



Excellence In Governance Academy

Throughout NeighborWorks® America's history, it has been a priority to ensure that network organizations are governed by strong leaders who serve effectively on their boards. This priority has spurred the evolution of a series of governance programs to enhance board performance.

Excellence in Governance began in 2011 as an 18-month governance strengthening program. Bringing together a four-person team of board members and CEO from each participating organization, the program provided individualized coaching, expert-led training sessions, ongoing peer exchange, assessments and two full board retreats – all within a performance-focused framework. The training introduced new board leadership concepts, modifiable tools and promising practices while the framework customized the program to each organization and allowed participants to identify and work on what mattered most to them. Organizations that completed the program received a grant to further their governance efforts.

Evaluations of EIG over five program rounds indicated that over 90% of board and CEO participants found the program “very valuable” or “extremely valuable,” with the program consistently exceeding their expectations. Adopted enhancements to processes, procedures and systems became the norm for new board members.

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During the pandemic, when board chairs needed more support than ever, Excellence in Governance evolved into the EIG ReConnect program. Commencing in 2021, EIG ReConnect was a 10-month, virtual governance development and coaching program that supported both existing and future board leaders.

In 2024, NeighborWorks innovated again, introducing EIG Academy, which builds on the successes of and learnings from five Excellence in Governance cohorts and EIG ReConnect. Shifting away from a designated coach/team model, EIG Academy participants gained access to multiple advisors with extensive experience and expertise in nonprofit governance.

This 18-month, virtual program is designed for NeighborWorks board members, chief executives and support staff who closely support the board and are ready to sharpen their leadership skills, strengthen their governance strategies and experiment with promising practices. EIG Academy is a comprehensive education experience, including monthly training seminars, peer cohorts, technical assistance, and customizable resources. Participants enhance their knowledge, improve board performance, and create lasting change for their organization. The first class of the program includes 115 participants representing 41 network organizations.

EIG Academy aims to:

- ▶ Build board capacity in strategic decision-making, risk management and financial oversight and sustainability.
 - ▶ Enhance board experience and value-added through generative conversations.
 - ▶ Increase meaningful board engagement by centering the individual skills, talents and experiences of board members.
 - ▶ Activate board members as constructive and productive partners of their organization's senior leadership team inside and outside of the boardroom.
- The second, overlapping class of participants starts in September 2025 for their first year of content and will join the first class as they continue into their second program year.

Our Work in Action

Loaida Rodriguez, in her first year as the newly elected board chair at HDC Mid-Atlantic, wanted to jumpstart the work of the organization's board. Drawing from her EIG Academy curriculum and engaging in collaborative discussions with her governance team, she quickly transitioned from learning to practical application in her role on the governance committee. Her ongoing experience as a board member and her close collaboration with the vice chair, CEO and fellow board members have led to and supported initiatives to formalize and restructure various aspects of the board and its work.



First, the board re-envisioned its committee structure and reorganized, eliminated and created new committees that provide better focus and alignment with strategic goals. Board members developed job descriptions for board roles to ensure that responsibilities were evenly distributed and that new board members have clear expectations for their positions. Next, they took a critical look at board meetings themselves. They added the role of timekeeper, instituting real-time feedback processes, and built agendas that moved the focus from management reporting to strategic, generative conversations with a stronger focus on actionable next steps.

Looking ahead, they'll be tackling the important topic of change over time. They'll focus on effective board composition, committee structure, increase focus on resident impact, advocacy, financial diversification and the importance of an ad hoc nominating committee for a continued board member pipeline. They also intend to set up succession planning for both the chief executive and board officer roles to ensure smooth and continuous leadership and organizational operations.