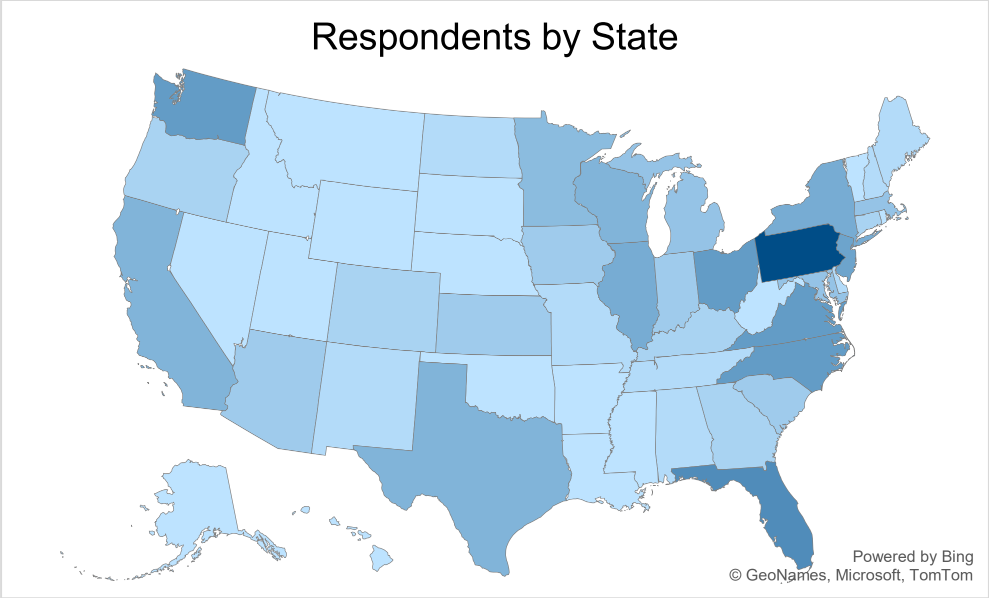
March 2026

Governance in Senior Living

ZIEGLER CFO HOTLINE℠

In February 2026, Ziegler distributed a CFO Hotline[SM] on topics surrounding senior living governance. This report examines the responses from over 150, primarily not-for-profit, organizations. Among respondents, roughly 60% were single-site and around 40% multi-site.

Respondents came from 32 different states across the country, with the strongest representation from Pennsylvania and Florida.



Executive Summary

Findings from this report highlight a governance landscape in senior living that is both evolving and grounded in longstanding structures, as organizations balance tradition with the need for modernization. Many providers are increasingly incorporating resident perspectives into governance, reflecting a broader emphasis on transparency and engagement, while also navigating potential conflicts of interest in certain decisions.

At the same time, some organizations continue to operate within legacy governance frameworks tied to historical affiliations, which can support mission alignment but may limit flexibility in recruiting specialized expertise. Encouragingly, there is a clear shift toward more strategic, skills-based governance, alongside efforts to modernize practices through term limits, board diversity, and streamlined structures.

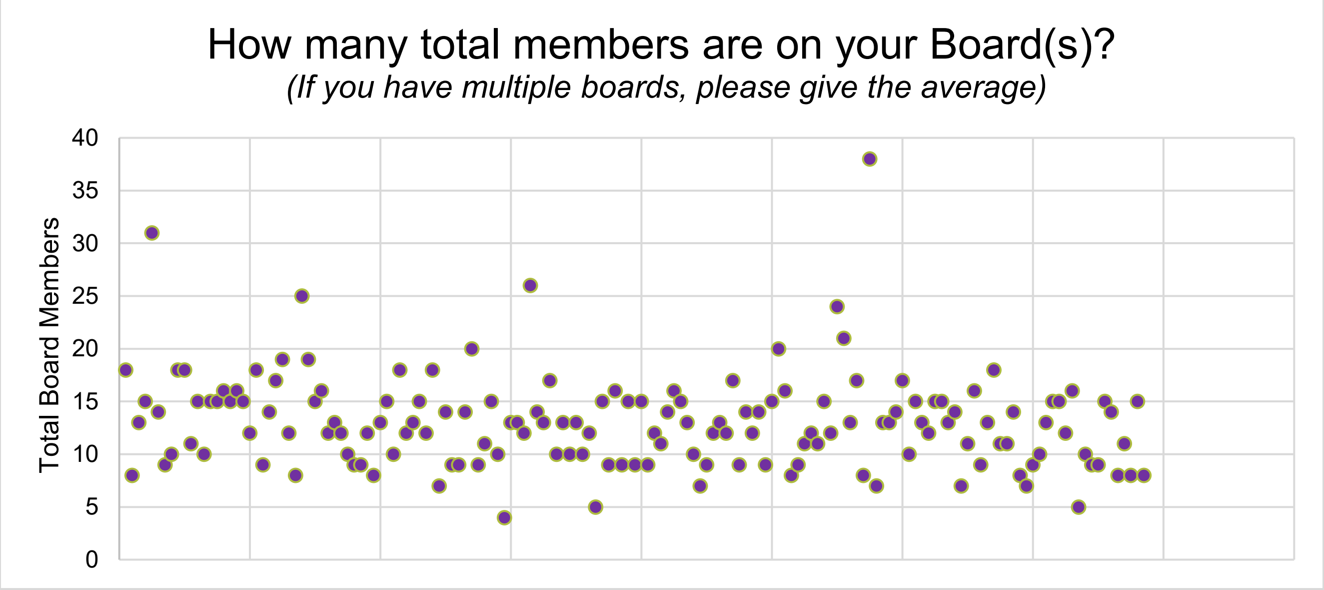
Overall, organizations are working to strengthen governance through a more intentional and balanced approach, combining mission-driven traditions with a focus on skills-based leadership and long-term sustainability.

Survey Responses

The survey asked respondents how many total members were on their board, with a note to use an average for organizations that have multiple boards. Survey responses indicate that board size among participating organizations varies widely, ranging from 4 to 38 members.

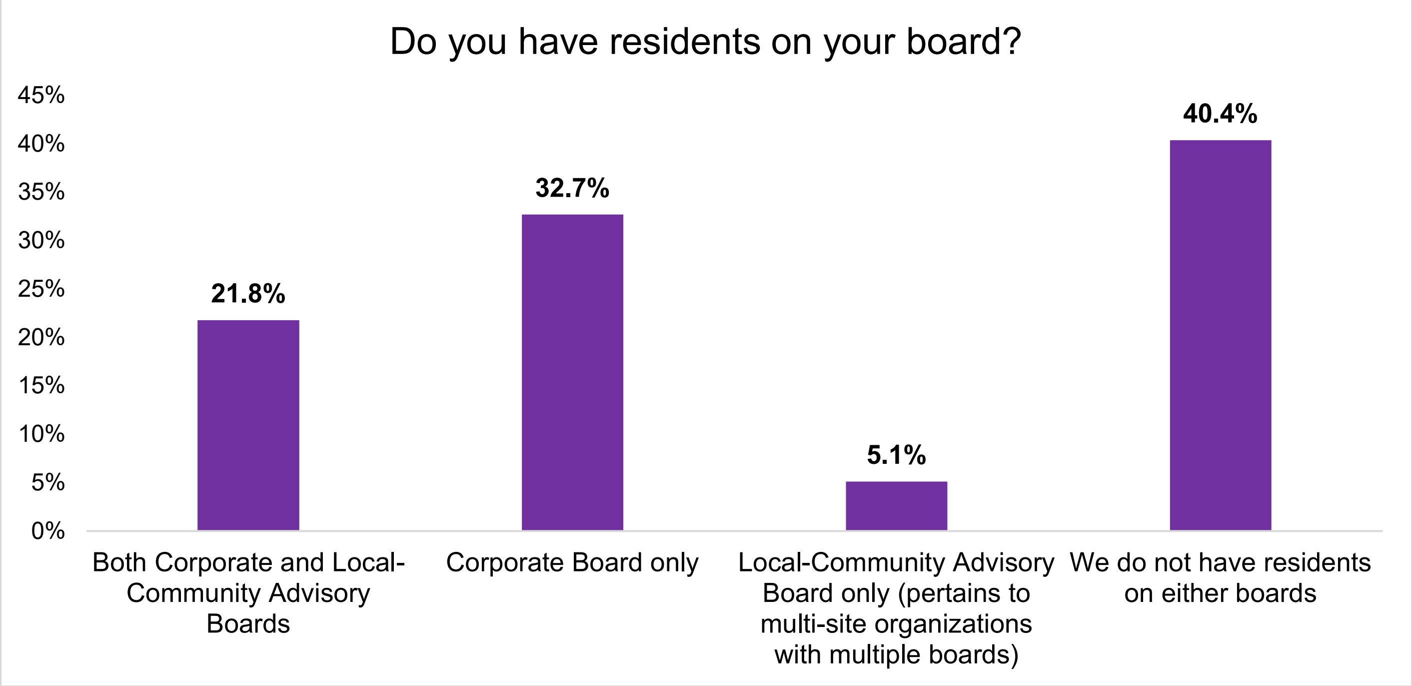
However, boards tend to cluster within a relatively narrow band, with both the average and median at approximately 13 members. The majority of organizations report boards with between 10 and 15 members, suggesting that this range may represent a practical balance between diverse representation and effective governance. A small number of larger boards appear as outliers, indicating that while some organizations maintain broader governance structures, most operate with more moderate board sizes.

	Number of Total Board Members
Min	**4**
Average	**13**
Max	**38**



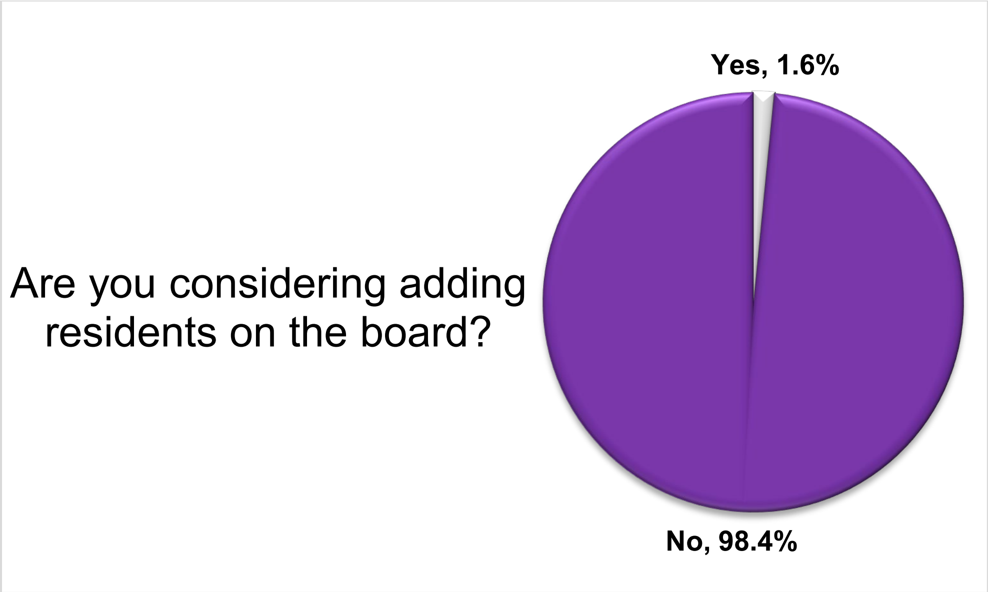
Survey responses show a mixed approach to resident representation in governance. Nearly 60% of organizations report having residents involved on at least one board, most commonly on the corporate board (32.7%), followed by representation on both corporate and local advisory boards (21.8%). A smaller share (5.1%) include residents only on local-community advisory boards, typically within multi-site organizations.

However, a notable 40.4% of respondents report no resident representation on either board, indicating that many organizations continue to separate resident engagement from formal governance structures. Overall, the results suggest that while resident participation is relatively common, organizations vary significantly in how directly residents are integrated into board-level decision making.



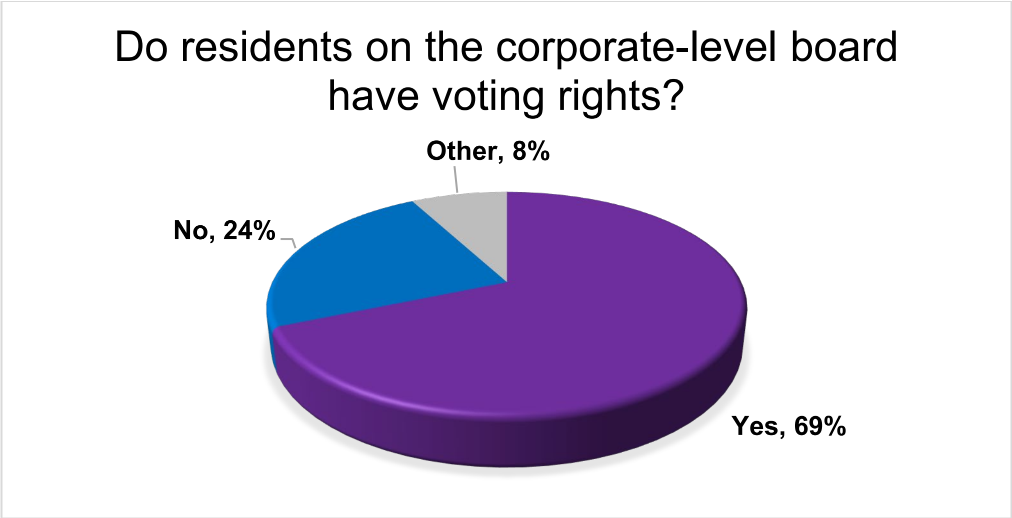
Among organizations that do not currently have residents serving on their board, very few report plans to change this structure. Only 1.6% indicated they are considering adding resident representation, while an overwhelming 98.4% said they are not.

This suggests that for most organizations without resident board members, the current governance structure is largely intentional and unlikely to shift in the near term. While resident participation is present in many organizations overall, those that have not adopted the practice appear generally comfortable maintaining a governance model without direct resident representation at the board level.



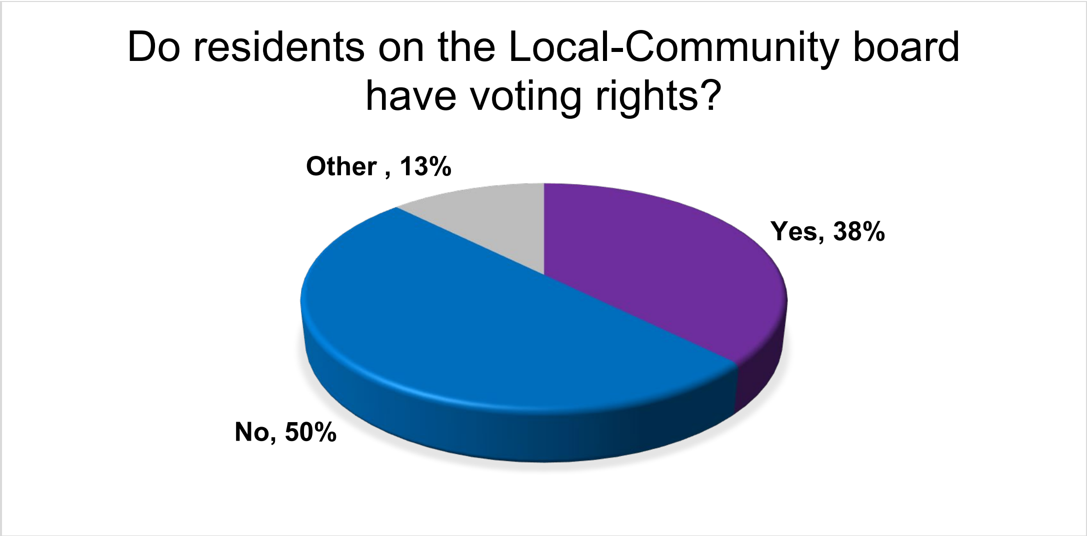
Among organizations that include residents on the corporate-level board, most grant full voting rights, with 69% reporting that resident board members have voting privileges. Another 24% indicate residents serve in a non-voting capacity, while 8% reported alternative arrangements.

Comments from respondents suggest that these "other" structures often involve conditional voting rights, such as residents voting on most matters but recusing themselves from decisions related to resident rates or fees, or situations where one resident board member holds voting rights while another serves in a non-voting role. In some cases, a resident with voting rights joined the board prior to becoming a resident, while additional resident representatives participate in meetings without voting authority.



Responses suggest that resident voting authority is less common at the local or community advisory board level than at the corporate level. Half of respondents (50%) report that residents serving on local-community boards do not have voting rights, while 38% indicate that residents do have voting privileges. An additional 13% selected "other," reflecting governance structures that vary by organization.

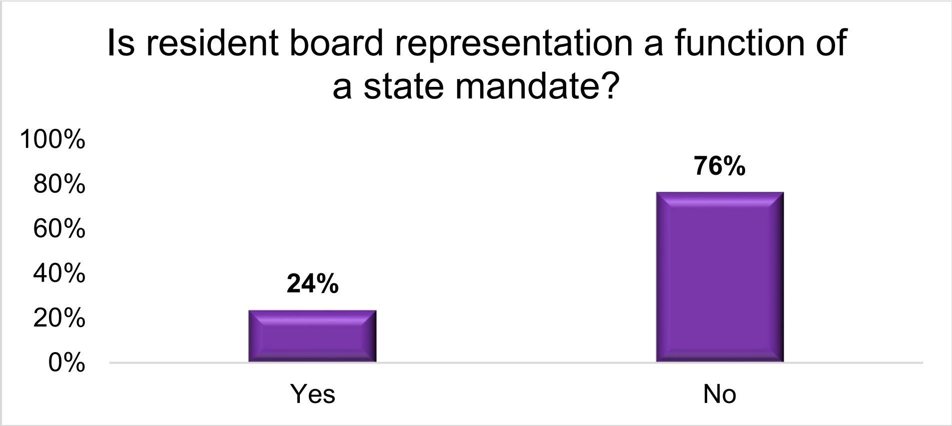
Comments from respondents indicate that some organizations utilize structured local advisory boards that include a single resident representative alongside organizational leadership or board members, with voting rights determined by the specific board structure. These variations highlight the range of approaches communities use to incorporate resident perspectives at the local governance level while maintaining different levels of decision-making authority.



Among organizations where residents serve on both corporate and local-community boards, resident members are overwhelmingly granted voting rights. Nearly 97% report that residents on the corporate board have voting authority, with only 3% indicating they do not. Similarly, 94% of respondents indicate residents on local-community boards have voting rights, compared to 6% who do not.

These findings suggest that when organizations choose to include residents on both governance levels, they typically provide full participation in decision-making, reinforcing the role of resident perspectives in board deliberations.

Survey results indicate that resident representation on boards is most often a governance choice rather than a regulatory requirement. Only 24% of respondents report that resident board representation is driven by a state mandate, while a majority (76%) indicate it is not required by state law. This suggests that many organizations include resident board members voluntarily as part of their governance philosophy or community engagement approach.



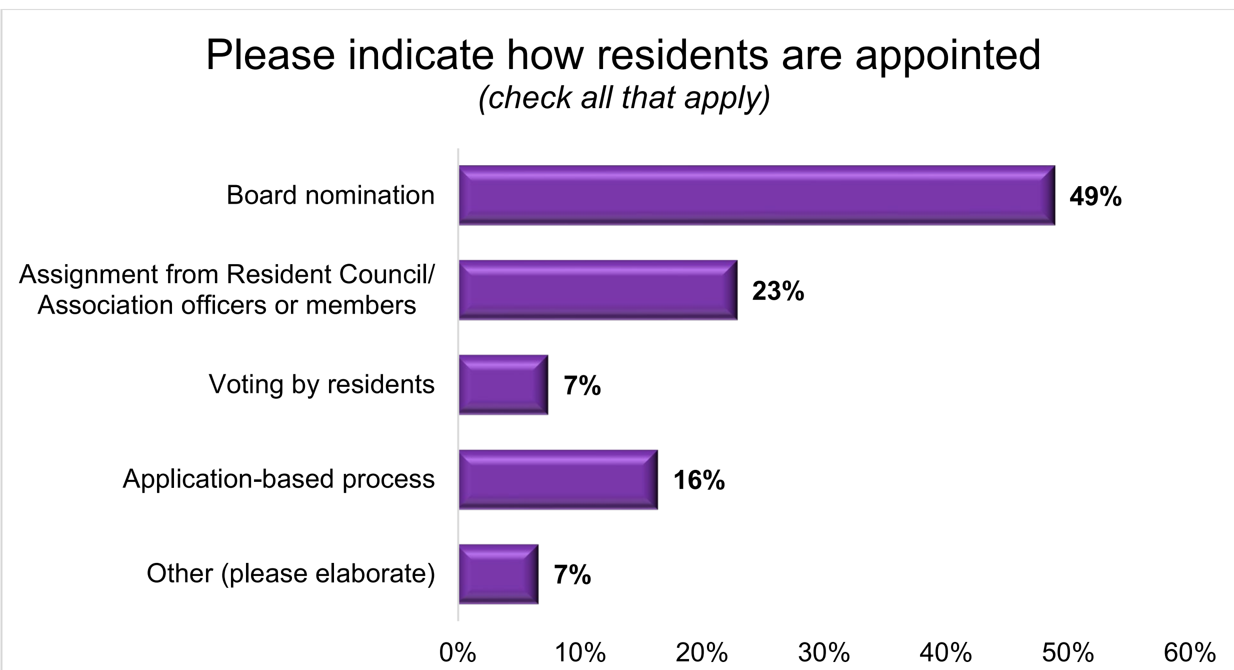
On average, organizations report approximately 2.2 resident representatives on both the corporate board and local-community board, suggesting that resident representation is typically present but remains a small minority of overall board composition.

Average number of residents on corporate and local-community boards → **2.2**

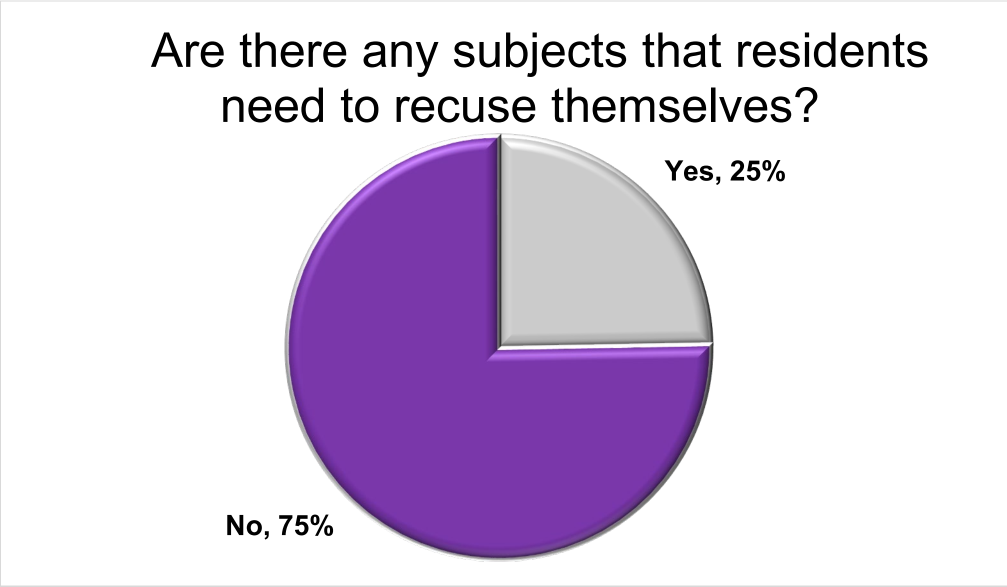
Nearly half of organizations (49%) report that resident board members are appointed through board nomination, making it the most common approach to resident representation. Another 23% rely on resident councils or associations to assign representatives, while smaller shares use application processes (16%) or direct resident voting (7%).

In practice, many organizations appear to use hybrid approaches, where residents or resident councils help identify or recommend candidates, but the governing board retains final approval or voting authority. In some communities, specific leadership roles such as the Resident Council President or Resident Association Chair are designated to serve as the resident board representative.

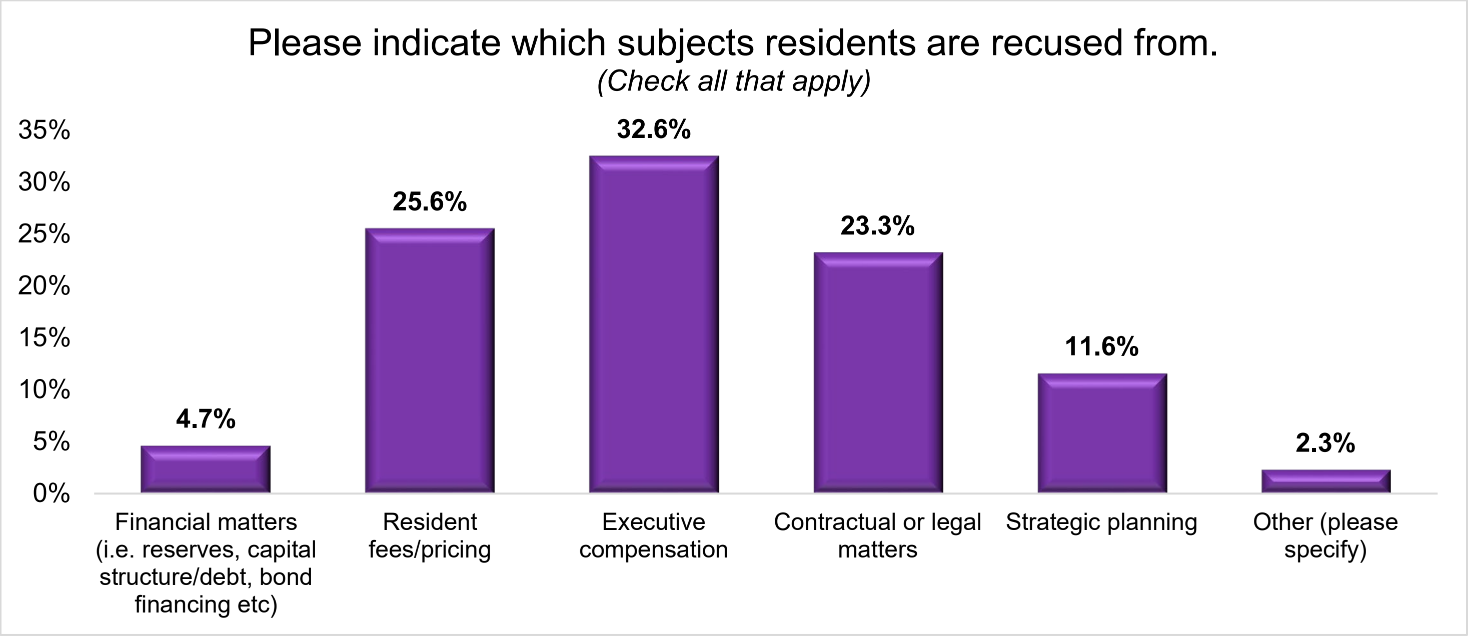
Overall, the responses suggest that while resident input is often incorporated in identifying candidates, final selection frequently remains with the governing board, reinforcing authority oversight while still incorporating resident perspectives. These results indicate that many organizations seek to balance meaningful resident representation with established governance practices.



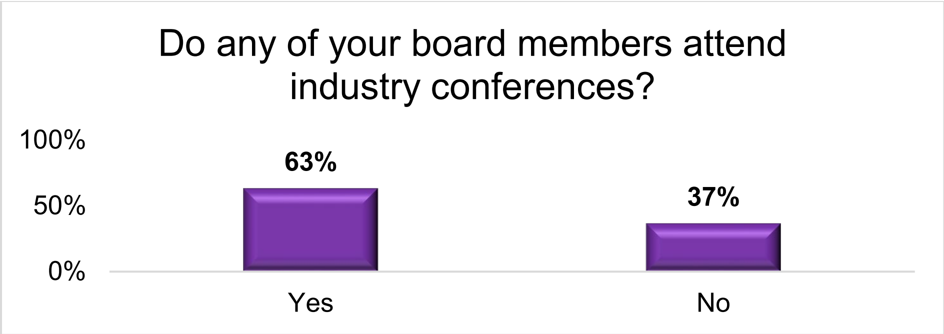
The survey results indicate that most organizations allow resident board members to participate broadly in governance discussions, with relatively few requiring formal recusal. Seventy-five percent of respondents report that residents are not required to recuse themselves from specific topics, while 25% indicate that recusal policies are in place for certain matters.



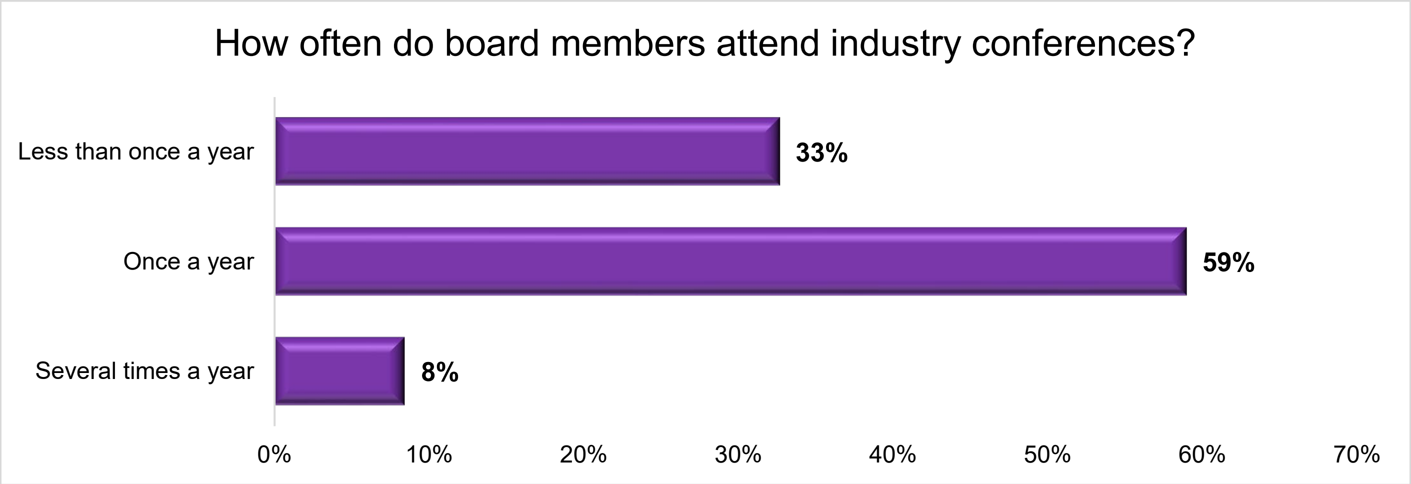
Among those organizations with recusal requirements, executive compensation (32.6%), resident fees or pricing (25.6%), and contractual or legal matters (23.3%) are the most frequently cited subjects. Far fewer organizations require recusal for strategic planning (11.6%) or broader financial matters such as audits, reserves, or capital structure decisions (4.7%), suggesting that many boards continue to include resident representatives in most governance discussions while applying targeted safeguards where potential conflicts of interest may arise.



A majority of organizations (63%) report that at least some board members attend industry conferences, indicating that many boards encourage external engagement and ongoing education about sector trends. However, 37% report that their board members do not attend industry conferences, suggesting that opportunities for broader industry exposure may vary across organizations.

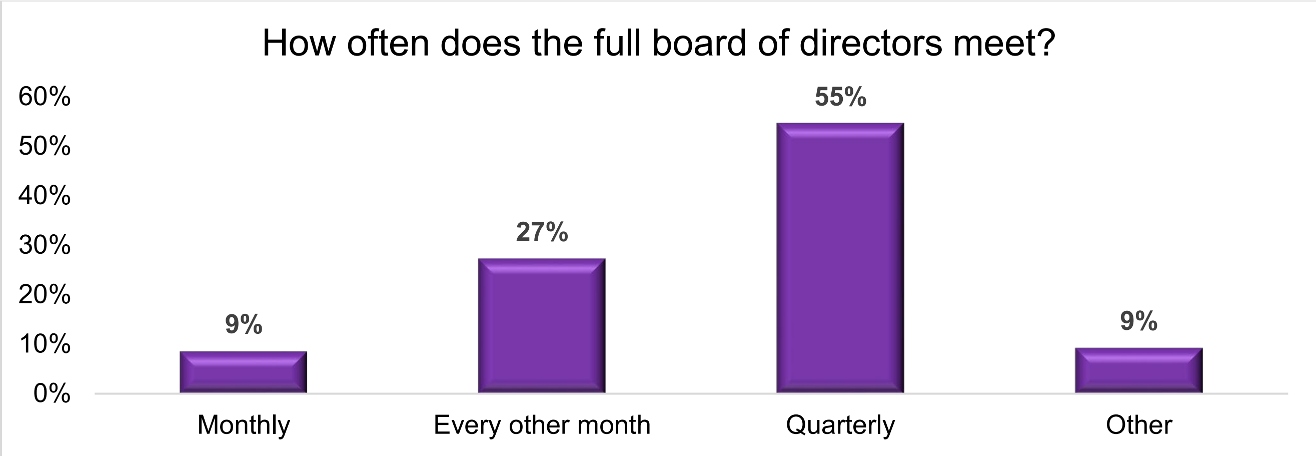


Among organizations where board members attend industry conferences, most report that participation occurs on a limited basis, with 59% indicating attendance approximately once per year. Another 33% report participation less frequently than once a year, while only 8% indicate that board members attend several times annually.

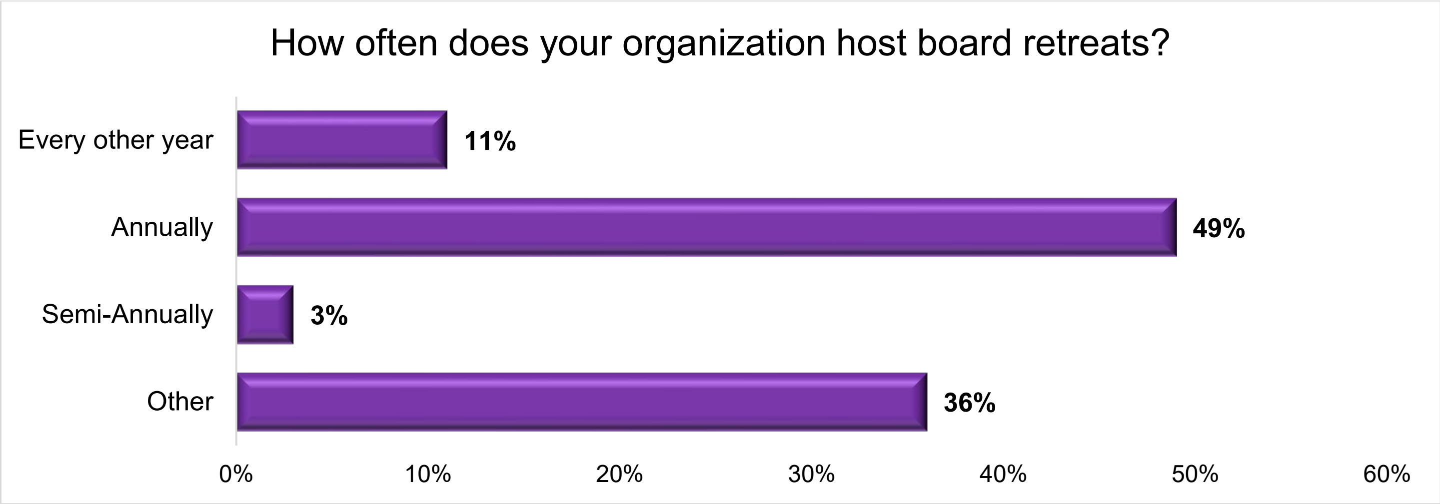


Most organizations report that the full board of directors meets on a quarterly basis (55%), making it the most common meeting cadence. Another 27% indicate meetings occur every other month, while 9% report monthly meetings.

Responses categorized as "other" reveals that many boards follow customized schedules that typically range between five and ten meetings per year, sometimes supplemented by an additional retreat or strategic planning session. Overall, the results indicate that while quarterly meetings remain the prevailing structure, many organizations adjust their meeting frequency to accommodate governance needs, planning activities, and organizational complexity.

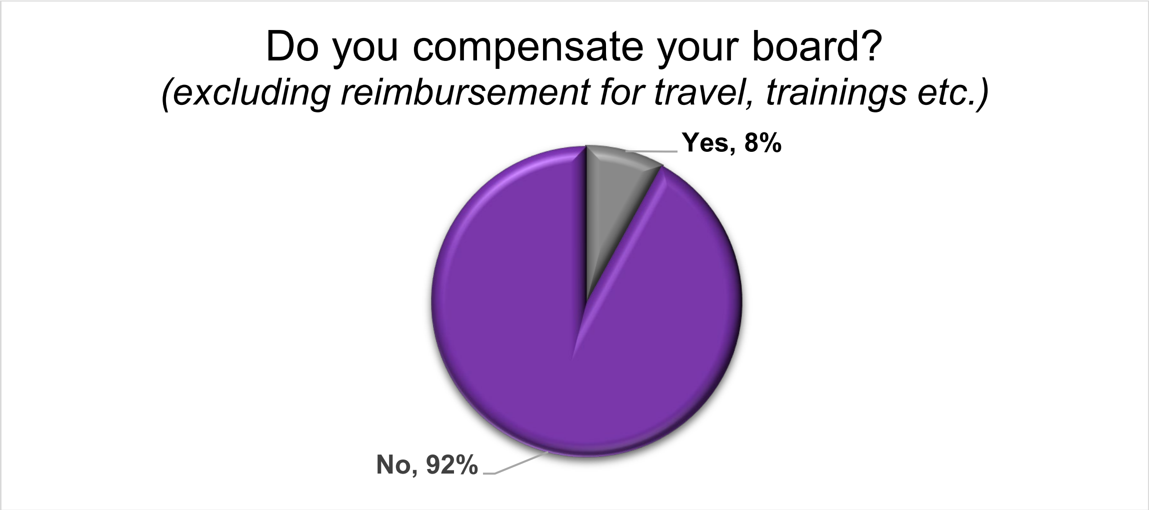


Responses suggest that many organizations do not hold formal board retreats, with nearly half of those who chose "other" indicating they never host them. Among those that do, retreats are typically held infrequently, most often every 3–5 years or on an as-needed basis, frequently tied to strategic planning efforts. A small number of organizations in this category rely on regular board education sessions or internal strategic planning meetings rather than dedicated retreats.



The vast majority of organizations (92%) report that they do not compensate their board members, aside from potentially reimbursing expenses such as travel or training. Only 8% indicate that board members receive some form of compensation for their service.

These results reflect the common governance structure among many not-for-profit organizations, where board service is typically viewed as a volunteer leadership role focused on mission stewardship rather than financial compensation.



Among the small share of organizations that report compensating board members, compensation levels vary widely and appear to differ somewhat between single-site and multi-site organizations.

For single-site organizations, reported compensation ranges from $500 to $46,988, suggesting that while some boards receive modest stipends, others provide more substantial compensation. For multi-site organizations, reported amounts range from $55 to $33,500, with most responses falling in the low-to-mid five-figure range or below.

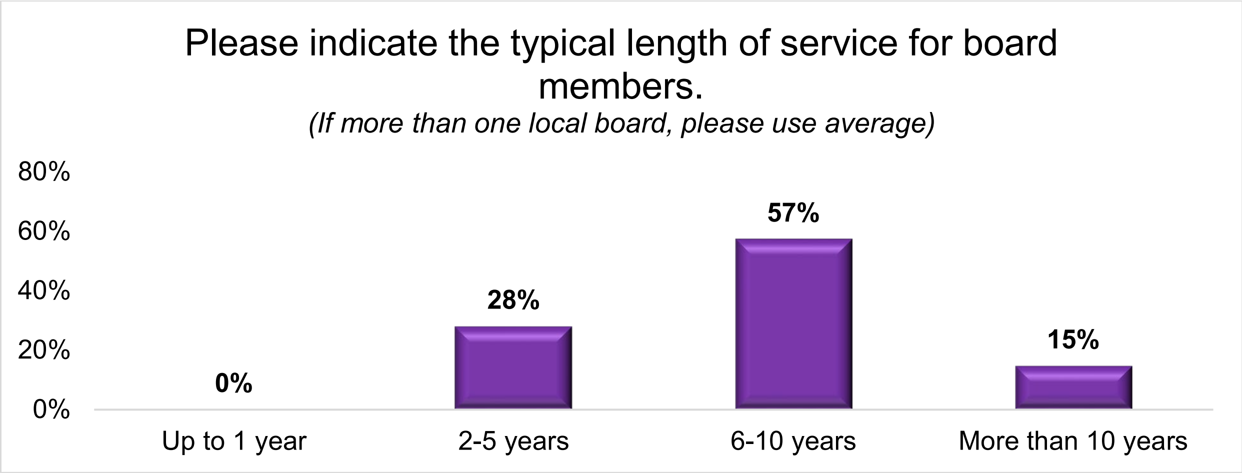
Overall, the results indicate significant variations in board compensation practices, even among the relatively small number of organizations that provide compensation, with no clear standard approach across the sector.

Range of Board Member Compensation*	
Single-site Range	**$500-$46,988**
Multi-site Range	**$55 - $33,500**
Total Range	**$55 - $46,988**

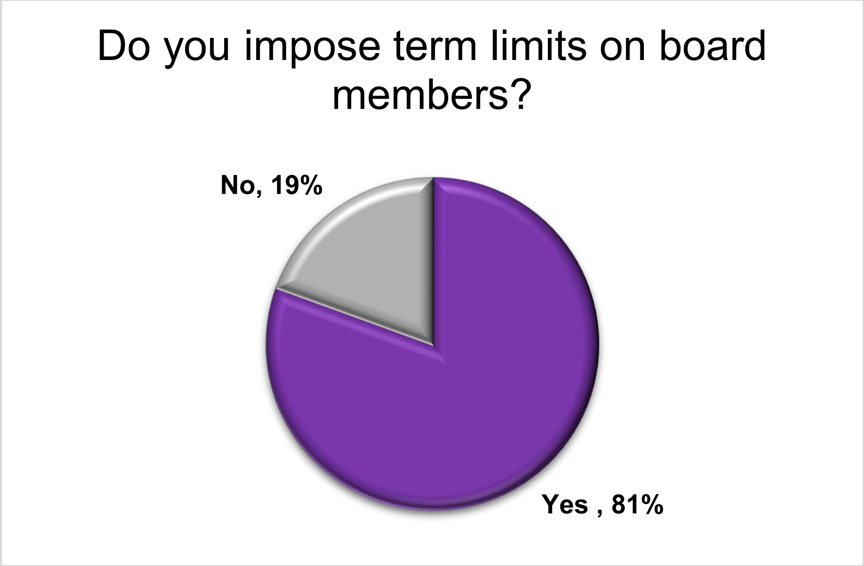
**N = 11. Verbatim responses reported.*

Most organizations report relatively long board service tenures, with 57% indicating a typical length of service between six and ten years. Another 28% report terms of two to five years, while 15% indicate board members typically serve more than ten years.

Overall, the results suggest that many organizations rely on longer-term board engagement, allowing members to develop institutional knowledge and continuity in governance, while still maintaining periodic turnover through defined term structures.

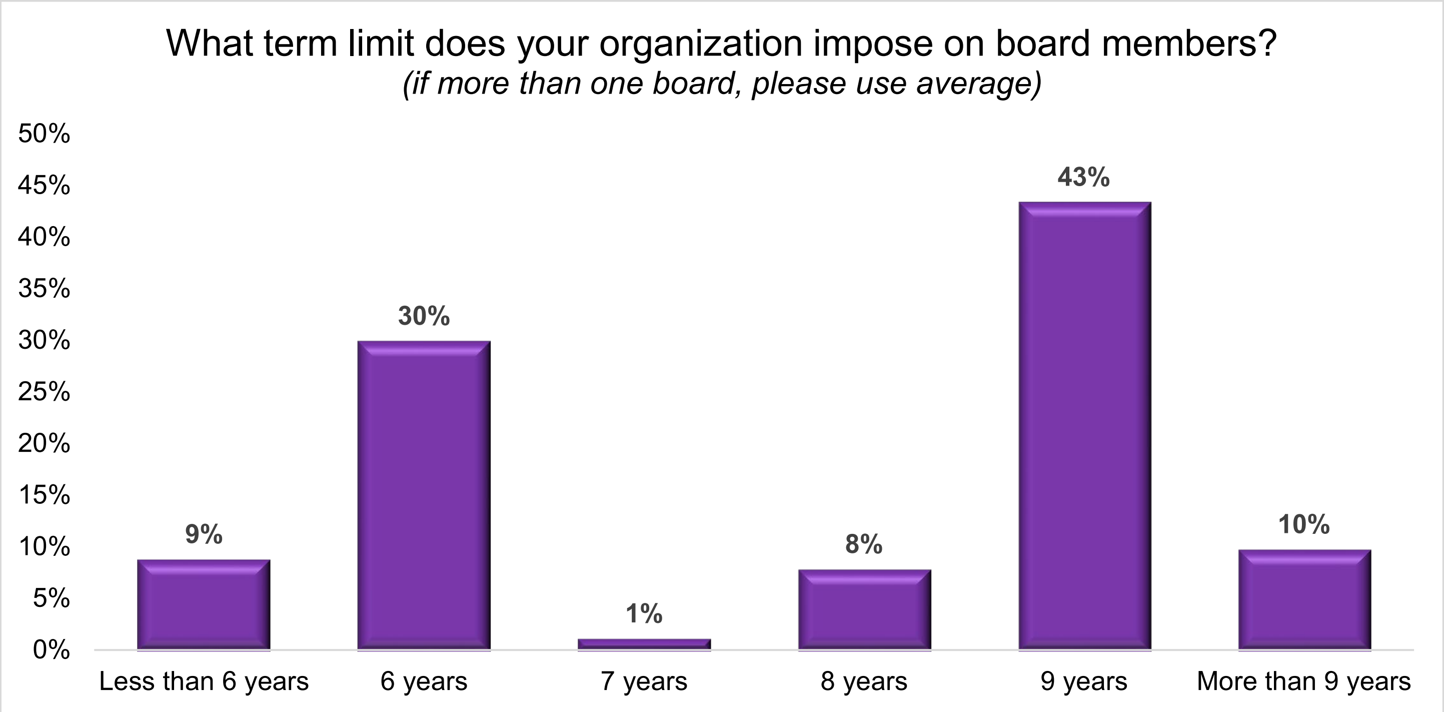


A large majority of organizations (81%) report that they impose limits on board members, while 19% indicate that they do not have formal limits in place.

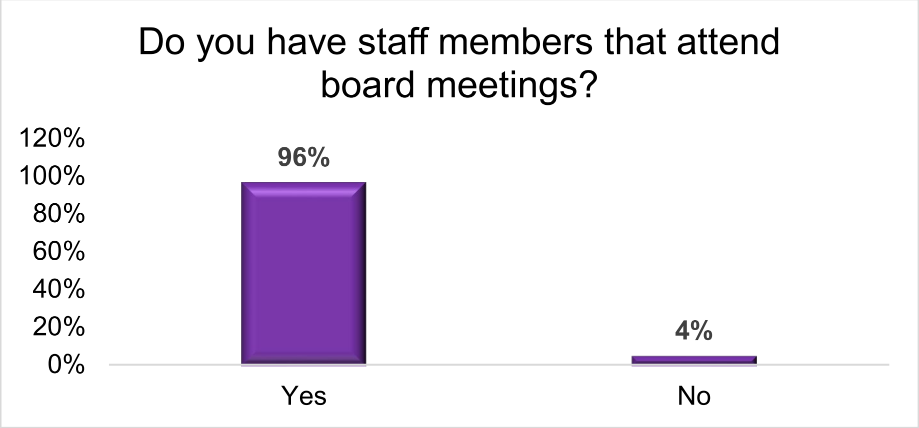


The majority of organizations report board terms of three years, with the most common limits allowing two to three consecutive terms (6–9 years total). A smaller number allow longer service through four-year terms or extended limits of up to 10–12 years. Many organizations also require trustees to rotate off the board for at least one year before being eligible to return, supporting board refreshment while maintaining continuity.

Some other nuances include organizations that have different term limits for non-resident board members and resident board members, with residents serving fewer years, as well as differing limits for corporate and local community boards.



Nearly all organizations (96%) report that staff members attend board meetings, while only 4% indicate that staff do not participate.

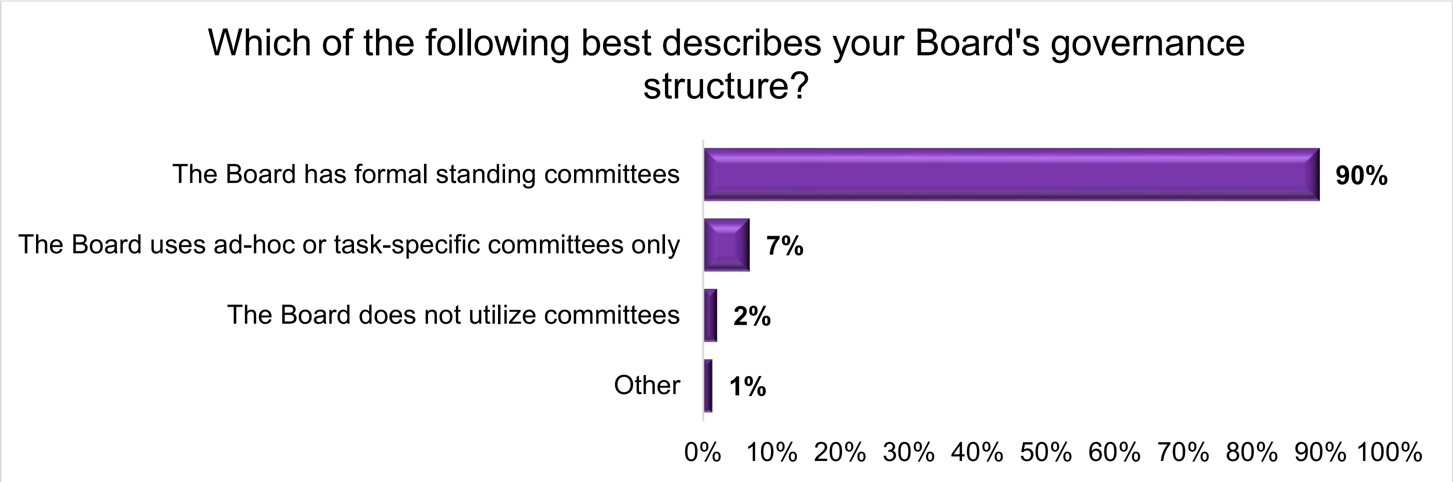


When asked which staff usually attend board meetings, responses indicate that the CEO and CFO are the most consistently present staff roles at board meetings, reflecting the importance of strategic leadership and financial reporting in board discussions. Many organizations also report participation from other members of the executive leadership team, including COO, CHROs, and other C-suite leaders, depending on the topics being addressed.

In addition, vice presidents, directors, and department leaders, particularly in areas such as marketing, development operations, and health services may attend periodically to present updates or provide subject-matter expertise. Overall, board meetings typically include core executive leadership along with select operational leaders based on the meeting agenda.

The vast majority of organizations (90%) report that their boards utilize formal standing committees, making it the dominant governance structure among respondents. A much smaller share (7%) rely primarily on ad-hoc or task-specific committees, while only 2% indicate that their boards do not utilize committees at all.

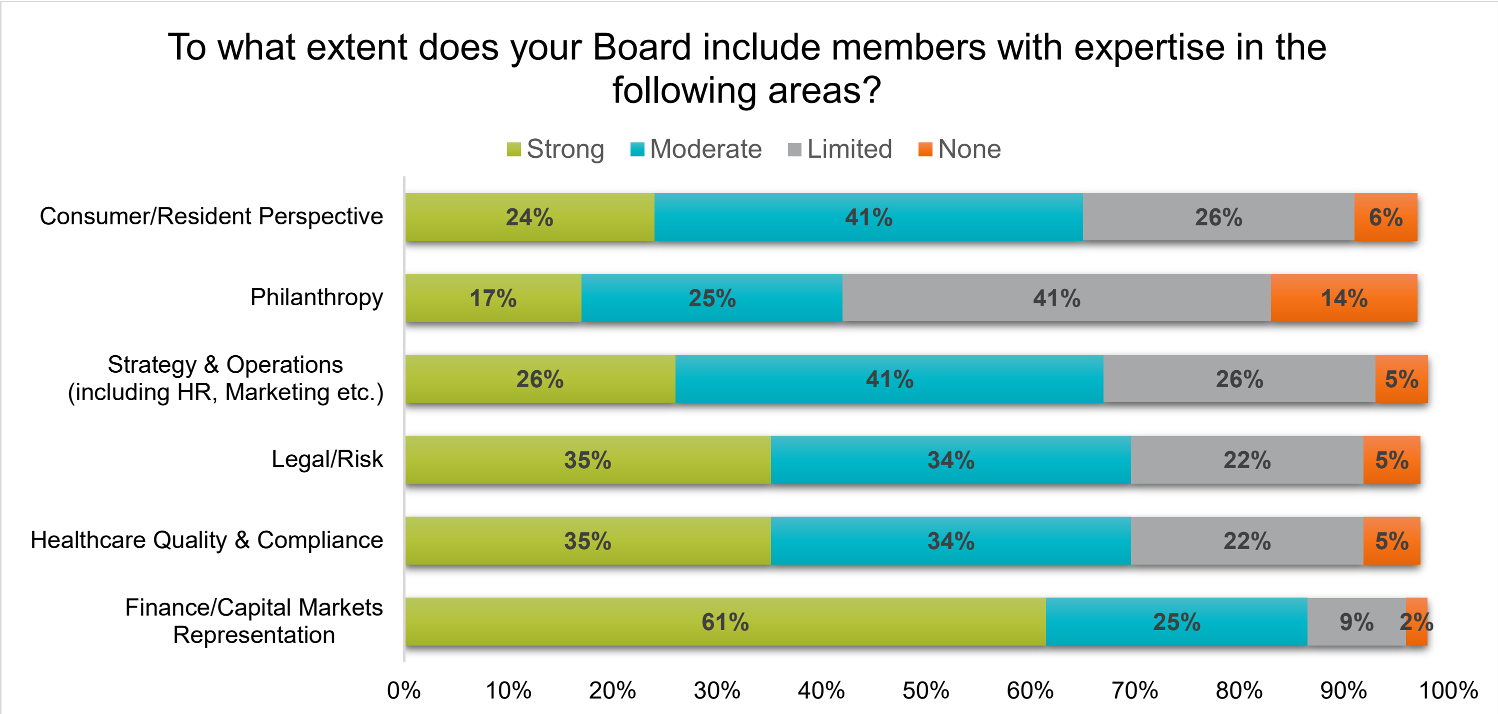
The few "Other" responses indicate that some organizations use a combination of both formal standing committees and ad-hoc committees, depending on the needs of the board. Overall, the results suggest that most boards rely on structured committee frameworks to support governance responsibilities and focus on key areas such as finance, governance, and strategy.



The results suggest that the most strongly represented skill set of sitting board members are in finance and capital markets, with 61% reporting strong representation in these areas and another 25% reporting moderate representation. This reflects the importance of financial oversight and capital planning in board governance.

Boards also report meaningful expertise in legal/risk and healthcare quality and compliance, with 35% indicating strong representation in each of these areas and another 34% reporting moderate representation. Expertise related to strategy and operations, and consumer or resident perspective is more commonly reported at moderate levels, suggesting these professionals are present but may not always be deeply represented.

In contrast, philanthropy expertise appears somewhat less prevalent, with the largest share (41%) indicating only limited representation in this area. Overall, the results indicate that boards tend to prioritize financial, regulatory, and operational expertise, while other perspectives such as philanthropy or resident experience may be incorporated to varying degrees depending on the organization.



At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to share any additional comments about their Board's structure, composition, or governance practices that they feel are important or distinctive. Responses highlight the continued influence of faith-based sponsorship and resident representation in board governance structures across many not-for-profit senior living & care organizations. At the same time, several providers indicated they are modernizing governance practices, including implementing term limits, recruiting trustees based on skill sets, and working to increase diversity. These responses suggest organizations are balancing long-standing governance traditions with the evolving needs of a more complex operating environment.

Below are a few of the comments:

- *"Working toward more age diversity and racial diversity. Recently moved to allowing virtual participation at all meetings except the annual retreat."*

- *"We have a spreadsheet with talents listed so that when we have an open position, we know what types of experience we are looking for."*

- *"We do not vote, but rather find consensus"*
- *"Two members of Residents Council attend all Board meetings, excluding Executive Session."*
- *"Our Board nominations must be ratified by founding churches. Majority of Board members come from the two founding churches."*
- *"In addition to our 3 voting resident board members, our organization has a resident representative from each community that attends board meetings. They do not vote and do not attend executive sessions. The residents that attend generally find this to be a very good experience and appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the organization."*
- *"We maintain 6 board seats for each of the two historical sponsoring church vestries (12 seats total)."*
- *"Having 1 resident on the board is required by state regulations. We have 4 on the Corporate Board and another 4 on the Foundation Board…The high number of residents at board meetings had a chilling effect on appropriate fee increases for many years, prior to new management's arrival…"*

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