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## Board Meetings

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Board Briefs are a series of "at-a-glance" resources to assist board volunteers in supporting their Clubs. They are designed for use at board meetings as subject matter for a five-minute educational opportunity. They can be discussed in their entirety or in sections. Different questions from the same brief can be posed at different meetings. The CVO can use them or ask an appropriate committee to lead the conversation (e.g., finance, governance, etc.).

### **Executive Summary**

Meetings offer the only opportunity for a Club board to come together as a whole and carry out its work. Meetings should be productive, engaging, and focused on substantive issues. Many meetings suffer, however, because little attention is paid to preparation; often the focus is on administration and information sharing, rather than on strategy.

### **Board Meetings: Planning and Preparation**

Some of the planning basics include

- *sending notice* — hold regular meetings and poll members at regular intervals to determine the preferred day and time
- identify a *site* for the meeting — although rotation has advantages, a regular site causes less confusion
- create an *agenda* and *send meeting packets (via mail or e-mail)* one to three weeks in advance
- *prepare* the meeting room and obtain necessary supplies (name tags, flip charts, audio-visual equipment, refreshments, etc.)

### **Setting the Agenda**

This is a collaborative effort among the CVO and CPO. Committee chairs should also be asked to submit agenda items. Good meetings are focused.

Effective agendas focus on strategic issues rather than on administrative detail or listening to reports. In establishing the agenda, it is important to carefully think through the content to cover all of the board's business in the allotted amount of time. The CPO and CVO should be reasonable in determining the length of the agenda. The more agenda items, the less time allotted to each item or the longer the meeting. It is important to allow enough time for board member inquiry and dialogue.

There are techniques that can be developed to save time at board meetings when *routine matters* need board approval but not discussion (e.g., changing names on bank accounts, committee and previous board minutes, etc.). If these items are mailed in advance, they can be packaged under what is known as a *consent agenda* and approved en masse.

### **Meeting Participants' Role**

All board members play an important role at meetings and should

- read background material provided prior to meeting; call in advance for more information
- be on time
- refrain from carrying on side conversations

- be open to the ideas of others and listen
- speak up and contribute their viewpoint
- help others stay on the subject
- take action on any personal responsibilities you have as a result of the meeting

### **Use of Executive Sessions**

These provide an opportunity for the *board to meet in private*. The board has a need, and a right, to meet in privacy at times. This may happen in the middle of an ongoing meeting or at a separately scheduled moment. Executive sessions can be turned into effective additions to normal board meetings. Situations that may *warrant an executive session* include

- investigating alleged improper conduct by a board member
- discussing financial issues with an auditor
- planning major endeavors
- handling matters where Club confidentiality is requested or prudent
- handling personnel issues such as compensation, performance evaluation, or disciplinary issues.

If the session is an informal discussion, detailed minutes may not be necessary, but the general substance of the executive session itself should be noted. If the session contributed to a board decision about a difficult or important issue, minutes may be necessary. Some organizations have legal counsel maintain minutes of all executive sessions. Executive session minutes should be shared only with participants and should not be attached to the regular board meeting minutes. Any confidential documents distributed for an executive session should be clearly marked as confidential, collected at the end of the meeting, and maintained by the CPO and/or the CVO.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

The following questions can be used for discussion at board meetings:

- How effective are our meeting agendas? What can we do to enhance our board meeting agendas?
- Are board members prepared for and engaged in board meetings? What can we do to increase board member engagement at meetings?
- Do we use a consent agenda? If so, how is it working? Could we use a consent agenda more effectively?
- Are we using executive sessions appropriately? How might we use them more effectively?

### **Additional Resources**

- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Chief Volunteer Officer (CVO) Guide.
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Board Volunteer Training.
- BoardSource, *Executive Sessions: How to Use them Regularly and Wisely*.  
[http://www.boardsource.org/dl.asp?document\\_id=555](http://www.boardsource.org/dl.asp?document_id=555)
- BoardSource, *The Consent Agenda: A Tool for Improving Governance*.  
[http://www.boardsource.org/dl.asp?document\\_id=484](http://www.boardsource.org/dl.asp?document_id=484)
- Chait, Richard P., William P. Ryan, and Barbara Taylor, *Governance as Leadership* (BoardSource and John Wiley & Sons, 2005).
- Flynn, Outi, *Meet Smarter: A Guide to Better Nonprofit Board Meetings* (BoardSource, 2004).

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