

Best Practices for Governance Board Evaluation

SACSCOC Annual Meeting 2018

KRISTI SHACKELFORD, James Madison University
SARAH MACDONALD, James Madison University

Who Are We?

Kristi Shackelford

- Doctoral Student in Strategic Leadership, Higher Ed Policy
- 18 years at JMU
- Hired as Compliance Report Editor; handle academic substantive changes

Sarah MacDonald

- Doctoral Student in Assessment and Measurement
- 11 years at JMU
- Member of SACSCOC Advisory Board

Today

- Review of best practices based on literature and survey
- Small group discussions
- Report out to larger group
- Discussion of self-evaluation options
- Questions and wrap-up

Learning Outcomes

- Identify best practices for self-evaluations of governance boards
- Learn about current self-evaluation methods from peers
- Discuss options for implementing self-evaluations at own institutions

Governance Boards Overview

“They look internally to represent the public interest, as assigned by founding documents and conveyed or affirmed by an informal consensus on the part of political, economic, and social forces that impinge in their institutions. Outwardly, they represent the interests of faculties, students, and administrators to the government and general public”
(Duryea, 2011, 2-3).

- A condition of being an accredited university is that the institution have a governing board.
 - Responsibilities range from making “all needful rules and regulations concerning the University” to the personnel evaluation of the president (SACSCOC, 26).
 - The Association of Governing Boards acknowledges that “most [members] have experience on boards of either corporate or nonprofit organizations, they are less familiar with academic trusteeship” (p. 3).

In Virginia

- Boards are recommended by the Virginia Commission on Higher Education Board Appointments, appointed by the Governor, and confirmed by the General Assembly.
- State law dictates the number of members and, occasionally, their regional demographics.
- Service is limited by time-delineated appointments, leading to frequent turnover.
- Few members with higher education experience



SACSCOC & Board Evaluation

- While previous standards have included specifics about the board's role and constitution, this requirement is the first to specifically call for any type of evaluation of the board.
 - The *Principles of Accreditation* (2018) state: “The governing board ... defines and regularly evaluates its responsibilities and expectations. (Board self-evaluation)” (pp. 13-14).
 - Rather than individual evaluations of each board member, the board must be evaluated on its overall performance.

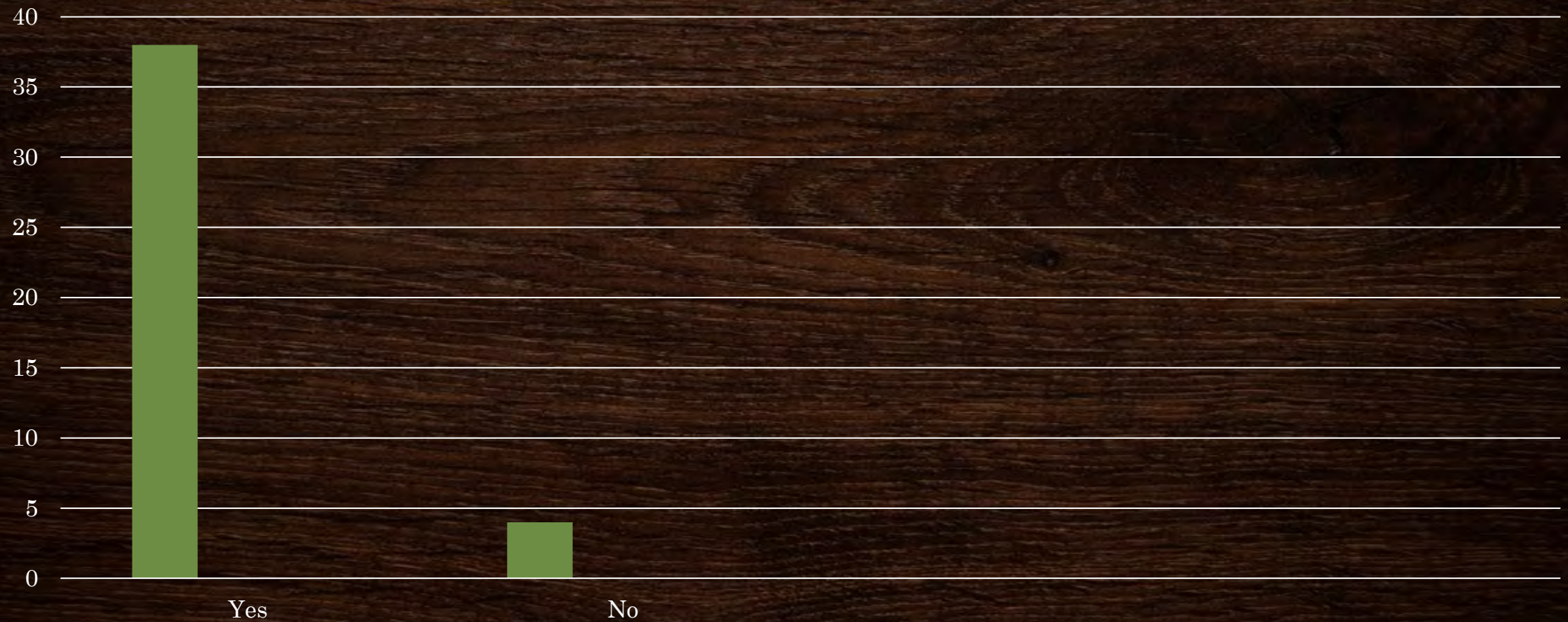
How to Evaluate Boards

- The structure and goals of a university governing board are typically based on the expectations of traditional nonprofits.
 - The governance of nonprofits is typically the purview of state, not federal, law. As result, the composition of nonprofit governing boards is usually dictated by the state (Hopkins & Gross, 2010).
- “Two types of evaluations are discussed in the nonprofit governance literature: overall board performance and individual board member evaluations. By every indication, **both practices are relatively rare in board governance**” (Brown, 2007, p. 305).

Why Focus on Evaluations Now?

- As the ultimate authority for a university, the governance board is ultimately responsible.
 - “Ambiguities and tensions inherent in service on a board of trustees suggest that mechanisms need to be in place to promote ongoing introspection to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the board in general, and its members in particular, are being fulfilled” (Henrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013, p. 234).
- There is an increasing call for accountability in higher education.
 - “The challenges trustees face are in many ways more daunting than ever, as perceptions of higher education institutions as moribund and expensive become pervasive” (Scott, 2017, p. 4).
 - There is “a recurring theme in the literature on nonprofit governance calling on boards to conduct regular assessments of their performance” (Harrison and Vance, 2015, p. 1130).

Does your governing board know that this is a required element of SACSCOC compliance?



Help! What About My Board?

- Research exists on the benefits of an effective governing board for nonprofit organizations in general, but fewer resources that directly address the need for and application of orientation and evaluation for boards in higher education.
 - “It is valid to state that the topic [issues of trustees] has never been an attractive, overwhelming preoccupation of higher education scholars” (Michael, Schwartz, and Cravcenco, 2000, p. 107).
 - More “research is needed to understand the criteria for performance of public higher education boards given their unique context (Kezar, 2006, p. 970).

Does your governing board currently conduct self-evaluations?



How often does your board conduct self-evaluations?



Current IHE Board Evaluation Practice

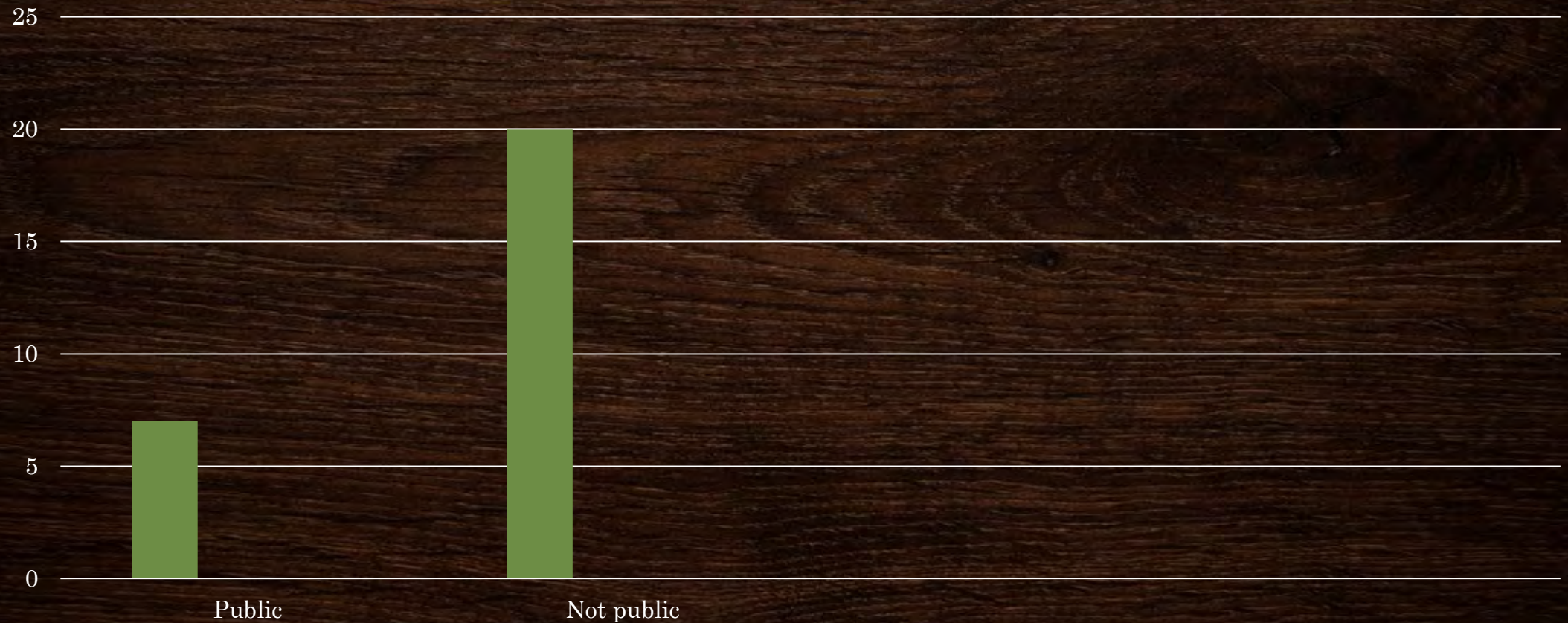
- Over two-thirds of boards of independent/private institutions (69 percent) conduct individual assessments of their members, compared to only 12 percent of public boards.
- While boards of most independent colleges are self-perpetuating (selecting most of their own members), members of public-university boards are typically appointed by the governor or legislature or elected, and these boards are less likely to assess their members.

Association of Governing Boards of University and Colleges, 2011

How to Evaluate Boards

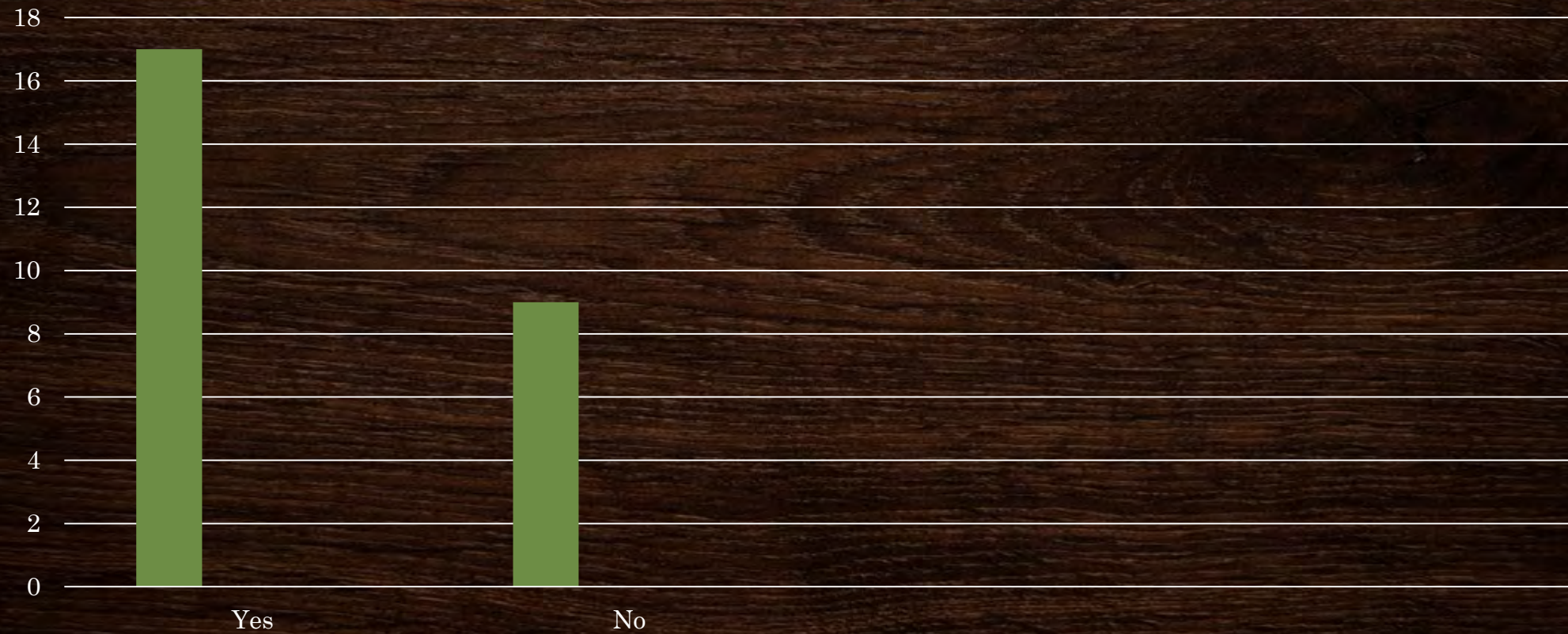
- Nonprofits often struggle with how to evaluate effectiveness in general, much less that of its governance board.
 - At its most basic, board effectiveness can be defined as “a board’s ability to perform its roles” (Jaskyte, p. 457).
 - As the result of inconsistent and differing definitions of board effectiveness, boards often find it difficult to develop accurate evaluations (Hannah, 2011; Jaskyte, 2012; Rasmussen, 2015).

Is the evaluation publicly available?



Are the results shared?

Chart Title



Who are the results shared with?

President

Discussed with the entire Board. Shared with President's Office and SACSCOC liaison for compliance reporting.

University Legal Counsel; Auditor

Just with each other

President

President

Director of Institutional Services compiled the results

Accreditation Liaison, President

Evaluation is done as part of biannual board retreat. As a public university, the board meetings are public information.

President and General Counsel

The board members complete an online evaluation, using survey software, and the results are aggregated and published in the online Board meeting materials at the next quarterly Board meeting.

Who are the results shared with?

the District President

Included in Board Minutes that are public.

It is conducted in collaboration with the president's executive leadership team who also provides feedback. The results are shared with the board and the leadership team. Gaps in perception are discussed; the board then sets goals according to their areas of concern.

The results are shared through a Board retreat which is noticed and open to the public--we're a public institution in Florida--Sunshine laws.

Rector, Institutional Research

I don't know.

president, vice presidents

President and Provost

Small Group Discussions

- Does your board currently conduct a self-evaluation?
- How, ideally, should self-evaluation happen?
- How does your institution define effectiveness?

How Did Your Group Answer?

- Does your board currently conduct a self-evaluation?
- How, ideally, should self-evaluation happen?
- How does your institution define effectiveness?

This Page Will Soon Have Notes!

Thank You!

Kristi Shackelford
shackekl@jmu.edu

Sarah MacDonald
macdonsk@jmu.edu

Materials available at
www.jmu.edu/sacscoc/
presentation

