



Maximizing Public Board Member Value & Meaningful Board Engagement: Inviting, Including and Incorporating Unique Perspectives



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Abstract

Public member participation on regulatory Boards is intended to bring an objective public voice to regulatory decision making. However, recent governance reviews of regulators in Canada and beyond have spoken to the lack of "public perspective" on regulatory boards and within regulatory decision making. Various governance modernization initiatives have attempted to address this gap by increasing the number of public members on boards. While there has been significant attention given to the gap that exists and getting more public members on regulatory boards and committees, little attention has been given to clarifying the role these public members play and articulating ways to empower these unique perspectives to make a meaningful contribution.

The poster presents the findings from a Canadian study in British Columbia. The study includes quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the backgrounds and experiences of public members serving on a range of regulatory boards, health and non-health. Recommendations are made for regulators and governments to consider.

Why is this Topic Important and What does the Literature Say?

Adding to the body of knowledge about Board governance will assist regulators and Board members to identify and better utilize the unique perspectives that public members bring to the Board room. In the landscape today of equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging, this topic is relevant when considering how to create Board communities where all members feel that they belong and make a valuable contribution. This topic is of relevance to regulators, governments, those interested in governance, and other Board members who have a stake in ensuring systems of good participatory governance.

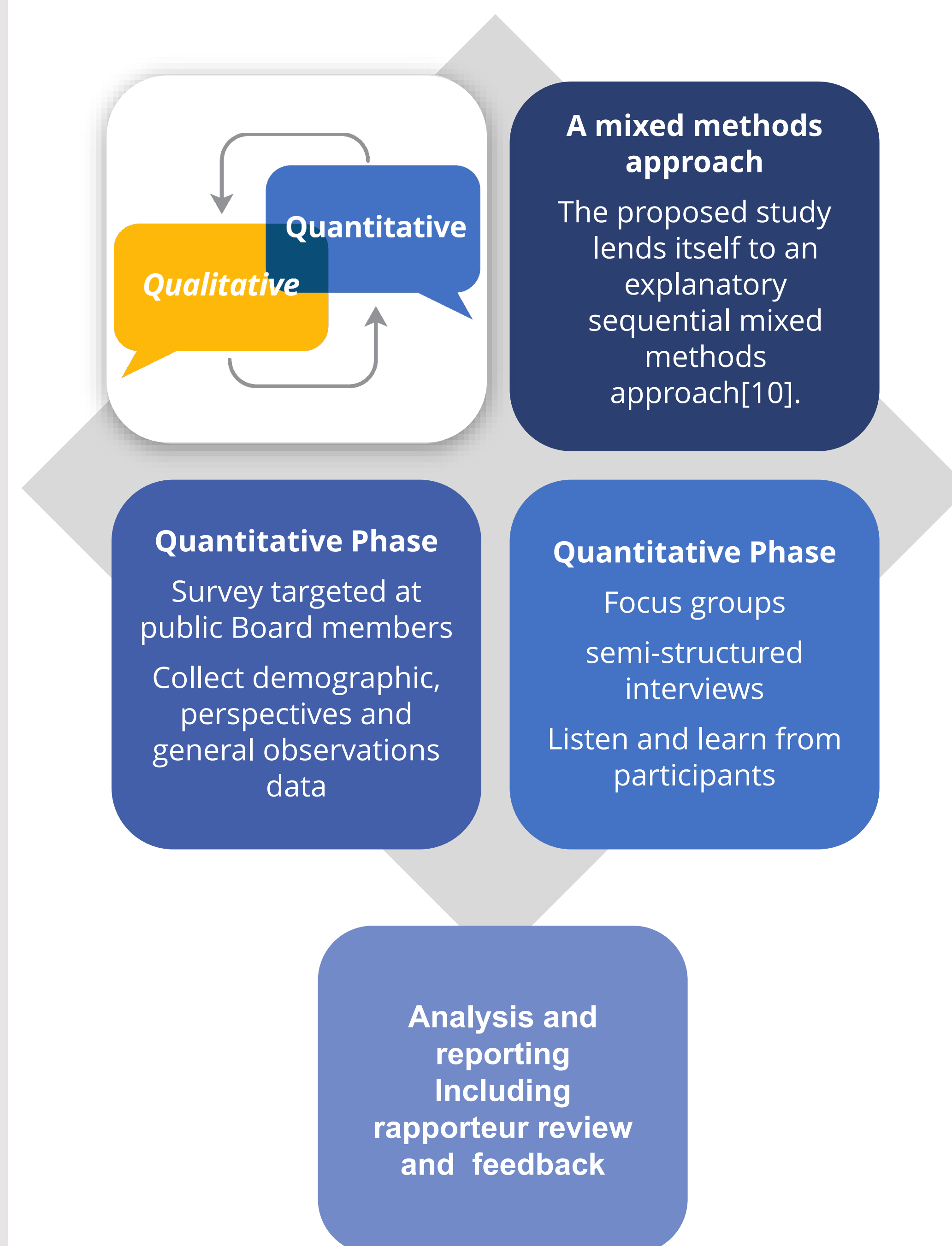
While the literature about governance in general is prolific there is limited published literature related to regulatory governance including the role of the public member. Key findings however from the literature reviewed include the following highlights:

- The definition, role and mandate of the public member is not always clear
- Understanding the history of regulation assists in understanding the regulatory infrastructures including a predominance of professional or election rather than appointed board members
- The number of public to professional/elected members is growing and on many board approaching 50%
- Public members are identified as bringing a different perspective to board discussions and in many cases shifting the dialogue from profession to public interest
- Challenges faced by public board members include having to learn a "new" profession specific language, learning complex laws, ensuring they act impartially, and for those who have sat on other not-for-profit board the nuances of regulation and regulatory governance

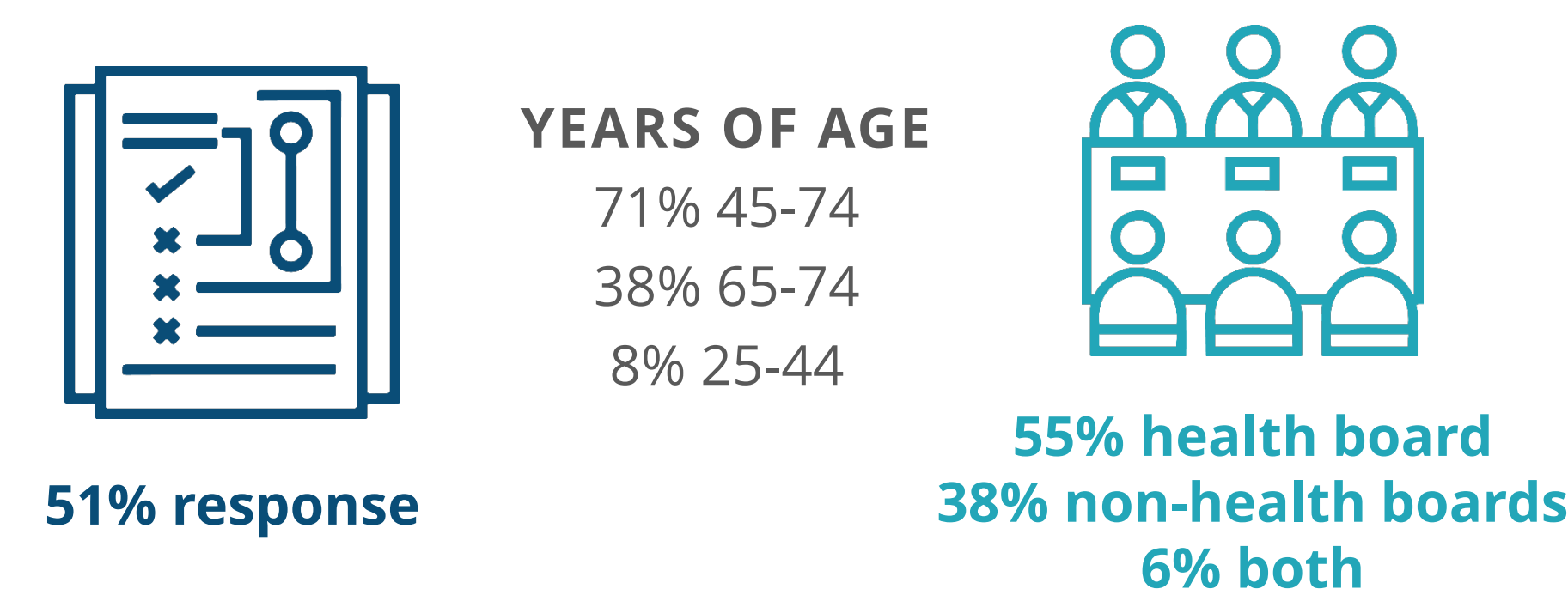
Study Objectives

1. Understand the background and experience of public board members;
2. Understand what public board members perceive as the most valuable contribution they can make to regulatory governance;
3. Understand what learning is most impactful for public members;
4. Understand what public members perceive as the barriers and enablers to board contribution; and
5. Provide recommendations to regulators and government to maximize the contribution of public regulatory board members.

Methods



Results



#1 Reason to Serve Public Service

Perceptions of Role

- Feel listened to and valued
- Feel more empowered after 3-6 months of learning on the job
- Opportunities for learning
- Workload and time is reasonable

Key Public Member Attributes

- Understanding governance
- Ability to ask strategic questions
- Understanding regulation
- Openness/curiosity
- Ability to navigate difficult conversations
- Understanding the practice context

Maximizing Contributions

- Ongoing learning that meets committee members where they are at
- Creating communities of practice and mentorship with other public members
- Increasing skills of chairs to create inclusive space where public perspectives are invited
- Clarifying roles

Conclusion

The qualitative findings from focus groups strongly supported the survey results. Participants reinforced that the primary motivation to serve is to contribute to the public interest. Many public members have significant experience themselves as members of regulated professions or in subject matter areas such as business, law or education. They have skills and experiences to offer and want to give back. Feedback included that public members bring a different perspective to board discussions and can often shift the dialogue from profession to public interest. They can ask clarifying or difficult questions through the lens of a consumer yet this needs to be empowered as part of board culture.

Role and mandate clarity were identified as areas for improvement so public members know what they are signing up for and, would assist all board members to understand the role and value of the public member. The importance of understanding regulatory governance vs. not-for-profit governance was flagged as an issue. Other learning needs emerged including the need to understand the professional practice context and language, the nuances of regulation. Public members voiced support for having access to a network of other public members to liaise with and learn from.

Recommendations from this study include the following:

- Create a Lifecycle of Learning for Public Members
 - Pre-appointment supports
 - Post-appointment orientation supports
 - Ongoing learning supports
- Develop a strategy to increase diversity on boards, welcome younger generations
- Build a public member community of practice
- Focus on board culture that is inclusive and welcomes all perspectives
- Support and communicate a range of learning opportunities including communities of practice and mentorship

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