

Developing a consent agenda

A chief characteristic of many board meeting agendas is a long list of items such as previous minutes, correspondence, reports by committees, the Chairperson and the Executive Director reports and review of financial statements, that tend to take up a good portion of the meeting time. Most of this does not contribute to helping the board do its job of governing but there is a strong belief that it has to be done. In fact, it probably does, but not in the way that we normally do it.

The way these items are generally handled is that they are listed on the agenda and we deal with each one separately. This usually involves some discussion of each item and not too infrequently lengthy discussions that add no value other than to satisfy the interest or curiosity of one or two board members. Unfortunately addressing a long list of reports, correspondence, and other administrative items takes up a considerable portion of the board's limited time. The consequence is little time to discuss the critical issues and business that the board should be addressing. This in turn leads to frustration and delays in decision making.

Fortunately, we now have a very useful and effective tool for speedily handling all of these items that we do not need to spend valuable board time discussing. It is called a Consent Agenda and it is described in detail below. If done appropriately it is legal and satisfies the board's fiduciary responsibilities. Like all other tools the key to its effectiveness is in using it properly.

Consent Agenda

A consent agenda consists of several items, packaged together, that are voted on without discussion. These items are usually routine matters that do not require explanation, clarification or discussion. Things that can be included in a Consent Agenda:

- The Executive Director or Executive Director's report
- Committee reports that are primarily intended as information updates
- Routine decisions that do not require board discussion such as a government requirement that the board approve the budget of one of the Chamber's sponsored programs or projects; payment of the annual fee for membership in the provincial

organization; the Chair's attendance at the national conference; monitoring reports and regular Society Act reporting.

- Monitoring reports
- Minutes of previous meetings
- Routine correspondence

The purpose of the consent agenda is to eliminate the need to take up valuable board time on items that truly do not require board discussion because they will receive automatic approval.

Working with a Consent Agenda:

- The directors agree on what can be included in the consent agendas at their first meeting.
- This provided guidance to the person or persons responsible for assembling the board's draft agenda. Any items that meet the board's criteria can be placed in the Consent Agenda.
- Five to seven days in advance of board meeting the draft agenda, and accompanying documents and reports, is distributed to all board members.
- Board members review the agenda, including the Consent Agenda.
- If a board member has concerns or questions about the recommendation pertaining to a certain item, they can request that this be removed from the Consent Agenda. This request is directed to the Chair and should be made in advance of the meeting.
- In such an instance the Chair removes the item from the Consent Agenda, and it is placed on the regular agenda for discussion.

After the approval of the regular agenda the Chair asks for approval of the consent agenda. The board then votes on the Consent Agenda items as a whole. The vote should be unanimous since items of concern or troublesome to any board member will have been removed.