



THE BOARD'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING AN HOA MANAGEMENT COMPANY

12 Questions Every Board Should Ask Before Signing or Renewing a Management Contract

A practical guide to evaluating ownership, professional standards, service accountability, fees, staffing, and long-term fit.

A better management decision starts with better questions

The best comparison is not simply management fee versus management fee. It is a disciplined review of ownership, people, systems, accountability, transparency, and the resources that will support the community after the contract is signed.

Because Communities Deserve Better!

Community Association Management, Limited

Educational White Paper | September 2026

Choosing a Management Company Is a Governance Decision

Choosing a management company is one of the most consequential decisions a Board can make. The relationship touches financial stewardship, governance, homeowner service, maintenance, compliance, records, technology, vendor management, and the continuity of the association as volunteer leaders change.

Community Associations Institute (CAI) makes the same point in its 2025 Selecting Management guide: Boards should first identify what the association actually needs, then use a disciplined process to compare companies against the same requirements.¹

The standard

Do not ask only, “What is the monthly management fee?” Ask what the association will receive, how performance will be measured, what costs extra, who will actually do the work, and what happens when something goes wrong.

Before requesting proposals

A Board will get better proposals—and make a better comparison—when it defines its requirements before asking management companies to price them.

- Management model and level of Board support required
- Expected site visits, compliance inspections, meetings, and operational support
- Financial management, collections, budgeting, and reporting expectations
- Homeowner service channels and self-service capabilities
- Technology, records access, and transition requirements
- Service standards, response expectations, and performance reporting
- All association-paid and homeowner-paid fees
- Specialized services the association may need now or in the future

Once those requirements are defined, use the following 12 questions to evaluate the management model—not simply the sales presentation.

1. Who owns the management company, and where are major decisions made?

Ownership is not simply a corporate detail. It can affect how quickly decisions are made, how standardized services become, how resources are allocated, and how much authority local leaders have to solve a client problem.

Questions to ask

- Who owns the company today?
- Has the ownership structure changed in the last five years?
- Where are staffing, pricing, technology, and service decisions made?
- What authority does local leadership have to resolve a service problem?
- If the company is acquired, what should the association expect during the transition?

¹Community Associations Institute, *Selecting Management: How to Find the Right Community Association Management Company*, 7th ed. (CAI Press, 2025).

What to look for

Look for a clear explanation of ownership, accessible leadership, decision-making authority, and the company's long-term commitment to the markets it serves.

2. Is the company professionally accredited, and what credentials do its managers hold?

Experience matters, but professional standards provide another useful measure. CAI advises Boards to look for credentialed professionals and specifically recommends looking for an AAMC® company when selecting a management company.²

- What company accreditation has been earned, and what does it require?
- What credentials are held by managers and senior leadership?
- How are employees trained and kept current on industry changes?
- Does the company support continuing education and professional development?

Why AAMC® matters

Accreditation should be explained, not merely displayed. The Board should understand the experience, credentialing, insurance, and ethics requirements behind the designation and how those standards translate into the management relationship.

3. What happens when the assigned Community Manager is unavailable?

Every Community Manager will eventually take vacation, become ill, change roles, or leave the company. The Board should understand whether the association is supported by an organization or depends primarily on one individual.

Questions to ask

- Who supports the association when the assigned manager is unavailable?
- Can other employees access the information necessary to assist the Board?
- Are important processes and client history documented?
- How are manager transitions handled?
- What prevents institutional knowledge from leaving with one employee?

What to look for

Look for organizational depth: specialized departments, documented workflows, shared systems, management oversight, and a transition process that does not require the Board to start over.

4. Who handles homeowner calls, emails, chats, and routine service questions?

A Community Manager's time is one of the association's most valuable management resources. If the manager spends much of the day handling routine service questions, less time remains for Board support, financial oversight, vendor management, planning, and proactive community management.

²Community Associations Institute, "Finding the Right Professional," CAI Online, accessed September 2026.

- Who answers homeowner telephone calls and routine emails?
- Are chat, messaging, and self-service channels available?
- Can homeowners see account history, payments, violations, work orders, and documents online?
- Which issues are resolved by support teams and which are escalated to the Community Manager?

A useful distinction

The Board should know whether the Community Manager is expected to personally process every interaction—or whether a trained service structure protects the manager’s time for higher-value community work.

5. What service standards or SLAs does the company actually measure?

Nearly every management company describes itself as responsive. The better question is how it knows. Defined Service Level Agreements (SLAs), performance standards, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) turn a promise into something that can be monitored.

Examples of measurable service standards

- Board email response times
- Homeowner telephone wait times and callbacks
- Email response and service-queue performance
- Site visit and compliance inspection completion
- Budget and financial-reporting timelines
- Work-order activity and follow-through
- Client satisfaction and relationship indicators

Questions to ask

- Which standards are documented?
- Which standards are actually measured?
- How often does leadership review the results?
- What happens when performance falls below the standard?

Promises are useful. Measurement is better.

A company that measures service performance is better positioned to detect recurring problems, hold teams accountable, and improve results before dissatisfaction becomes a crisis.

6. Which fees are included in the management fee, and what costs extra?

The lowest monthly management fee does not necessarily produce the lowest total cost. Boards should evaluate the full economic relationship, including association-paid charges and homeowner-paid fees.

- Base management fee and included services
- Addendum, hourly, meeting, administrative, technology, mailing, and printing charges
- Collection-related charges and revenue arrangements
- Resale, closing, document, and homeowner-paid fees
- Maintenance-related charges and affiliated-company services

Then ask one more question: Which fees or activities generate revenue for the management company or an affiliated company? Transparency upfront makes proposals easier to compare and reduces surprises later.

7. How are collections integrated with management and financial reporting?

Delinquent assessments directly affect cash flow and the association's ability to operate. Collections should therefore be visible within the broader management and financial process—not treated as a disconnected black box.

- How are delinquent accounts identified and advanced through each collection stage?
- Can the Board see the current status of each account?
- How are payment plans and collection holds controlled?
- Who identifies accounts that have stalled or require attention?
- How are legal collections coordinated with management and financial reporting?

What to look for

The Board should be able to understand both the financial impact of delinquency and the operational status of collection activity without having to assemble information from several disconnected sources.

8. How are rental restrictions, insurance requirements, and compliance obligations tracked?

Complex associations often outgrow spreadsheets, email folders, and individual employee memory. Rental caps, leases, insurance documentation, architectural approvals, and compliance activity all require repeatable systems.

- Can the company determine whether a rental cap has been reached?
- How are leases, rental approvals, and expiration dates maintained?
- How are homeowner or vendor insurance requirements tracked?
- How are expiration dates and missing documents identified?
- How are violations and compliance activity documented?
- Can the Board access relevant information when needed?

Systems matter when the details multiply

Operational controls become increasingly important as an association grows more complex. The Board should understand which processes are system-driven and which still depend on someone remembering to follow up.

9. How does the company help the Board understand the overall health of the association?

Good management should not focus only on what happened yesterday. Boards also need help identifying risks that may become expensive or disruptive tomorrow.

Areas a strong assessment should consider

- Reserve funding and major capital needs
- Delinquencies and financial trends
- Insurance and risk exposure
- Governance and Board effectiveness
- Deferred maintenance and operational risk
- Compliance and records practices
- Long-term planning and community priorities

A structured Community HealthCheck can give a Board a practical snapshot of financial, operational, governance, and management health. For managed clients, a deeper Community Health Score can eventually support ongoing benchmarking by community type and region rather than comparing fundamentally different associations as though they were the same.

Reserve planning should be active

The Board should also ask whether reserve planning is treated as a static report that sits on a shelf or as an ongoing financial-planning tool that changes as projects, costs, conditions, and priorities change. Living Reserve Studies are designed around that more active approach.

10. What education is available to new and experienced Board members?

Volunteer directors are routinely asked to make decisions involving budgets, contracts, reserves, insurance, collections, governance, maintenance, and legal obligations—often without formal training.

- What orientation is provided when a new director joins the Board?
- Are educational resources available on demand?
- How are legislative, lending, insurance, or industry changes communicated?
- Is education dependent entirely on the assigned Community Manager?

Education is a management resource

A management company should help Board members become more informed decision-makers. HOA.University is designed to provide structured learning paths and ongoing education rather than requiring every lesson to begin with a problem.

11. Can the service model change as the association's needs change?

Not every association requires the same level of management. A large amenity-rich community may need frequent site visits, compliance inspections, maintenance coordination, and substantial Board support. A self-managed association may primarily need accounting, collections, technology, or administrative support.

Questions to ask

- Does the company offer more than one service model?
- Can services increase or decrease as the community changes?
- Can a self-managed association purchase professional accounting support without full management?
- Can additional operational services be added when needed?
- Will the association be forced into services it does not need?

Community's service options—Partner Plus, Partner Basic, eManageSuite, and Accounting Only—are designed to provide different levels of support rather than forcing every association into a single model.

12. How does the company measure and report whether it is delivering what it promised?

Management agreements describe services. Proposals describe capabilities. Sales presentations describe expectations. The Board should ask what happens after the contract is signed.

- What performance metrics are tracked?
- Does leadership review those metrics?
- How are missed service standards addressed?
- Are client satisfaction results monitored?
- How does the company identify a relationship that may be deteriorating?
- What information can the Board use to evaluate management performance objectively?

Accountability should not begin with a complaint

The strongest operating model detects service problems early, assigns ownership, and creates a path for correction before the Board concludes that changing management companies is the only remaining option.

A Better Way to Compare Management Companies

CAI's selection guidance emphasizes defining the association's needs, developing consistent specifications, checking references, interviewing candidates, analyzing proposals, reviewing the management contract, and planning carefully for a transition if the Board makes a change.³

A Board can turn those principles into a practical comparison by using the same evaluation categories for every company.

Evaluation Area	Question for the Board
Ownership & local decision-making	Who owns the company, and where are service decisions made?
Professional standards	What accreditation, credentials, training, and ethics standards are in place?

³Community Associations Institute, *Selecting Management*, 7th ed. (CAI Press, 2025), chapters on specifications, references, interviews, contracts, and transition.

Organizational depth	What resources exist beyond the assigned Community Manager?
Homeowner support	Who handles routine questions and service interactions?
Service accountability	Which SLAs and KPIs are measured and reported?
Financial transparency	What is included, what costs extra, and who receives ancillary revenue?
Collections	How integrated and visible is the collection process?
Operational controls	How are rentals, insurance, compliance, and records tracked?
Long-term planning	How does the company help identify risk, reserve needs, and capital priorities?
Board education	What resources help volunteer leaders make informed decisions?
Service flexibility	Can the relationship change as the association's needs change?
Measured performance	How does the company demonstrate that it is delivering what it promised?

Beyond the 12 Questions: References, Contract Terms, and Transition

Check references for the right reasons

Do not ask only whether the reference “likes” the management company. Ask about manager turnover, financial accuracy, response times, Board communication, transition quality, unexpected charges, technology, and how the company handled a difficult problem.

Interview the people who will actually support the association

A polished salesperson may never manage the community. The Board should understand who will lead the relationship, what support departments are involved, how escalation works, and what happens when the assigned manager changes.

Read the management agreement as an operating document

- Which services are included and which require an addendum or separate fee?
- What notice is required for termination or non-renewal?
- Who owns and controls association records and data?
- How quickly must records, bank access, and system credentials transfer at termination?
- What obligations survive termination?
- What homeowner-paid charges are permitted under the agreement?

Plan the transition before signing

A management change affects bank accounts, homeowner payments, collections, vendor relationships, records, technology, open work orders, budgets, contracts, and communications. The Board should understand the transition plan before the effective date—not discover it during the first month of service.

A good proposal answers “how,” not just “what.”

The Board should be able to see how the company will transition the association, who owns each step, what information is required from the outgoing company, and how service continuity will be protected.

How Community Is Built Differently

Community Association Management, Limited is an independently owned, AAMC®-accredited community association management company serving North Carolina and South Carolina. For more than 20 years, Community has continued to build specialized services around the needs of Boards and communities.

Independent. Accredited. Transparent. Accountable.

- Independent ownership and Carolinas-based decision-making
- AAMC® accreditation and professional development
- Defined service standards and measurable SLAs/KPIs
- A team-based management model supported by specialized departments
- Four service options: Partner Plus, Partner Basic, eManageSuite, and Accounting Only

Services designed around recurring Board challenges

- Rental cap and lease tracking
- Insurance tracking and renewal monitoring
- Integrated collections visibility
- Living Reserve Studies for more active reserve planning
- HOA.University for structured Board education
- Maintenance services and coordinated work-order support
- Dedicated Resident Services and compliance resources
- Community HealthCheck for evaluating financial, operational, governance, and management health

Management should be more than a manager.

A Board should receive the benefit of an organization: people, processes, technology, specialized resources, measurable standards, and institutional knowledge that remain in place even when one individual is unavailable or changes roles.

Before You Renew, Ask One More Question

If your Board cannot clearly answer the questions in this guide, that may be a reason to take a closer look at the current management relationship—even if the association is not yet ready to make a change.

How healthy is our association today?

A Community HealthCheck can help a Board evaluate key areas of financial, operational, governance, and management health and identify where additional attention may be warranted. The purpose is not simply to determine whether the association should change management companies. It is to understand where the community stands today and what deserves attention next.

Ready to evaluate your current management model?

Use this guide with your Board, compare your current relationship against the 12 questions, and identify the areas where the association needs clearer answers.

Visit communityassociationmanagement.com to learn more, take the Community HealthCheck, or request a conversation about your association's management needs.

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Educational Notice: This white paper is intended for general educational discussion. It is not legal, tax, investment, insurance, or accounting advice. Association requirements may vary by governing documents, contracts, insurance policies, and applicable law.