Board Tools

9 Ways to Improve Board Processes

Bob Harris, CAE
Spring 2012

Introduction

Read a set of minutes and one may ask why the board convened? Their was no evidence of significant actions and the majority of time was spent listening to reports.

Assess the agenda and one wonders if the board had adequate (any) time to focus on the mission, members and goals.

From the process of commitment to agenda design, there are ways to enhance governance and improve outcomes. Don’t let, “we’ve always done it this way” be your mantra.
Sign In to Increase Awareness

• Skip the roll call by circulating an attendance sign-in sheet.

• Include the MISSION STATEMENT to serve as a reminder that all discussions should be framed by the mission.

• Promote compliance with ANTITRUST avoidance, disclosure of CONFLICTS OF INTEREST and the need for CONFIDENTIALITY by including the statements.

• Retain sign-in sheets in accordance with the organization’s document retention and destruction schedule.
Craft a New Agenda Format

- Integrate a conflict of interest query at the start of the meeting so that directors can fulfill their fiduciary duty by disclosing any potential CONFLICTS with items on the agenda.

- Use a CONSENT AGENDA to deliver reports in advance. Accept one motion to approve the reports as distributed – possibly saving 30 to 60 minutes on verbal reporting.

- Reflect the organization’s GOALS on the agenda and align the pending actions and discussions with their respective goal.

- Identify a MEGA-ISSUE on the agenda so that directors come to expect at least one of the critical issue to accomplish.

- Include the MISSION STATEMENT at the bottom of the agenda to frame discussions.
Evaluate Board Meetings

- Use the back of the meeting agenda to assess effectiveness of the meeting and how it can be improved.

- Rotate responsibility amongst directors to conduct a 1-minute poll: 1) was it an EFFECTIVE meeting; 2) did we advance our MISSION and serve the members; 3) how can we IMPROVE the next meeting?

- If time runs out and you don’t get to the 1-minute poll, just having it on the back of the agenda is a subtle reminder that the board processes should be as effective as possible and open to improvement.
Carry the Plan in Your Wallet

- A convenient, economical method to keep the MISSION and PRIORITIES in the wallets of the leadership team.

- Reduce the elements of the strategic plan (MISSION, VISION, VALUES, GOALS) to fit on the front and back of a business card (or a bi-fold card if more space is needed.)

- Encourage leaders to cite the mission and goals when they are speaking or giving interviews.

- Distribute cards at membership meetings to improve awareness of the organization.
The FORMAL DUTIES of the board are set forth in the bylaws and polices.

Seldom are the CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS of the board committed to writing. This results in new directors having to learn-as-they-go.

“Ground Rules” are the less formal expectations of the board as developed and communicated by the chief elected officer.
Frame the Year of Work

- Keep the STRATEGIC PLAN and priorities on the table at every board meeting.
- Print it on card stock or laminate it and insert in board-leadership notebooks.
- When discussions go astray, pull out the plan and ask how the discussion advances the mission or goals?
- If projects arise that don’t fit in the plan --- ask what projects should be dropped to take on this new endeavor?
Board Member Commitment Form

I agree to...

1. Uphold the governing documents of the organization

2. To avoid actions or discussions that could violate state or federal antitrust laws

3. To disclose any potential or perceived conflicts at the start of my term and throughout

4. To respect the confidentiality of documents and discussions I may see during the board duties

5. To work to advance the mission and to serve the members

Signature _______________ Date ___________
Filter Agenda Discussions

- Many board discussions result in a depletion of resources, i.e. funds, time, staff, energy.

- Not all directors are keenly aware of organization resources.

- Keep a FILTER on the board table as a reminder that discussions should fit within the MISSION, advance the GOALS/PRIORITIES, and serve the MEMBERS.

- Set performance measures and metrics for every project to monitor progress and recognize success.
Provide Resources

- Provide the documents necessary to fulfill governing duties, including:
  - Mission Statement
  - Articles of Incorporation
  - Bylaws
  - Policies
  - Strategic Plan
  - Budget

- COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES – designed to print on 11 x 17 as a guide to committees – free.

- BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES – laminated 8 ½ x 11 - $12 ea or $9 ea for 3 or more, plus s+h (email bob@rchcae.com with qty and street address for UPS ; invoice will follow.)