

Tips on Chairing Board Meetings

- Have an agenda that clearly specifies the objective for each agenda item, time allocated for it, and who will be presenting it
- Be sure that the agenda is distributed to board members along with relevant support material well in advance of the meeting
- Minimize the number of last minute additions to the agenda
- Have a set of meeting ground rules
- Use discussion and voting procedures that are not rigid and formal, but that effectively control the discussion
- Keep the discussion on track
- Keep a speaking order list to keep track of everyone who wants to speak.
- Use the “First Speakers Rule” to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak. This means that people who have already spoken twice are not given the chance to speak again until those who have not spoken have a chance to do so at least once
- Remind everyone at the beginning of the meeting that they are there for a common purpose and that they have a role to play in making the meeting effective and productive
- Quickly learn about the “Attitude and meeting behaviour” that each board member brings to the table and establish a strategy for managing each one
- Start and end meetings on time. Don’t reward latecomers by waiting until they arrive to start the meeting
- Identify the strengths of each board member and find ways for them to use those strengths during the meeting
- When tempers begin to flare and the discussion is becoming heated, call a short break so that everyone can calm down
- If a board member has not taken the time to read the material relevant to the discussion at hand do not punish others by taking valuable board time to bring them up to speed
- Stagger items on the agenda so that a contentious item is followed by an item that is unlikely to require serious discussion or debate
- Stop the discussion at varying intervals to summarize what has been said so far, or to move the discussion in a different direction
- Avoid dealing with administrative/operational items in a board meeting
- Have staff, committee and task force reports distributed as part of the board package in advance of the board meeting, then do not allow the reports to be presented verbally at the board meeting

- Do not get involved in the discussion of an issue while you are chairing the discussion. If you want to get involved turn the chair over to someone else.
- If information vital to the discussion of an agenda item has not been distributed for the board meeting, table the item for the next meeting
- If a board member has not taken the time to read the material relevant to the discussion at hand do not punish others by taking valuable board time to bring them up to speed
- Use a colour system to designate the various phases of the discussion (i.e. green for obtaining information, facts, and members' views about the issue or problem; blue for brainstorming and developing creative solutions or alternatives; yellow for discussion and debate of the proposed solutions/options; and, red for discussing the strategies and operational aspects of implementing the solution or option
- Select a meeting room that can comfortably accommodate the number of people who will be in attendance
- Make sure that chairs are comfortable