

## **Board meeting magic**

### *Organization is key to productive get-togethers*

Are you making the most of the time your board spends together during regular meetings? To keep productivity and morale high, it's essential that meetings be carefully planned and efficiently run and that decisions made in meetings receive follow-up attention.

### **Before the meeting**

Before the board meets, determine your organization's most pressing issues. Then, create a realistic agenda of the discussion topics, placing the most important ones at the top. Assign an action/output to each topic — whether you want the board to make a decision, go to a vote or do further research — along with who will be responsible for follow-up.

Next, decide the best forum for your meeting. Face-to-face meetings tend to be more conducive to interaction, networking, brainstorming and collaborating. Phone meetings usually are more easily scheduled, quickly conducted and less expensive. Choose the venue based on what needs to be accomplished. For example, a vote on a single issue might be better handled through a conference call; a lengthy discussion of proposed new programs would be better suited to a face-to-face meeting.

To allow the board ample time to process pertinent information and form well-thought-out opinions, develop and distribute a pre-meeting packet that includes a brief summary of key points to be discussed. Finally, send out a reminder a few days before the meeting. It can mean the difference between good and poor attendance.

### **During the meeting**

A warm and welcoming atmosphere sets the stage for a productive meeting. If you're conducting an in-person meeting, make sure the room is comfortable, well-lit and favorable to discussion. If it's a phone meeting, provide introductions so board members know who the other participants are.

Regardless of the forum, your first order of business is to thank everyone for attending. Board members are volunteering their time and knowledge to your organization. Acknowledging this upfront makes it clear that you appreciate and value their contributions.

Punctuality is also key, so make sure you get started at the appointed time. To begin, reiterate the goals of the meeting. Explain the overall outcomes you are seeking and decisions that need to be made, along with how the meeting is organized to achieve these goals. Next, summarize key issues and briefly review the topics to be addressed. Finally, establish ground rules for the meeting, such as staying on point and reaching consensus.

Once the meeting is underway, encourage debate and discussion, making sure everyone has a chance to speak. You might engage quieter members by asking open-ended questions such as, “What’s your position on this topic?” Be aware when a discussion has run its course; summarize pertinent points and then move for a vote, consensus or assignment of further research.

Although you want to follow the meeting agenda, remain flexible. Allow participants to discuss pertinent items that may arise during the meeting, and be willing to switch gears when necessary. When everyone understands the decisions that have been made and responsibilities going forward, schedule your next meeting and adjourn the current one.

### **After the meeting**

Immediately following your meeting, send a summary to all board members recapping key points. This document should reiterate conclusions, follow-up assignments and the next scheduled meeting date. If the meeting didn’t accomplish all its intended goals, solicit ideas for improving the next one.

With one meeting behind you, it’s time to start gathering information for the next one. Stay informed about hot issues within your organization and keep a running a list of items that could benefit from discussion at your next meeting.

### **Moving forward**

Because most nonprofits have many complicated issues to discuss, make sure your board meetings are productive. Planning and organization can help your board remain focused and motivated. •