



# *Guide to the Literature on Governance: An Annotated Bibliography*

BY  
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*From “Guide to the Literature on Governance: An Annotated Bibliography” by Judith R. Saidel. This bibliography was prepared as part of Governance Futures: New Perspectives on Nonprofit Governance, a research project undertaken by BoardSource in collaboration with the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard University. The Governance Futures project was supported by several funders, including The Atlantic Philanthropies, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation.*



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## **Preface**

The burgeoning literature on nonprofit governance offers an astounding array of booklets, articles, chapters, and volumes of interest to many different audiences. If recent years can predict future trends, the publication rate of materials on governance shows no sign of slowing. Such a broad range of materials serves many different purposes. The intention of the *Guide to the Literature on Governance* is to make a significant part of this wealth of information more readily accessible by providing a user-friendly bibliography with annotations.

Target audiences for the *Guide* include technical assistance and management support providers, other consultants, faculty, instructors, and students. Additional audiences are board members, volunteers, nonprofit managers and staff, the media, and commentators interested in governance issues.

Each entry in the *Guide* is divided into several distinct sections. The “Service Area” identifies the programmatic context, such as health care or human services, in which the analysis is based. Brief summaries of the publication’s topic, highlights, and methodology follow, and, where appropriate, a “Special Features” note brings to your attention particularly useful figures, tables, and charts. Two indices — citations by authors and by service area — offer additional entry points to the works included in the *Guide*.

A general introduction and introductions to each section are unique features of the bibliography. BoardSource’s multi-year project *Governance Futures: New Perspectives on Nonprofit Governance* provided an ideal opportunity to plumb the depths of the literature on governance and report on its swirling currents and eddies. The general introduction identifies crosscutting themes and tensions in the governance literature. Introductions to Parts I – V integrate and synthesize selected publications in each section, indicating where there are gaps and contradictions and where there is consensus among the authors.



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### **Author Identification**

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## General Introduction

The bold purposes at the core of the Governance Futures: New Perspectives on Nonprofit Governance project are to discover, develop, and disseminate innovative governance strategies that vary significantly from conventional practices. In early planning discussions among research team members from BoardSource, the Hauser Center on Nonprofit Organizations, and the University at Albany, it was clear that a thorough review of the literature on governance should be one of the primary enterprises of the project. The idea to publish an annotated guide to the governance literature quickly followed.

Works referenced in this bibliography offer a remarkable variety of insights, ranging from research-based findings on how chief executives and board chairs assess individual board member effectiveness to experience-based reflections on new ways of thinking about nonprofit governance. Authors of studies cited here, all published between 1980 and July 2002, are researchers, consultants, teachers, current and former executives, and board members who base their work in many disciplines and draw on a broad range of professional experience.

Although diversity on a number of dimensions characterizes the *Guide's* entries, several themes emerge from a review of the references taken as a whole. For instance, many authors agree that there is a disconnect between what the prescriptive literature on board roles and responsibilities says boards *should be* doing and what boards *are actually* doing. Is this a failure of theory, a failure of practice, or both? A review of studies included in the *Guide* suggests the answer is most likely “both.”

Another area of consensus is the general acknowledgement of massive gaps in the literature on governance. Carver's observation that “...the governing board is understudied and underdeveloped” (1991:181) resonates with comments made by many authors. Virtually every aspect of nonprofit governance is in need of research attention. In fact, despite the impressive number of studies and commentaries on nonprofit governance published in the last twenty years, the most remarkable aspect of this literature may be its incompleteness.

For starters, there are few straightforward descriptive studies. We have little statistical data about who does—and does not—serve on nonprofit boards, board practices, differences in board composition or practices across service areas or geographic regions. Few studies on nonprofit governance take into account gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic differences. Add the arena of descriptive work on international governance participants and practices and the gaps in research turn into craters.

The opportunities for analytical and explanatory research are myriad. A short list of areas in need of further investigation might include: the culture of nonprofit boards; board processes and social capital, civic engagement and political participation; and unconventional and innovative governance structures and practices.

The opportunities for further work on nonprofit governance are virtually limitless. For aspiring researchers and authors, this is good news. For those seeking immediate research-based answers to urgent governance dilemmas, the news is less promising. Still,



Formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards

imaginative scholars and practitioners are at work and the publishers' presses are rolling. Stay tuned for frequent updates to the Guide to the Literature on Governance.