How to Communicate Engineering Diagnostics to Your Board

A practical guide for Community Association Managers and board members navigating structural reports, milestone inspections, and SIRS findings.

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1 Introduction: The Translation Problem

You have been in that meeting. The engineer hands over a bound report -- forty pages of technical findings, photographs of rebar corrosion, and references to Florida Statute sections. Before you can finish your summary, a board member interrupts: "So what does this actually mean for us?"

It is a fair question. And it is one that catches a lot of capable managers and board presidents off guard -- not because they do not understand the findings, but because translating engineering language into board-level decisions is a skill that nobody teaches you.

That is what this guide is for. We wrote it because we sit across the table from boards every week. We see what works. We see what falls apart. And the difference almost never comes down to how serious the problem is -- it comes down to how clearly the problem was communicated.

Whether you are presenting a milestone inspection report, walking your board through a Structural Integrity Reserve Study, or explaining why a repair project just doubled in scope, this guide will give you a framework for having those conversations with confidence.

Who This Guide Is For

Community Association Managers (CAMs), board presidents, treasurers, and anyone responsible for explaining engineering findings to a group of volunteer decision-makers who may not have a technical background.

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Know Your Audience Before You Open the Report

Before you decide how to present the findings, take stock of who is sitting in the room. Every board is different. Some boards include retired contractors or attorneys who can absorb technical detail. Others are made up of owners whose primary frame of reference is their own unit and their monthly assessment.

Neither group is wrong. But they need different approaches.

The Three Board Archetypes

The Detail-Oriented Board. These members will read the full report before the meeting. They want to understand the methodology, the severity ratings, and the engineer's reasoning. For this group, your job is to organize the findings -- not simplify them. Provide a clear summary upfront, then let them dig into the details.

The Bottom-Line Board. These members want three things: what is wrong, what it costs, and what happens if we wait. They are not being dismissive -- they are being practical. For this group, lead with the financial and safety implications and have the technical backup ready if they ask.

The Mixed Board. Most boards are a combination. You will have one member who wants to see every photograph and another who checks out after two minutes of technical detail. The framework in Chapter 3 is designed specifically for this reality.

Quick Read: Gauge the Room

If you are not sure which type of board you are presenting to, start with the bottom-line summary. Detail-oriented members will ask for more. You can always go deeper. You cannot un-bore someone who checked out on slide three.

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The Three-Part Framework for Presenting Findings

When we coach CAMs and board presidents on how to present engineering findings, we recommend a simple three-part structure. It works for milestone inspections, SIRS findings, forensic investigations, and remediation proposals alike.

Part 1: The Situation

Start with context. Remind the board why this report exists. Was it triggered by a statutory requirement? A complaint? An insurance claim? Grounding the conversation in the reason for the work keeps the discussion from feeling abstract.

- "Florida law required us to complete this milestone inspection because our building turned 30 this year."
- "We commissioned this investigation after multiple owners reported water intrusion on the east elevation."

Part 2: The Findings

Present the key findings in plain language. You do not need to read the report aloud. Instead, translate the top three to five findings into statements the board can act on. Pair each finding with a photograph if possible -- a picture of corroded rebar communicates more than any paragraph.

- Prioritize by severity: what is urgent, what is important, what can wait.
- Use the engineer's severity ratings but explain what they mean in practical terms.
- Avoid minimizing. If the engineer flagged it, there is a reason.

Part 3: The Path Forward

This is where most presentations fall apart. The board hears the problems but gets no clear direction on what to do next. Always close with recommended actions, estimated costs (even rough ranges), and a proposed timeline. If the engineer provided options, present them as options -- not as open questions.

Framework in Practice

Situation: "Our SIRS was completed last month as required by Florida statute." Findings: "The study identified three components with deferred maintenance -- the roof, the balcony waterproofing, and the plumbing risers." Path Forward: "The engineer recommends addressing the balcony waterproofing first, with an estimated cost of $380,000 to $450,000 over the next 18 months."

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How to Structure the Conversation

The order in which you present information matters more than most people realize. A finding that feels manageable when presented after a clear plan can feel catastrophic when dropped without context. Here is the order that works:

Step 1: Set the Stage (2 minutes)

Open with a brief reminder of why this work was done, who performed it, and what the board should expect to hear. This is not the time for detail -- it is the time to frame the discussion so board members know what is coming.

Step 2: Lead with the Summary (3 minutes)

Before you walk through individual findings, give the board a one-paragraph overview. Think of it as the executive summary they wish every report started with. "Overall, the building is in fair condition with three areas that require attention in the next 12 to 24 months."

Step 3: Walk Through Key Findings (10-15 minutes)

Present findings one at a time, each with a photograph and a plain-language explanation. Stick to the top three to five issues. If the report has twenty findings, group the minor ones into a "maintenance items" category and cover them briefly at the end.

Step 4: Present the Recommended Path Forward (5 minutes)

Lay out the next steps, estimated costs, and proposed timeline. If there are options, present them as a clear choice: "Option A addresses all three items now at $600,000. Option B phases the work over three years at $680,000 total but spreads the assessment impact."

Step 5: Open for Questions (10+ minutes)

Leave at least as much time for questions as you spent presenting. This is where trust is built. If you do not know the answer, say so and commit to getting it. Never guess on numbers or timelines.

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Handling Pushback on Costs and Timelines

Pushback is normal. It does not mean the board is being difficult -- it means they are doing their job. Volunteer board members are stewards of other people's money, and they take that seriously. Your job is not to shut down pushback but to address it with facts.

"Why does this cost so much?"

This is the most common question, and the worst answer is "because that is what the contractor bid." Instead, break the cost into components the board can evaluate: mobilization, materials, labor, engineering oversight, permitting. When a board understands that $90,000 of a $400,000 project is scaffolding, the conversation shifts from sticker shock to logistics.

"Can we wait?"

Sometimes the answer is yes -- and it is important to say so when that is the case. But when waiting carries risk, be specific about what that risk looks like. "If we defer the balcony waterproofing, the expected cost increases by roughly 15 to 20 percent per year as water damage progresses into the structural slab." Give them the cost of waiting in real numbers, not vague warnings.

"Can we get a second opinion?"

Do not take this personally. It is a reasonable request, especially for large expenditures. The right response is to support it: "Absolutely. We would recommend selecting another licensed engineer with experience in buildings like ours. We can provide a list of the scope items to make sure the comparison is apples to apples."

The Cost of Context

Boards that understand why something costs what it does are far more likely to approve the expenditure. Take the extra ten minutes to explain the cost breakdown. It saves months of indecision.

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When to Bring the Engineer Into the Room

Not every board meeting needs the engineer present. But some absolutely do. Knowing the difference saves your board money on professional fees and saves your engineer from sitting through two hours of unrelated association business.

Bring the Engineer When:

- The report contains findings rated as "severe" or "life-safety" concerns.
- The board needs to make a decision involving more than $250,000.
- There are competing repair options and the board needs technical guidance to choose.
- The findings are likely to generate emotional reactions from owners (structural damage, safety issues, large special assessments).
- The board has specific technical questions you cannot answer.

Present Without the Engineer When:

- The findings are routine maintenance items with clear recommendations.
- You have a strong enough understanding of the report to answer anticipated questions.
- The board meeting is a preliminary discussion, not a decision-making session.
- The report is a Phase 1 milestone inspection with no substantial deterioration findings.

Pro Tip: Pre-Brief the Engineer

When you do bring the engineer to a board meeting, brief them beforehand on the board's personality and concerns. A five-minute call can make the difference between a productive presentation and one that goes sideways because the engineer spent twenty minutes on methodology while the board just wanted the bottom line.

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Sample Talking Points: Milestone Inspections

Below are ready-to-use talking points for presenting milestone inspection results. Adapt the language to your building's specifics.

Phase 1 -- No Substantial Deterioration Found

> *"Our building completed its required milestone inspection under Florida law. The licensed engineer performed a visual inspection of the building's structural components, including the foundation, columns, beams, floors, roof structure, and load-bearing walls. The inspection did not identify any substantial structural deterioration. No Phase 2 inspection is required at this time. The report has been filed with the local building official as required."*

Phase 1 -- Substantial Deterioration Found (Phase 2 Required)

> *"Our milestone inspection identified areas of concern that require further investigation. Specifically, the engineer observed [describe findings in plain language -- for example, 'concrete spalling and exposed reinforcing steel on the parking garage columns']. Under Florida law, this triggers a Phase 2 inspection, which involves physical testing of the affected areas. We are working with the engineer to schedule that work within the required timeframe. We will bring the Phase 2 findings to the board as soon as they are available."*

Phase 2 -- Results and Recommended Action

> *"The Phase 2 inspection has been completed. The engineer performed [testing methods in plain language -- for example, 'concrete core sampling and ground-penetrating radar scanning'] on the areas flagged in Phase 1. The findings confirm [summary]. The engineer's recommended repair scope is estimated at $[range]. We recommend engaging a qualified contractor to begin developing a detailed repair proposal. The full report is available for any board member who would like to review it."*

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Sample Talking Points: SIRS Findings

Presenting the SIRS for the First Time

> *"As required by Florida law, our association has completed a Structural Integrity Reserve Study. This study evaluates the condition and remaining useful life of key structural components in our building -- including the roof, load-bearing walls, foundation, floor structures, plumbing, electrical systems, waterproofing, and windows. Unlike a traditional reserve study, the SIRS was conducted by a licensed engineer who physically inspected each component. The study also provides replacement cost estimates that our association is now required to fund. Reserves for these items can no longer be waived by owner vote."*

Addressing the Funding Impact

> *"Based on the SIRS findings, our association needs to fund $[total] in reserves over the next [timeframe]. Here is how that breaks down by component: [list top three to four items with costs]. Our current reserve balance covers approximately [X%] of the total required funding. We have [options: phased assessment increase, special assessment, combination] to close the gap. The board will need to decide on a funding approach by [date]."*

SIRS Presentation Tip

When presenting SIRS funding numbers, always show the per-unit monthly impact alongside the total number. A $2 million reserve requirement sounds alarming. '$85 per unit per month over ten years' sounds manageable. Both numbers are true -- choose the framing that leads to productive discussion, not panic.

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Common Mistakes That Derail Board Discussions

1. Reading the report aloud.

The board has the report. Your job is to translate it, not recite it. Summarize, contextualize, and recommend.

2. Burying the cost.

Do not wait until the last slide to mention the price tag. Boards that feel ambushed by a number will shut down. Lead with the range early, then explain what drives it.

3. Minimizing the findings.

"It is not that bad" may feel reassuring in the moment, but it undermines the engineer's credibility and your own. If the report says it is a concern, present it as a concern.

4. Presenting without a recommendation.

Boards need direction. Laying out findings without a suggested next step creates paralysis. Even if the recommendation is "we need more information before deciding," say that clearly.

5. Using jargon without explanation.

Terms like "chloride-induced corrosion" or "post-tensioned slab" mean nothing to most board members. Use the technical term if you need to, but immediately follow it with a plain-language explanation.

6. Skipping the timeline.

Every finding should come with an urgency indicator. "This needs attention in the next 6 months" is actionable. "This needs attention" is not.

7. Failing to follow up in writing.

After the meeting, send a summary email that captures the key findings, the board's decisions, and the agreed-upon next steps. This protects the association and creates a paper trail.

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Your Pre-Meeting Checklist

Use this checklist before every board meeting where engineering findings will be discussed.

- [ ] Read the full report at least twice. Highlight the three to five key findings.
- [ ] Prepare a one-paragraph executive summary in plain language.
- [ ] Pull the most impactful photographs from the report for your presentation.
- [ ] Confirm the estimated cost ranges for recommended repairs.
- [ ] Identify the timeline and urgency level for each major finding.
- [ ] Decide whether the engineer should attend (see Chapter 6 criteria).
- [ ] If the engineer will attend, brief them on the board's style and concerns.
- [ ] Prepare for the three most likely questions the board will ask.
- [ ] Have a recommended next step ready for each key finding.
- [ ] Draft a follow-up email template to send after the meeting.
- [ ] Bring printed copies of the executive summary for each board member.
- [ ] Confirm the meeting agenda allocates enough time for discussion.

Need Help Presenting Your Findings?

CSI works alongside CAMs and boards every day. If you have a report that needs translating, a board that needs convincing, or a building that needs inspecting -- we are here to help.

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