



Getting Your Board on Board

D2L

Contributors



The Lighting Industry Association (LIA)

Ayça Donaghy
Chief Executive Officer

Ayça brings over 15 years of experience in the broader electro-technical sector that combines strategic thinking, team management, and a dedication to sustainability, diversity and innovation. Since taking on the role as CEO of The LIA, she has spearheaded a series of groundbreaking initiatives, including university competitions aimed at bridging the skills gap, and has been instrumental in propelling the lighting industry’s mission and amplifying its voice on a national level.



Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology

Letty Kluttz
Senior Vice President of Education, Membership and Programs

Letty Kluttz has been with the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) since 2019 and is currently the senior vice president of membership, education and programs. With a strong background in executive operations, learning, and development, Letty has a proven track record of leading high-impact educational initiatives and large-scale events. She has successfully managed multimillion-dollar budgets, spearheaded innovative programming, and driven member engagement through strategic partnerships. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated expertise in conference planning, stakeholder collaboration, and program development, consistently delivering value-driven experiences for diverse professional audiences.



The American Society of Nondestructive Testing

Neal Couture
Chief Executive Officer

Neal Couture is Chief Executive Officer of the American Society for Nondestructive Testing (ASNT) and is a member of the ASNT Board of Directors, ASNT Foundation Board of Trustees, and ASNT India Private Limited Company Board of Directors. Neal has been with ASNT since 2019, shepherding the society through the COVID-19 pandemic, developing and implementing a bold new strategic vision, and transitioning to a fully digital, remote workplace. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Asian-Pacific Federation of Nondestructive Testing (APFNDT) and as Chair of Task Group 7 on NDE 4.0.

Neal has more than 20 years’ experience as a leader in the not-for-profit industry and is a subject matter expert in association management. A Certified Association Executive (CAE) and Fellow (FASAE) of the American Society for Association Executives (ASAE), he serves on the Board of Directors for The Council of Engineering and Scientific Society Executives (CESSE) and Leadership Advisory Board for Professionals for Association Revenue (PAR). He is the author of Modeling the Way: Ethical Leadership, a chapter in ASAE’s Professional Practices in Association Management, Fourth Edition, and a frequent speaker on association management, leadership, and strategy.

Neal holds a Master of Education in Human Development from the George Washington University. His previous positions include Associate Dean of Finance and Administration with Boston College, Director of Government Procurement Law and Business Programs with the George Washington University Law School, and Executive Director of the National Contract Management Association (NCMA). Prior to entering the nonprofit sector, Neal was a business manager in the aerospace and defense industry. He is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and the California Air National Guard.



Ontario Public Buyers Association

Rozalyn Werner-Arcé
Executive Director

Rozalyn Werner-Arcé brings over 30 years of experience in the non-profit sector, with a career dedicated to strengthening associations, human services and charitable organizations. Since December 2021, she has served as Executive Director of the Ontario Public Buyers Association (OPBA), where she leads efforts to advance the association’s mission, deliver innovative member services, foster growth and develop strategies that enhance engagement and non-dues revenue. Roz believes in the power of building meaningful connections and advancing initiatives that create lasting value for the public procurement profession and its members.



Bruce Rosenthal Associates, LLC

Bruce Rosenthal
Sponsorship Strategist/Consultant

Bruce Rosenthal is a strategic advisor, consultant and educator with over 20 years of experience advancing corporate sponsorship programs for associations. He helps associations grow revenue, increase member value and drive sustainability. Bruce is the author of Mastering Association Corporate Sponsorships and a leading voice on association-corporate relationships.

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Foreword

Professional associations play a central role in advancing their members and strengthening the industries they serve. Yet fulfilling that role is becoming more complex. Member expectations are evolving, loyalty is less assured, and competition—from both traditional and commercial providers—continues to intensify. At the same time, pressure to diversify revenue and demonstrate long-term sustainability is increasing, placing greater scrutiny on decisions at the board level.

In this environment, learning is increasingly a strategic lever. When aligned with organizational priorities and supported by the right digital infrastructure, it can strengthen engagement, support workforce development and generate meaningful, long-term value. But realizing that potential requires addressing fundamental questions around investment, risk and measurable return.

The experiences captured in this guide reflect how association leaders are navigating those challenges. They offer practical insight into aligning learning with governance priorities and building the confidence needed to secure and sustain board-level support.

When approached with intent, learning moves beyond a programmatic offering. It becomes a core capability—one that underpins resilience, supports growth and distinguishes associations that are adapting from those that are leading.



Bill Sheehan

Bill Sheehan
Global Head, Association Strategy
D2L

When **learning** becomes
a strategic priority, the
conversation shifts—
from programs and
participation to **value**,
growth and **resilience**.

Securing the **foundations**

THE FOUNDATIONS OF BOARD CONFIDENCE



1. Draft the
strategic blueprint



2. Engineer
measurable return



3. Reinforce the
internal framework



4. Design for
long-term resilience



Draft the Strategic Blueprint

Clarify how Learning Advances Mission, Growth and Resilience

Architecting learning as a strategic capability begins with a documented blueprint that clearly defines and aligns its purpose, outcomes and value to the organizational mission and goals. This builds a strong foundation, anchoring learning in competitive differentiation, member retention and diversified revenue streams to achieve the financial stability critical for modern membership organizations.

A good starting point is by connecting with your board to make sure they're in the loop from the beginning.

For Letty Kluttz, Senior Vice President of Education, Membership and Programs at the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, she not only told her board how their learning was evolving through the incorporation of microcredentials, but some members were also part of the planning.

“We let our board know the strategy and direction we were going in, and some of our board members actually sat on the initial task force when we were having conversations,” she says. “It’s very important to keep them informed of new and innovative initiatives that you’re bringing forward to your membership because they are part of your membership. And they’re always a good litmus test too, to say, ‘does this make sense?’”

Starting with the right documentation is another way to frame learning as a strategic capability. Having clear documentation turns learning from an abstract idea into a shared strategic advantage that leaders can get behind.

Another good starting point to help build a strategic blueprint for learning is by leaning on peers who’ve already experienced success. Associations who intentionally connect with similar organizations, during webinars or at networking events, can help provide real benchmarks to make it easier to secure buy-in. Demonstrating how these peers have positioned learning as a strategic growth pillar and the measurable impact it has delivered provides leadership teams with tangible proof points.

Bruce Rosenthal, Sponsorship Strategist/Consultant, Bruce Rosenthal Associates, LLC., suggests engaging directly with members—and the board—to understand what they’re interested in. By asking members what information they need to be successful or new topics they need covered, says Bruce, you get a better understanding of how to meet their needs.

Once you have a proposal you are confident will meet members’ needs, it’s important to assess your organization’s long-term goals to articulate how the learning strategy will contribute directly to organizational objectives and industry impact. By presenting these measurable outcomes, learning can be seen as a needed

strategic capability. This is something Ayça Donaghy, CEO of The Lighting Industry Association (LIA), had success with when approaching the board.

“[Showing] how the learning strategy tied into our objectives for the association and the industry we serve as a whole, but also the evidence of need

Once you have a proposal you are confident will meet members’ needs, it’s important to assess your organization’s long-term goals to articulate how the learning strategy will contribute directly to organizational objectives and industry impact. By presenting these measurable outcomes, learning can be seen as a needed strategic capability. This is something Ayça Donaghy, CEO of The Lighting Industry Association (LIA), had success with when approaching the board.

“[Showing] how the learning strategy tied into our objectives for the association and the industry we serve as a whole, but also the evidence of need throughout the process, was really critical,”

— Ayça Donaghy
CEO, The Lighting Industry Association (LIA)

Collecting and sharing data can transform learning from a discretionary initiative into a validated strategic investment. Some ways The LIA collected evidence was through:

- Member surveys related to learning
- Gaps seen in member audits
- Competitor insights

“All this data shows how we’re serving our industry and what others are, or more importantly, are not doing, and where the gaps are that we can fill,” Ayça says. This allowed The LIA to show that learning wasn’t education for its own sake, but a reference tool for revenue resilience and diversification. “We reframed learning from a cost center to a growth enabler. We linked it to member retention, enhanced reputation, wider influence, and in policy and standards work,” says Ayça.

For modern associations, learning is not optional, it’s fundamental to effective risk mitigation. “Without a strong learning strategy, associations risk being bypassed in favour of things like events, consultants and self-serve platforms that members might invest in in the absence of an association that’s able to support them in that way,” says Ayça.

Developing a strategic blueprint for learning positions it as a driver of revenue resilience, member retention and competitive differentiation, shifting the board conversation from cost to risk mitigation. It changes learning from a “nice to have” to clearly align it to revenue strategy and the member value proposition.

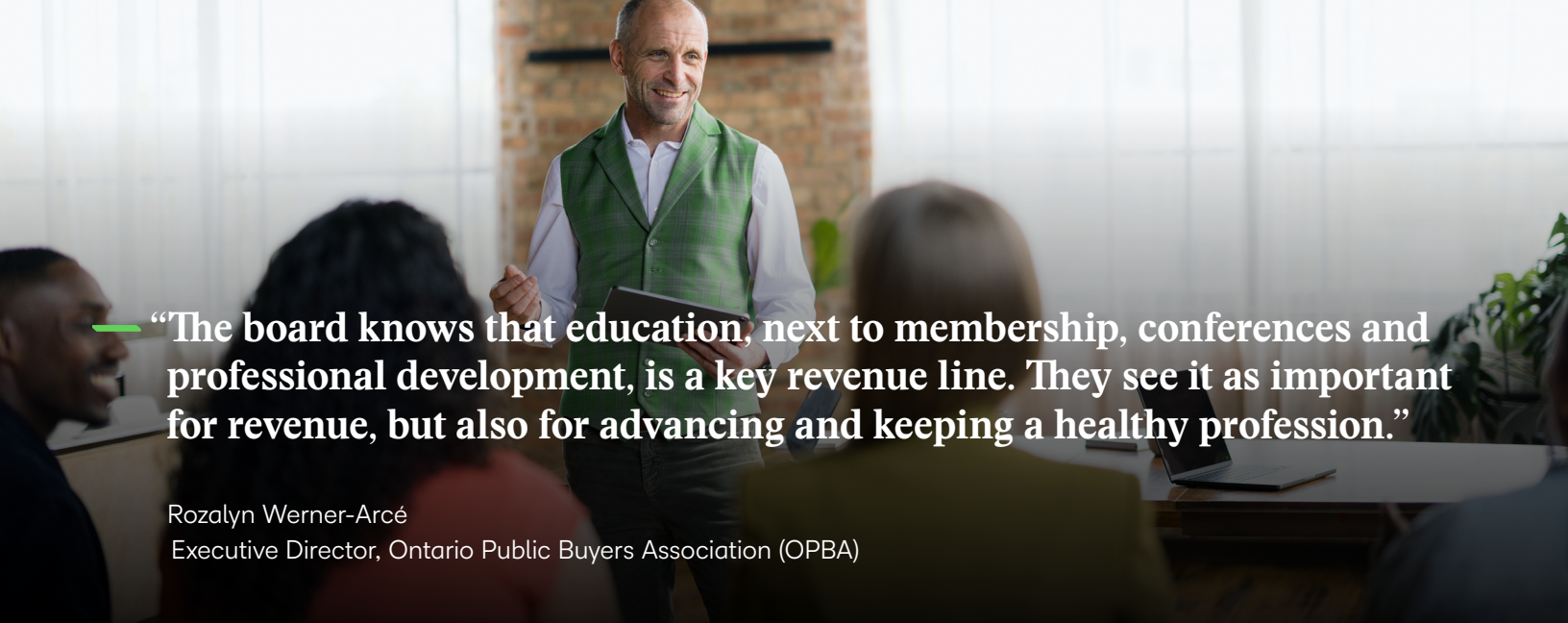
SPEAKING THE BOARD’S LANGUAGE

Not only can being crystal clear help drive home the impact of learning, but it also provides the opportunity to speak to the board in a language they understand. “Learning strategy as a risk mitigation and future proofing is something that boards can relate to,” explains Ayça.

The key shift for The LIA was using language the board understands by linking learning to:

- member retention
- enhanced reputation
- wider influence
- policies and standards

When learning is consistently articulated as a growth enabler and a form of future-proofing, the shift in language moves the conversation away from cost and toward impact. “Once we started talking about learning in those terms, the board could link it to their day-to-day conversations about their own business,” she says.



— “The board knows that education, next to membership, conferences and professional development, is a key revenue line. They see it as important for revenue, but also for advancing and keeping a healthy profession.”

Rozalyn Werner-Arcé
Executive Director, Ontario Public Buyers Association (OPBA)

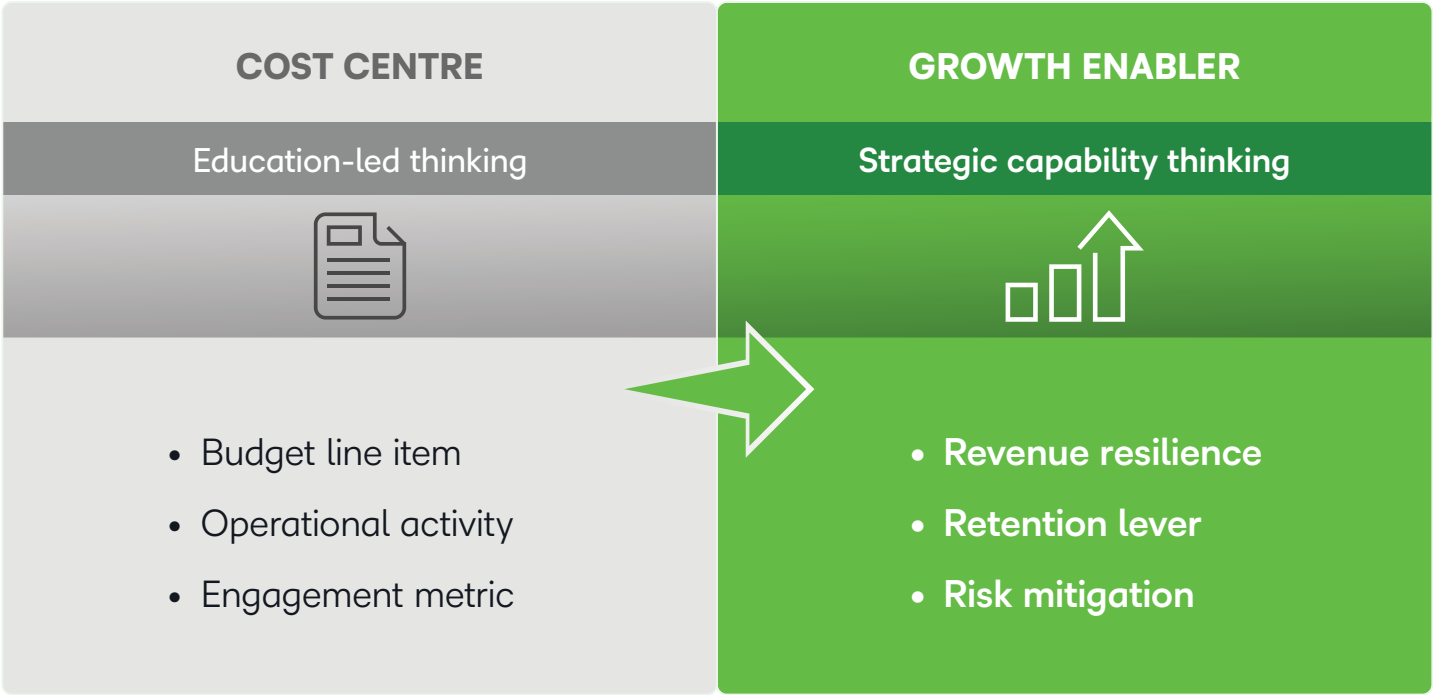


SECTION 2: SECURING THE FOUNDATIONS

Engineer Measurable Return

Providing Phased Investment Logic and Credible Early Evidence

FROM COST CENTRE TO GROWTH ENABLER



— “We reframed learning from a cost centre to a growth enabler.”

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry Association

When the benefits of new learning initiatives are clearly articulated, quantifiable and supported with meaningful data, decision-makers can confidently connect the investment to future returns. By intentionally engineering phased investment logic and establishing credible, early metrics, programs can build executive trust, secure sustained funding and reinforce their strategic value to the organization.

For Neal Couture, CEO, The American Society of Nondestructive Testing, using data can not only help to illustrate expected wins, but also make it easier for the board to make decisions.

“You’ve got to understand, how big is my market? We have 10 members. How many should it be? How many could it be? What’s in that community?” says Neal of the importance of collecting the right data, which can include who the association is trying to reach.

“It all gets put together by data-driven practices,” he continues. “We have to make sure we have the right people getting the right information to tee up the decisions that the board needs to make.”

Keeping education—and the impacts it has on the association—top-of-mind for the board can also help remind them of why it’s a critical investment. This is something Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, Executive Director, Ontario Public Buyers Association, implemented to help gain buy-in from the board and drive them to champion learning as well.

“I had to present a good case of why we needed to shift our learning programs,” says Rozalyn of her engagement with a board who likes the status quo. “But they also recognize times are changing. Having your board on board and championing the change is critical to it.

“The board knows that education, next to membership, conferences and professional development, is a key revenue line. They see it as important for revenue, but also for advancing and keeping a healthy profession.”

Meeting the needs of your members can also help contribute to showing the long-term ROI of learning and its impact on reducing churn. When learning extends membership tenure by even a small margin, the compounded financial impact across the base is significant—directly increasing ROI through sustained participation and retention.

On the other hand, the cost of inaction must also be considered when overcoming objections to investing in learning. For some associations, the decision to invest in learning can be driven by a clear need to better serve evolving member needs to deliver more meaningful, sustainable value. The investment is essential—because enabling growth would naturally lead to greater long-term returns, versus the possibility of losing members because your educational programming can’t keep pace.

The LIA was also able to lean into member retention and success to demonstrate value and impact on the bottom line. The association developed a sales course for its members to help make their workers better equipped to close deals. The success seen from the course resulted in higher profits for members, leading to its workers taking more courses.

“We are hoping to develop courses for every single department of our member companies so that every individual that works for them are more competent and productive in their job. Therefore, the value actually does translate to that bottom line.” says Ayça.

By gathering data on both course uptake and completion and membership renewal rates, the return-on-investment for a learning strategy can be forecasted and tracked through quantifiable metrics. Assessing this correlation creates a simple way to measure and track member engagement levels and the financial impact of this on the association.

Another way The LIA was able to show value faster was by implementing a pilot course. “Before we dug deep into the depths of content creation, the first thing we did was create a small module to showcase what is achievable before the long-term investment,” says Ayça. “That was a really good way of getting the whole journey started on a very positive note with tangible product to be able to showcase the vision.”

This was an important step for the board, as Ayça realized ambitions shared on paper wouldn’t convince them. The launch of the program was the big “aha” moment for the board to see the value of investing in learning.

Engineering measurable return is therefore possible by establishing clear expectations and goals—mapped to project timelines—alongside stating how progress of these will be measured. To pave the way to success, take a structured approach to investment by showing the lifetime value of learning, how it can reduce membership churn, the cost of not investing and how it demonstrates revenue per member uplift. When value is demonstrated incrementally and in terms decision-makers recognize, learning shifts from a perceived risk to a strategic investment with clear long-term returns.

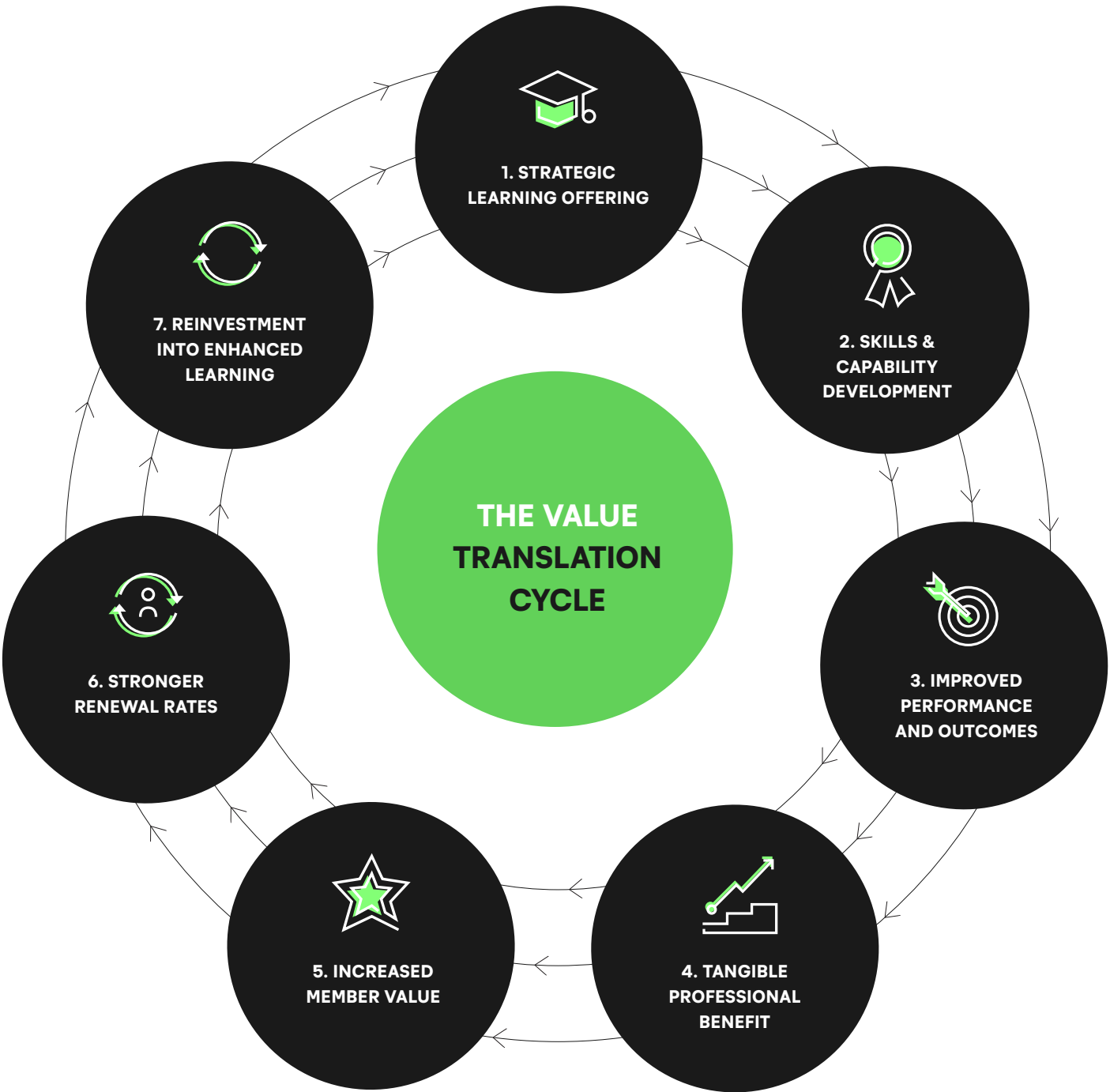


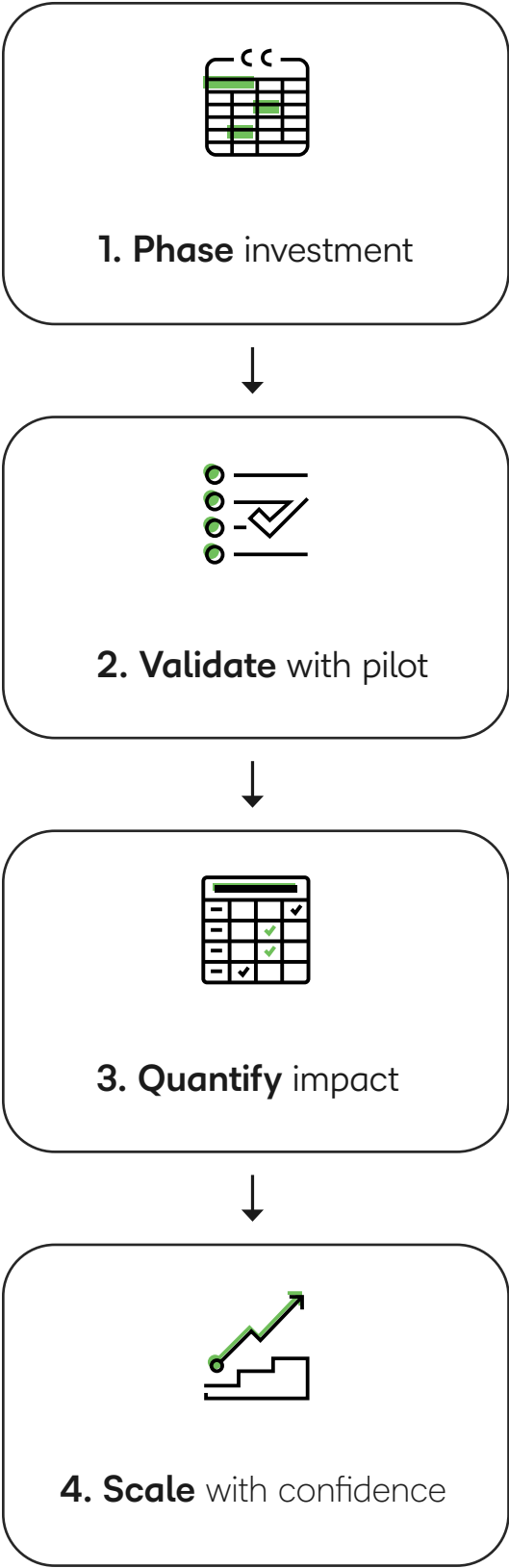
“In reality the cost didn’t matter, because if we’re going to grow, we’re going to get more money in.”

Fiona Palmer,
The Chartered Institute of
Logistics and Transport in the UK

— “We are hoping to develop courses for every single department of our member companies so that every individual that works for them are more competent and productive in their job. Therefore, the value actually does translate to that bottom line.”

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry Association





BUILDING CONFIDENCE WITH A PHASED APPROACH

Another tip for getting board buy-in is by breaking the project down into bite-sized pieces to make it less overwhelming.

“Turning what can seem like a huge hurdle for the board, a big risk to take on a potentially resource heavy project can be tackled so much easier with the board in bite-sized chunks,” explains Ayça. “Every step of the way in every board meeting you’re able to report back on success before launching the new phase. Improving that concept one phase or step at a time was really, really useful.”

— **“Eighteen months from the initial small pilot we had something we could show measurable engagement with, strong feedback on and clear signals that we were addressing a market gap.”**

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry Association



Reinforce the Internal Framework

Secure Internal Champions and Shared Ownership

Even when strategic goals are aligned, gaps can form between governance and operations if learning isn’t structurally embedded. Without clear ownership and credible leadership, learning initiatives can stall—leaving them to drift into being perceived as “education-led” rather than strategy-led. Associations that prevent this instability treat learning as part of the organization’s strategic architecture. In doing so, visible champions with embedded ownership ensure learning remains a durable, strategic driver rather than an optional program.

Having an internal contact who understands the board’s dynamics and personalities can be invaluable—serving as a sounding board to refine your strategy and anticipate how it will land. For example, getting to know the board is something Neal, as CEO, is familiar with.

“We have to have a way of making sure that the people that are on the board of directors are the right ones. And what are the right ones? Are they the right mix?” says Neal, adding that the mix can change every year, leading to a continuous discussion the board itself has to own.

“I’ve been in 200 board meetings, maybe more, and you start to understand how they should work—what doesn’t work, what works well,” he adds, pointing out experience and ability to do research—like assigned readings before a meeting—can be green flags.

Another way to fortify learning as a strategic lever is by hiring an experienced training lead to act as an operational credibility anchor. Ayça was able to bring on a training manager who had experience developing competency frameworks and developing skills maps for learners.

“Her own success in having achieved this before helped me win confidence of the rest of the team because she can speak firsthand as to how exactly it’s going to work,” she said. “Having somebody who has some experience of rolling out a learning management system and a competency framework...helps gain the team’s confidence and the board’s confidence.”

Another way to embed learning into leadership and governance is by engaging with and leaning on senior internal champions to support and present the strategy.

For some, this can look like identifying other departments—and senior leaders within them—who share similar ambitions. These individuals can use their fresh perspectives to act as coaches to help strategically position your vision, and assist you in anticipating and preparing for any potential objections when presenting your plans to the board. Senior leaders can also help review your strategy to ensure the ideas are aligned to

larger business plans—and even present the plan to the board, acting as a strategic translator to gain approval. At The LIA, Ayça established a task force of senior leaders from the industry to provide a layer of external validation. “They’re respected, well-known individuals that care about education, training, talent development, retention and recruitment,” she explains. “Having them own this topic and advise the board on it as well as me, The LIA team and my training manager has been a really nice cover. With so many groups bought into it, the decision is no longer questionable.”

Associations that can successfully reinforce the internal learning framework do so by securing credible advocates and leadership champions, embedding ownership and aligning governance and delivery. Building a strong internal structure ensures learning decisions are collective instead of departmental, with mutual goals that advance the long-term interests of the association and the profession it serves.



PRESENTING TO THE BOARD

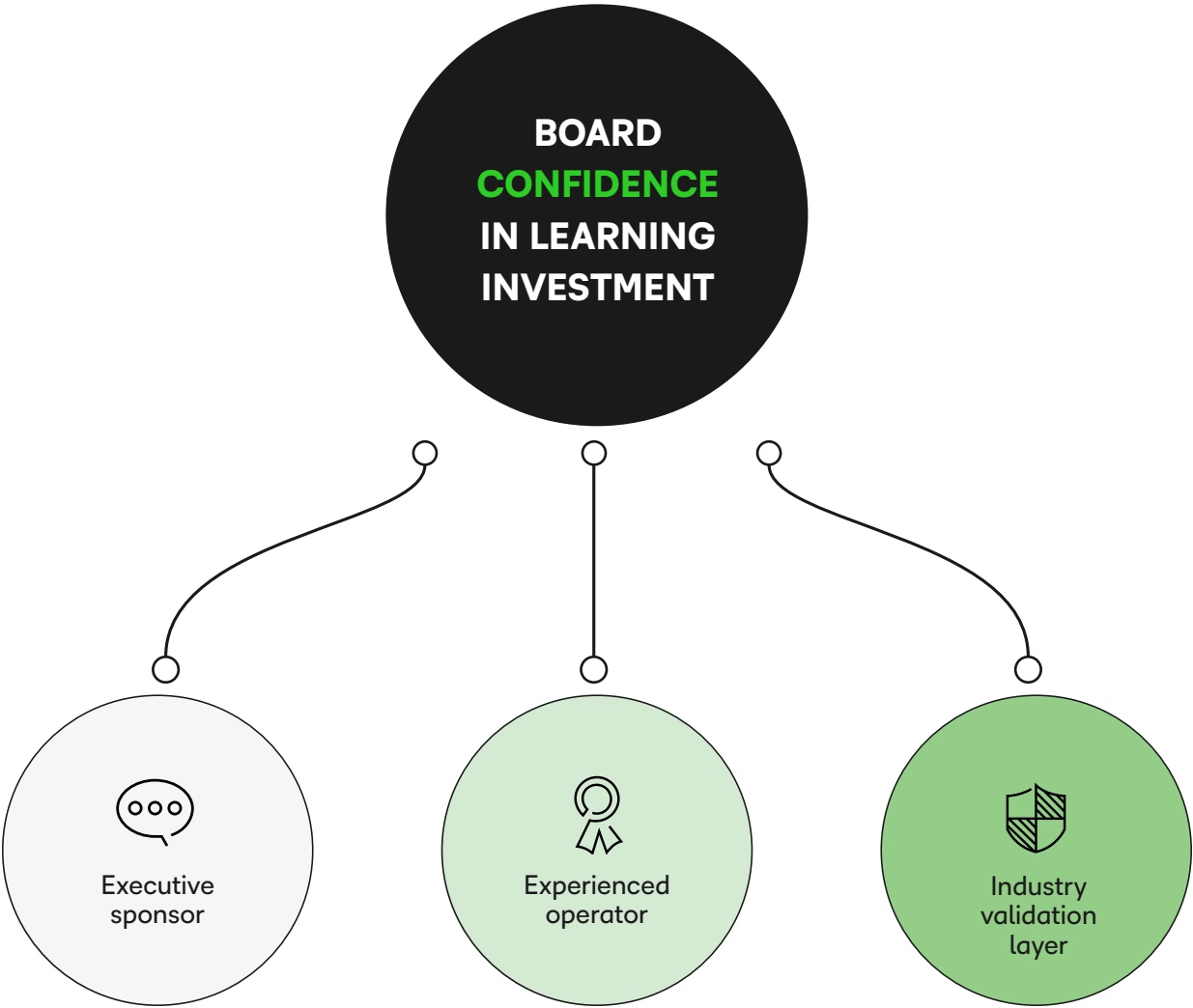
When making the case for learning, detail and brevity need to work together. For your own use, draft a comprehensive, technical document that captures the full scope of the initiative, from requirements to long-term vision. This becomes the reference point behind the scenes.

For the boardroom, that detail is distilled into a concise, focused deck. By highlighting strategic alignment, risks and outcomes—rather than operational complexity—associations make it easier for board members to engage, ask the right questions and make informed decisions.

The result is clarity without oversimplification, and confidence without overload.

EMBEDDING STRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT

Structural alignment turns learning from departmental initiative into organizational strategy.



— **“With so many groups bought into it, the decision is no longer questionable.”**

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry Association



Design for Long-Term Resilience

Protect Long-term Organizational Relevance by Growing With Your Members

A learning model designed for yesterday's expectations cannot sustain tomorrow's association. Associations that fail to modernize their learning model risk not only declining engagement, but long-term revenue erosion. Building a true learning strategy which delivers to the modern member—with a digital-first and blended offering that meets members' ever-changing needs with micro-credentials and stackable pathways—provides associations with a model which supports the resilience and sustainability required in today's climate.

"All industries are currently facing unprecedented change in digitization, decarbonization and regulation. The strategy is really being a proactive, future-ready association and of course learning plays a fundamental role within that mission," says Ayça.

As associations begin to experience more generational shifts—with long-standing members reaching retirement and new professionals entering the field—digital-first expectations must be met to remain competitive and modern. The LIA leans on the needs of their members, including the next generation, to help make the association future-ready.

"I think one of the key shifts for those less experienced members is they don't want transactional support. They want ongoing professional development and strategic insights," Ayça explains. "It's all about keeping themselves competitive, differentiating themselves from the rest of the industry for their success, progression and development."

When The LIA was building its first courses, they used consultants or subject matter experts to develop content. Now, they draw on members to help create new courses to ensure the content is best aligned to their learning needs.

"It's been so interesting and exciting to see members wanting to be involved, wanting to put forward their employees as volunteers to help with future courses and identify what other courses are needed," explains Ayça. *"Not only does that show that they're really engaged and that the subject matter that we've put into the courses is really resonating with them, but now they have this vision of other courses that are going to help them even more."*

Future-ready associations are recognising the growth opportunities which come from a strategically implemented learning strategy. By building a meaningful foundation—that not only demonstrates just an understanding of their members but instils confidence in their ability to support each individual's professional development—organizations are achieving the stability required to stay relevant, remain competitive and grow with their members.

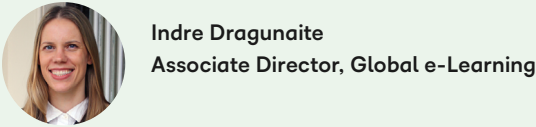
— **"It's been so interesting and exciting to see members wanting to be involved, wanting to put forward their employees as volunteers to help with future courses and identify what other courses are needed."**

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry Association (LIA)



BOARD-READY PRINCIPLES FOR SECURING STRATEGIC APPROVAL

Indre, associate director, global e-Leaning, IPA, shares her high-level tips on preparing to approach the board with a proposal





EVIDENCE

- ✓ Identify a skills gap
- ✓ Seek learner feedback



BUSINESS CASE

- ✓ Draft scope of work
- ✓ Confirm exact costs and add a buffer



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

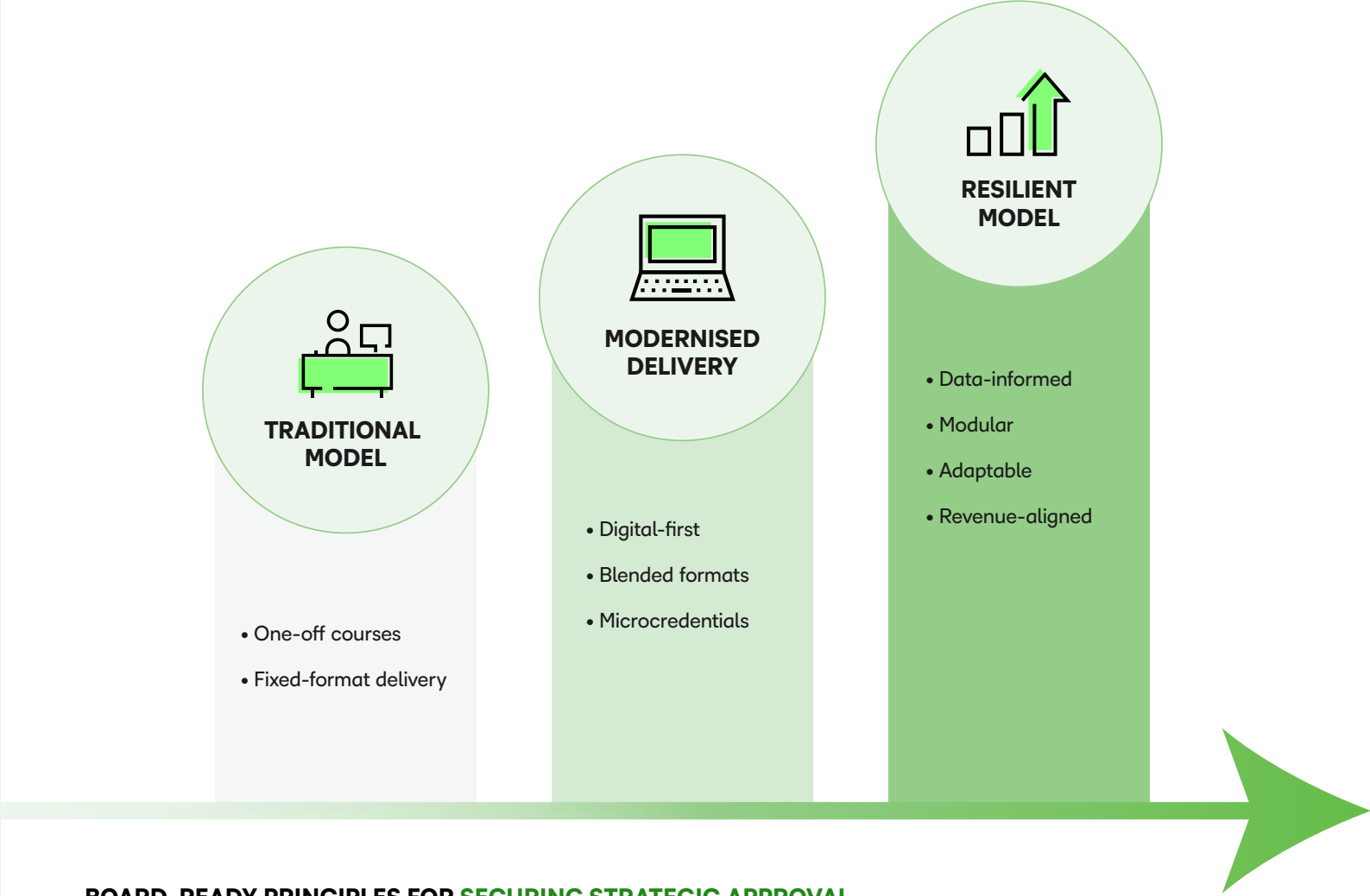
- ✓ Align with organizational strategy
- ✓ Connect learning to growth, retention and mission



LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

- ✓ Secure a senior leader
- ✓ Build shared ownership

DESIGNING FOR LONG-TERM RESILIENCE



BOARD-READY PRINCIPLES FOR SECURING STRATEGIC APPROVAL

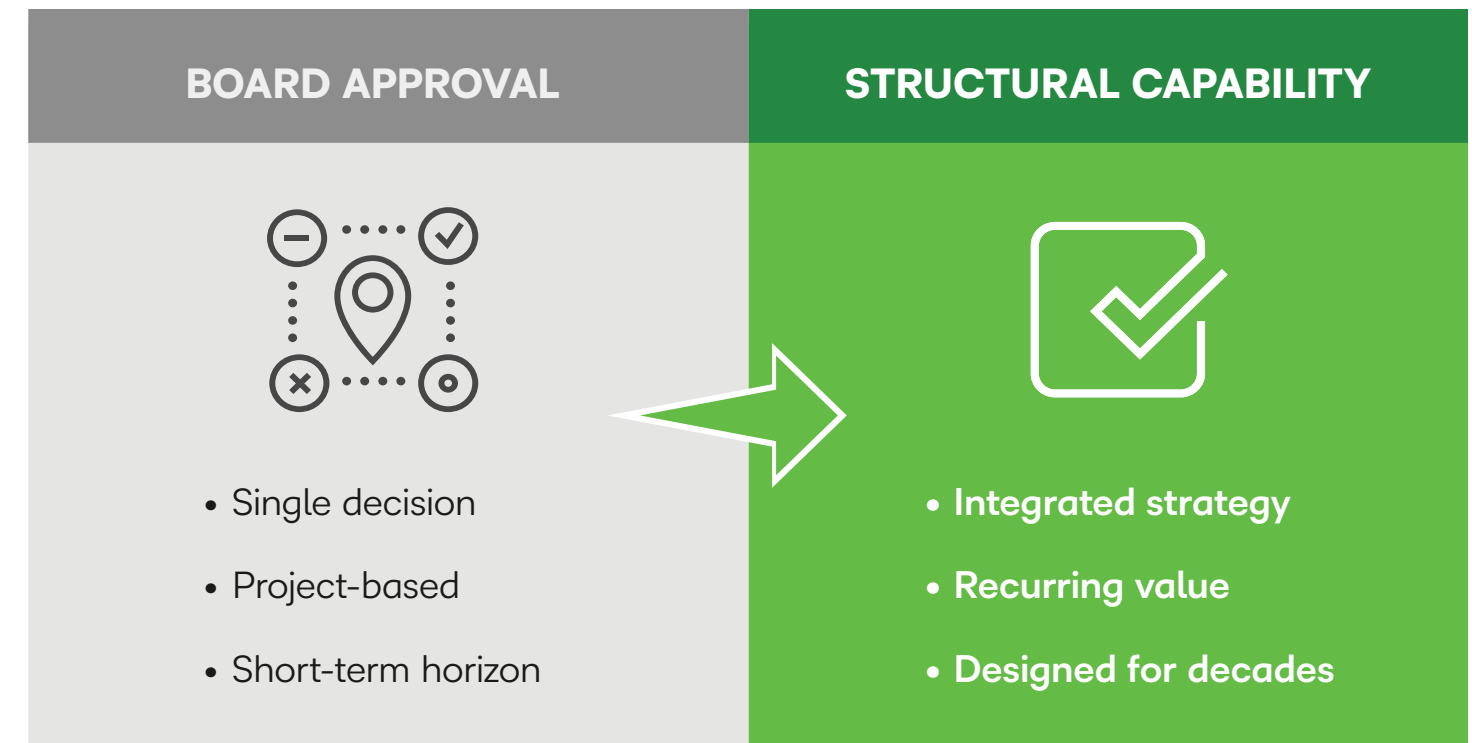
Consider these high-level tips when preparing to approach the board with a proposal:

- Consult with groups and committees to identify a skills gap
- Draft a proposition/scope of work for the training
- Seek feedback from learners to ensure your proposal is hitting the right requirements and will have impact
- Find out exact costs—and add in a buffer—to ensure you don’t have to ask for additional funding
- Align your offering with your associations’ strategic goals, as it will make the argument to invest more compelling
- Find a senior leader to support your plan and help present to the board

“Learning is not a nice to have, it never has been. It’s certainly our lever for relevance, resilience and renewals.”

Ayça Donaghy,
The Lighting Industry
Association

FROM BOARD BUY-IN TO BUILT-IN CAPABILITY



From board buy-in to sustainable impact

“In my opinion, learning is not a nice to have, it never has been. It’s certainly our lever for relevance, resilience and renewals,” says Ayça. “It comes down to the fact that you can’t build a future ready organization with yesterday’s knowledge.”

A structured approach to implementing a learning strategy transforms a proposal from costly education offerings to long-term growth capabilities and builds the strong foundation needed for it to be a success. Starting with a blueprint helps to give meaningful direction. Showing how learning can produce a measurable return constructs confidence in its impact. Reinforcing education with an internal framework provides the stability and support needed to get collective buy-in. Designing the plan with long-term resilience will give it the strength it needs to endure current and future change.

All of these elements work together to showcase learning as a need-to-have. When strategic intent, financial rigor, leadership alignment and future-ready design are cohesive, learning becomes a structural capability designed for decades—not cycles. In a climate of accelerating change, that distinction defines which associations grow with their members—and which are left behind.



ABOUT D2L

D2L is a global learning innovation company, reshaping the future of education and work. We are leading the way into a new era of personalised learning, driven by the belief that everyone deserves access to high-quality education, regardless of age, ability or location. Our signature technology product—D2L Brightspace—enhances the learning experience for millions of learners at every stage of life, from the earliest days of school to the world of work.

Learn more

HEADQUARTERS

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