

# Institute On Governance

Better Governance for Public Benefit



## A Legacy of Excellence

Best Practices Board Study  
Aboriginal Healing Foundation

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Aboriginal Healing Foundation

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009



# Best Practice Study Goals

The Institute On Governance (IOG) undertook a best practices study of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's (AHF) Board to:

- identify the key factors that have led the AHF Board to perform at its current high level,
- to inform and inspire other boards to improve their performance, and
- offer suggestions for the current AHF Board regarding how their performance may be improved for the remainder of its existence.



# Methodology

The study was primarily interview based. Interviewees were asked to rank 11 characteristics and provide examples to support their ranking.

17 interviews were conducted, including interviews with:

- 2 external stakeholders
- 13 board members
- 2 staff

The study also reviewed all of the governance documents of the AHF.



# Characteristics Evaluated in Interviews

1. Board develops and maintain a longer term vision and a clear sense of direction
2. Board incorporate Aboriginal values and worldviews in significant aspects of its work
3. Board ensures the prevalence of high ethical standards and understand their legal obligations
4. Board ensures effective performance through sound information
5. Board ensures the financial and organizational health
6. Board ensures sound relationships with key external bodies
7. Board ensures sound relationships with members and clients and provide opportunities for them to influence key initiatives
8. Board manages risk effectively
9. Board maintains accountability
10. Board ensures the soundness of governance systems
11. Board has an effective Board Chair and Committee Chairs



# Results Overview

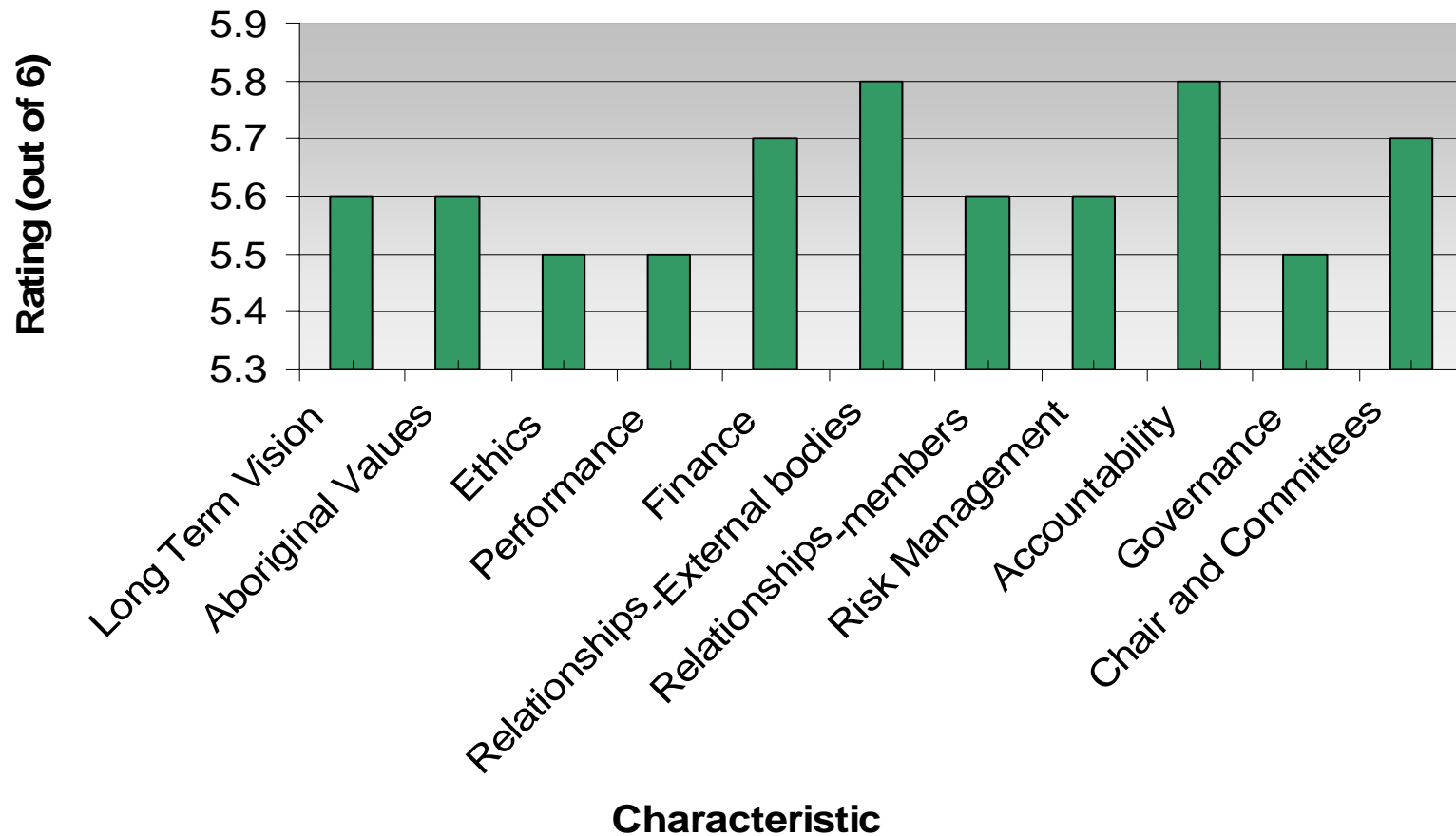
Generally, the AHF scored extremely high in all categories. No characteristic was rated below a 5.5.

“ Relationships with External Bodies” and “Accountability” both rated highest at 5.8.



# Results Overview

**Average Rating of Each Characteristic for the AHF**





# Results Overview

- Several interviewees referenced the sharing circle used to open every board meeting as an important element for the Board's success.
- Many spoke about the familial feelings toward the board member and the support they provided to each other.



# Results Overview

- Accountability and transparency were a point of a pride for many interviewees who stated that the AHF was a leader in this respect.
- The role of Elders, the relationship with representative organizations and the regional gatherings have all contributed to creating a successful pan-Aboriginal organization and Board.





# Noteworthy Best Practices

- The Board mirrors the mission.
- The Board guides a pan-Aboriginal organization that is very cohesive.
- The Board has facilitated excellent relationship building.
- The Board has achieved admirable transparency and accountability.
- The Board has effectively managed a half-billion dollars.



# The Causal Factors

- The very strong working relationship between the Chair and the Executive Director.
- The high degree of continuity among the Board and staff.
- The fundamental governance and management practices in place at the AHF.
- The inclusion of clientele in the work of the organization.
- The scrupulous approach of the organization regarding nepotism and other ethical issues.



# Recommendations

- More regular evaluations undertaken by an outside individual or organization.
- Periodic assessments of board meetings and committee meetings.
  - The IOG has developed a simple tool to conduct such assessments, a tool which takes less than 5 minutes to fill out and could be used periodically to ensure that meetings are effective and productive.
- A more formalized approach to risk management.



## Future of the AHF

- The Foundation has been and will continue to be a valuable resource for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The AHF should pursue a partnership with the TRC.
- The AHF is well positioned to play a role in supporting distressed communities.