



## **Governance That Adds Value**

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### **Chairman's Toolkit: Making the Most of Meetings**

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**Agenda Management**

**Sample Governance Agenda**

**Meeting Management**

# Agenda Management

Having a well structured, well managed agenda is an essential prerequisite for having an effective meeting. Here are some guidelines for effective agenda management:

## Create an Agenda Before the Meeting

Having an agenda to put on the table at the beginning of the meeting saves a great deal of valuable time. Ideally, the chairman will solicit others' suggestions for agenda items in advance of writing the agenda. If this is not possible, it is still preferable for the chairman to complete the agenda based upon his/her best understanding of what needs to be addressed. Additions and changes can be made as part of the agenda's approval process, during the meeting. Having a good, rolling agenda of the items to be addressed in future meetings helps to manage every agenda.

## Establish and Stick to Time Limits for Each Agenda Item

Establishing time limits is part of the chairman's agenda-drafting responsibility, and the group approves the time limits as part of approving the agenda. This happens at the beginning of the meeting. Five minutes before the end of the discussion of a specific item, the chairman can let the group know that the end is near and it is time to either make a proposal or wrap up the discussion. Mastering the art of limiting discussion – without cutting people off – is a key skill of meeting chairmanship.

## Clearly Identify the Purpose of Each Agenda Item

Each agenda item should be clearly identified as having one of the four purposes:

1. **Information Only** – Reports and updates fall into this category. Make sure these could not otherwise be handled in a written update instead. **For information items, the only discussion that is allowed is to make sure that everyone understands the information.** If material and significant Decision or Coordination (see below) issues arise out of reports, they should be scheduled for a later meeting. **Rigor in managing information items often is the single most important change needed for having more effective meetings.**
2. **Decision-making** – The most effective way to manage decision items is to have proposals/recommendations presented at the meeting rather than using meeting time to figure out a decision. When this is not possible, an effective option is to schedule a Dialogue (see below) to discuss an issue in one meeting and then bring a proposal back to the next meeting for a decision.
3. **Dialogue (Open discussion, brainstorming, etc.)** – Dialogue items are topics where you want to have a free-flowing discussion and an exchange of ideas in

preparation for a future decision. A good way to manage this discussion is to actually avoid making proposals for action in order to keep options open. Be careful to make sure that everyone in the group understands that this discussion is not intended to reach a conclusion, at this meeting. Otherwise, action-oriented people can get very frustrated in these dialogues.

**4. Action Coordination/Problem-solving:** These are discussions about how to execute a decision that has already been made or to solve a problem that requires more than one person to solve it. The trick here is to stay focused on what the objective is and to not second-guess decisions that have already been made. It is easy for these discussions to lose focus and wander. The best way to structure an action coordination/problem-solving discussion is to address the following areas:

- Clearly answer these questions: “What is the outcome that must be produced? If we are successful, what results would be accomplished?” Often action coordination/problem-solving discussions wander because the objective has not been defined or agreed to.
- Identify the most important, immediate action or next step needed to accomplish the outcome. Too often discussions reveal all the possible steps/actions but never get to defining the most important next action step.
- Assign accountability for the next step. Who will do it? What will be done? By when will it be done? Who will they report back to? If there will be additional action after this step, who will be accountable and to whom will they report progress?

# Sample Governance Agenda

## AGENDA

Call to Order

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes from previous meeting(s)

Chief Executive Officer Report

- Status of progress on Annual Objectives/Plan of Action for addressing problem areas. (Information Only)
- Operational Update/Special Staff Reports (Information Only)
- Operational Decisions requiring Board approval

Board Policy – New Policies, Policy Revisions

Discussion/Decision-making on Future Opportunities, Initiatives

Board Education

Items for Future Agendas

Adjourn

## Chairman's Responsibilities

The meeting chairman has a primary responsibility for the quality of a meeting. The actual content of the items discussed in any meeting are also important to the chairman. However, the chairman is the one person whose first duty is to assure that effective process and meeting procedures are followed. To accomplish these responsibilities, the chairman is accountable for the following:

1. Compile and organize agenda.
  - Create a rolling agenda for the year so you know what must be addressed when, during the year.
  - Create a system for compiling and tracking agenda issues requested/suggested by the Board/Committee members.
  - Make sure you know the purpose of every agenda item and whether it is a decision, informational, coordination, or a dialogue/brainstorm.
  - Assign time limits for each agenda item.
2. Manage discussions so that they stick to the agenda.
  - Stay engaged with managing every discussion.
  - Consciously choose your posture at the table. Sit back only if you are willing to let the discussion flow freely.
  - If people bring up issues not on the agenda and/or current discussion, ask them to describe how the topic is related. If it is not, politely ask them to hold the idea/discussion for a future agenda (this is why every agenda has the Agenda Item "Future Agenda Items" where these issues can be added to the rolling agenda.)
3. Manage the meeting so that your meeting ground rules and decision-making process is reasonably followed.
  - Don't let two person dialogues/debates dominate the meeting. Intervene politely and ask for others' opinions on the subject.
  - If someone insists on repeating their thoughts, ask them if they believe that other members have heard the point. If not, ask them to clarify what they believe has not been heard and then open discussion to others.
  - If side conversations occur, stop discussion and get the meeting back in order.
4. Manage the meeting so that it starts and ends on time and that agenda items follow reasonable time limits.
  - Hold discussions within set time limits.

- Make sure you have an exit strategy for every discussion item. Here are some options for bringing a discussion to a close:
    - Ask to see if someone has a specific proposal (motion) to make. If not, move on.
    - Conduct a “straw vote” to ascertain the sense of the group.
    - Poll each member for his or her opinion prior to making a decision about the disposition of an issue.
    - Call discussion to a close with no further action.
    - Call discussion to a close and schedule the issue for a later agenda.
    - Call discussion to a close and assign the issue to an individual or group for analysis and recommendation...
    - Call discussion to a close and assign the issue to the Managing Partner or Administrator for analysis and recommendation.
5. Assure that everyone on the Board/Committee has the opportunity to speak.
    - Make use of roundtable techniques.
    - Make sure that people are listening to each other. Check out what people are hearing when things get emotional and/or complex.
    - Draw out those who have not spoken.
  6. Assure that communications are respectful.
  7. Assure that one person or just a few do not dominate the discussion.
    - Make use of roundtable techniques.
    - Draw out those who have not spoken.
  8. Bring discussions to closure with either a motion/vote, delegation for further study, or simple end. See #4.
  9. Address conflict and disagreement in a constructive manner.
  10. Manage the “mood” of a meeting.
    - Pay attention to the “feeling” of the room. If something seems off, call it out in a non-judgmental manner and check out what’s going on.
    - Breaks can change the mood of the room.
    - Draw out those that are the quietest.
  11. Delegate chairmanship of the meeting to another person if you must be fully engaged in the content of a discussion for an extended period of time.

