

11 Ways to *Liven Up* a Board Meeting

Board meetings are more important than you realize, because they are often a board member's principal point of contact with your organization.

So make sure your meetings are great experiences for your board members. If you create meetings that are simply reports, many board members may lose interest.

Here are 11 great ways to create meetings that bring out your board's best:

1

Focus the agenda on what you need out of your board.

Look for ways to structure real discussions among board members that will elicit commitment and leadership. Decide what is needed most out of each meeting; set your agenda accordingly. And at the beginning, tell your board members what you hope to accomplish in the meeting.

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 your organization 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 (and your team!) more interesting work.

4

Look at trends within routine reports.

Identify larger, big-picture issues that are reflected within routine reports. For example, with the financial report, stage 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), and take on one of these topics at each of your next four meetings.



For more resources on creating a high performing board, scan here.



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6

Look at your board meetings as cheerleading sessions.

Where is the enthusiasm? Don't you want to fire up your board members and put them into action? If so, consider how you can bring energy and excitement into discussions. Create meetings that give board members messages they can share with the broader community.

7

Interview the Executive Director.

Your Executive Director deals with many challenges that are deeper, more strategic issues. An unscripted conversation with the ED can be far more interesting than a formal report. Why not create an informal "fireside chat" with the Executive Director, and have someone interview them about what is on their mind?

8

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

If you are unsure about where the discussion might go, then let a couple of trusted board members know in advance about your planned discussion topic. 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 former 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 topic 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 people who may hold back, to participate.



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