The purpose of an agenda is to ensure a meeting will be conducted in an orderly manner and discussions will lead to results. With an agenda, conversations stay on track and the meeting should end on time.

The agenda is prepared in advance through collaboration of the chief elected officer and the chief staff person (executive director). With sufficient timing, it is distributed well before the meeting with supporting information. For quarterly meetings, directors might receive it 30 days ahead; for monthly meetings one might expect it 7 to 10 days in advance.

Upon Receipt

What directors do upon receipt of the agenda to prepare for the meeting will impact discussions and outcomes.

The agenda is a vital board tool. From its development to execution at the meeting, it has value. Directors who are unfamiliar with how to use the agenda may simply save it, add it to a folder or read it the first time when they arrive at the meeting.

The executive director or board chief elected officer should communicate meeting expectations from the start. To guide directors, consider these applications upon receipt of the agenda. Make “agenda management” a part of new director orientation.

Date and Meeting Location

Most agendas include the meeting date, time frame and location. Check to be certain nothing has changed since the meeting was originally calendared. Make travel arrangements or determine if attendance is allowed via conference call. Your attendance does make a difference.

Content – An agenda will identify the substantive topics that need the attention of the board. In most cases it will identify priorities as well as goals and strategies from the organization’s strategic plan. Review the agenda to determine approaching concerns and discussions.

Questions – Upon early receipt of the agenda there is time to ask questions BEFORE the meeting. A director may want to query why something is on the agenda or ask for supporting reports. Why enter a meeting with questions that could have been answered earlier?

Homework – The agenda may jog one’s memory about an assignment or commitment. Use the advance notice to identify assignments that may need to be completed before the meeting convenes.

Additions – Most organizations have a protocol for adding items to an agenda. Be sure to have knowledge of when and the proper channels if items can be added. Nobody appreciates a director arriving at the meeting and adding surprise topics.

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