



2026 Club Board Perspectives Research

Protecting Financial Health: False Confidence or Long-Term Financial Focus

Boards express strong confidence in their clubs' long-term financial practices. This research examines a deeper question: whether that confidence can be substantiated. The findings show where the proof is missing and provide boards with a pathway to get on the right financial track.

Key Insights

- Board confidence in financial stewardship is high, with 73% agreeing that their financial model is focused on long-term sustainability, but the results indicate that the actions and tools that would substantiate that confidence can often be missing.
- Thirty-one percent (31%) of board members who claim both capital alignment and a long-term focus report no recent capital reserve study, and this rate is among the highest at some of the largest clubs, indicating it is a governance challenge rather than a resource problem.
- Boards endorse proportional financial contributions across membership groups more in principle (3.91/5) than they report enforcing them in practice (3.60/5), a gap that holds across clubs of every financial size.

By the numbers, private club boards believe that they are successfully focused on their long-term finances. In the 2026 Club Board Perspectives study, conducted in partnership with the National Club Association, 73% of surveyed board members agree that their club's financial model is focused on long-term sustainability. Agreement is high across all stewardship behaviors we tested, from aligning capital funding with replacement timelines (4.10/5) to reviewing governance structures for sustainable decision-making (3.92/5).

This year's research was designed to test whether that confidence is substantiated. The pattern that emerged is consistent: the claims are strong, but the instruments that would prove those claims, such as a current reserve study, financial contribution proportionality and a structural check on short-term pressures affecting decisions, are often missing. Three findings show where confidence outruns evidence.

Check One: The Calibration Problem

A capital reserve study quantifies the condition and remaining useful life of capital assets, giving the board a basis for an informed funding strategy. However, for those respondents who indicated that their club 1) ensures capital funding is aligned with asset replacement timelines, and 2) their financial model is focused on long-term financial sustainability, 31% reported not having a capital reserve study (Figure 1). These board members claim financial alignment without this supporting evidence.

Figure 1. The Calibration Gap

PROTECTING FINANCIAL HEALTH - THE CALIBRATION PROBLEM

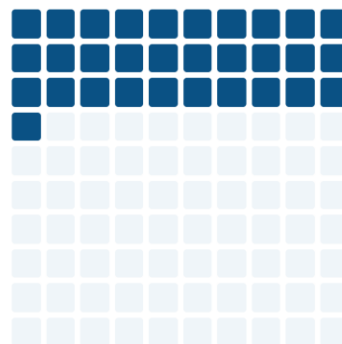
Nearly 1 in 3 confident boards lack key information behind their claim.

Results showed no difference in club size between board members who indicated that their funding is aligned with replacement needs and those who did not have a capital reserve study.

31%

of confident board members lack a capital reserve study

Among boards that agree capital funding is aligned with replacement timelines and that their financial model is focused on long-term sustainability.



■ Confident boards without a capital reserve study
■ Confident boards with a study

Source: GGA Partners 2026 Club Board Perspectives Research

The natural inclination is to assume this is a resource constraint. The data say otherwise: calibration gap rates are among the highest at the largest clubs (~28% for those with >\$20M in revenue), while some smaller clubs show the lowest rates (~13% for those with >\$5M in revenue). When the gap appears across the revenue spectrum, it is a governance choice, not necessarily a budget limitation.

Actions Boards Can Take: Boards may ask, “Haven’t we always managed without a formal study?” Perhaps, but past actions do not guarantee future success. A reserve study lets the next board

inherit a clear understanding of what is needed, rather than starting from scratch or relying on its own judgment. It is important to ask: does a current reserve study exist, or are we relying on opinions for guidance? Do we know our largest replacement liabilities from aging assets, or are we guessing? The answers tell you whether capital alignment is a calculation the board can defend or merely a collective view held by board members.

Check Two: The Balance Bias Gap

We asked boards about proportional contribution, the idea of structuring dues and access so that higher privilege carries a higher contribution, twice. First, as a principle, in how the respondent sees it as a value (no membership group materially subsidizes another). Secondly, as practice (who pays versus who benefits). Boards endorse the principle at 3.91/5. They report the practice at 3.60/5.

That 0.31-point spread is not noise; it appears across all revenue tiers, ranging from 0.23 to 0.46 (Figure 2). This consistent gap across club sizes signals a structural opportunity rather than a resource constraint. And it names an uncomfortable distinction: endorsing fairness is a value; enforcing it is an action-in-waiting. Board members have indicated proportionality is important. Closing the gap is the next step, except where the misalignment is a deliberate policy rather than an oversight. A Junior membership subsidy, for example, isn't a proportionality failure; it's a proportionality decision, and the task there is to document it and revisit it regularly.

Figure 2. Differences Between Proportionality Perception and Practice

PROTECTING FINANCIAL HEALTH - THE BALANCE BIAS GAP

Every sized club scores their practice below the principle.

Boards have endorsed financial fairness across membership groups as a value, but results show that actions are needed to follow through on this stance.



Every size of club trends negatively, with an average fairness principle value of 3.91 and an average practice score of 3.60, which indicates boards endorse fairness as a principle but need further action to enact it.

Source: GGA Partners 2026 Club Board Perspectives Research

Actions Boards Can Take: Put the club's contribution policy in writing and test, category by category, who actually pays against who actually benefits. It is important to ask: can we show, with data, that no membership group is materially subsidizing another unless it is a strategic decision? Is proportional contribution a documented formula that the club is committed to or merely a shared aspirational sense of fairness? When a decision favors one group, does the board name the trade-off out loud? The answers tell you whether proportionality is a principle the board enforces or merely endorses.

Check Three: The Blind Spot Matrix

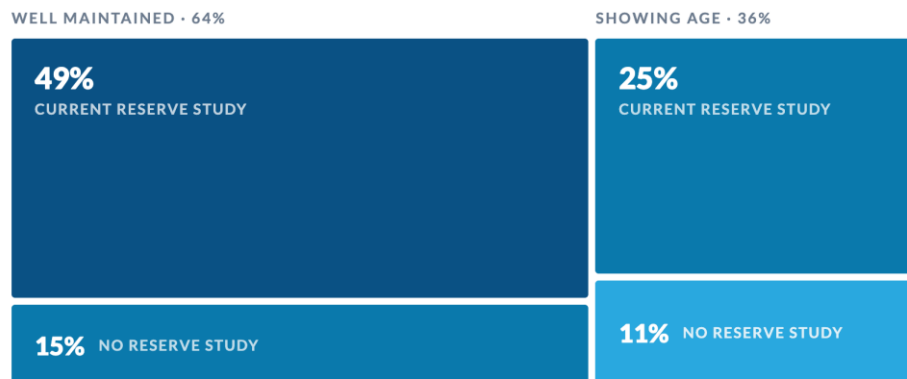
Every club sits somewhere on a simple 2x2 matrix that shows whether the capital reserve study is in place and whether the assets are being maintained. The four positions carry very different obligations, and this research reveals how boards in each position rate their own understanding of financial risks (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Understanding Asset Replacement Needs

PROTECTING FINANCIAL HEALTH - DEFERRED LIABILITY

Most clubs are well maintained — 26% are aging without a map to guide next steps.

Share of clubs by reserve study presence and self-reported asset condition. The no reserve study group is where liability is silently transferred to future members.



Source: 2026 GGA Partners Club Board Perspectives Research. Clubs were asked to identify the age of their capital reserve study, and results were compared to the self-reported physical condition of current facilities.

Roughly half of respondents' clubs (49%) have a current study and well-maintained assets. Fifteen percent report well-maintained assets, but no current study. Here is the finding worth pausing on: these boards rate their risk-review processes at 4.11 out of 5, nearly identical to those who have a reserve study. This group's assets are buying them time; the infrastructure is new, but deferred maintenance could be silently compounding, and they are not necessarily assessing and addressing the risks that could impact them.

Additionally, 25% have a current reserve study but report aging assets. These clubs know what they owe; the next step is a funded plan, not another diagnostic. The remaining 11%, with aging assets and no current study, occupy the highest-risk position: without the study, they lack a maintenance roadmap and could create governance challenges for future boards and impact members' experiences now and in the future.

Actions Boards Can Take: Locate your club in the matrix, then commit to the next step to maintain financial health that the position requires. It is important to ask: which quadrant are we actually in, judged by the presence of capital reserve studies and asset condition rather than perception? If our assets are buying us time, are we preparing for their replacement or deferring again? If replacement is already delayed, is there a funded plan behind the number? Are we properly addressing the financial risks that could derail our plans? The answers tell you whether the board is governing its deferred liability or quietly passing it to the members who come next.

Taking Boards to the Next Level

Our research examined three further governance behaviors that follow the same pattern: a board that rates itself well on paper, but whose behavior does not fully support those positions on closer inspection. The value of these diagnostics is in seeing your own board's position and building an appropriate plan from there. Three additional questions worth asking to help understand your club's position:

1. **Short-term tension impacts:** Will short-term pressures override long-term stewardship? Twenty-six (26%) percent of board members prioritize short-term member satisfaction over long-term sustainability, yet 59% of that group believe their financial model is sound. These can coexist because decisions affect current members, who vote, but they could pose a challenge for future boards.
2. **Risk-reality gap.** Is our risk review genuine or just ceremonial? A review can seem thorough in self-assessment but be baseless if it lacks supporting evidence. The real test is whether the board's risk review leads to decisions based on current data or just ratifies assumptions. Without a tested instrument, the review becomes a ritual, falsely reassuring and uninformative.
3. **Avoidance signal.** Which forward-looking questions are we shying away from? Some respondents skipped questions about subsidies and privilege, responding "N/A" or declining to answer. Non-response is not neutral, as silence can signal unresolved or unidentified trade-offs. The real test is whether the board can directly address uncomfortable structural questions, as avoided questions often reveal where their vulnerabilities lie.

Monday Morning Actions

Confidence in a club's long-term financial health is proven by specific decisions, outcomes and evidence, not good intentions. Take these three steps to help support your club's ongoing financial health:

- **Confirm the intent to fund the long term.** Ask the board: when short-term member satisfaction and long-term sustainability collide, which one wins, and will we commit to the funding

discipline that answer implies? Eighteen percent of boards concede that short-term satisfaction takes precedence, and naming where your own board actually stands is the precondition for everything that follows.

- **Commission the engineering-led reserve study.** Identify the barrier to an engineering-led study and determine whether it withstands scrutiny. A current study lets the next board inherit this board's strategic work rather than perpetuating its opinions, thereby driving the club's long-term financial success.
- **Put financial proportionality in writing.** Compare who pays with who benefits across membership categories and state whether the principle you endorse is one you will enforce.

Visit www.ggapartners.com/insights to discover more about how clubs can help protect their financial future through your club's strategy, explore insights from the Club Board Perspectives research, and learn how GGA Partners can support your club's long-term success.

