Dear Friends,

Last week, on a teleconference, the Governance Working Group reviewed the operational definitions submitted by the Administration for Policy 2.14.   We would like to share the outcome of that conversation with you.

First, in the spirit of continuous learning, some background on the monitoring process for this policy. To monitor most policies, the Board receives internal monitoring reports, submitted by the Administration. But with Policy 2.14 ("Communication and Support to the Board"), the Board will monitor through direct inspection. To monitor compliance or non-compliance with a policy requires defining the standard by which compliance could be recognized. This standard is described in the policy's "operational definition." Even when the Board monitors through direct inspection, the Administration provides the operational definition that defines the standard the Board will look for, to recognize compliance or non-compliance.

Here's one way to describe an operational definition: "a statement that describes how a particular variable is to be measured, or how an object or condition is to be recognized." Twentieth-century management expert W. Edwards Deming said, "an operational definition is a procedure agreed upon for translation of a concept into measurement of some kind."

So, the Board looks to operational definitions to translate the abstract policy into measurable terms that define compliance or non-compliance, setting the standard by which all Trustees will be able to judge, "Yes, data proves compliance," or "No, data doesn't prove compliance."

The move from policy to operational definition is the move from general to specific, from conceptual to concrete.

Unfortunately, in the operational definitions submitted for Policy 2.14, the Governance Working Group sees a pattern of operational definitions that don't clearly define a metric of compliance, but instead maintain the same level of abstraction as the original policy.

For instance, here's Policy 2.14.13: *"[The President may not…] Fail to marshal for the Board as many staff and external points of view, issues and options as needed for fully informed Board choices."* And here's the Administration's submitted Operational Definition: *"We interpret this policy to require that background information for the board on matters they will be considering be provided in a timely and accurate manner."* This operational definition is a restatement of the policy, not a clarification of the terms by which compliance would be met.

For this policy, an operational definition could include parameters for how many perspectives might be marshaled ("at least three" or "no fewer than forty-seven"); how many options might be presented ("at least two," etc) and in what cases such "points of view, issues, and options" might be provided ("for every Board choice" or "for Board choices related to property matters" or "Board choices related to what they'll have for lunch, but not for dinner"); the Administration could target that some percentage (51%? 90%?) of Board members agree that during the previous year the Administration provided the Board with adequate information, points of view and options needed to make informed decisions. There are other ways in which the conceptual policy could be translated into concrete, operational terms, but these are only some examples. The goal is to for the direct inspection process to be focused on an operational definition based on clear metrics that the Board and Administration have agreed in advance is reasonable.

So, to be able to accurately and fairly monitor compliance with Policy 2.14, the Governance Working Group will recommend that the Board ask the Administration for operational definitions that provide metrics that clearly define compliance or non-compliance.   The GWG has requested agenda time at the June meeting for a full Board discussion of the operational definitions we all received for Policy 2.14,   If you have not had the opportunity to read the document submitted by the Administration, we ask that you do so prior to the Board meeting.

We look forward to the opportunity for us all to learn and discern together.

With gratitude and respect,
Jake Morrill
On behalf of the Governance Working Group