

# Making meetings better

## Discussion questions about meetings:

1. Have you ever come from a meeting really excited about what the group accomplished and where it was going next? What tips did you learn about making meetings great?
  
2. Have you ever been to an unspeakably unproductive meeting? What caused it?
  
3. How would you feel if someone from the public (donor, supporter, opponent, or skeptic) attended your board meeting unannounced?

## Some tips: making meetings better

- **Revisit the meeting agenda:**
  - Use consent agendas
  - Clarify expectations (Time frame for items? Action or discussion? Etc.)
  - Plan an annual calendar of topics, based on the priorities and needs of the board. Regularly allocate meeting time for board priorities and projects (30-45" for brief trainings on relevant topics, or mini-work sessions to advance the board's fundraising, recruitment, or other projects.)
- **Make time to:**
  - Connect with your fellow board members, to deepen relationships and build trust
  - Connect with the mission
  - Engage in informed, purposeful discussion
- **Come prepared for meaningful discussions and decision-making:**
  - Contingent upon advance access to info
  - Contingent upon clarifying what kinds of info you need from staff or others
- **Ask and encourage questions**
  - New perspectives are useful, should be invited
  - 'What is the worst thing that could happen if we take this action?' 'What's the best possible outcome?'
- **End with re-cap of assignments**
  - What, who, when
- **Well before the next meeting, remind people about assignments and deadlines**
- **Evaluate yourselves**
  - What does the board suggest, to make meetings more engaging? To make their work together more powerful?
- **What else?**



## Asking better questions:

Better questions lead to more meaningful discussions and more thoughtful, strategic decisions. As a starting point, here are some examples to try.

### The kinds of questions that foster generative thinking and discussion<sup>1</sup>:

- What are we missing in this discussion?
- How can we frame this situation differently?
- What best explains our recent successes? Our setbacks?
- What is the biggest gap between what the organization claims it is and what it actually is?
- How do we incorporate our core values in our work?
- **What else?**



### Questions that foster meaningful budget work for the board<sup>2</sup>:

- Are there specific financial objectives that we want to achieve during the next year?
- Are there desirable new projects, program expansions, or changes in compensation?
- Are there large expenses for which we should be saving?
- Should we consider revisiting how we use our unrestricted funds?
- **What else?**

Even financial oversight can be approached with a spirit of inquiry that engages the board's collective expertise and varied perspectives. Here are a few examples of how budget and financial conversations can shift from oversight to inquiry<sup>3</sup>:

Oversight (emphasis on compliance)	Inquiry (emphasis on leadership)
Can we afford it?	Is this the best use of our resources? (What's the opportunity cost – what are we passing up on?)
Did we get a clean audit?	What can we learn from our audit?
Is the budget balanced?	In what ways does the budget reflect our values and priorities? Where does it fall short?

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Governance as Leadership*, by Chait, Ryan, and Taylor.

<sup>2</sup> From Jan Masoaka, Blue Avocado. <http://www.blueavocado.org/content/meaningful-budget-work-board>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from *Governance as Leadership*.