

Collective wisdom: making meetings great

This is a compilation of hot tips and kernels of brilliance about making board meetings great, based on small group discussions of ~120 nonprofit leaders who attended the 3/27/2015 Sherwood Trust Workshop in Walla Walla. While there's plenty of overlap across categories, your ideas are loosely organized into themes. Enjoy!

Theme	Tips
Advance planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ED & Executive Committee meet in advance of entire board meeting, in order to set agenda with objectives for board meeting. Executive committee sets agenda but refrains from extensive discussions. • Distribute reading materials in a timely manner for board consideration • Represent finances with graphs and visuals • In shaping agenda, use matrix [high impact – low impact] x [high control – low control] to prioritize discussion points. (Do a Google image search for “priority matrix” to see a range of different approaches.) • 7 P's
Structure and agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline time table of the agenda, w/ clear outcome guidelines for each item • Use a consent agenda • Clarify what's old and what's new business • Use a "Parking Lot": things off topic that require later discussion • Timekeeper/facilitator/evaluator role = separate from chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Manages who's not being vocal, encourages comment ○ Keeps track of timeframes for each agenda item ○ Evaluates: did we stay on track, did we cover what we intended, etc. • Leave room for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ personal sharing, get-to-know-you ○ overview of important issues ○ discussion ○ brainstorming ○ new ideas / concerns ○ look at and report on blind spots ○ celebration, success stories, humor • Visual representation: Use whiteboard during meeting to record visual representation of topic (next steps, options, future topics) and who is responsible for each. Take photo, include with minutes. • Recap/Minutes available while “fresh” and readily accessible as needed.
Purpose / Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember the mission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connect to the purpose of our work, why we do what we do ○ Have mission moments/stories/testimonials at board meetings ○ Board members take turns presenting mission moments ○ Mission-education component in onboarding and in board culture • Connect the meeting to Strategic Plan / strategic priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Report to show progress toward goals in strategic plan, prepared by staff and sent in board packet ahead of board meeting ○ Dashboard representing where we are, what's next ○ Focus on goals where board has a role / can make a difference

Tone and approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring positive attitude, generosity of spirit • Don't squelch new ideas • Be organized • Committees research/discuss/recommend; Boards review/discuss/decide. • Delegate diverging conversations to committees • Clarity of Purpose; Tight focus; Clear tasks / action-points • Strong Leadership. • Celebrate successes big and small • Humor • Door prize drawings at end of meeting to encourage attendance, add fun. • Advance notice to facilitate creativity • Have toys / opportunities for movement / "Kinesthetic" etc. • Stand up for whole meeting
Team-building, trust, and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in, pre-meeting social/icebreaker to bring everyone together, build relationships and trust prior to getting down to business. • Rituals, team building, relationship-focus • Bonding activities to build trust (during and outside of meetings) • Use a range of techniques to get the benefit of hearing from all voices: Open Mic / Small-group conversations / Round-the-Room
Board learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite guests with relevant expertise to meetings; schedule learning. • Board members mentor new board members (buddy system) • Hear from program staff about best practices and hot topics in field • Outside of meetings: site visits, program visits, relevant lectures, etc.
Individual Engagement	<p>Strong theme of needing engagement and individual ownership for productive meetings. Engaging all members as participants can look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXAMPLE 1 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Present specific question like "what are you willing to contribute?" 2. On 3x5 card, each person answers privately 3. Publicly share with group 4. Group discussion of their input, how it will contribute to group • EXAMPLE 2: Give everyone a task / assignment for upcoming meeting so everyone has purpose for being there. • EXAMPLE 3: Close with each member describing one element of the meeting that connected with them.
Donor/Stakeholder Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you notes by board members to people who have donated to the organization in some capacity
Staff involvement and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-minute report by a different staff member, highlighting their role. • Seek out the expertise within organization; build opportunity to share, train. • Periodically, secure representation for all areas/members: staff in different departments – TEAM building reinforcing whole agency.
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food allows for social connection at meeting • Have good food and treats! • Provided by the board (donated, potluck)
Board Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truly value one another • Express appreciation for board members; e.g., end-of-year list of accomplishments