

---

POLICY BRIEFING

# Questions Boards Ask

*How Anticipatory Governance Reshapes Board Deliberation*

---

Boards are making decisions about the future every day—but most of the time, the future itself is not explicitly part of the conversation. Assumptions about students, funding, workforce needs, and institutional role sit in the background, shaping decisions without being named. Anticipatory governance brings those assumptions forward and makes them part of how boards deliberate.

Anticipatory governance changes the questions boards ask. The shift is not just in tools or frameworks—it shows up in how conversations are framed and what is brought into the discussion. Instead of focusing only on the decision in front of them, boards begin to consider the broader context in which that decision sits: how conditions may change, what assumptions are being made, and what direction their choices are taking them over time.

## Framing

*These questions are not a checklist. They are ways of opening up the conversation and making the future more visible in the work of the board. The goal is not to rely on a set of prompts, but to develop a different habit of thinking—more explicit about uncertainty, more aware of change, and more deliberate about direction.*

---

## Time and Horizon

- What time horizon are we actually making this decision for?
- Are we making a long-term decision with short-term assumptions?
- What looks different about this decision at five or ten years?
- Are we solving for the present, or for what is coming?

---

## Patterns and Change

- Is this an isolated issue or part of a larger shift?
- Where are we seeing this pattern already?
- What does this connect to that we are not talking about?
- Are we treating a pattern as a one-off?

---

## Identity and Role

- Who are we becoming if we make this decision repeatedly?
- What kind of institution does this reinforce?
- Is this aligned with the role we want to play in the future?

---

## Fit with a Changing Environment

- What has to stay true about the world for this decision to make sense?
- What if that no longer holds?
- Does this still make sense if the context changes?
- What would this look like in a very different environment?

---

## Institutional Direction

- What direction does this decision take us over time?
- If we continue making decisions like this, where do we end up?
- Are we moving toward something, or just responding to pressure?

---

## Limits of Current Thinking

- What are we not considering because it sits outside the current model?
- Where are we assuming continuity without realizing it?
- What feels unrealistic—and why?
- What would have to be true for that to become realistic?

---

*Over time, the goal is not to rely on a set of prompts, but to develop a habit of thinking that makes the future a regular, structured part of how the board governs. The shift is subtle but consequential: decisions are no longer based only on present conditions, but on how they hold up as those conditions change. The board becomes more explicit about the future it is assuming—and more intentional about the direction it is setting.*