

2019-2020

Charter School Governance

Index Report

We surveyed 635 trustees and CEOs representing 166 charter school boards nationwide.

Their responses paint a clear picture of the state of charter school governance today.

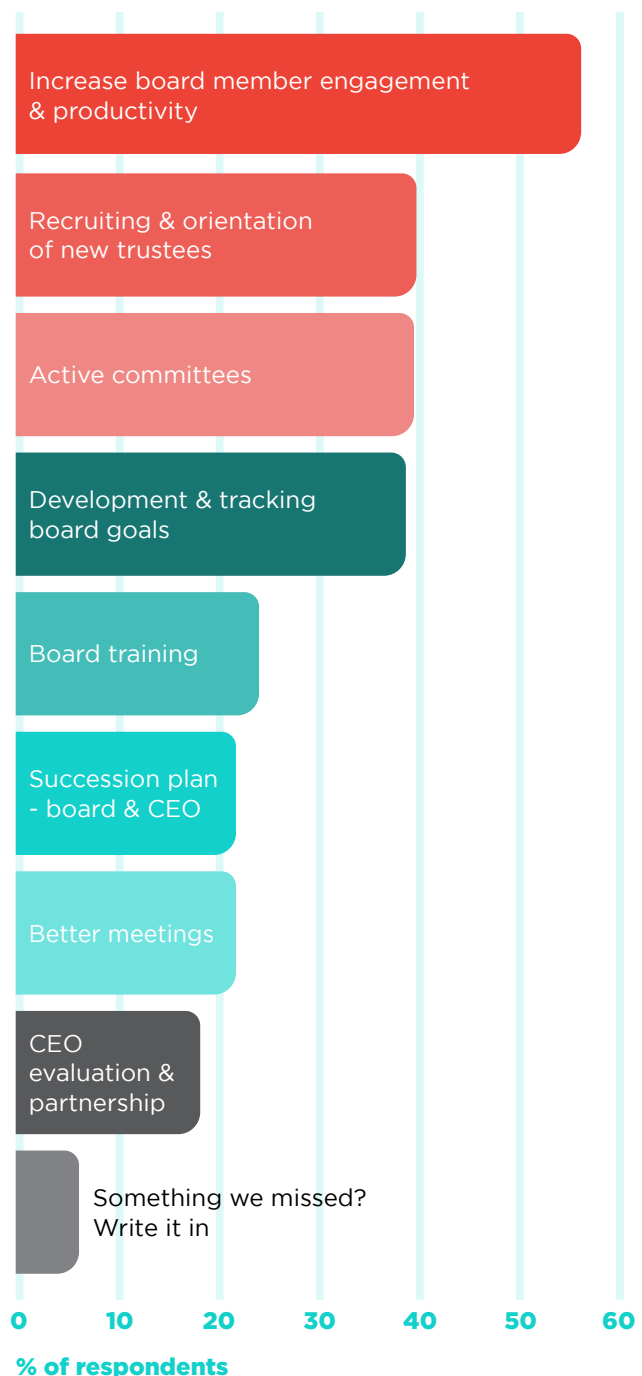
We asked charter school trustees & CEOs one question:

What are your top three board development goals for this year?

The responses seem clearly unified around four key areas. But there's more to this story.

In addition to the multiple choices presented as potential answers, respondents could write in anything we missed.

The write-ins were few and far between. The approximately 40 we received focused primarily on development and fundraising, representing a strong enough curve to inform next year's index framework.

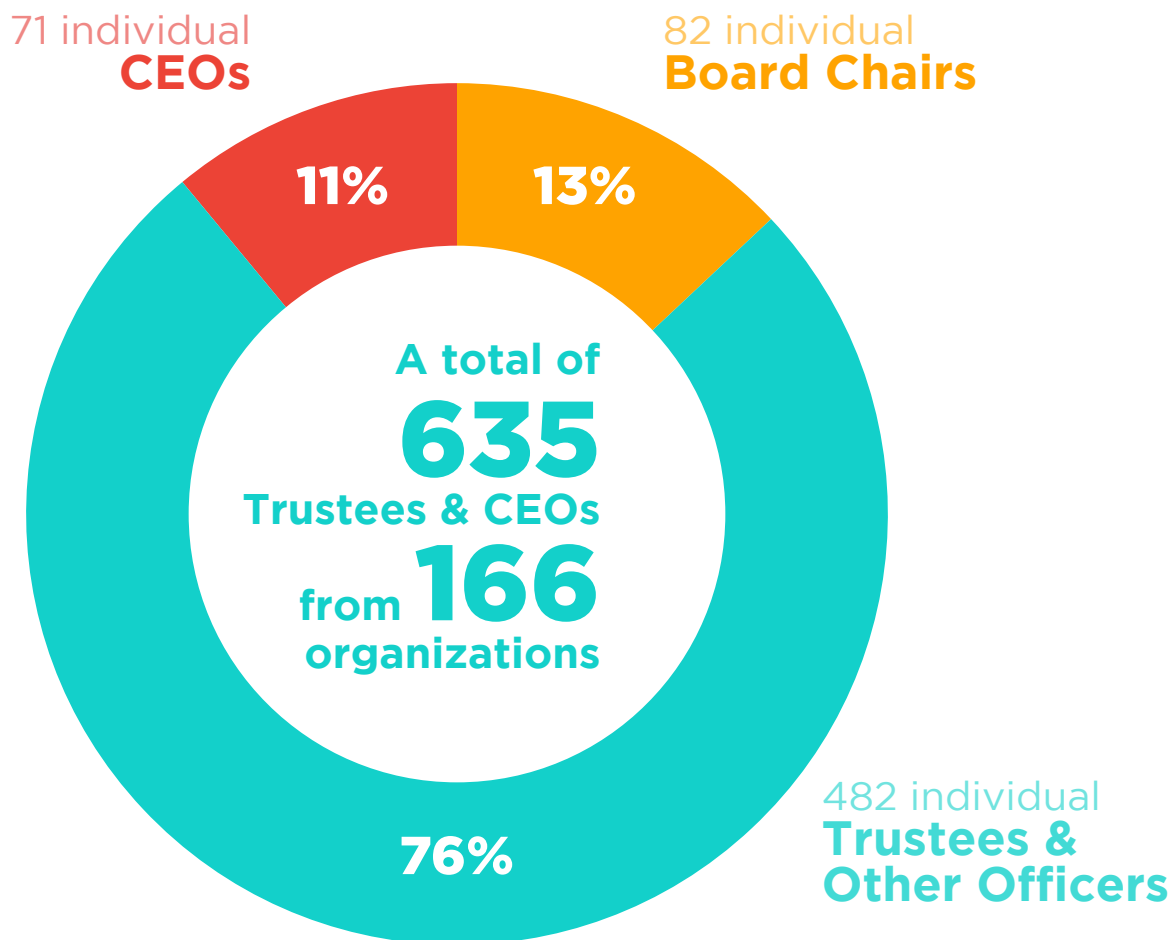


More about the respondents

Consistent with the nature of [governance teams](#), board members represent the largest portion of our respondents.

The respondents represent a cross-section of trustees and CEOs at a wide range of charter schools: new schools in their founding years, those establishing a strong proof point, and emerging or large charter management organizations.

All respondents are associated with boards that are **BoardOnTrack** members.



Finding #1:

To be effective, charter school boards must get aligned on their priorities.

Depending on your role on the board or as CEO, your view of the board's work and the organization as a whole can be dramatically different.

You might all be sitting at the same table. But you don't see your board's priorities the same at all. What looks like a critical need will look different depending on the point of view allowed by your role.

Aligning around a single set of priorities is the primary challenge to charter school governance today.

As you'll see throughout this report, our survey finds major divides in how trustees, board chairs, and CEOs see the board's top-most development priorities.

For example: far more trustees and CEOs see the need for board meetings to be better than do the board chairs who likely run those same meetings.

In practice, this means that the majority of the team has deemed to be a top priority something that will not be addressed. Because the person who could address it, the board chair, doesn't share that view.

Unless, of course, the team as a whole engages a clear process to name and align around a single set of priorities.

If you aren't aligned around what your priorities are, how will your board get the right work done?

Without aligning around a set of priorities, many governance teams might fall into focusing on personalities rather than priorities, or process in place of progress. [Both good process and measurable progress are vital. Neither can happen without the other.]

The results of this first annual charter school governance index call for every governance team to ask themselves three questions.

1. Is your team aligned around a single set of priorities?
2. How do you know?
3. How will you put your priorities into practice?

Is your team aligned?

Find out with the one-minute survey.

boardontrack.com/one-minute

Finding #2:

Charter school CEOs & trustees want to increase board member engagement & productivity.

The universality of this priority makes clear that charter school trustees are committed and want to do a better job. But, CEOs see this as an even greater need than trustees do.

When coupled with the two related priorities, on committees and board goals, it's clear that trustees also want their teams to be more engaged and productive.

Overwhelmingly, the top priority of charter school trustees & CEOs alike is to increase board member engagement & productivity.

Nearly 60% of all trustees and CEOs name engagement and productivity in their top three board development priorities. They represent a remarkable 81% of responding boards.

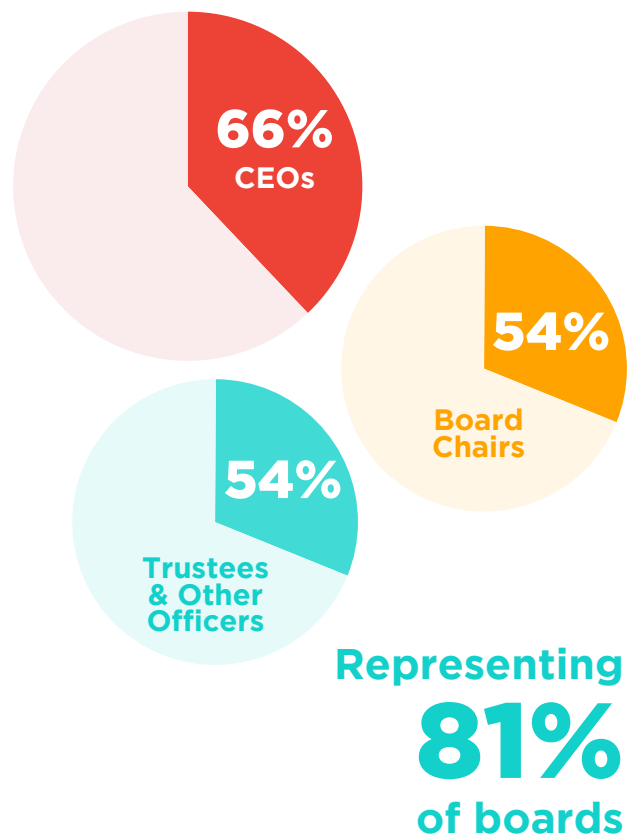
There's strong agreement across the roles here, with the majority of CEOs, board chairs, and trustees and other officers placing this in their top three.

What's contributing to this mindset? And what does this mean for boards and the charter schools they govern?

These teams are on the right track. It takes putting the right people, in the right roles, doing the right work, to actually make an impact.

But, this focus leaves a question: are you hearing your peers talk about this priority? It's not a topic we see covered in depth at national conferences. We think the community as a whole needs to focus together on how to boost board member engagement; on a consistent, scalable, sustainable level, with the right tools and training and processes. With unified focus, we'll reduce the friction that's required to be a good board.

Engagement & productivity is in the top three board development priorities for:



More CEOs think their boards need to be more engaged & productive than do trustees, chairs, or other officers.

Nearly 70% of CEOs name board engagement and productivity in their top three board development priorities. That's a considerably greater portion than board chairs, trustees, or other officers.

Where's the disconnect?

Board members are very busy volunteers. What they see as doing as much as they can might be seen as not enough by CEOs.

When viewed alongside the fact that nearly no one — including CEOs — put CEO partnership or support and evaluation in their top three priorities, this disparity becomes a bit easier to understand.

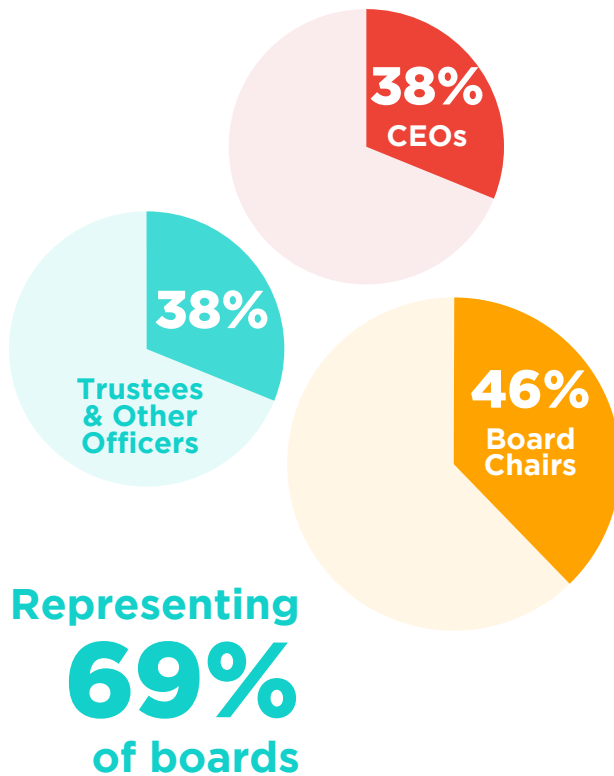
As much as the CEO relies on the board to be a strategic partner, most charter school leaders have little or no experience working with boards.

Without a robust board-CEO partnership, including a year-round evaluation **and** support process, the lines of communication are not as open as they need to be. There's neither the forum nor the habit of communicating in the way that would allow the CEO to voice their needs, or the board to understand them better.

Learn how to be a more
BoardSavvy™ charter school CEO.



Active Committees fell in the top three board development priorities for:



Get the definitive guide to building active board committees.

The majority of charter school boards want to have more active committees.

Anecdotally, it's our experience that, nationwide, too many boards are still functioning as a committee of the whole or with committees in name only.

They tend to believe that they don't have enough people, or not enough of the right people with the right skill sets, to form the right committees. Or, that their trustees are just too busy to get the work done in between board meetings *and* committee meetings.

Well-run committees are the engine of a well-run board.

The nearly 70% of CEOs who say they need more engaged and productive boards would do well to recognize the power of active committees to help them get what they're after.

The job of establishing & running committees sometimes falls too heavily to the CEO, but board chairs are feeling this need more acutely.

It's the board chairs and other officers who tend to run committees. In the founding stage, the CEOs tend to find themselves running or participating in each of their board's committees.

There are three key ingredients to building & maintaining active committees.

1. Structure yourself for success, with the five core committees every board needs — Finance, Development, Governance, Academic Excellence, and CEO Support and Evaluation.
2. Put the right people on the right committees; recruit non-board members to serve when needed.
3. Meet regularly [we recommend monthly], work towards strategic goals that contribute to the organization's priorities, and use a dashboard to track goals and tasks transparently.

Active committees need transparency & accountability.

Even if a board does have active committees, transparency and accountability are needed to confirm that the committees are in fact active.

If committee members aren't aligned on their priorities, the committee isn't aligned with the board's and organization's priorities, or the committee hasn't set and tracked measurable goals, the board won't know whether it has active committees. And that brings us to the next point within the engagement and productivity set.

More than one-third of trustees & CEOs are looking to better develop & track board goals.

This focus strengthens the clear picture of a community that wants to know they're not only getting things done, but getting the right things done. They want to translate their strong commitment into measurable results — and know the progress they're making throughout the year.

Board goals define how the board will add value to the organization this year.

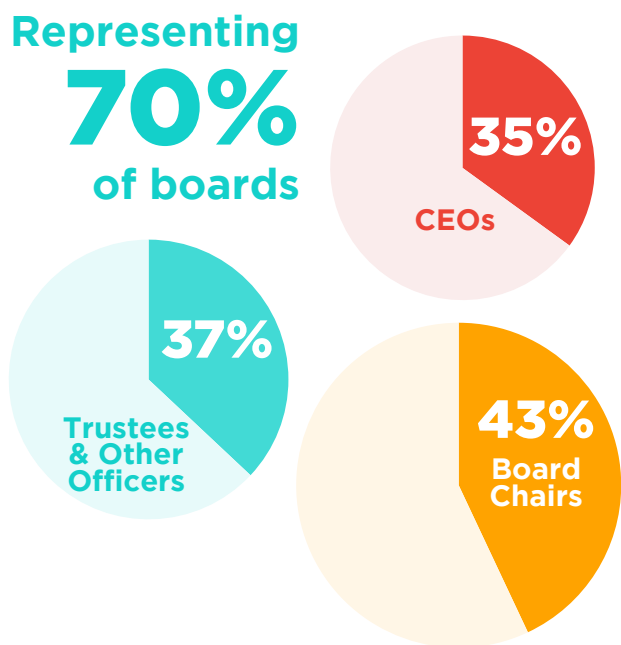
Each charter school board has a very important job to do and very little time to do it.

The board's goals are the difference between meetings that are strategically focused on priorities and progress, and those that are derailed by personalities or driven by being reactive.

Boards that seek to boost board member engagement and productivity will do well to set goals and set themselves up to achieve them.

The board needs a process for defining, timing and assigning the tasks that will build success. And a dashboard to track those tasks, ensuring transparency, accountability, and visibility.

Developing & Tracking Board Goals fell in the top three board development priorities for:



Get on track to make an impact.

Take our free email course — the guide to board goals.

Finding #3:

Recruiting & onboarding new trustees is paramount primarily to CEOs & board chairs.

Trailing far behind the group of engagement and productivity-related priorities, recruiting and orientation of new board members is a priority to nearly half of CEOs and trustees.

Recruiting is a perennial problem for every charter school board.

Term limits end, trustees move away, and the board's needs evolve constantly. As the organization grows, the board must grow as well, compounding the challenge of recruiting the right people at the right time.

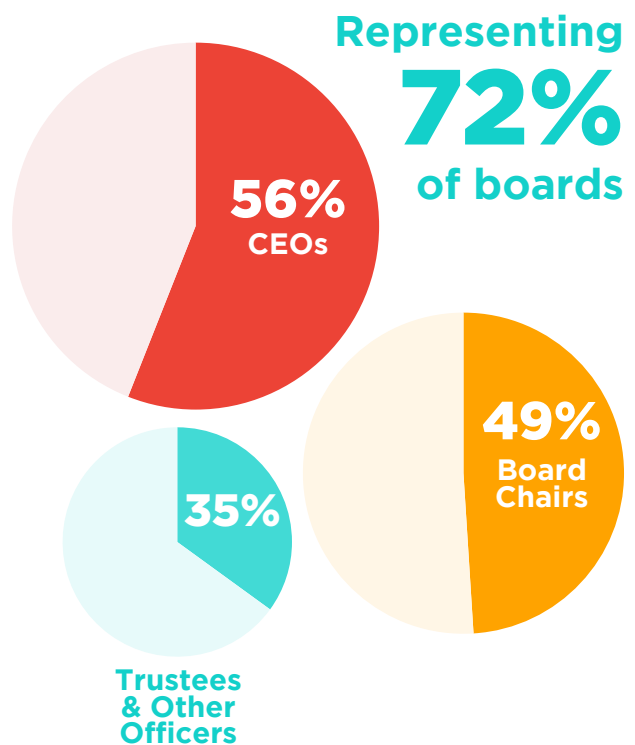
No matter how healthy your board is, recruiting and orientation will be an ongoing task. Even if you've got [strategic, data-driven recruiting working well](#), this should remain in the top three for the majority of CEOs and board chairs — if not all governance team members.

CEOs & board chairs think differently about this than board members & other officers because their roles are different.

Again, there's a division among the ranks here. More than half of CEOs [56%] and nearly half of all board chairs are focused in on this as a top priority. But, just about one-third of board members and other officers share this focus.

It makes sense. While board members' terms will eventually end, it's the board chairs, CEOs, and Governance Committee chairs on whose shoulders this all falls.

Recruiting & Orientation of New Board Members fell in the top three board development priorities for:



Get the tactics & tools you need to recruit your ideal board members.

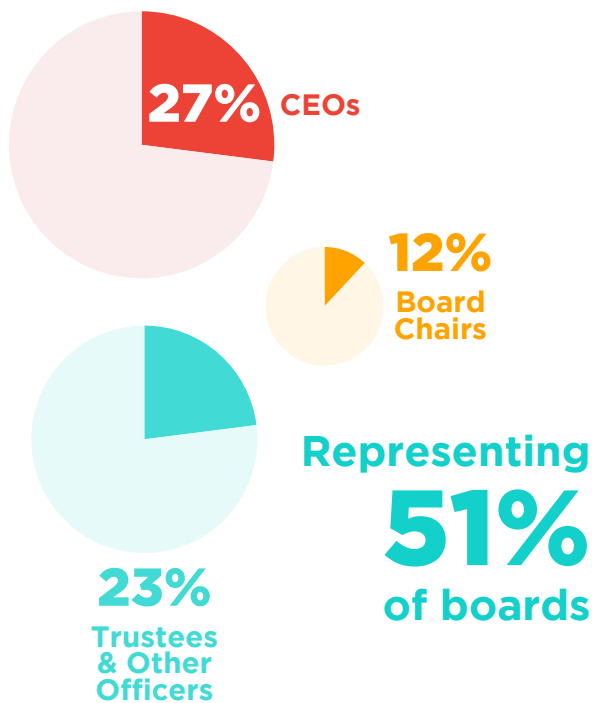
Get our free email course to go from reactive recruiting to strategically building your board.

Start Now

Finding #4:

Board members & CEOs need better meetings. Board chairs don't see it.

Better meetings fell in the top three board development priorities for:



Approximately one-quarter of trustees and CEOs place better meetings in their top three priorities. And only 12% of board chairs say the same.

This disconnect between the board chairs, who normally run meetings, and the CEOs and trustees who participate in them, is stark.

This data speaks to a stark disconnect between who's running the meeting and who's coming to the meeting.

This is another case in point that your view of the board's top priorities will be guided by your role. So, the board can only be aligned around a single set of priorities if you engage in a process to explicitly name and agree on them.

Meetings that are not well run are not engaging or productive.

Meetings are where the rubber meets the road for your board. The people who name this among their top three have figured out that better meetings make more productive and engaged boards.

And, the disconnect among roles on this priority is another potential root cause of the widely agreed-upon priority of boosting board member engagement and productivity.

If board members seem disengaged, that disengagement is being witnessed at meetings. If meetings — led by board chairs — are not well run, they're not engaging or productive.

As with other key findings, BoardOnTrack members might prioritize better meetings differently than the rest of the charter school community.

It's important to note here that board meetings are likely better if your board uses **BoardOnTrack**.

BoardOnTrack members build agendas easily off of past agendas, take meeting minutes in real time then quickly distribute for approval, and upload meeting packets online to ensure everyone can access the right information to be prepared for the next meeting.

When boards are more organized, meetings run better, and people are less likely to name this as a top priority for development.

Get tips for strengthening your board meetings.



Finding #5:

Board training is a top priority for board members. But not for CEOs.

While just about one-quarter of board chairs, members, and other officers name board training among their top priorities, only 15% of CEOs do the same.

Board members need training & professional development.

A lack of training could be what's driving board member engagement and productivity concerns in many boards.

But board members want to do a better job for the charter schools they're governing and the CEOs they're partnering with. It's up to governance teams nationwide to engage the right resources to meet this need.

Who makes the decisions for your board's training & professional development?

If your CEO plans your board retreat, but doesn't see board training as a priority, how will your board get the training it needs?

In order to invest in quality training, and training that meets the organization's needs, CEOs and board members need to be on the same page about where this falls in their priorities, and why.

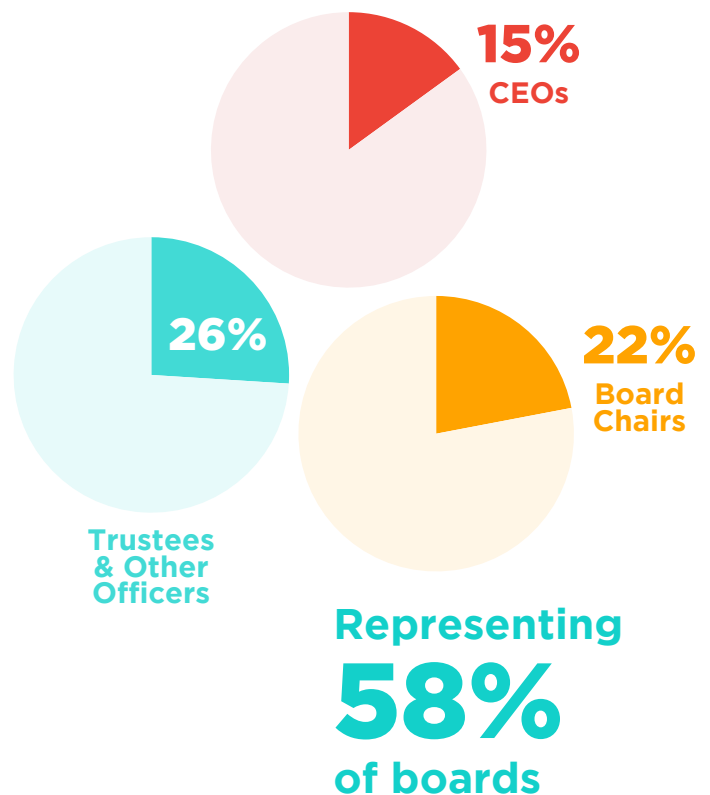
CEOs who want better board member engagement & productivity should look to meeting their board's training needs.

It is indeed a bit ironic that professional development for the board is not among the top board development priorities for so many CEOs. Especially when we reach back to the high percentage of CEOs who want better board member engagement and productivity.

Still, training alone will not solve board challenges sustainably.

Building a better board and delivering exceptional results requires the right combination of professional development, scalable processes, and measurable progress.

Board Training fell in the top three board development priorities for:



Finding #6:

CEO support & evaluation isn't among anyone's top priorities.

Quite possibly the most surprising and concerning finding: nearly no one place the CEO evaluation and partnership in their top three priorities.

Is this because people are doing a great job? Or they don't know the importance of this?

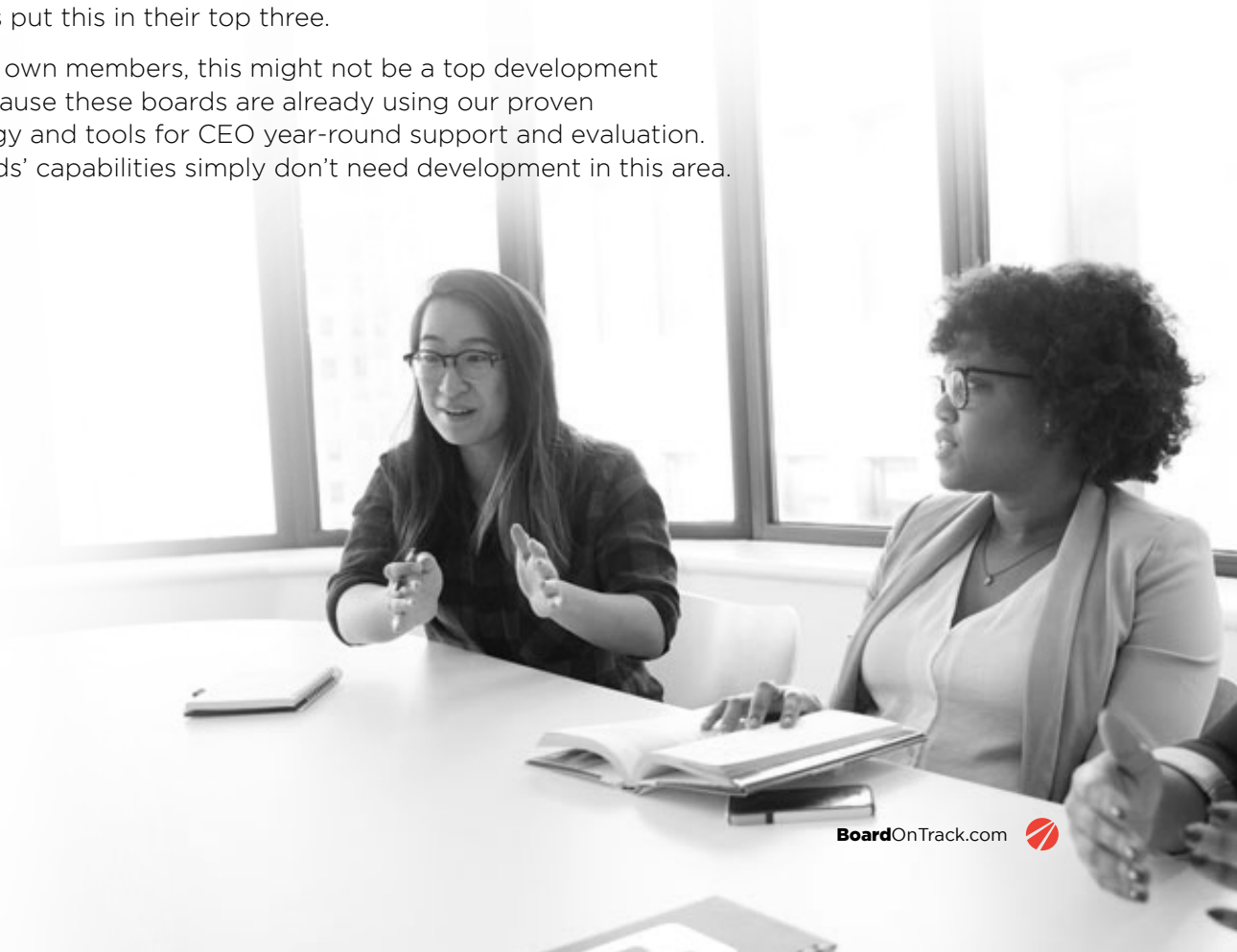
Granted, these leaders have numerous concerns to attend to.

Perhaps if we'd stretched out to ask for their top five, the results would've been different. Still, it's important to take note.

Arguably, the board's most important job is to hire, evaluate, support and, when necessary, fire their charter school's top executive. That takes consistent process and purposeful partnership.

It starts with the board chair and CEO. Yet, only 5% of board chairs and 4% of CEOs put this in their top three.

Among our own members, this might not be a top development priority because these boards are already using our proven methodology and tools for CEO year-round support and evaluation. These boards' capabilities simply don't need development in this area.



About BoardOnTrack

BoardOnTrack empowers charter school boards to deliver exceptional results.

Headquartered in Massachusetts, **Board**OnTrack members include hundreds of high-performing charter schools and charter management organizations throughout the nation.

We equip trustees with a powerful combination of data and proven practices to govern for growth, without drowning in the details that form the underpinnings of good governance.

We enable charter school CEOs and senior staff to leverage their boards as strategic governing partners, without turning board management into {yet another} full-time job.

In short, **Board**OnTrack simplifies board governance. We provide all that your board needs to help deliver on your charter promises, all in one place.



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