



An excerpt from *The Best of the Board Café*  
www.boardcafe.org

## Ten Quick Ways to Invigorate Board Meetings\*



*Board members invest a tremendous amount of time and energy at board meetings. A few simple changes can often make that investment pay off in important ways.*

Make a resolution to implement at least one of the following ideas this month:

1. Supply name tags for everyone, every meeting. It's embarrassing to have seen people at several meetings and wondered what their names are . . . and later it's *really* hard to admit you don't know their names.
2. Make a chart of frequently used external and internal acronyms (such as CDBG for Community Development Block Grants or DV for domestic violence) and post it on the wall of every meeting. (If you distribute the list on paper, it is soon lost.) The chart will help people unfamiliar with the acronyms know what others are talking about.
3. Write an anticipated action for each agenda item. Examples:
  - Finance Committee report, brief questions and answers: *Anticipated Action* = no action needed.
  - Volunteer recruitment and philosophy: *Anticipated Action* = form committee of three to four board members.
  - Public Policy Committee: *Anticipated Action* = approve organizational statement to city council on zoning changes.
4. Make sure that each person says at least one thing at every board meeting. This is the board 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?"
5. Avoid one-way presentations 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 such reports in writing in the board packet and just ask if there are any questions.
6. Don't include committee reports on the agenda just to make the committees feel worthwhile. If a committee has done work but a board discussion isn't necessary, 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. Schedule committee reports

according to the topic at hand, rather than at every meeting. For example, if a discussion is planned on attracting and retaining staff, reports from the finance committee and the personnel committee will be more useful and more memorable.

7. On the agenda, have an open-ended discussion on at least one of the most important matters facing the organization. For example, discuss the economic downturn, changes in government funding, possible reasons for declining preschool enrollment, a competitor organization, the possibility of losing donated space—whatever matters are keeping the leadership awake at night.

8. Encourage “dumb” questions, respectful dissent, and authentic disagreements. Find a chance to be encouraging, at every meeting: “Sylvia, I’m glad you asked that ‘dumb’ question. I wanted to know the answer, too.” “Duane, I appreciate the fact that you disagreed with me in that last discussion. Even though you didn’t convince me, your comment helped make the discussion much more valuable.”

9. 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.

10. 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?”

And a suggestion: once every year or two, survey the board about meetings. Pass out a questionnaire for anonymous return to the board vice chair or secretary, asking, “What do you like best about board meetings? Least?” “Are you satisfied with what’s usually on the agenda?” “How could the board chair do more to encourage discussion at the meetings?” “Is the location or time of day difficult for you?”

\* One of the five most reprinted *Board Café* articles.

**Also Try**

Ten Tips for the Board Chair on Meetings .....p. 158

The Strategic Board Agenda.....p. 161

Better Board Meeting Packets.....p. 164

Should the Board Hold Executive Sessions?.....p. 166

