

## ***KDLA October 2011 Trustee Tip of the Month How Can Library Board Meetings Be More Effective?***

### **Quick Tips**

To ensure effective library board meetings, trustees can:

- ◆ Review the documents in the board packet received before the meeting to avoid the need for extended discussion of each item on the agenda.
- ◆ Start the meetings on time and socialize before and after the meeting.
- ◆ During the meeting, follow the agenda and use the adopted parliamentary procedure.
- ◆ Read reports from the director, staff, committees and regional librarian before arriving to limit time for questions or discussion.
- ◆ Use an evaluative tool to assess meeting efficiency to see where improvements can be made.

As a library trustee, one of your most important tasks is to attend board meetings. However, if your library board meetings have become marathon in length or overwhelming due to the sheer amount of business that needs to be covered, then your board may need to work on making your meetings more effective.

It is your obligation as a board member to come to the meeting prepared, having read any and all documents sent to you ahead of the meeting, such as the agenda, previous meeting's minutes and financial statements. **The meeting agenda should be sent out to board members ahead of time via mail or email along with other pertinent meeting documents.**

The board president and other members should strive to start the meeting on time, every time. As soon as the meeting is called to order, socializing and other extraneous conversation should stop. Meetings that start on time are more likely to be businesslike and productive.

In general, most board meetings are facilitated by the board president, with assistance from the library director. The board secretary should arrive ready to take minutes, if applicable. The board treasurer should be prepared to give the financial report, which ideally should be prepared with the assistance of the director.

Board presidents should guide the board as a group in making decisions in a timely manner, putting an emphasis on what needs to be accomplished with each item on the agenda. Don't be afraid to limit discussions that stray from the subject at hand. **An effective board meeting should last 60-90 minutes.** Board meetings that regularly last longer than 90 minutes usually result in irritated or exasperated board members, and spotty member attendance.



*Serving Kentucky's Need to Know*

Meetings will be more effective when the agenda is prioritized. Don't spend time on routine reports. **Contrary to popular belief, there is no need to read aloud the minutes, financial reports, or director's/staff reports.** Get these reports out to board members in advance, and ask at the board meeting if there are any questions. The director or treasurer can briefly highlight items of note on the financial reports but they do not have to be orally reviewed in their entirety. This allows more time for strategic discussion of new and unfinished business items. Also, copies of the previous year's board packets should be on hand at each meeting in the event that there are questions.

Dan Cain, of Cain Consulting, who specializes in board training, makes these recommendations for conducting effective board meetings:

- ◆ Study materials and think of questions and comments about issues prior to meetings.
- ◆ Make time to study issues, conducting research, etc. outside of board meetings.
- ◆ Make the board time-conscious.
- ◆ Avoid discussions concerning day-to-day operations.
- ◆ Keep socializing to a minimum during the meeting.
- ◆ Follow the agenda and some form of parliamentary procedure.\*

Being aware of and understanding the board's adopted rules of procedures can also ensure the meeting runs in an effective and timely manner. In 1980 the Kentucky Attorney General opined that library boards may adopt their own rules of procedure. [OAG80-216] However, most boards' bylaws state that the Library Board of Trustees will follow Robert's Rules of Order in conducting its meetings. An understanding of these procedures, in particular how motions and votes are conducted, can save time and ensure library business is conducted in a professional manner.

Try to limit unfinished business items. Unfinished business items are sometimes the result of meetings that run so long that there is simply no time to address all items of business. New or unfinished business items that need extensive discussion should be addressed in a special called meeting or a committee meeting.

If your board has fallen into habits that are contributing to unwieldy meetings, it may take some time to break old habits. Making an effort to conduct effective board meetings is well worth the effort, especially if you find that your meetings are consistently running past the 90 minute mark, that your agenda always includes unfinished business, and that your board has difficulty making decisions. Making this

effort will help ensure that trustees are focused and committed during the board meetings.

It may be helpful to conduct an annual evaluation of the board's meetings to ensure that they are focused, productive, and efficient to make the best use of the board trustees' time and that the library can benefit fully from the trustees' contribution and skills. You will find some examples of meeting evaluation tools on the next page.

*\*The Board Team Handbook: The Board Member's Guide to Visionary Leadership*

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This is not legal advice and I am not an attorney. If you feel you need legal advice you should consult an attorney.

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## Example Board Meeting Evaluation Tools

### Board Meeting Checklist:

Rate items:

- 1 - Poor
- 2 - Needs Work
- 3 - Adequate
- 4 - Very Good
- 5 - Excellent

- Agenda and supporting documents circulated prior to meeting
- Meeting began on time
- Agenda items relevant to mission, goals, and objectives of the organization
- Agenda items related to board work (not staff or committee issues)
- Structure and leadership of meeting encouraged thoughtful discussion
- Agenda items were clearly identified as for information, discussion or decision
- Reports were accepted as submitted, and only questions and/or discussion related to them were considered
- Decision-making method being used was according to the parliamentary procedure adopted in the by-laws
- Appropriate information was available to make decisions
- Atmosphere was relaxed and friendly
- All board members were encouraged to participate
- Motions were accurately recorded in the minutes
- Meeting duration was appropriate to the needs of the group and the issues to be addressed
- Staff and board members presenting information were prepared and effective

Strengths of the meeting:

Suggestions for future improvement of effectiveness:

Source: Board Development: Board Building - Recruiting and Developing Effective Board Members for Not-for-Profit Organizations. The Muttart Foundation and Alberta Culture and Community Spirit. ISBN 0-9697939-5-2.

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## Tools for Board Meeting Evaluation

At the end of each meeting, encourage board members to complete a brief evaluation of the meeting. Board members can write their responses and give them to the secretary. The secretary tabulates and distributes the results with the minutes of the meeting. Be sure to plan a method for dealing with suggestions and implementing strategies to improve board meeting performance.

You can use the following exercises for board meeting evaluations.

### Exercise: Start Doing and Stop Doing

- Take 10 minutes at the end of the board meeting to review meeting effectiveness.
- Ask members to list the productive and nonproductive parts of the meeting by completing the following phrases.

### Exercise: After the Board Meeting Review

- Encourage board members to complete the following review at the meeting or within 24 hours, so that their observations are fresh.
- May be used after every meeting, or less frequently as a tool in meeting planning.

At our board meetings, we should:

Stop doing...

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Continue doing...

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Start doing...

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Note: You could use a similar approach to assess other areas of board work, such as planning and other committee work.