



BOARD & GOVERNANCE LAB

TRAINING SERIES

**STRONGER BOARDS.
STRONGER IMPACT.**

This training combines governance education with the practical tools needed to help boards lead through complexity, change, and growth.

alabamanonprofits.org

FALL 2026



Lab Goals

Overarching learning objectives for this program include:

1. Gain a clear understanding of the legal roles and responsibilities of nonprofit board members.
2. Explore the fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governance
3. Examine components for nurturing a healthy partnership between the board, chief executive, and community, and factors that influence these relationships
4. Identify emerging trends and effective practices that strengthen meetings, organizational resilience, leadership during periods of uncertainty and rapid change
5. Improve/develop governance practices for succession, transitions, and board renewal



Legal Roles



Healthy Partnerships



Effective Practices



Nonprofit organizations are operating in an environment of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and scrutiny. Shifting funding realities, heightened expectations for accountability, leadership transitions, workforce challenges, and changing community needs are requiring boards to do more than provide traditional oversight. Today's boards must be prepared to govern with clarity, courage, and strategic foresight.

The Board & Governance Lab—a partnership between the Alabama Association of Nonprofits and Vernetta Walker & Associates Consulting, is a six-part learning experience designed to strengthen the governance capacity of nonprofit organizations and the leaders who guide them. Designed for executive directors, CEOs, board chairs, officers, and board members, the Lab helps participants move beyond understanding basic board responsibilities to building the governance practices their organizations need to thrive and navigate the future.

Across six sessions, participants will examine effective governance; what high-performing boards do differently; board engagement and accountability; impactful meetings; committee structures that create space for consequential work; succession and leadership continuity; and how to translate governance knowledge into sustained organizational practice.

Vernetta Walker & Associates Consulting is a national advisory firm that helps nonprofit and social sector organizations strengthen governance, leadership, and organizational resilience—particularly in complex, high-stakes, and rapidly changing environments. The firm works with boards, CEOs, and leadership teams to navigate critical governance challenges, strengthen board-CEO partnership, clarify decision-making and accountability, and build governance practices capable of supporting organizations through growth, transition, uncertainty, and change.

Strong governance does not happen by accident. It must be intentional, assessed, and strengthened over time.



Session 1

The New Fundamentals of Nonprofit Governance: Building a Foundation for High-Impact Leadership In-Person - 6 Hours

The environment in which nonprofit boards govern has changed dramatically, and the fundamentals of good governance must be understood within that new reality. Increasing financial pressures, heightened legal and reputational risk, rapidly changing technology, shifting community expectations, and greater demands for transparency and accountability require boards to be more informed, agile, and intentional about how they lead.

This session establishes a contemporary foundation for effective nonprofit governance by examining the board's core roles and responsibilities, including its legal and fiduciary duties and the critical distinction between governance and management. Participants will explore how the board's responsibilities extend beyond compliance and oversight to include stewardship of the organization's mission, strategy, resources, leadership, and long-term sustainability. The session will challenge participants to see governance not simply as an organizational requirement, but as a strategic asset—and potentially a competitive advantage—that can strengthen organizational performance, resilience, credibility, and mission impact.

This session will explore:

- Core board roles, responsibilities, and fiduciary duties
- Governance versus management
- Stewardship of mission, strategy, resources, and leadership
- Governance as a strategic asset and competitive advantage

*The goal is not simply better boards;
it is stronger organizations because they are better governed.*

Session 1a (Will be a part of Session 1)

The Board's Role in Fundraising:

Building a Board That Opens Doors, Builds Relationships, and Becomes a Powerful Champion for the Mission

A fundraising board is not necessarily a board where everyone is asking for gifts. It is a board where members understand their role, connect people and open doors through their relationships, strengthen donor relationships, and help grow the organization's resources.

Often said, "***Our board needs to help more with fundraising.***" But a more useful question is: "***What do you actually want them to DO?***"

This practical session will help nonprofit CEOs and Board Chairs answer that question by clarifying expectations, creating a stronger culture of engagement, and identifying meaningful ways for every board member to contribute. Participants will leave with practical strategies for equipping board members, increasing participation, and building a stronger CEO–Board Chair partnership around fundraising.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Clarify the board's fundraising role and how board and staff work together to build relationships and grow resources
2. Recognize fundraising as relationship building, not simply asking for money.
3. Identify specific, practical ways board members can contribute to fundraising beyond making the ask.
4. Strengthen the CEO–Board Chair partnership in setting expectations, engaging board members, and creating a culture that supports fundraising.
5. Create a Board Fundraising Action Plan for increasing board fundraising engagement within their own organization.

Guest Presenter

Nancy Rieves, Founder and CEO of Fundraising Maximized,
Your Fundraising Coach





Session 2

What High-Performing Boards Do Differently: Moving from Oversight to Strategic Leadership Webinar - 2 hours

High-performing boards distinguish themselves not simply by what they know, but by how they govern—where they focus their attention, the questions they ask, the quality of their relationships, and their willingness to engage the issues that matter most. This session examines the practices and behaviors that enable boards to move beyond routine oversight and become effective strategic partners in organizational leadership.

Participants will explore the essential elements of a strong board–CEO partnership, including role clarity, mutual accountability, trust, and the ability to navigate appropriate boundaries between governance and operations. Using the fiduciary, strategic, and generative modes of governance, participants will consider how boards can shift their altitude depending on the issue before them—monitoring performance when appropriate, shaping strategic direction when necessary, and asking deeper questions about assumptions, possibilities, and what may be changing around the organization. The session will also examine how boards create a culture of inquiry, candor, and constructive challenge where differing perspectives are welcomed.

This session will explore:

- Board–CEO partnership and mutual accountability
- Strategic versus operational thinking
- Fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance
- Inquiry, candor, and constructive challenge

*High-performing boards do not simply oversee the work;
they improve the quality of the thinking.*



Session 3

Board Engagement and Accountability:

Moving From Attendance to Ownership

Webinar - 2 hours

An effective board needs more than capable people around the table—it needs board members who understand what is expected of them and take collective ownership for the organization’s mission, direction, and performance. This session explores the full board member lifecycle, from recruiting people whose perspectives, expertise, networks, and lived experiences align with the organization’s future needs to onboarding them for meaningful contribution and creating clear expectations for service.

Participants will examine what genuine engagement looks like beyond meeting attendance and committee participation, including preparation, inquiry, advocacy, strategic contribution, and shared accountability. The session will also address one of the most persistent governance challenges: what to do when board members are disengaged or consistently fail to meet expectations. Participants will explore practical approaches to board assessment, candid feedback, ongoing development, and board renewal—building a culture in which accountability is understood not as punitive, but as essential to effective stewardship.

This session will explore:

- Board member recruitment, onboarding, and continuous development
- What meaningful engagement looks like
- Expectations, performance, and accountability
- Evaluating board effectiveness

Engagement is not attendance. It is ownership.



Session 4

Meetings that Matter: Redesigning Where Governance Actually Happens Webinar - 2 hours

Board meetings should be where the board does its most consequential work—not where information goes to be read aloud. Yet too many meetings are dominated by reports, updates, and committee business, leaving little time for the strategic questions, difficult tradeoffs, emerging risks, and future-focused conversations that require the board's collective judgment. This session examines how meeting architecture can fundamentally change the quality of governance. Participants will explore how to design agendas around organizational priorities, use consent agendas and dashboards to streamline routine oversight, and intentionally create space for fiduciary, strategic, and generative discussion. The session will also examine the role of committees, the quality and timing of information provided to the board, and decision-making practices that promote thoughtful inquiry without unnecessarily slowing action. Participants will leave prepared to assess whether their current meeting practices are enabling the board to govern—or simply keeping it busy.

This session will explore:

- Agenda architecture around organizational priorities
- Consent agendas and dashboards
- Strategic and generative discussion
- Committee roles, information flow, and decision-making

Board meetings should create value, not simply consume time.



Session 5

Governance Sustainability:

Succession, Transition & Renewal

Webinar - 2 hours

Leadership transitions are inevitable; governance disruption does not have to be. Sustainable governance requires boards to think beyond who is serving today and intentionally build the leadership capacity, institutional knowledge, and governance infrastructure the organization will need tomorrow. This session examines succession as an ongoing governance responsibility rather than an activity triggered by a resignation or crisis. Participants will explore board succession and renewal, officer and committee leadership pipelines, executive transition readiness, term limits, and strategies for transferring institutional knowledge without becoming dependent on long-tenured individuals. Particular attention will be given to the board's responsibility for preparing for both planned and unexpected CEO transitions and ensuring that leadership change does not destabilize the organization. The goal is to help participants build governance systems that preserve continuity while making room for new perspectives, new leadership, and the organization's evolving needs.

This session will explore:

- Board succession and renewal
- Officer and committee leadership pipelines
- Planned and unexpected executive transitions
- Term limits, institutional knowledge, and resilience

Leadership continuity is built before a transition begins.



Session 6

Turning Governance Practice into Mission Impact! Webinar - 2 hours

This capstone session challenges participants to move beyond adopting governance “leading practices,” to consider whether the way their board governs actually enables the organization to achieve what matters most. Drawing on the full Board & Governance Lab, participants will examine how role clarity, board–CEO partnership, engagement, meeting architecture, accountability, succession, and strategic thinking work together as an integrated governance system. They will assess where their current governance practices support organizational performance—and where structures, habits, or traditions may be getting in the way. Most importantly, through inquiry participants will identify what their organization needs from its board over the next 12–18 months, so they can translate that into a focused governance agenda: what the board should start, stop, continue, or redesign, who will take ownership, and how progress will be measured. Participants leave the series not simply knowing more about governance, but with clear priorities for putting better governance to work.

This session will explore:

- What to start, stop, continue, or redesign
- Governance priorities
- Action steps and measures of progress



About Our Facilitator

Vernetta Walker is CEO and Chief Governance Gladiator of Vernetta Walker & Associates Consulting, a national advisory firm focused on strengthening nonprofit boards, CEOs, and leadership teams in complex, high-stakes environments. A former Chief Governance Officer and Vice President of Programs at BoardSource, Vernetta brings more than 20 years of experience helping mission-driven organizations govern with clarity, courage, and accountability.

Vernetta has advised hundreds of public charities, associations, and foundations across the United States and globally. Her clients include Easterseals, the Smithsonian National

Adj. Professor

Columbia Univ.

Nonprofit Expertise

20+ Years

Museum of the American Indian, YMCA of the USA, the National Aquarium, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and the Walt Disney Company.

Known for her practical, candid approach, Vernetta works at the intersection of governance, strategy, and leadership—helping boards move beyond compliance to become engaged, effective partners in mission impact. In addition to consulting and executive coaching, she is a sought-after speaker and facilitator on nonprofit governance, board–CEO partnership, and navigating polarized, resource-constrained environments.

Earlier in her career, Vernetta practiced law before serving as Director of Administration of Justice Grants at the Florida Bar Foundation. She later held senior legal and policy roles with the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations—creators of the Standards of Excellence for Nonprofit Organizations—and the Alliance for Justice. She also taught Nonprofit Governance at Columbia University.

BOARD & GOVERNANCE LAB

2026 Program Dates

Attendees must commit to all of the following dates:

Oct. 8 - In Person, Birmingham - 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

Oct. 22 - Virtual Meeting - 2 hours

Nov. 5 - Virtual Meeting - 2 hours

Nov. 19 - Virtual Meeting - 2 hours

Dec. 3 - Virtual Meeting - 2 hours

Dec. 10 - Virtual Meeting - 2 hours

Registration

INVESTMENT

\$660 (Members) or \$1,320 (Non-members)

Includes all training sessions, templates, tools, and cohort community access.

This cohort is designed for leaders who want to strengthen their Board, support their Boards and teams more effectively, and position their organizations for long-term stability and impact.

For more information visit
alabamanonprofits.org/events.

**VERNETTA
WALKER**
& ASSOCIATES

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