

Board Meetings - Quick Tips for Better

From Hollyhock's newsletter – April 2004-04-07

1. Make sure that each person says at least one thing at every board meeting. This is the Chair's responsibility, but everyone should help! "Cecilia, you haven't spoken on this issue. I'm wondering what you're thinking about it?" "Matt, at the last meeting you made a good point about finances. Are there financial issues here that we aren't thinking about?"

2. Write an "anticipated action" for each agenda item. Examples: "Finance Committee report, brief questions and answers: no action needed." "Volunteer recruitment and philosophy: Anticipated Action: form committee of 3-4 board members."

3. Make sure the room is comfortable! Not too hot or cold or crowded. Offer beverages and something light to eat such as cookies or fruit.

4. No one-way communication from staff. If you have a regular Executive Director's Report on the agenda, or if a staff program director is giving you a briefing, be sure that such presentations need a response from the board. If not, put them in writing in the board packet and just ask if there are any questions.

5. Don't include committee reports on the agenda just to make the committees feel worthwhile. If a committee has done work but doesn't need it discussed, put the committee report in the board packet. (In the meeting be sure to recognize the committee's good work and refer people to the written report.) Instead, schedule committee reports in the context of the main discussion.

6. Note to the board president and the executive director: what are the two most important matters facing the organization—economic downturn, changes in government funding, changes in the public's concern due to the perceived urgency of other issues, etc? Whatever you decide the most important issues are, one of these matters should be on every board meeting agenda.

7. Encourage "dumb" questions, respectful dissent, and authentic disagreements. Find chances to be encouraging: "Sylvia, I'm glad you asked that 'dumb' question. I didn't know the answer either." "Mark, thanks for voicing your disagreement with me in that last discussion. Even though you didn't convince me, your comment helped make the discussion much more valuable."

8. Adjourn on time, or agree to stay later. Twenty minutes before the scheduled end of the meeting, the Chair should ask whether the group wants to stay later: "If we continue this very interesting discussion, we will have to stay fifteen extra minutes to hear the recommendation on the executive director's salary. Can everyone stay that long, or should we end this discussion and move to that one immediately?"

The process of developing a functional and effective board is obviously not one that happens overnight -- and it involves a lot more than creating more efficient meetings. The work is worthwhile, however -- investing in your board can pay big dividends for your organization! [If you feel that your board could do with a little support, consider sending a couple of members to our workshop.](#)

This article is drawn from the BoardCafe newsletter

[Hollyhock Leadership Institute](#), provides leadership training & strategic support for people working towards environmental and social change. www.hollyhockleadership.org