



The Board Plan

The year ahead, mapped

The concept

A board plan is the calendar of board attention. Properly drawn, it sets out what the board will work on, when, across the coming year, and ensures that the matters the board must attend to are distributed deliberately rather than allowed to bunch in the months the in-tray happens to favour. The exercise is, in part, a discipline against reactivity: a well-built plan creates protected space for the deep work, sequences the major decisions so that each is properly prepared for, and surfaces in advance the months that will be over-loaded.

A working board plan would ordinarily address: the location and cadence of meetings; the major decisions the board will be asked to make and when; the time set aside for the board's role and for strategy; the deep dives into topics that warrant sustained attention; the cycle of policy review; the rhythm of performance and risk monitoring; the finance and audit calendar; legal and regulatory matters; the board's own annual review of itself; and the planning of communications with stakeholders, the responsible minister or shareholders, regulated parties, and the public.

In practice

We were engaged by a large Crown entity to design its board plan for the year ahead. The challenge was familiar to such organisations: too many Parliamentary and ministerial deadlines competing for the same months, deep dives repeatedly displaced by reactive items, and a sense that the board was being run by the calendar of others rather than running its own. The work involved mapping all of the recurring obligations imposed by the Crown Entities Act, the Public Finance Act, the audit cycle, the letter of expectations and the entity's own policy review schedule, and then identifying the windows in which deep dives, strategy refreshes, and the board's own annual review could sit without displacement. The resulting plan distributed attention deliberately across the year, surfaced two months that were chronically over-loaded, and gave the board the confidence that it would attend to each of its required matters with something close to the time each deserved.

Questions we asked in designing the board plan

- What are all of the recurring matters the board is required to address, by statute, by ministerial expectation, by audit cycle, and by the entity's own policies, and when does each fall due?
- What deep dives does the board wish to commission across the year, and what is the right cadence for them?
- Where in the year does the board's attention currently bunch, and where does it thin out, and is that pattern intentional or accidental?
- How are major decisions to be sequenced through the year, and what preparation does each require if it is to land well?
- What is the rhythm by which the board will review its own performance, and at what point in the year does that review serve the next year's plan best?
- How are communications with the minister, the responsible department, regulated parties and the public to be planned across the year, and where do they intersect with the board's substantive work?