

Effective Meetings

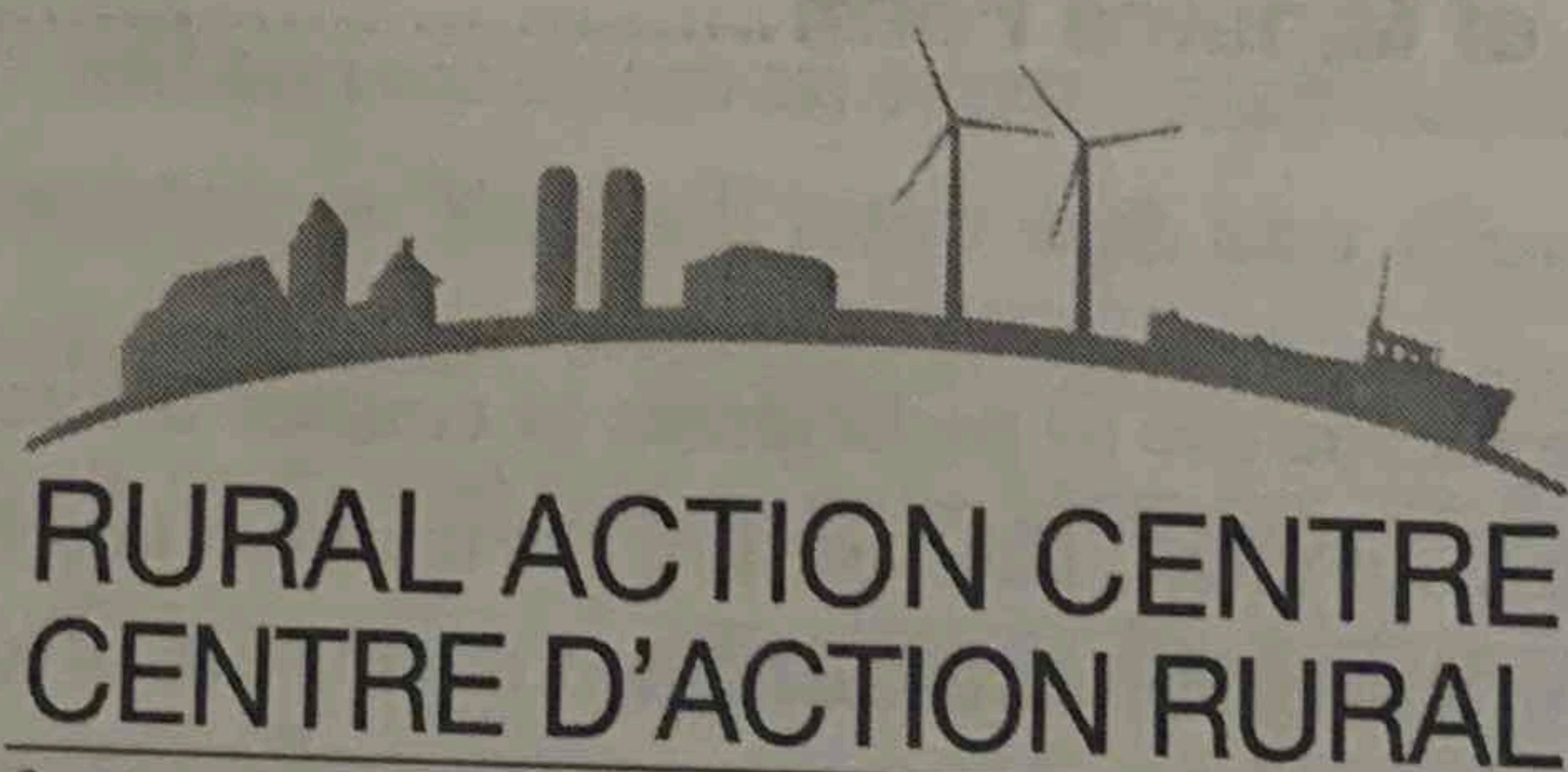
Volunteer Board Development Workshops

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RURAL ACTION CENTRE
CENTRE D'ACTION RURAL

Services de développement économique et communautaire
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Permissions

The participant materials are for the use of participants of courses offered through the Volunteer Board Development Workshops project. The intent of the material and the workshop series is to support board development in Prince Edward Island and the materials may be freely used or modified by voluntary and non-profit organizations. The information contained in this work has been developed, compiled, adapted and built upon from multiple sources. It was designed and developed by Paula Gallant, Training and Facilitation, www.trainingandfacilitation.ca.

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How to Run Effective Board Meetings

Effective meetings can create motivation among board members, improve the quality of decisions made, and inspire members to act. So why is it that many board and committee members state that meetings are too long, unfocused, and do not achieve results? Well-planned, productive meetings *are* possible, and in this 3-hour workshop you will discover how to make them happen.

What you will learn?

You will learn about:

- Preparing for the meeting: its purpose and agenda
- Running effective discussions during meeting
- Making decisions effectively based on the organization's mission
- Keeping effective records
- Determining next steps and follow-up
- How to ensure participants are prepared, present, and participate
- How to promote teamwork
- How to use rules of order or ground rules

Who should attend?

This workshop is designed for volunteers who serve as board members for community-based and volunteer-led organizations and groups. It is specifically designed for board members from organizations that often have modest budgets, few (if any) part-time staff, and rely heavily on volunteers.

Benefits of attending

Whether you are new to board service or are an experienced board member, there are many benefits to attending this workshop. You will leave with new ideas, easy-to-use materials and tips sheets, and motivation to share with fellow board members. This workshop is a chance to see and utilize new tools and tips to help you plan, lead, and follow-up on effective meetings. It will also provide an opportunity to meet others in your area who serve on boards, and learn from their experiences and good practices.

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Activity: Web of life for your organization

Original purpose:

People for whom it exists:

Present condition (How does it differ from 10 years ago? What changes have there been externally? What internal adjustments have been made?)

Perceived relevance to the people it serves:

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Preparing for a meeting

It is important to ask yourself certain questions while planning a meeting:

What?

What is the purpose of the meeting? What are the desired outcomes of the meeting?

Why?

Is the meeting necessary or is there another way to achieve the purpose? It is estimated that over 50% of board meetings could be replaced by other forms of communication such as memos, letters, conference calls, face-to-face discussion, and email.

Most of the time, a board meeting should be held for the purposes of:

- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Planning at the organizational level
- Evaluation

Other purposes (idea generation, data-gathering, sharing, planning for specific events and projects, etc.) can be done by committees or in other ways.

Who?

Who are the people responsible for each item? Who are the decision-makers and who is knowledgeable when it comes to discussing the items on the agenda?

When?

When is the most appropriate time for the meeting? Keep in mind participant schedules and deadline dates for action.

Where?

Select a facility that is both convenient and appropriate. What type of support services or equipment will be required? (e.g. flip charts, equipment for power point presentations, conference call capability, etc.).

How?

Usually prepared by the chair of the meeting, the written agenda will guide the discussions and decisions of the meeting. Its distribution prior to the meeting with the minutes from the

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previous meeting is a critical factor in ensuring that participants arrive prepared and ready to contribute in a meaningful way.

Preparing for an effective board meeting involves two types of tasks:

1. Preparing an agenda (see Appendix A for an example)

- Review past minutes and consider items to come forward
- Confer with staff and the committee chairs or staff liaison
- Ask members if there are any other items that need to be on the agenda
- Allocate a time limit to each item
- Ensure that the person responsible for each item will attend the meeting
- Circulate agenda prior to the meeting

A good agenda meets the following requirements:

- ✓ All items should relate to the mandate of the board – make sure the board is not spending time on tasks that are really the responsibility of staff, committees, or volunteers.
- ✓ Most items should focus on an action or a decision.
- ✓ The purpose of each item should be clearly indicated on the agenda.
- ✓ A realistic time limit should be set for each item.

2. Providing background material

The board must establish what information it wants to receive from staff and committees.

- ✓ Which items are reported to the board and which are not?
- ✓ How detailed does the information need to be?
- ✓ What format is most helpful?

In considering these questions, keep in mind the purpose of board meetings, outlined on the page 5, to ensure that the information relates to the purpose. Ensure that there is sufficient relevant information to allow a full discussion of each item, but not excessive information that drowns the board in detail – experiment a little to find the right balance for your board. The person responsible for each agenda item normally prepares the background material.

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TOOL: CHECKLIST FOR ALL MEMBERS

Before meetings:

- Reread the minutes of the previous meeting as a check on whether you have completed all task assignments.
- Make necessary arrangements to avoid being called out of the meeting.
- Plan appropriately in order to be at the meeting on time.
- Be prepared with any materials or data needed to help them deal with agenda items.
- Study the agenda ahead of time and prepare to discuss the agenda items intelligently.
- If you must be absent, inform and prepare the group.

During meetings:

- State opinions and concerns honestly and clearly, do not withhold them.
- Stay on the agenda item being discussed and help others stay on it.
- Ask for clarification when you do not understand what someone is saying.
- Participate actively.
- Volunteer for action items.
- Encourage the participation and involvement of all members.

After meetings:

- Keep respective stakeholder groups updated on progress.
 - Follow through with assignments or action items.
 - Support the decisions of the members.
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TOOL: CHECKLIST FOR THE CHAIR

Purpose: The chair has the additional duty of helping the group reach effective decisions, ensuring that discussions stay focused and on track.

Before meetings:

- Ensure each meeting has an agenda and distribute it to all members.

During meetings:

- Keep the discussion focused on the topic and on accomplishing objectives.
- Encourage balanced participation.
- Maintain an appropriate pace.
- Make sure follow-up activities are planned.
- Post and review the meeting agenda.
- Use consensus to make all major decisions.
- Be sure accurate meeting minutes are being taken.

After meetings:

- Ensure that minutes are distributed to members and others as appropriate.
- Follow up with members between meetings to provide support with completing assignments.

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Good Practices for Running Effective Meetings

Principles

Impartiality

A chairperson is like a judge in a court. He or she should ensure that all participants have an opportunity to express their point of view. It can be difficult to leave your own opinions at home, but if you can't remain impartial, you shouldn't have taken the job.

Collaboration

The board works together and with staff in a professional, collegial and collaborative manner. Collaboration is needed to get results and build relationships with a combination of patience and discipline, and listening deeply while speaking assertively.

Assertiveness

Ensuring that everyone gets a hearing will almost certainly involve stopping someone from dominating the proceedings. The more contentious the issue the more likely you are to require firmness. You don't need to be rude or dogmatic. Phrases such as "I think we should hear from Ms. Smith on this" or "can we have some comments from the engineering department on this" should be sufficient in most cases. Once you provide this opening, however, you need to ensure that there are no interruptions while the next speaker has their say.

Regularity

Volunteers have many demands on their time. If an organization persists in a pattern of unproductive, listless, unclear or dreary meetings, it will soon begin to lose its volunteers. It is important that meetings be as effective as possible. Successful meeting results are determined not only by what happens during a meeting but by events before and after the meeting as well.

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Techniques for balancing participation

Ground rules

Purpose: Ground rules are guidelines for individual and group behaviors. They define the expectations members have for themselves and each other regarding how they will work together.

When to use and whom to involve: Ground rules must be developed and agreed upon by all members at the initial meeting(s) and must be reviewed regularly. Ground rules should be used as a tool any time you bring a group of people together on a project of any nature.

Balancing participation:

- ✓ Ground rules
- ✓ Rounds
- ✓ Directly asking
- ✓ Tokens
- ✓ Talking item/stick
- ✓ Speakers list
- ✓ Observe the pace of proceedings

Ground rules should be written down and posted at all meetings. As the work progresses and as the group develops or adds new members, the group may revise their ground rules to address issues that arise such as handling differences of opinions in more open and supportive ways, reaching true consensus before moving to new topics, and ensuring equal airtime for all members.

Time needed: 30-45 minutes to develop the first time, plus additional time to periodically review/update; 5 minutes at the end of each meeting to evaluate how the ground rules worked.

Tool: Ground Rules

After understanding the purpose of ground rules, get input on how the board would like everyone to work together. Record responses on a flip chart and post the ground rules at the beginning of each meeting. Below are a few examples to trigger your thinking about some areas for ground rules; in other words, how a group functions with respect to:

ISSUE #1: How decisions are made

RULE #1: We will seek group consensus on all major decisions.

ISSUE #2: Dealing with conflicts, listening, giving and receiving feedback

RULE #2: We will not shoot the messenger.

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- ISSUE #3: Participation of members
 RULE #3: We will be honest in our communication.
- ISSUE #4: Use of agendas, minutes, record keeping, etc.
 RULE #4: The Chair will set the agenda and distribute it to all members prior to the meeting. The recorder will be responsible for distributing the minutes from the meeting.
- ISSUE #5: Communication between meetings
 RULE #5: We will have periodic check-ins (via phone) so that members can keep each other updated.
- ISSUE #6: Member attendance and promptness
 RULE #6: Except for unforeseen circumstances, all members must attend meetings at the agreed-upon time.
- ISSUE #7: Length, frequency and timing of meetings
 RULE #7: All meetings will begin and end on time.

Directly asking silent members

The direct approach is to simply ask silent members if they have anything to say and request that dominating members refrain from speaking at times. It is helpful if this is one of the ground rules.

Rounds

Rounds are an effective way to balance participation while not singling out quiet people. Everyone takes a turn to speak on a subject without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds are useful for equalizing participation and giving everyone some clear space to express their opinion. Allowing people to "pass" means that quieter people don't feel put on the spot. To keep the round focused clearly state its purpose and write it on a flipchart where everyone can see it. You can set time limits as necessary.

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Tokens

Each person is given the same number of tokens, the total of which depends on the time limit. Every time someone speaks to the group they must put one of their tokens in the centre. If they have no more tokens, they cannot speak. This activity helps everyone consider the value of his or her contribution, and encourages listening.

Talking item/stick

You can use a stick or a conch shell or almost any other distinctive object. Place the talking stick in the centre of the group. Speakers take it from the centre, say their piece and return it to the middle. Only the person holding the talking stick is permitted to speak (you can set a time limit if necessary). This tool allows people to consider and take their time in voicing their views as they don't have to be afraid that some one else might jump in. It also makes people conscious of when they interrupt others and helps them to break the habit.

Keeping a Speakers List

This is a tool that involves asking people to raise a hand when they wish to speak, and noting them down in order. They are then invited to speak in that order. The group will soon become impatient with people that ignore this protocol and just barge in and interrupt.

Observe the pace of proceedings

Sometimes the pace affects people's level of participation – those who are not participating simply need some breathing space to formulate their ideas and put them forward. You can address this problem by occasionally asking the group to sit quietly for a time while they think about a particular issue at hand – it's easy if you formulate a question for them to consider. Restart the discussion by asking the quieter members if they have any comments.

Evaluation

Opportunities for constructive feedback reduce the likelihood of repeating ineffective procedures time after time, increase the likelihood of skill development, and provide an occasion to celebrate success. Taking time at the end of a meeting to discuss what worked and what can be improved will help with the planning of the next meeting.

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Techniques for keeping on topic

Reminding participants of the agreed-upon agenda and purpose

Make your comment in a way that acknowledges the usefulness of the views being contributed, but suggest that this is not the best forum in which to express them. You might suggest how this view could be channeled to the appropriate person or body (e.g. letter, committee discussion, a further meeting at a later date). Be gentle but firm, and use eye contact to make a friendly connection with the person you cut off. Once reminded, board members will often keep themselves on track. Other times, you will have to be persistent. Developing a good agenda can also assist a chair in keeping on topic.

Keeping on topic:

- ✓ Remind participants of the agreed-upon agenda and purpose
- ✓ The parking lot
- ✓ Be flexible

The parking lot

The parking lot makes sure all ideas get recorded and participants don't feel like they've been ignored. Whenever anything comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand "park" it in the Parking Lot (a large sheet of paper on the wall). In other words write it up on the paper and deal with it later. This allows you to stay focused but reassures participants they will be heard. Of course if you want to avoid people feeling ignored, make sure you do deal with parked items! Consider having a space reserved on the agenda to deal with parked items.

Be flexible

Sometimes an idea is just too good or important though it's not on the agenda. You can say: "This is not on the agenda, but it seems important. Would you like to continue to talk about it or should we go back to our agenda?"

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Techniques for leading difficult discussions

Clarifying

At certain times in the discussion board members may not understand each other or may talk past each other. Feelings usually intensify if the miscommunication continues. The board chair needs to help clarify what is being said, essentially acting as an interpreter. In many cases, all that is required is to rephrase or paraphrase what one or two board members have said so that everyone understands their point. Always be sure to check your interpretation with the speaker for accuracy.

Leading difficult discussions:

- ✓ Clarify
- ✓ Summarize
- ✓ Neutralize

Example: "If I understand you, Eleanor, your point is that, although these programs are necessary, they are inappropriate for our organization and should be delivered by another agency. Is that right?"

At other times, the board discussion has moved along from its original starting point to a new stage, but is still within the parameters of the established agenda. Just to ensure everyone in the group is clear, it might be helpful to articulate the topic currently being discussed and check it with the group.

Example: "We seem to have finished questions of clarification to Beth, and are now moving into debate about the pros and co's of her proposal. Have we answered all of the questions regarding clarification?"

Summarize

Summarizing can be used to end a topic, to end a discussion, to limit the need for discussion and at the end of a meeting to ensure that everyone has a clear overview of what took place or what action is now required.

Summaries help the group:

- ✓ see how close they are to agreement
- ✓ refocus the discussion
- ✓ move the pace along
- ✓ identify disagreement to name of areas of further discussion

Summarizing
requires active
listening

State concisely
what was said in an
impartial way

End with a clear
statement about
what is expected

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Neutralizing

When someone is angry, you want to bring down the heat of the argument and draw out the facts as the person sees them. It can be helpful to try to neutralize the statements being made in anger. Examples of neutralizing statements or lead ins are:

- "I sense that there is more about..."
- "I wonder if..."
- "Could it be that..."
- "It sounds like..."
- "Is it correct to say..."
- "So your perception is..."
- "Can you tell me more about the issue that causes..."
- "I can see that you have strong feelings about that."

Notes:

Make decisions effectively

By law, boards of directors must act as a group. Decisions must be made not by individual directors, but by the whole board or a committee of the board authorized to act on behalf of the board on the matter in question. Boards generally make decisions using either a majority vote (51% of the board members present at a meeting assuming quorum has been established) or consensus.

How boards make decisions is in many ways determined by the profile of the group and the organization's culture and values.

Agenda

For each item on the agenda clearly indicate whether the item is:

- ✓ For information only (I)
- ✓ For consultation: Requires input from the board but the decision will be made by someone else, e.g. the executive director (C)
- ✓ For decision: Requires a decision by the board (D)

In making decisions, it is helpful to follow these steps so that all board members can make an informed decision:

- Clarify the decision and its significance
- Understand the context of the decision and determine who should be involved
- Gather relevant information and present alternatives
- Establish criteria for evaluating the alternatives
- Compare alternatives against the criteria
- Present recommendations
- Boards using **traditional parliamentary procedures** require a chair who understands the rules of procedure. (See Appendix C for Rules of Order)
- Boards using a **consensus model of decision-making** require a chair who will summarize each stage of the discussion until consensus is reached. (See Appendix D for further information on consensus)

Adapted from Frequently Asked Questions about Nonprofit Boards, Centre for Nonprofit Management

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Decision-making

Consensus	Voting
<p>When</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Decisions are important, have large ramifications or affect a lot of people ■ Groups are small (10 or fewer) ■ A large groups is considering issues of great importance ■ There will be a rich exchange of ideas, whether in person, by phone, by video conference or with groupware ■ The group is informed and individual members feel a similar level of investment or are essential to a good decision ■ If consensus cannot be achieved, have a back-up method to reach a decision 	<p>When</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is known that consensus is highly unlikely in the time allowed ■ Members of the group are equally informed on the subject matter and understand one another's viewpoint ■ It's been determined that the majority can handle the implementation without the active involvement of those in the minority ■ There is a plan to handle reactions of those who disagree with the outcome
Subgroup	One Person
<p>When</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A subgroup has the necessary information or expertise to make the decision ■ A subgroup is the only entity affected by the decision and can implement it without the active involvement of the majority ■ The whole group is comfortable delegating its authority to representatives 	<p>When</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ It is an emergency ■ One person has all the relevant information ■ One person is especially trusted by the team to make a good decision ■ The outcome only affects the decision maker

What is consensus?

Consensus decision-making is a search for the best decision through the exploration of the best of everyone's thinking. It means that everyone understands the decision and can explain why it's best and everyone can live with the decision. It requires time, communication skills, and active participation of all team members, trust and commitment. (See Appendix D)

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Keep effective records

Board members of voluntary, non-profit organizations must perform their legal duties with care. **An effective way to minimize risk to themselves and the organization is to ensure permanent official records exist of the board's activities.** Good record keeping helps an organization function efficiently, effectively and ensures accountability to its members and the public.

Hard copy vs. electronic records

Consider using two binders as one way to organize and store all hard copies and accompanying materials.

One binder could hold official documents such as:

- certificate of incorporation
- letters patent or articles of incorporation
- constitution and/or bylaws
- other important organizational documents such as insurance, leases, banking resolutions, corporate seal, etc.

In a second binder keep:

- the official listing of the board of directors, their names, addresses, phone numbers and emails, and details regarding each director including their date of election, term reappointments and resignations
- the minutes of all meetings, categorized according to annual general meetings, board meetings and committee meetings with copies of reports and additional information that was filed at the meeting

Record keeping obligations include maintaining:

- ✓ minutes of meetings of the members, directors and committees
- ✓ proper financial and accounting records
- ✓ legal documents such as incorporation certificates, letters patent or articles of incorporation and official seals (where applicable)
- ✓ an official register of its members and directors

The information in the binders is part of the organization's official legal records. They are the historical record of the organization, and must be kept and not destroyed. Another option is to scan and save documents on CD or DVD. Be aware that electronic storage does not guarantee long-term retention of your records due to technology changes and degeneration of disks.

Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture

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Determine next steps and follow-up

Follow-up

Before the meeting adjourns, the chair must ensure that items for action are clearly stated and delegated. Between meetings the chair or others may monitor progress on the action items with the individuals to whom they were designated. It is important to discuss how and who will monitor progress.

Set team goals and individual objectives

- Ensure that everyone on the board is working toward a well-defined and articulate goals
- Identify who owns each task or action that relates to decisions or goals
- Identify what tasks and activities are most important for each member

Minutes

In order to provide an accurate and useful record of the meeting the person responsible for the minutes needs to record follow-up actions and indicate who is responsible for each. (See Appendix E for a sample minutes form)

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