Running Effective Meetings: Strategies and Tactics
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Basic Elements of Most Board Agendas

- Establish Quorum –have enough members attended to allow us to conduct business? (defined in the by-laws, usually 50% + 1 member)

- Minutes – what did we do last time?

- Reports of officers, staff (CEO/Executive Director), standing committees (Executive, Finance, Governance/Nominating), special committees or ad-hoc work groups – what happened between board meetings?

- Unfinished/Old Business—what follow-up is needed to previous agenda items?

- New Business – what actions or discussions are before the board that are new?

Effective Board/Staff Partnership for Better Meetings

Ideally, the agenda is prepared and managed in the meeting by a combination of staff and board members. Options include:

1. CEO/Executive Director sends email to the board, asking if there are any items that should be added to the agenda

2. CEO/Executive Director drafts the agenda

3. CEO sends to Chair/President, who validates the draft agenda, asks questions and adds items as needed

4. Executive Committee, which finalizes the agenda before sending out to the full board

5. The CEO and Board Officer talk through the agenda items informally, by phone, or over lunch so that the Officer is familiar enough with the topic to introduce it in the meeting

   KEY PRINCIPLE: As a general rule, the CEO and other staff should talk as little as possible during the meetings, usually to give information or answer questions. It is a BOARD meeting, not a staff report to the volunteers. Preparing the board to introduce topics and facilitate discussion makes for a much more engaging board experience.

Optional Elements – Apply as useful

- ***Put names next to each agenda item*** – So that it is clear who is to introduce the topic (Treasurer? Staff? Committee Chair?).

- ***Tag Agenda Items*** –Next to each agenda item, indicate how each item is intended, for example:

  - o *Information (only)* – to give a "heads up" to the board about a new opportunity (invited to apply for a grant) or potential threat (may be losing funding next year from a corporate sponsor going out of business)

  - o *Discussion (without action)* – to talk about an item that is not yet ready to move to action, but needs a little more thought than "just" information (a key staff person is considering a move to a different area; do we need to restructure, and if so, what would the impact be?)

  - o *Action* – a specific motion is needed to bring an item to resolution and direct staff or a committee to execute action

- ***Timeframes*** – add a time estimate to each agenda item, and use that to plan out the meeting. Adjust as needed during the meeting, recognizing that spending more time on an item will limit the time for other items.

- ***Build in a "Mission Moment"*** – share a story about a client (without names or other identifying information) or a donor interaction that illustrates the impact of the work you do, or helps communicate the value of your services.

- ***Offer a Program or Department "Spotlight"*** – invite a staff person to come talk about what they do, their priorities for this year, or other topic; as a way to connect to other staff besides the executive director, as long as reporting boundaries (the org chart) are respected.

- ***Use a "Parking Lot"*** – a blank piece of flip chart paper, or a white board, where issues that are tangential to the current agenda item are written down or "parked". This helps acknowledge the importance of that tangential item without spending too much time. Keep a running list of parking lot items from meeting to meeting, and assign them out to staff or committees to follow up. Also use it to build future agenda items.

- ***Strategic Discussions*** – reserve time to engage the board in bigger questions about the organization's current situation and needs. For example: brainstorm ways to add fee-for-service revenue to your funding mix. Or talk about how to connect more with younger volunteers.

- ***Human Elements*** – make sure there is some fun, hope, excitement and passion in the meeting; board members need to connect to each other and the work of the organization. Consider using brief icebreakers, or personal sharing, or unstructured social time to get to know each other.

Core Facilitation Practices: Good Meeting Leaders...

- stay neutral while facilitating discussion (it's okay for chairs to have an opinion)

- listen actively

- ask questions

- paraphrase what you are hearing for clarity

- synthesize ideas

- stay on track with the agenda

- give and receive feedback

- test assumptions

- collect ideas

- summarize clearly

- observe/ listen to body language

- check-in about the process, participant needs, and reactions

- own the process, not the content or outcome (while facilitating the discussion before the vote)

- manage and balance participation

- go "in the balcony" to observe the process and group dynamics

- recognize that leading the board doesn't start or end with the board meeting

Adapted from "Facilitation at a Glance" (2nd edition), Ingrid Bens, Goal/QPC www.goalqpc.com

Delegation and Accountability: A suggested approach

Principle 1*: If the board doesn't give it away (delegates authority), it remains the board's responsibility to carry it out.*

Principle 2*: The board can delegate authority, but the ultimate responsibility always comes back to the board.*

LEVELS OF DECISION MAKING & DELEGATION

Level 1: Board Decides

Motion is made → Seconded → Discussed → Carried
> *Examples: approving meeting minutes; accepting the annual audit; approving a compensation package for the CEO*

Level 2: Board Delegates to Committee (or ad-hoc working group/task force) and assigns one of the following authorities:

2.a. Committee will decide and execute
> *Example: Fundraising Committee will plan and carry out a special event, within an approved budget*

2.b. Committee will discuss and formulate a recommendation to come back to the board by a certain date
> *Example: Board Governance committee will draft a recruitment plan to bring on new directors, for board input, approval and execution*

2.c. Committee will discuss and provide input to the CEO or other staff (but it is their decision to make)
> *Example: Marketing ad-hoc working group will have a session to look at sample annual reports and give input to the Marketing Director (staff), who will then do the final report with that input in mind*

Level 3: Board Delegates to CEO* and assigns one of the following authorities:

3.a. CEO (or delegated staff) will decide and execute
> *Examples: the CEO is empowered to select and hire a contractor to develop a website; the CEO is approved to submit a grant to fund a new program*

3.b. Formulate a recommendation and come back to the board or committee for decision
> *Example: CEO is charged to draft new personnel policies for board review and approval*

* NOTE: delegation to a single volunteer can also happen, either in an all-volunteer organization or where a board member offers specific expertise to augment the work of staff (like developing a new website)

Common Flaws that Frustrate People about Meetings

Poor Design

- Overloaded, with too many items on the agenda

- Not enough time dedicated to agenda items

- Lack of clarity on the outcome (action? discussion? Information?)

- Not enough "drama" to focus group attention

Bad Preparation

- Too much detailed committee work being done in the board meeting

- Board members coming in unprepared

Ineffective Execution/Facilitation

- Not following the agenda; too many distractions or tangents

- Not honoring timeframes for each agenda item, ignoring start time, or end time

- Not attending to the group process and dynamics

- Not dealing with Interrupting Behaviors (see below)

Undeveloped or Unhealthy Group Dynamics

- Too much unresolved or unaddressed conflict – the "elephants in the room"

- Power not shared by all members

- Personality differences not honored

Inadequate Follow-through

- Unclear motions directing action between meetings

- No task list (Who will do What by When?)

- Minutes/notes/task lists not distributed in a timely fashion

Suggested Group Agreements– to define how the board will interact

- One voice at a time – so we are having one meeting throughout (no side conversations)

- If there are concerns or disagreements, they need to be brought up during the discussion of the item – not afterward in the "parking lot"; once a seconded motion is discussed and carried, the issue is done (Vegas Rule)

- When faced with a difficult question or hard conversation: Ask for clarity with curiosity – instead of being defensive or shutting down

- Turn mobile devices to off or vibrate

- We respect the chair of the meeting working to balance all our voices

- We agree to engage in the meeting and in our board service, to "own" the organization's success through active listening and making comments

- No idea is bad – respect each idea, with permission to ask questions, provide feedback and raise concerns in exploring the idea; stay focused on the idea, not the person

Dealing with Interrupting Behaviors

Rule #1: Don't assume negative intent or label people. Instead, seek to clarify why these behaviors are happening and communicate the effect they have on a productive meeting.

Dominating – overly vocal, talking more than others, going on and on without making a point, sometimes from a position of formal or informal power.

Responses:	Re-direct and re-re-direct (cut off if needed…"I'd like to hear from others")
	Summarize and ask others for opinions
	Address directly offline
	Round robin participation (all talk before repeats are allowed)
	Remind about participation guidelines, established before meetings

Diverting – taking the agenda off-track, raising unrelated points, telling stories, or raising irrelevant concerns.

Responses:	Re-direct back to the agenda topic
	Use the Parking Lot or Task Capture
	Ask them to clarify relevance to agenda topic
	Call "Sidetrack " or "Rabbit Trail" in a light-hearted manner
	Assertively cut off if needed
	Assign a role (except the role of facilitator!)

Distracting – having side conversations, checking out of the meeting, reading messages or doing other work during the meeting

Responses:	Stand near the person(s)
	Confront softly, even non-verbally, but directly in meeting
	Encourage "one conversation" to the whole group
	Ask them to share relevant comments with the whole group
	Address directly offline
	Assign a role
	Group enforcement of expectations
	Separate two or more distracting people

Deadweighting -not participating in the discussion, offering no ideas or reactions, generally not engaging with the meeting

Responses:	Call people by name ("we haven't heard from you, John…")
	Use individual brainstorming and small groups to break up the flow
	Encourage full participation using Group Agreements
	Round-robin – each person is asked to share their thoughts one at a time
	Praise input when it occurs
	Address directly offline ("I'm curious about your lack of input…anything we should talk about?")

Decision Making: Roberts Rules of Order Process
(adapted to the needs of small boards)

- When a topic comes up on the agenda, the person identified on the agenda will give *introductory remarks, including context, history, discussion* to date on this topic, etc.

- When there are multiple options possible, *list each out on a separate flip chart* page and to pros/cons of each in writing

- A member of the board can make a *main motion* to take a specific action by saying that "I move that…" and the content of their proposed action or recommendation. (Or, if the direction of the conversation is clear, the Chair can call for a motion from a board member "to that effect". Common practice is that the Chair should generally not make a motion, though it is usually not forbidden.)

- Another member of the board can then *second the motion*, indicating that they believe the motion is worthy of discussion

- If there is no second to the motion, the motion is deemed to have *"died for lack of a second"* and it is not discussed

- If a proposed motion comes from a committee of the board, or a task force/ work group charged by the board to come up with recommended action, it can *be treated as a seconded motion from that group* if two or more board members served in that committee/group. Discussion can ensue without a motion in the board meeting

- Once the motion is made and seconded, the group *discusses the motion*

- *Amendments can be made to the motion* by someone making a new motion that is seconded and agreed to by the group (for example, if the original motion is to implement a new policy on a certain date, but during discussion the group agrees that a later date is preferable, a new seconded motion would amend the original motion with the new date)

- A board member, or the Chair, can *call the question*, meaning they think there has been adequate discussion so the vote should occur (this is to be used with proper attention to the group process, and is not meant to cut off debate prematurely)

- Motions can be *postponed definitely* (until the next meeting, for example) or *postponed indefinitely* (put aside permanently)

- *Tabling a main motion* doesn't "kill" it; it is used to deal with something more urgent than the motion but the main motion will come back for consideration in the same meeting

Montana Open Meeting Act

Excerpts from Montana Annotated Code

2-3-201. Legislative intent -- liberal construction. The legislature finds and declares that *public boards, commissions, councils, and other public agencies* in this state exist to aid in the conduct of the peoples' business. It is the intent of this part that actions and deliberations of all public agencies shall be conducted openly. The people of the state do not wish to abdicate their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. Toward these ends, the provisions of the part shall be liberally construed. (Emphasis added)

2-3-203. Meetings of public agencies and certain associations of public agencies to be open to public -- exceptions. (1) All meetings of public or governmental bodies, boards, bureaus, commissions, agencies of the state, or any political subdivision of the state or organizations or agencies supported in whole or in part by public funds or expending public funds, including the supreme court, must be open to the public.

(2) All meetings of associations that are composed of public or governmental bodies referred to in subsection (1) and that regulate the rights, duties, or privileges of any individual must be open to the public.

(3) The presiding officer of any meeting may close the meeting during the time the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy and then if and only if the presiding officer determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure. The right of individual privacy may be waived by the individual about whom the discussion pertains and, in that event, the meeting must be open.

(4) (a) Except as provided in subsection (4)(b), a meeting may be closed to discuss a strategy to be followed with respect to litigation when an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public agency.

(b) A meeting may not be closed to discuss strategy to be followed in litigation in which the only parties are public bodies or associations described in subsections (1) and (2).

(5) The supreme court may close a meeting that involves judicial deliberations in an adversarial proceeding.

(6) Any committee or subcommittee appointed by a public body or an association described in subsection (2) for the purpose of conducting business that is within the jurisdiction of that agency is subject to the requirements of this section.

Applicability to Nonprofit Organizations:

Generally, the Open Meeting Act and related precedent do not require private associations (i.e. nonprofit organizations) to have open meetings. The exceptions are:

1. If required under the terms of funding from a public entity, stipulated in a grant agreement or contract for services.

2. If the nonprofit has substantial control over a public revenue source allocated directly to that organization.

Some Helpful Resources

General Meeting Resources

Death by Meetings by Patrick Lencioni
http://www.tablegroup.com/books/dbm/

Manager Tools and Career Tools Podcasts – while not just about meetings, these audio podcasts focus on a variety of workplace issues. http://manager-tools.com/podcasts/manager-tools and http://manager-tools.com/podcasts/career-tools

About Icebreakers
Considerations about using Icebreakers: estela-kennen.suite101.com/using-meeting-ice-breakers-a9777
Suggested Exercises from Meeting Wizard: meetingwizard.com/meetings/ice-breakers.cfm?re=5

Meeting Schedulers
Simplify your meeting scheduling!
Doodle: www.doodle.com
Meeting Wizard: http://www.meetingwizard.com/ (also see the Resources section for meeting tips)