

# RUNNING EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

## **Purpose of a Board Meeting**

- ◆ Inform, convince, or inspire directors
- ◆ Resolve conflicts between persons and factions and lead to appropriate decisions
- ◆ Allow debate on significant issues and strategic directions
- ◆ Coordinate people and activities
- ◆ Create common understanding and common purpose

## **Do's and Don'ts for the Board Chair**

- ◆ Do ask yourself before every meeting "what do we need to accomplish at this meeting?" Refer to the previous meeting's minutes. Construct the agenda and conduct the meeting accordingly.
- ◆ Do develop an agenda with the executive director. The agenda should have times and a person responsible for each agenda item. Also each agenda item should be marked to indicate whether its purpose is informational, for discussion, or for a decision/action.
- ◆ Do Not clutter the agenda with minor issues or committee or staff reports that are unrelated to significant topics for discussion or decision.
- ◆ Do make sure the agenda and supporting documentation is distributed by mail or fax at least three days before the meeting.
- ◆ Do make sure directors have the information in advance that they will need to make decisions.
- ◆ Do Not make decisions based on information distributed at a meeting. If the information is not available until the day of the meeting, reschedule consideration of the agenda item for a subsequent meeting.
- ◆ Do make sure the board packet (information backing up the agenda) contains information that is concise, accurate, and timely. Where a decision will be made, a summary of the relevant information should be provided highlighting the key points and the recommendations of the executive director and/or the committee.

## EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS (CONTINUED)

- ◆ Do make sure the room is comfortable and well lit and that water and coffee or tea are provided.
- ◆ Do make sure the seating plan facilitates interaction among directors. A broad rectangle, with all directors facing in, is preferred.
- ◆ Do make sure the Executive Director is sitting next to you.
- ◆ Do make sure someone is taking minutes.
- ◆ Do start on time.
- ◆ Do review the agenda briefly and point out what needs to be accomplished at this meeting.
- ◆ Do stick to the time schedule, but be flexible enough to deviate if circumstances dictate.
- ◆ Do take a minute to acknowledge special events or special individual accomplishments that have occurred since the last meeting.
- ◆ Do Not talk too much. Your role is to be a neutral presider over the meeting process, to encourage full participation and teamwork, to prevent domination by a few, to make sure everyone understands the issues at hand, to help frame issues and bring them to resolution, to help crystallize consensus, to determine when it's time to bring an issue to vote or refer it to committee or seek additional information, to deflect tangents and stay on focus, to pay attention to the agenda and the clock.
- ◆ Do practice using the following techniques for encouraging discussion:  
*How do you feel about that? Let me see if I understand your position, you are saying... Can you clarify that? Can you give an example? Let's give Tim a chance to explain... Sally, you haven't said so, but I think you agree... I'm concerned that we are not hearing from everybody on the committee. How do you feel, Lisa? If this doesn't work, what will we lose?*

## EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS (CONTINUED)

- ◆ Do make sure that decisions or assignments made are reflected in the minutes. Confirm with the recorder that he/she has written down the appropriate information.
- ◆ Do Not schedule a meeting to last more than two hours.
- ◆ Do summarize at the end of the meeting what has been accomplished and what assignments have been made. Also, thank directors for their participation.
- ◆ Do ask directors to evaluate meetings twice a year, in writing and anonymously. The key question is: "Was this board meeting a good use of your time?"