starts; Likely homogenous	Board expansion - more diversity with more focus on planning & oversight	Board focused on policy & strategy; Board delegates management to ED	Board members are hard to recruit, retain & engage; Low focus on strategy	Board not fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities

# Stevens' Nonprofit Lifecycle Stages



#### WHY GOVERNANCE MATTERS

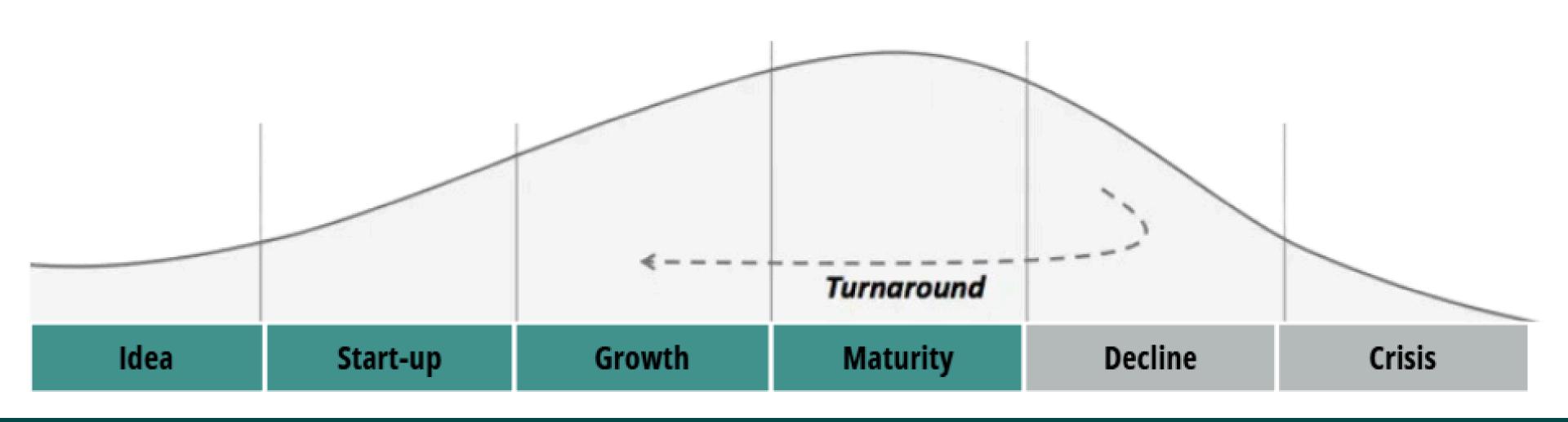
 Governance = sustainability, accountability, mission alignment

 "Creates the container" for strategy, leadership, and impact to thrive

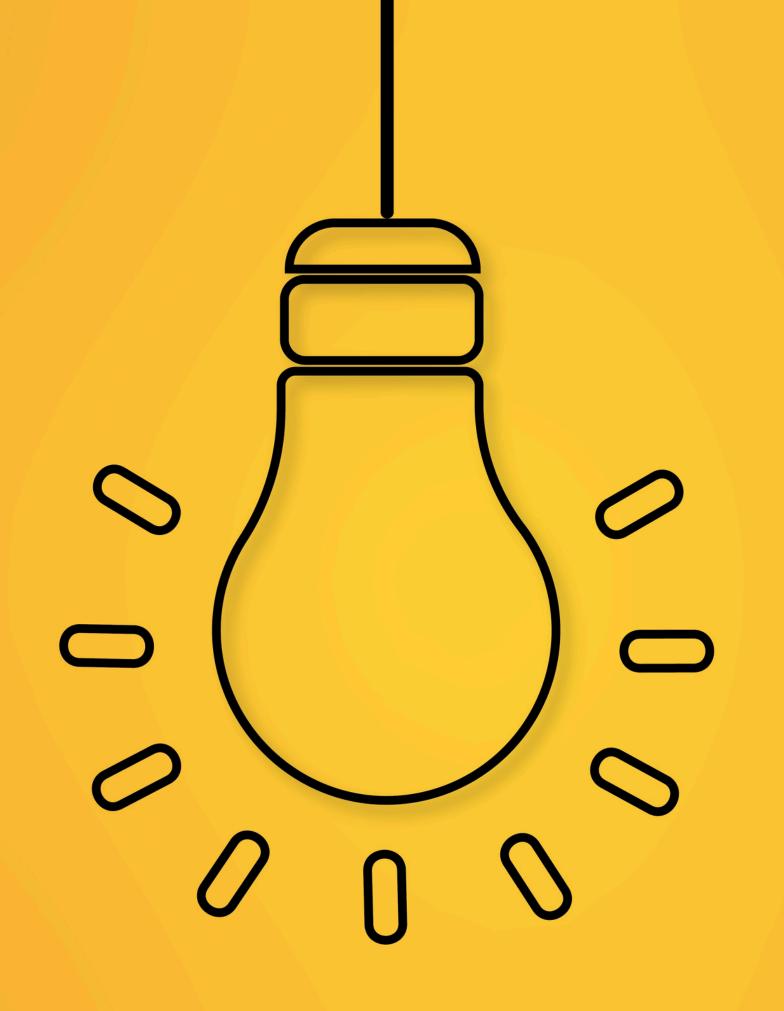
Keeps power ethical.



## Governance Across the Lifecycle







## Stage: Idea

Typical Governance Characteristics:
Not yet developed

Practical Governance Strategies: Formalize a board with clear bylaws, roles, and expectations



## Stage: Startup

Typical Governance Characteristics:
Formal governance starts;
Likely homogenous

Practical Governance Strategies: Expand board diversity, skills, and role in strategic planning







## Stage: Growth

Typical Governance Characteristics:

Board expansion - more diversity, more focus on planning and oversight

Practical Governance Strategies:
Ensure board focus on governance, policy,
and long-term strategy;
Improve structure and processes



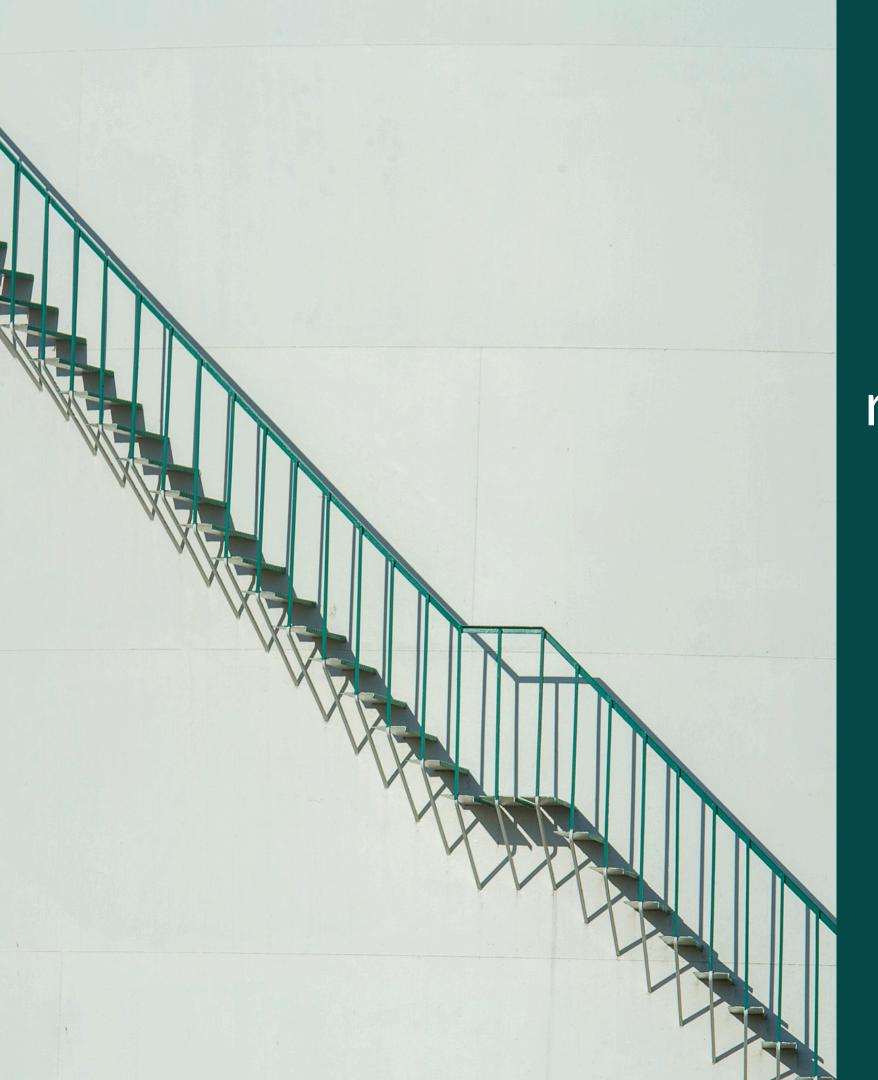
## Stage: Maturity

Typical Characteristics of Governance: Board focused on policy and strategy; Board delegates management to ED

Practical Governance Strategies: Reassess structure for efficiency; Invest in board development; Ensure updated succession, emergency, and disaster planning







## Stage: Decline

Typical Characteristics of Governance:

Board members are hard to recruit,
retain and engage; Low focus on strategy

Practical Governance Strategies:
Rebuild accountability and ensure
fiduciary responsibilities are met;
Reengage board members with
meaningful work;
Sharpen strategic oversight



## Stage: Crisis

Typical Characteristics of Governance:

Board not fulfilling fiduciary

responsibilities

Practical Governance Strategies: Recruit new leadership aligned with organizational turnaround





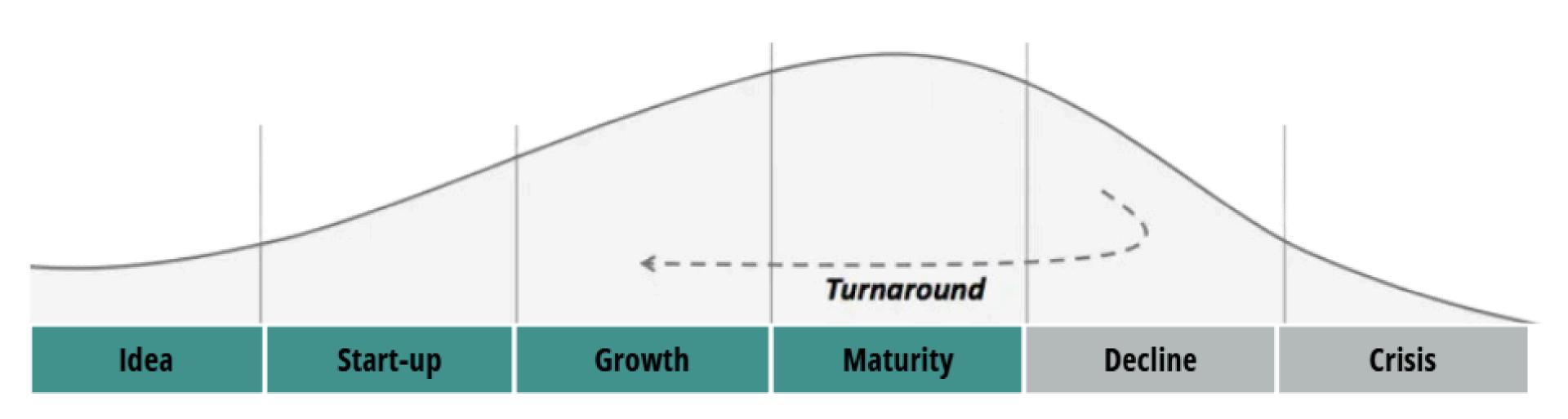
## DIAGNOSTIC TOOL



What lifecycle stage is your Governance in?



## Let's Share





#### Turnaround Decline Crisis Idea Start-up Growth Maturity Consistent results Established in Need exists, but Informal - Need Pilot successful through robust Demand near zero: marketplace - Strong nonprofit isn't evaluation; Focused established, best Lessons integrated Intense results, partner-ofpartner-of-choice; competition for practices integrated, into design; on continuous Market duplication choice & consistent pilot launched Measurement starts resources & energy improvement, scale, from other orgs delivery system-building Build-out of Sophisticated Unable to attract First official PR marketing & comms media or public marketing & Decreased public materials: plan using multiple communication interest; Issué are not attention; Not utilized Primary method of Brand Messaging does channels; Everyone need, including discussed in the marketing is work-ofequipped to tell the public & mediā media. not resonate with mouth public relations story High financial diversity More diverse Cash reserves with established Funders are not insufficient to financial resources Limited financial relationships with renewing contracts; Most are with established cover operating multiple funders; Low cash reserves; Revenue resources; expenses; Longin-kind relationships with Decreasing donor retention & loyalty hand-to-mouth Endowment exists: funders, but still time donors High financial unpredictable tapped out predictability Founder has hired Leadership is often 2<sup>rd</sup> or becomes ED and Flat organization or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation from Entrepreneurial decisions are likely is key decision-Increasing turnover; Decreased ability to founder; Clear division Inability to fill made by founder; maker with board Operations key roles of labor & Volunteers needed attract top talent guidance; for guidance accountability among for hands-on support Volunteers used as resources Increased division of Culture is well-defined High contention & labor & and serves as a Culture is defined by Culture is actiondivision among Decreased Culture accountability as competitive staff; Mistrust of the Founder oriented transparency staff is hired; Culture advantage; Volunteers leadership. is results-oriented seen as ambassadors Board focused on Formal Board expansion -Board members are Board not fulfilling policy & strategy; more diversity with hard to recruit, retain Not yet governance fiduciary Governance developed Board delegates štarts; Likely more focus on & engage; Low focus responsibilities planning & oversight management to ED homogenous on strategy

## Looking at the Full Lifecycle



#### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES



Align with best practices



Engage reluctant or fatigued boards



Build equity & inclusion



## Case Study From Decline to Turnaround

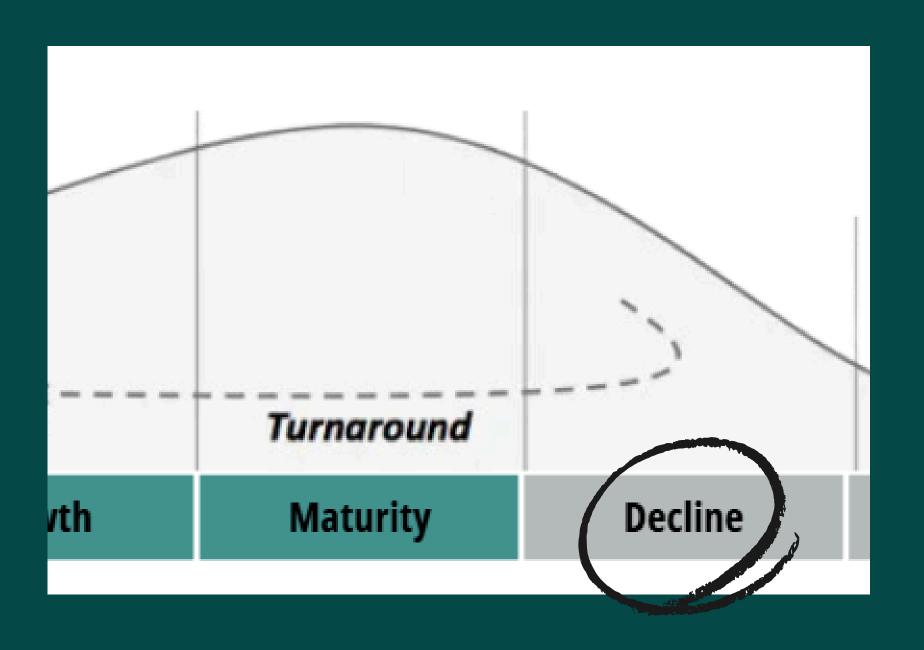
The Board That Found Its Backbone





## Lifecycle Snapshot

- Mid-sized human services nonprofit (\$1.5M budget)
- Founder departure → fatigue & drift
- Board disengaged, unclear roles, outdated bylaws
- Operations thriving, governance lagging





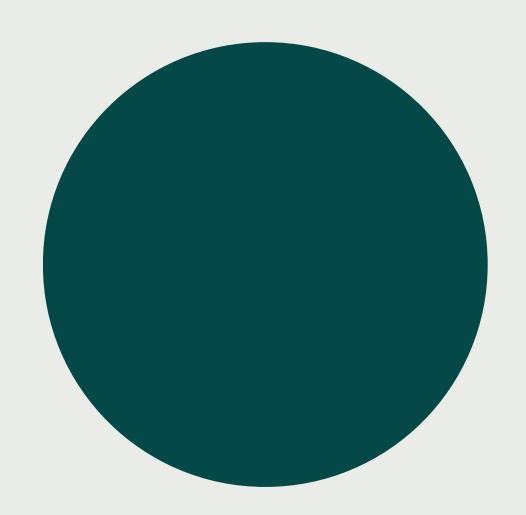


## What We Found

Symptoms	Impact
No active committees	No shared accountability
Stale recruitment	Homogenous, low energy board
Outdated bylaws	Decisions made by default
No performance reviews	ED isolated and unchallenged



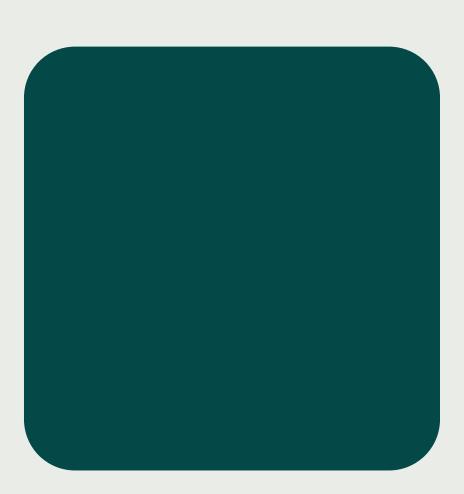
#### REBUILDING THE CONTAINER



#### **Structure:**

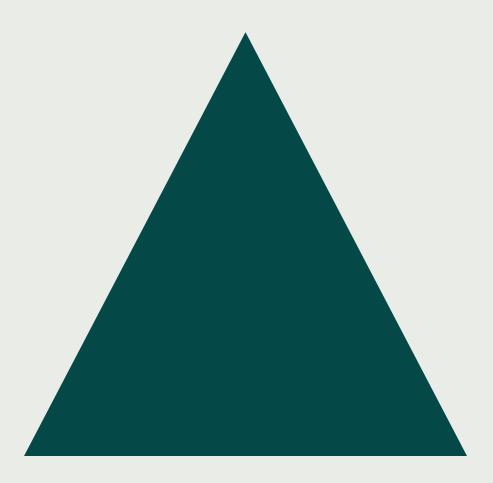
governance reset retreat, committee redesign





#### Accountability:

term limits, evaluation, officer succession



#### **Engagement:**

Role mapping, recommitment, mission focus

## The Turnaround

#### Before:

- 52% meeting attendance
- O active committees
- 0 new recruits in 3 years

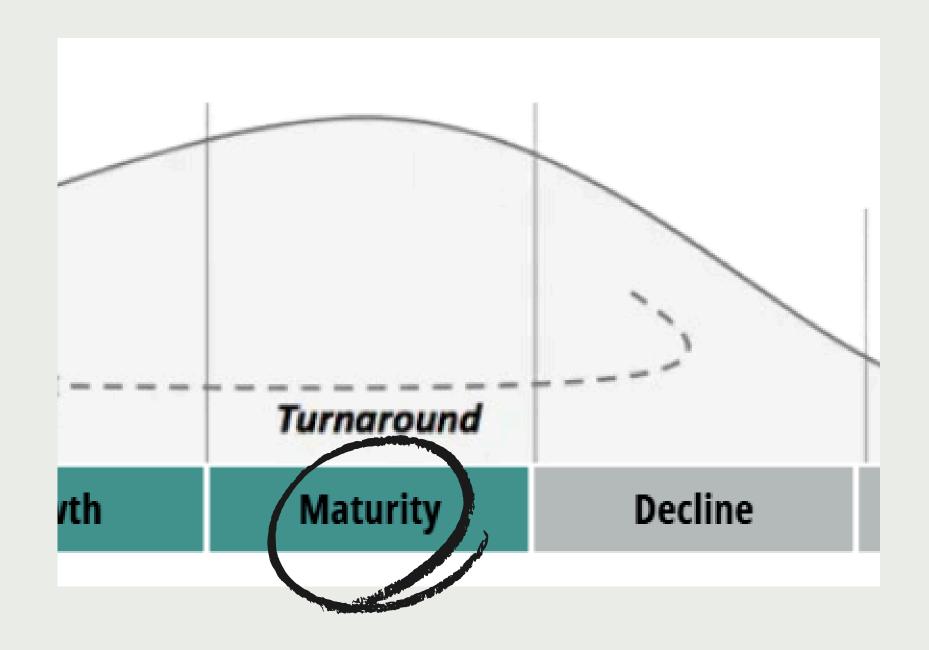
#### After (6–18 months):

- 90% attendance
- 2 new committees, 2 new skilled members
- Board initiated planned giving



#### LESSONS FROM THE LIFECYCLE

- Governance declines before programs do.
- You can't recruit your way out of dysfunction — you have to reset.
- Turnaround starts when someone names the truth.





#### KEY TAKEAWAYS



Recognize governance needs at each stage.

Apply tools/templates for assessment & planning.

Implement strategies for engagement & sustainability.

## What is one governance priority you want to take back to your board?





### NEXT STEPS



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## THANK YOU!

#### **GINNY WALLER, J.D.**





#### **ALYSON CULIN**

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