

FORESIGHT

CHOOSING THE FUTURE

Boards must make the choice to create future-adaptive associations that can thrive under the unforgiving conditions of a turbulent world.

BY JEFF DE CAGNA, FASAE

❖ **LESS THAN A YEAR BEFORE** the mid-way point of The Turbulent Twenties arrives, association boards must make a crucial decision: Will they reject complacency and bring a renewed sense of purpose to standing up for their successors' futures?

As human systems responsible for guiding human systems through an increasingly nonlinear and incomprehensible world, the answer must be an unequivocal yes, with a clear commitment to the board's duty of foresight at the core of that choice.

2024 marks the 10-year milestone of the duty of foresight, a concept I originated in the pages of *Associations Now* magazine in summer 2014. Since that initial article, I have had many compelling conversations about the duty of foresight with diverse groups of board directors and officers, CEOs, and other contributors to board work. This ongoing process of discovery and reflection has helped me develop a richer understanding of why the duty of foresight is essential to building fit-for-purpose association boards:

The duty of foresight demands a fearless reckoning with orthodoxy. Over the last 10 years, the duty

of foresight has consistently included the pursuit of intentional learning as a critical element. Eliminating the barriers to learning with the future created by orthodox beliefs—the deep-seated assumptions we make about how the world works—requires association boards to confront, interrogate, and defeat their detrimental impact at every opportunity.

The duty of foresight nurtures a deeper sense of responsibility. It impels boards to bring critical thinking, genuine empathy, and a clear-eyed perspective to conversations about the world they are leaving for their successors. The futures for which association boards are responsible today do not belong to them, and the care required to shape those futures must be grounded in our shared humanity.

The duty of foresight enables long-term adaptation. Boards can neither control the direction of the futures their organizations will face, nor can they render them invulnerable to the accelerating and intensifying impact of social, technological, economic, environmental, and political forces. The duty of foresight rejects the unattainable notion of “future

proofing” in favor of creating capable and future-adaptive associations.

Throughout this year, the second half of The Turbulent Twenties, and into the challenging decades ahead, the board's duty of foresight will endure as a vital choice for association boards committed to setting a higher standard of stewardship, governing, and foresight. For boards ready to become fit-for-purpose, the duty of foresight is an ethical, honorable, and purposeful decision to stand up for their successors' futures.

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Note: This article originally appeared in the 2024 *Associations Now Board Brief*, a must-have resource for every new board member and an essential refresher for returning leaders published by ASAE. To purchase the Board Brief in its entirety, visit asaecenter.org/bookstore.