



2026

Board Effectiveness Survey

REPORT

The 2026 OnBoard Board Effectiveness Survey

How board directors raced past their own governance on AI adoption — and what the boards that stayed ahead of it are doing differently.

Sixth annual fielding. 531 governance professionals. Survey closed June 1, 2026.

92% of board directors used AI for board work in the last six months. 60% of them sit on boards with no formal AI policy. 41% sit on boards with no guidelines at all governing their AI use. The question facing the 2026 boardroom is no longer whether directors are using AI on the most sensitive material a fiduciary handles. They are. The open question is whether the board has a written AI policy governing how and a system in place to keep their data secure. The 6% of boards that have written an enforced one rate themselves 32 points more effective than the 38% that have nothing.

Five things to take from this report

- 1. Shadow AI use in the boardroom is now at critical mass.** Adoption climbed from 69% to 92% since our 2025 survey. The default AI stack directors are using includes ChatGPT and CoPilot — two consumer-grade LLMs now in contact with the organization's most fiduciarily sensitive content.
- 2. A written AI policy is the cleanest predictor of board effectiveness in the dataset.** Boards distribute across a five-tier ladder from none through enforced. Self-reported board effectiveness climbs at every step. The biggest single-step lift happens when policy moves from intent to written artifact.
- 3. Directors lead AI adoption and carry the most exposure.** They post the highest investment intent in a secure AI solution of any role (39%, tied with CEOs) — and the lowest penetration of any board-purpose-built tool.
- 4. Confidence in board security dropped 15 points since the 2025 survey** — the steepest decline anywhere in the survey.
- 5. The persistent people problem has not moved in six years.** 87% of respondents report at least one ineffective member on their board. AI raised the bar in the room and up-leveled expectations directors have of each other.



Foreword: What changed since the last board effectiveness survey

In 2025, AI took a firm foothold in the boardroom with 69% of directors using AI to support board work. By the time the 2026 survey closed nine months later, 89% of all respondents — and 92% of board directors specifically — were using AI for board work. Critical mass in adoption stretched across roles, sectors, and geographies.

What did not arrive alongside adoption was the governance scaffolding. 63% of boards still have no formal AI use policy. Only 6% have an enforced policy requiring signatures and reviews. It should come as no surprise to see that confidence in board security dropped 15 points. The most-cited negative impact of AI on board effectiveness is data privacy — a direct symptom of the gap between use and oversight. That is the story this report tells, and the title is the data's own diagnosis: boards adopted AI faster than they governed its use. Every leader, every director reading this report is most likely sitting on a board that has crossed the adoption line and not yet instituted an enforced policy. This research shows a counterintuitive reason they should.



The Shadow AI Boardroom

With 92% of board directors using AI for board work in the past six months, what tools directors are reaching for is the part of the picture that should sharpen the room.

Tool	2025 Share	2026 Share	Δ
ChatGPT	48%	58%	+10
Microsoft CoPilot	32%	53%	+21
Gemini	11%	28%	+17
Claude	7%	24%	+17
Grok	4%	11%	+7
Perplexity	6%	8%	+2
DeepSeek	3%	8%	+5
Other board-management AI	—	5%	new
Have not used AI	31%	10%	-21

The bottom of the table is a warning sign. 8% of board directors put board work through DeepSeek — a Chinese-built open-source model. The dominant director workflow runs these tools against the materials before the meeting starts — summarizing the board book, anticipating questions, researching the topic on the table. Minutes cleanup, the lowest-stakes use, comes second.

Director use case	Share of AI-using directors
Summarizing board books, reports, or documents	54%
Writing or cleaning up meeting minutes	53%
Drafting or formatting meeting agendas	49%
Researching topics or analyzing data for board materials	40%
Presentations or executive reports	35%
Anticipating board questions and preparing responses	33%

The first row is disquieting. Summarizing a board book is the same as uploading a board book: they are uploading strategic plans, M&A diligence, executive compensation reviews, legal opinions, audit findings, vendor risk assessments, and security incident updates. This is the most sensitive material a director sees as part of their fiduciary duty. By default, consumer-LLM accounts train on uploads and conversations. Those documents are entering the LLM's corpus unless the director uses a paid personal account and has manually disabled the training setting, or is using an enterprise tier account.

The phrase our research team kept coming back to in the analysis was the Shadow AI Boardroom — directors sending sensitive board materials through tools their boards have not approved, do not control, and in many cases do not know are being used. Across this dataset, that behavior is the default.

Two patterns make the exposure compound. The first is that directors are using several different AI models in their work: 60% of board professionals run two or more AI tools (up from 39% in 2025). The second is who's in the cohort. Those with the deepest fiduciary exposure — directors and CEOs — are also the heaviest, broadest users of AI. At some level, these individuals recognize the need for security and are the most likely (39% each) to rate their interest in a secure AI solution at 8 or higher.

Role	Rate investment intent 8+ on a secure AI solution
Board Director / Member	39%
CEO / President	39%
Corporate Secretary / General Counsel	37%
Executive Director	34%
Board Administrator	25%
All respondents	33%

Respondents named the consequence. When asked where AI has negatively impacted board effectiveness, data privacy, confidentiality, and data usage concerns took the top spot at 38% — ahead of every other answer. In second place, respondents reported their board effectiveness was negatively impacted by revealing limited AI knowledge and expertise among board members (27%). Board members are looking around the room, recognizing when a peer is not keeping pace, and it is impacting their view of the entire board.

Director takeaway. The probability that multiple members of your board put your board book through a consumer AI tool in the last ninety days is north of 90%. The open question is whether your board has written down what it expects of itself in a formal policy.

A Written AI Policy Is the Cleanest Predictor of Effectiveness in the Dataset

We asked respondents where their board sits on a five-tier scale of AI policy maturity: no policy at all, developing a policy, basic guidelines, shared formal policy, and enforced policy with signatures and reviews. The boards distributed as follows:

Tier	Share of boards	n
1 – No policy	38%	202
2 – Developing a policy	25%	132
3 – Basic guidelines	19%	100
4 – Shared formal policy	12%	63
5 – Enforced policy (requiring signatures + reviews)	6%	32

63% of boards have nothing formal in place. 6% have a policy with enforcement behind it. The middle is wide and active – a quarter of boards are drafting their policy right now.

When our research team looked at whether adopting an AI policy moved other effectiveness metrics, the pattern was striking. Effectiveness, security confidence, collaboration, perceived AI impact, and investment intent all climbed in step with policy maturity.

Each respondent was asked, "Compared to 12 months ago, has the success of your board improved or declined in the following areas?" and given a five-point scale to evaluate their effectiveness, collaboration, and confidence in security.



Tier	Board Effectiveness (mean)	Collaboration (mean)	Confidence in Security (mean)
No policy	3.65	3.64	3.33
Developing	3.86	3.86	3.66
Basic guidelines	4.09	3.98	3.72
Shared formal	4.02	3.95	3.78
Enforced	4.47	4.19	4.41

Three observations:

The biggest single-step lift is the move from Developing to Basic guidelines — +11 points. That is the moment a board's AI posture stops being a conversation and becomes a written artifact. The act of writing the policy down appears to do meaningful work in the perception of a board's effectiveness, security, and collaboration.

Shared formal policy plateaus slightly below Basic guidelines on effectiveness. Boards that socialize a policy without enforcing it are sitting in a trap — the artifact has been delivered, the behavior has not necessarily followed. Enforcement is where the curve resumes climbing.

Security confidence has a different shape from effectiveness. Tiers 2–4 are essentially flat (53% to 57%). Then it jumps 24 points at enforcement. Writing a policy improves perceived effectiveness on day one. Enforcing it is what makes a board feel safer.

The directors at the top of the curve are running more AI, in more places, while governing the work they do with each one. And as policy matures, AI moves into the highest-judgment work. The share of directors using AI to anticipate board questions and prepare responses grows from 12% in no-policy boards to 67% in enforced-policy boards — a 5.6× lift. Summarizing board books grows from 50% to 80%. Governance review grows from 26% to 47%. Policy turns out to be the gate that brings the higher-stakes work into scope.

The full policy-ladder cross-tab, for the design team:

Policy tier	Effectiveness top-2 box	Security confidence top-2 box	Collaboration top-2 box	Positive AI impact (Q3 top-2 box)	Investment intent 8–10
No policy	55%	28%	56%	51%	20%
Developing	70%	53%	68%	73%	33%
Basic guidelines	81%	53%	74%	79%	43%
Shared formal	79%	57%	73%	79%	35%
Enforced	88%	81%	81%	78%	78%

It's worth noting that boards with an enforced policy are more likely to be corporate, more likely to be larger in size, or resourced enough to write and enforce a policy in the first place.

Directors Lead Adoption and Carry the Most Exposure

When our research team looked just at how directors responded, the picture became clearer. They sit alongside CEOs at the top of the adoption curve — and apply AI to the highest-stakes work in the lifecycle of a board meeting.

Director fact	Value
Directors who used AI for board work in the past 6 months	92%
Average AI tools per AI-using director	2.68
Directors rating secure-AI investment 8 or higher	39%
Directors who have used a board-purpose-built AI tool	<25%
Directors sitting on boards with no formal AI policy	60%
Directors sitting on boards with literally nothing in place	41%

The directors with the deepest exposure to confidential board material are the highest-intent buyers of a secure AI solution and the lowest-penetrated users of any board-purpose-built one. The cohort that has done the math about what it needs has not been provided a solution.

What directors actually do with AI

When directors use AI, here's what they are doing: 54% are reviewing board books and reports, 40% are researching topics and analyzing data, and 34% are drafting and editing presentations.

The data is clear: directors are using AI to prepare to perform their fiduciary duties.

The director tool stack splits by cognitive load

ChatGPT and CoPilot show up in roughly 70–85% of director responses on every use case.

What tools they use as the work gets harder is what has your general counsel concerned.

Use case	Tool that over-indexes most (lift vs. director baseline)
Anticipate board questions	Claude (1.64×), Grok (1.88×), DeepSeek (1.71×), Perplexity (1.71×)
Review governance / regulatory	DeepSeek (2.14×)
Research / data analysis	Perplexity (1.98×), Grok (1.74×)
Presentations	DeepSeek (1.82×), Grok (1.76×)

When directors anticipate hard questions, they typically reach for ChatGPT plus CoPilot plus Claude. For governance and regulatory reading, DeepSeek over-indexes by a wide margin.

That's where the DeepSeek footprint gets uncomfortable. 31% of directors who use AI to review governance and regulatory content are running it on DeepSeek — a Chinese open-source model, applied to US, UK, and Canadian regulatory material on behalf of fiduciaries, with no board policy authorizing it and no IT team aware.

The working director and the strategic director are different people

The director persona splits sharply by sector. Strip nonprofit directors out of the population and the profile reorders: among commercial directors, the top use cases are summarize materials (62%), research / data analysis (46%), anticipate board questions (39%), and governance review (39%). Among nonprofit directors, the top use case is minutes (71%) — the inverse of the commercial profile, because on many small nonprofit boards the director, the administrator, and the executive sometimes overlap into the same person.

Director takeaway. If the description above sounds like your situation, your board is in the cohort that needs the policy artifact the most and the secure AI system to back it — and almost certainly does not yet have this in place.

Confidence in Board Security Dropped 15 Points

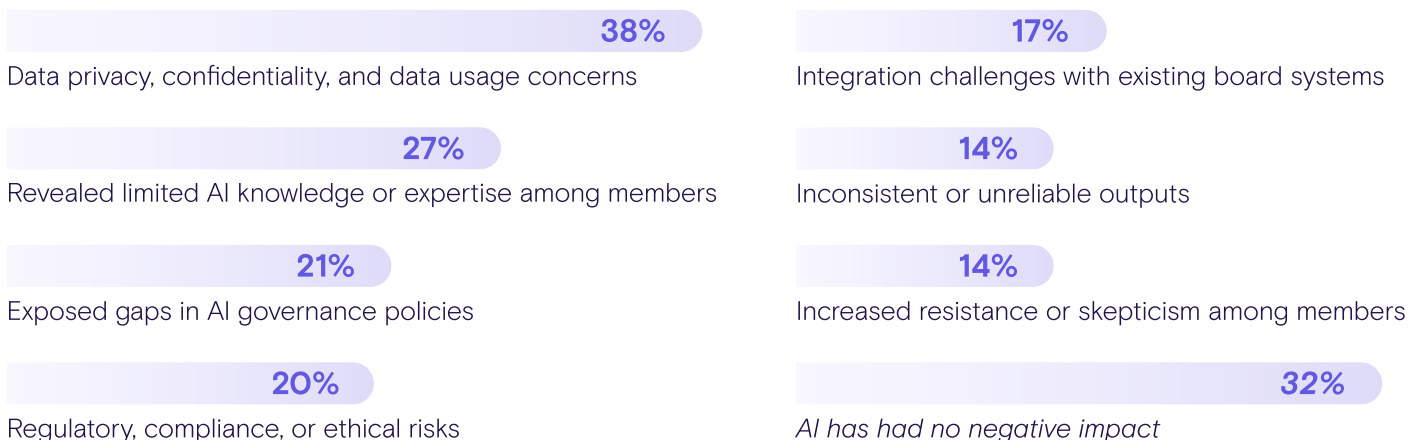
We asked the same boardroom-sentiment question in 2026 that we asked in 2025. Effectiveness and collaboration moved slightly lower. Confidence in security collapsed.

A 15-point drop in confidence in security is both the steepest move anywhere in the survey and the only major metric moving in the opposite direction from AI adoption. The 2026 figure sits below even the 2024 baseline (54%) that the 2025 report celebrated bouncing back from.

Dimension	2025 improved (top-2)	2026 improved (top-2)	Δ
Confidence in security	61%	46%	-15

Pair the drop in security confidence with the top negative-impact answer — data privacy, confidentiality, and data usage concerns at 38% — and the cause is not hard to find. Directors are watching the AI tool list grow, fearing their colleagues are uploading board books into ChatGPT, and recognizing that a crisis in information security is brewing.

Negative impact of AI on board effectiveness



The second negative impact pours salt on the wound. 27% of respondents say AI has revealed limited AI knowledge or expertise among board members.

This is the director looking around the room and recognizing that some of their peers do not understand the tools well enough to spot a bad answer, do not know what a hallucination looks like, do not realize that the model agreed with them because models agree by default. The bar for showing up to a board meeting has been raised, very concretely, by the directors at the same table who walk in readied by their favorite LLMs. Everyone else in the room can feel it.

The third negative impact — exposed gaps in AI governance policies (21%) — ties a bow around this issue. Directors know the gap is there. They named it. They have not been given the tools to close it.

Boards are collecting AI's productivity dividend — efficiency in preparing materials (50%), more actionable minutes (43%), faster access to historical decisions (33%). They are waiting for governance to catch up.

Director takeaway. A 15-point drop in security confidence is the room telling itself the obvious. Without a written, enforced policy and a place to run board AI work that respects the permissions the board already operates under, this issue will compound.

Where AI Is Helping — and Where It Has Not Landed Yet

When asked where AI has positively impacted board effectiveness, respondents lead with the operational wins. 50% point to increased efficiency in preparing board materials. 43% cite more concise and actionable meeting minutes. 33% report faster access to relevant information and historical decisions. Below that line: enhanced director preparedness (22%), improved quality and depth of board insights (21%), better tracking of action items and follow-ups (19%).



Positive impact of AI on board effectiveness



What is missing from the top of that list is the rest of the story. Improved strategic scenario planning sits at 14%. Stronger risk identification and governance oversight at 7%. Increased engagement and participation during meetings, also at 7%. The places where AI could most meaningfully change a board — strategy, risk, and engagement in the room — are not where boards are using it yet. That is the gap policy maturity closes: when boards climb the policy ladder, the judgment-grade use cases are what comes into scope.

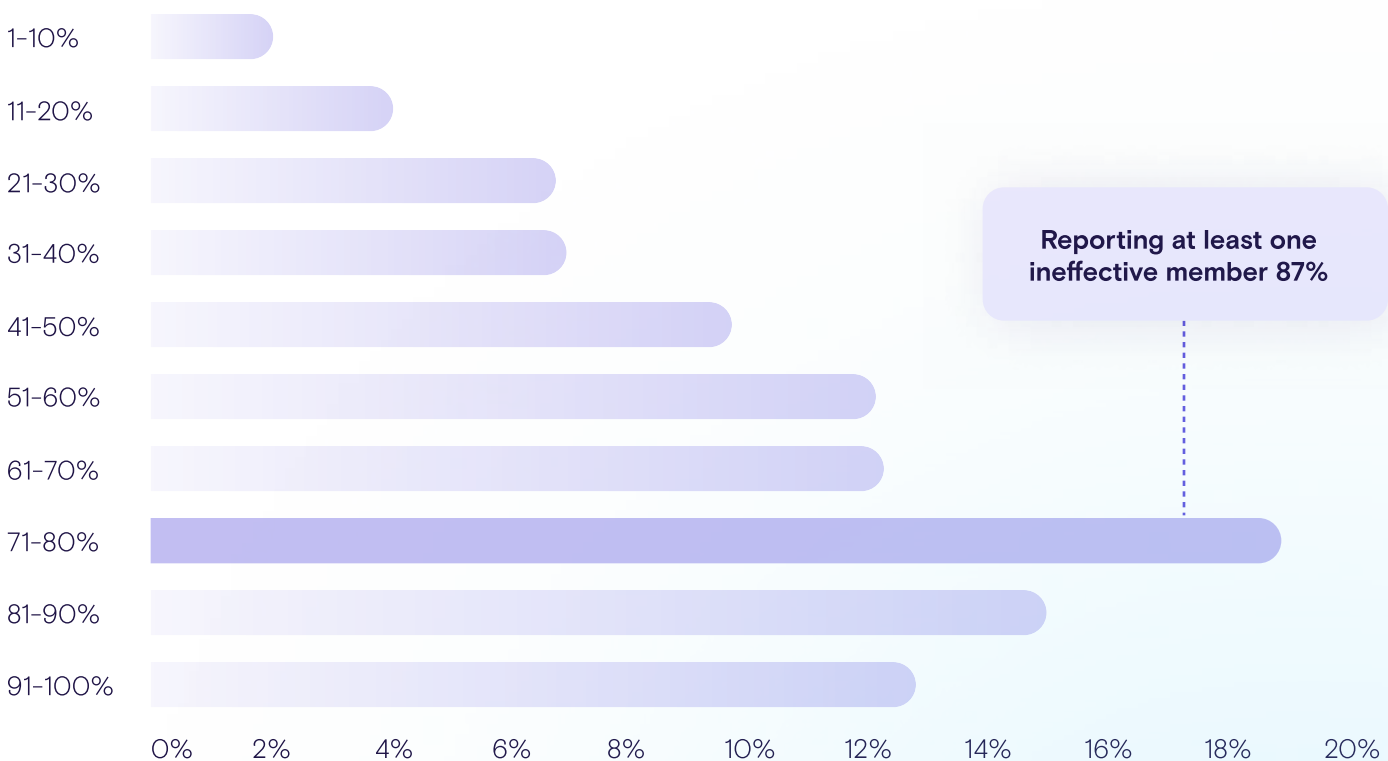
The Persistent People Problem Has Not Moved

The most durable finding in this study is not about AI at all.

We ask respondents each year what percentage of their current members effectively contribute to the board's key goals and objectives. Every year, roughly the same answer: 87% of respondents report at least one ineffective member on their board. Most boards have ten or fewer members, so "at least 10% ineffective" reduces to "at least one person isn't contributing." The weighted-average estimated ineffectiveness sits at 37% in 2026 and 36% in 2025. Inside a sample of 531, that is noise.

The qualitative texture matches. The top opportunities-to-improve in 2026 are the same ones boards named in 2025: underperforming members, limited communication between meetings, unclear expectations, inconsistent preparedness. Two opportunities did rise materially — time constraints in meeting preparation (+5 points) and minimal accountability or follow-through (+4 points). The work is getting harder, even with AI in the picture.

Share of respondents by % of board members who effectively contribute



AI changed what a prepared director looks like once they arrive at the meeting. The director who used to skim the board book on Sunday night is now sitting across the table from one who summarized it on Friday, asked their model what the board ought to push back on, and walked in with discussion points prepared. Their peers notice. 16.5% of boards named ineffective or slow adoption of AI as an opportunity to improve.

That observation stands as the strongest argument against the "AI board member" framing now appearing in the market. A set of vendors are selling AI assistants designed to act as board participants — or at least claiming that's the future they envision. The data has nothing kind to say about that direction. The problem the data describes lives inside the seats already at the table — directors who could be operating at the full capacity their role deserves and currently are not. The work is to amplify every director already on the board, supported by tooling that respects the rules of the room.

Director takeaway. The composition of your board roster is a search-and-nominations problem. The preparation of the directors on it is the problem AI can actually move. Hold the distinction every time you read a vendor pitch.

A framework: The Board AI Maturity Curve

Five stages of policy maturity for AI use at the board level. A self-assessment that any director can run against their own board in thirty seconds.

Tier 1 — None	
Assessment question (yes / no)	Has your board discussed AI use formally at all?
Survey cohort	38%
What's true at this stage	Effectiveness 55%. Security confidence 28%.
The next step	Start the conversation. Put it on a governance committee agenda.
2 — Developing a policy	
Assessment question (yes / no)	Is there an active workstream moving toward a written policy?
Survey cohort	25%
What's true at this stage	Effectiveness 70%.
The next step	Cross the line from intent to a plan. The biggest single lift in the dataset is here.
3 — Basic guidelines	
Assessment question (yes / no)	Does your board have a written document directors can reference?
Survey cohort	19%
What's true at this stage	Effectiveness 81%.
The next step	Write the plan and operationalize it — share it formally, identify the tools that comply, identify the gap.

4 – Shared formal policy

Assessment question (yes / no)	Has the policy been formally shared, and do directors know it exists?
Survey cohort	12%
What's true at this stage	Effectiveness 79%.
The next step	Move to enforced – signatures, review cadence, the tooling the policy assumes.

5 – Enforced

Assessment question (yes / no)	Are signatures, periodic reviews, and approved tool lists in place – and do directors operate inside them?
Survey cohort	6%
What's true at this stage	Effectiveness 88%. Security confidence 81%.
The next step	Stay there. Re-evaluate annually as the tool landscape shifts.

Across every metric we measured, boards with an enforced AI policy outperform boards with no policy. Effectiveness: 88% vs 55%. Collaboration: 81% vs 56%. Confidence in board security: 81% vs 28% – nearly three times higher. What changes with policy is how directors use AI. Without a policy, only 12% use AI to anticipate board questions before a meeting. With an enforced policy, 67% do – more than five times higher. Summarizing the board book follows the same pattern: 50% to 80%.

Investment intent, though, doesn't climb in a straight line. Boards with enforced policies are the most willing to invest in secure AI (78%). Next come boards still drafting their first set of guidelines (43%) – not boards that have shared a finished policy (35%). Boards drafting are actively shopping. Boards that have shared a policy without enforcing it have moved on, mentally – and they are the cohort most likely to discover, a year from now, that the policy was theater. Each step is achievable. Start the conversation. Write the draft. Share the document. Put enforcement behind it. The next section breaks the work into four moves.



What boards should do next

Four moves, in priority order.

1

Put the AI policy conversation on a governance committee agenda.

This is the document that determines what a fiduciary may and may not do with confidential board material. The work belongs alongside D&O coverage, audit oversight, and the rest of the board's fiduciary apparatus. Boards that wrote a policy down — half-page guidelines or signed enforcement document — rate themselves materially more effective on every dimension we measured. The single largest effectiveness lift in the dataset happens the moment intent becomes artifact.

2

Inventory the AI tools your directors are already using.

92% of directors are using AI; 60% of boards have no record of which tools. The starting point of any policy is an honest list. A short anonymous survey of the directors — which AI tools have you used for board work in the past six months — surfaces the actual perimeter the policy needs to govern.

3

Choose one secure environment for the highest-judgment AI work.

Policy is what brings the higher-stakes uses into scope — summarizing board books, anticipating board questions, reviewing governance and regulatory material. Those uses require the AI to operate inside the same security envelope the board materials already live in. A secure environment that draws on the actual governance record, respects the existing permission structure, and never trains on board material is the architecture the data is pointing at.

4

Train your directors inside that environment.

The second-most-cited negative impact of AI in this survey was limited AI knowledge or expertise among board members. A consumer model on personal material teaches the wrong reflexes. The same kind of model, working on the board's own record inside a governed envelope, teaches a director how AI fits into their judgment — without putting board material at risk while they learn.

The future the data points at is every director, amplified — directors operating with full context, supported by an AI that respects the rules of the room. The bar for the room has moved. The work is to lift the people who already sit at it.



How OnBoard AI Becomes a Strategic Partner to Your Board

The data in this report describes one fundamental gap: directors have already adopted AI for board work, faster than their boards have governed it. The path forward is a secure environment built on the principles a fiduciary actually needs. OnBoard AI is exactly that — designed against four rules the survey data argues for, and ready for your board today.

Every answer comes from the actual governance record.

Real minutes, real documents, real board discussions. When a director asks OnBoard AI to summarize the board book — the use case 54% of directors are already running through consumer LLMs — OnBoard AI summarizes that board book, from inside the security envelope where it already lives. When a director asks what was decided about the audit committee's vendor risk concern in March, the answer comes from the actual minutes. No hallucinations. No fabricated votes.

The AI respects the permissions your governance framework already defines.

Committee membership, independent director status, conflict screens — the information barriers already in place on your board apply inside OnBoard AI. A director asking about something they shouldn't see gets the same answer the platform gives them today: nothing.

It works across the full lifecycle of a meeting.

Agenda suggestions draw on open items from prior meetings. Board book summaries personalize to what each director flagged last time. Action items detected during the meeting flow into the next agenda automatically. The use cases that grow most with policy maturity — anticipating board questions (12% → 67% across the policy ladder), reviewing governance and regulatory material (26% → 47%), summarizing board books (50% → 80%) — are exactly the work OnBoard AI is built for. And nothing in this stack ever trains on your board's material.

It compounds.

Every meeting your board runs makes the next one smarter. A question raised in March surfaces in June's prep. An action item assigned in Q2 appears on the Q3 agenda. The full governance history of your board becomes a wellspring every director can draw from — institutional memory that no longer walks out the door when a board member rotates off.

The four moves in *What boards should do next* describe steps any board can take this quarter. OnBoard AI is the secure environment those moves point at — built to the principles the data argues for, available today.

Every director, amplified.

Addendum — International parity

A natural question reading this report from outside the United States is whether the story is a U.S. phenomenon. The data argues it is not. Of the 531 respondents, 107 sat outside the United States — a smaller but workable sample. Among that subset, 88% of directors used AI for board work in the past six months, within 4 points of the U.S. director rate (92%). The tool ranking is identical: ChatGPT, CoPilot, Claude, Gemini. The use case mix tracks the U.S. profile. The policy gap is, if anything, wider — roughly 18% of international boards have any form of policy in place against approximately 21% in the U.S. cohort.

The "adopted faster than governed" pattern is global. Data-residency regulation has not slowed adoption; nor has the conversation looked materially different outside North American board culture. The recommendations in What boards should do next apply without modification across jurisdictions.

Source data. OnBoard 2026 Board Effectiveness Survey, n = 531. 2025 baseline: OnBoard 2025 Board Effectiveness Survey (fielded August 2025, n = 549 published / n = 562 raw). External context referenced: Deloitte 2025 Governance of AI; KPMG 2025 Board Leadership Center Survey on Generative AI; EY 2025 Responsible AI Pulse; OpenAI 2025 ChatGPT usage study.

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