

OPERA COMPANY GOVERNANCE REPORT

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The success of opera companies depends on effective board leadership, a healthy board composition, a productive committee structure, judicious policies, clear expectations, and diversity among board members. This report, excerpted from data from 135 U.S. and Canadian opera companies, provides context for board members and staff to compare their practices to those found most commonly across North America. The benchmarks provided are not intended as recommendations or ideals to be achieved. Rather, this information should serve as a reference to make decisions that are appropriate for each company and its community.

Data are presented as averages of all responding companies and are reported, at times, by company budget size. Canadian companies are aggregated across budget size.

Budget 1: \$15 million or more
 Budget 2: \$3 million to \$15 million
 Budget 3: \$1 million to \$3 million
 Budget 4: \$250,000 to \$1 million
 Budget 5: Under \$250,000

Board Size

	Voting Members (average)	Non-Voting Members (average)
Budget 1	61	9
Budget 2	35	16
Budget 3	26	7
Budget 4	17	3
Budget 5	10	2
Canadian	15	2

Board Composition

	Honorary Members (average)	Emeritus Members (average)	Ex Officio Members (average)
What percent of companies have them?	28%	33%	58%
Who are they?	Significant donors; community leaders; artists; corporate leaders; and former board members and staff	Former board chairs, members, and committee chairs; former staff leaders; and significant donors	General/artistic directors; representatives of guilds, auxiliary boards, and orchestras/choruses; and community leaders

52% of companies have active opera artists on their boards.
 29% of companies have retired opera artists on their boards.
 45% of companies have corporate or foundation representatives on their boards.



Committees

Most Common Committees	Percentage
Finance	83%
Governance	79%
Development	71%
Executive	69%
Special Events	44%
Education/Community Engagement	41%
Marketing	40%

Are non-board members allowed to participate?

21% — Yes, for all committees
 60% — Yes, for some committees — generally excluding executive and governance committees
 44% of companies have used taskforces to supplement committees.
 38% of companies have one or more advisory or subsidiary boards.

Board Meetings

Meeting Duration: 90 minutes

Meeting Schedules: 97% of board meetings are on weekdays, of which 45% are in the evening and 39% in the afternoon.

Meeting Frequency: 7–8 per year

Most Common Agenda Items

Artistic Reports	98%
Financial Reports	93%
Executive Session	36%
Social Reception	28%
Guild Reports	24%
Performance on Video	21%
Presentation from a Program Participant	19%
Breakfast, Lunch, or Dinner	19%
Live Performance	17%

Changes During COVID-19:

Nearly all companies pivoted to virtual board meetings via Zoom, although general procedures remained unchanged.

Many reported that online meetings were shorter, more focused, and more efficient, with higher attendance.

This increase in productivity came at the expense of social activities, but the online medium allowed for the inclusion of special guests, presentations of pre-recorded performances, and participation of more company staff. In many cases, the ease of virtual meetings allowed companies to schedule more frequent convenings for committees and taskforces.

Terms and Policies

Have term limits: 65%

Average term: 3 years

Average number of terms: 2–3

Most Common Board Policies

Conflict of Interest Policy	84%
Anti-Harassment Policy	70%
Whistle-Blower Policy	51%
Board Code of Ethics	47%
Gift Acceptance Policy	44%
Investment Policy	38%
Endowment Spending Policy	35%
Diversity Charter	32%



Other policies relate to advocacy, confidentiality, spending, intellectual property, succession, record retention, and social media.

Board Participation

55% of companies require board members to participate on committees

95% of companies provide orientation to new board members, most frequently:

- Distribution of a board handbook — 72%
- One-on-one meetings with staff leadership — 69%
- Distribution of company overview documents — 67%
- One-on-one meetings with the board chair — 63%

59% of companies engage board members in training or coaching, most frequently on:

- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion — 62%
- General Governance Practices — 40%
- Fundraising — 37%

59% of companies conduct evaluations of board and board member performance.

Board Giving

90% of board members contribute to their companies' annual funds.

24% of total contributed revenue comes from board giving.

	Require a gift with no minimum	Require a gift with a board minimum	Average board gift
Budget 1	10%	80%	\$99,450
Budget 2	9%	91%	\$23,696
Budget 3	28%	64%	\$8,556
Budget 4	29%	59%	\$3,700
Budget 5	37%	43%	\$3,154
Canadian	31%	31%	\$7,513

61% of companies also require board members to purchase subscriptions, tickets, and/or special event tables/tickets.