

# How to Run a Better Board Meeting – and Liven Up Your Board



If your board meetings are regarded as an unpleasant obligation, it's time to bring a fresh perspective: board meetings are an opportunity to exchange ideas, resolve issues and deepen commitment.

Here are 11 great ways to rethink your approach and create meetings that bring out your board's best.

1

## **Focus the agenda on results.**

Look for ways to structure real discussions among board members that will elicit commitment and leadership. Decide what is needed most out of this meeting, set your agenda accordingly and tell your board members at the beginning of the session why they are present and what you need out of them.

2

## **Be creative with the agenda.**

Look for ways to tweak the meeting plan to evoke your board members' passion for your cause. Avoid a dry recital of figures, and instead humanize your discussions by giving the board insight to what the agency is really accomplishing out in the world.

3

## **Focus on problems, challenges, or broad issues.**

Discussions of this nature will activate your board members' various backgrounds and skills sets, not to mention their interest. It will allow you to draw upon a deeper reservoir of their talent and energy, and will give them more interesting work.

4

## **Look at trends within routine reports.**

Identify larger, big-picture issues that are reflected within routine reports. For example, along with the financial report, consider a discussion of long-run implications of certain revenue or cost trends. What are three important questions anyone might want to ask about this month's financial report? Identify these questions yourself and introduce them to the board as discussion topics.

5

## **Plan big – add strategy discussions.**

Bring big-picture strategic planning issues into regular board meetings. For example, you could take the standard strategic planning issues focusing on organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis).



6

**Look at your board meetings as cheerleading sessions.**

Where is the enthusiasm? Get ready to fire up your board members and put them into action. For these meetings, switch your view to seeing the board as the team that is out on the field, with the role of the staff being there to encourage and congratulate them: How would you stage such a session?

7

**Interview the Executive Director.**

Your Executive Director deals with many challenges that board members never even confront. The Director's report to the Board rarely includes some of the deeper, more strategic issues that they often deal with. An unscripted conversation with the ED can be far more interesting than a formal report. Why not consider allowing time for the board members to interview the Executive Director about what is on their mind?

8

**Always choose one interesting item and set it up for a discussion.**

If you are nervous about turning your board loose and are not sure where the discussion might go, then let a couple of trusted board members know in advance about the planned discussion. Tell them your perspective and what you need from the board's conversation on this issue.

9

**Select a theme for each meeting.**

Follow the advice of the Alliance for Peacebuilding CEO, Chic Dambach, who likes to select a theme for each meeting based a particular need or issue facing the organization. He says, "This allows ample time for in-depth analysis of that topic. For particularly important issues, the theme can be repeated over the course of several meetings until the issue has been adequately addressed."

10

**Create "mission moments" in every board meeting.**

Give your trustees a personal experience of your mission in action. Use a testimonial or a story about someone touched by your organization. This could be the most powerful subject of the entire meeting.

11

**Break into groups.**

Instead of reporting to board members about an upcoming challenge, present the issue as a question and ask them to discuss it in small groups. Then the board chair can facilitate the full group discussion afterwards. Having small groups enables everyone to speak, encouraging shy people, those who typically avoid speaking to the full board, to participate.



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