



Meeting Facilitation Tips

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The Scenario

Imagine this scenario: you have been selected as the chair of the hospital board's quality committee, but you have never chaired a board or committee. In fact, the hospital board is the only board on which you have ever served. You are an expert in quality improvement in a non-healthcare industry and you care passionately about using that knowledge to help ensure high quality healthcare for your community. However, you now feel a little out of your element. This article is for you and all others who would like practical tips about preparing for and leading great committee and board meetings.

The Agenda

The first step in becoming an excellent committee or board chair is developing a clear meeting agenda.

Tip #1: Create an agenda that sets clear expectations. A well-crafted agenda helps the chair to proactively communicate what needs to be accomplished and it becomes a tool for leading the meeting. A great agenda includes all the following components:

- Major topics of discussion
- The purpose of each discussion (e.g., secure approval, provide input, or educate)
- Timeframes for each agenda item (start and end times)
- Framing questions for each topic (see below for an explanation)
- Names of the individuals leading each discussion
- Where to find background materials

Tip #2: Partner with management regarding topics. The executive who staffs your committee or board can assist with drafting the agenda. For instance, the CFO usually supports the finance committee, and the hospital president/CEO is the board chair's liaison. Best practice is for the meeting agenda and material development to be a joint effort between the executive liaison and the chair. This approach helps model the

respectful partnership that should exist between governance and management. (Note: The CEO should assign one executive liaison for each board and committee.)

Tip #3: Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Most new chairs put too many items on the agenda because they hope to get a lot done in their first few meetings. However, these chairs quickly learn that too many items can result in an unsatisfying meeting experience. Either items are insufficiently discussed, or they run out of time to cover all the topics. Eventually, good chairs learn that only two or three major topics can be addressed in a one-to-two-hour meeting.

The Materials

Once the agenda has been agreed upon, the materials to support the topics must be carefully developed.

Tip #4: Ensure that the materials focus participants' preparation. This sounds obvious, but too often well-intended executives provide too much information for the board or committee. The chair should work with their executive liaison to ensure the materials are at the governance level and that they provide the background needed for substantive discussion. Often, this means providing concise, graphical displays of trends over time instead of pages of detailed information.

Tip #5: Create "framing questions" for each major topic. The chair should expect management to clearly articulate the question(s) they have for the committee or board. For instance, management may want the community health committee to discuss the

→ Key Board Takeaways

Board and committee chairs who lead productive, effective meetings use the following practices:

- Develop clear, realistic meeting agendas in partnership with their executive liaison.
- Ensure that materials help board and committee members focus their preparation time.
- Make sure the meeting "room" enables all to participate fully, without distractions.
- Facilitate robust discussions and informed decision making.
- Commit to continuous improvement of themselves and their committee or board.
- Help ensure that the board and organization achieve their purpose.

results of the community health needs assessment (CHNA). A possible framing question for that agenda item might be, “What do you think are the top three healthcare needs that our organization must address, based on the CHNA?”

The “Room”

Whether the board or committee meeting is conducted in person or virtually, the meeting “room” must be carefully prepared.

Tip #6: Rely on the governance support professional. The person who provides administrative and logistical support to the board or committee can help create a meeting environment that is conducive to discussion. If the meeting is in person, the room setup should allow for everyone to see and hear each other. If the meeting is virtual, it is important that each member has practiced entering and moving around in the electronic platform. In either case, the governance support professional should make sure each board member knows how to navigate the board portal to find materials before and during the meeting. Technical support should be available throughout the entire meeting to provide just-in-time assistance.

Tip #7: Anticipate all logistical needs. Every little thing counts when it comes to ensuring a productive meeting. For instance, new board members may not know all the names of their colleagues and the managers attending the meeting. Therefore, ask the governance support person to provide tent cards with each person’s name in large letters. Of course, participants will need beverages and, depending on the time of the meeting, something to eat. Most will also want to plug in their computers or iPads, so extra power strips are helpful.

If the meeting is virtual, ensure each person’s name is accurate in the electronic platform. Also make sure that each board member has access to all the meeting materials (e.g., those participating via phone or virtually may need to receive an email with materials that were not included in the packet).

The Meeting

The key to leading an effective meeting is to be a facilitator who helps the participants express themselves.

Tip #8: Listen; do not lecture. It is often a challenge for highly intelligent, action-oriented leaders to prioritize listening over offering opinions. Yet, the job of a chair is to do just that—draw out each participant’s thoughts about the topic. (As a reminder, chairs have no special authority; it is only the full committee or board that can make decisions.)

Tip #9: Prioritize conversation over presentation. Great meetings are ones in which there is robust discussion and debate. An expectation should be set that all will come to the meeting, having studied the materials. Verbal presentations of material that was in the packet should be forbidden. The chair will need to manage the time and may have to gently remind “presenters” to stop presenting and to engage the group in conversation.

Tip #10: Facilitate discussions and decision making. It is the chair who must help the group come to a decision about how to move forward. This may require using techniques such as a round robin in which the chair asks each person “around the table” to comment before important votes. Sometimes, the chair must suggest that the more dominant or vocal members of the group give the quieter individuals an opportunity to speak. At other times, the chair may need to summarize what has been said so far and suggest options for moving forward.

Tip #11: Commit to continuous improvement. Becoming an excellent meeting facilitator is a skill that can be learned and optimized through training, practice, and honest feedback from fellow board and committee members. Conscientious chairs take a few minutes at the end of each meeting to ask what worked and what should be changed to ensure more productive meetings in the future. The best chairs request that their board or committee members complete an annual evaluation survey on their chairs’ performance, and they make improvements based on the feedback secured.

The Benefits

The main benefit of this deep dive into how chairs should prepare for and facilitate meetings is that their boards and committees will achieve their purpose—providing excellent governance oversight. There is also a side benefit to taking such a rigorous approach to meetings—the individual chair can feel more confident that his or her leadership is valuable to fellow trustees and helps the hospital achieve its mission.

*The Governance Institute thanks Pamela R. Knecht, President and CEO, **ACCORD LIMITED**, for contributing this article. She can be reached at pknecht@accordlimited.com.*

