

Transform the Bored Room: Firecracker Facilitation Tips

Posted by **Emily Davis** on Oct 3, 2017 3:58:02 PM

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*This post is one in a series of posts written by nonprofit leaders who are presenting sessions at the **2017 BoardSource Leadership Forum** taking place in Seattle, October 18-20. We hope you will be joining us there.*



Board meetings got you down? Bored to tears by your committee meetings? Social gatherings leaving something to be desired?

Meetings for the sake of meetings make no sense, however board meetings are a place for critical decisions and governance oversight. Too many board meetings are lacking in great facilitation, running on too long, or even getting completely off track.

Turn your board and committee meetings into more enjoyable experiences without an expert facilitator. A handful of small tips can make a huge difference in reaching your agenda goals, as well as in making your meetings actually enjoyable.

Here's a teaser into some of the topics we will cover at the BLF session on meeting facilitation: Ban the Bored Room: Fantastic Facilitation Skills.

Take time to prepare and plan. A well-run board meeting takes time and planning to the actual meeting. It's like the theatre; much of the preparation happens behind the scenes. The board chair and the chief executive should have a close working relationship with frequent communication and planning for the board meeting.

Having preparatory conversations with individuals before a board meeting can help save time from reporting out or following tangents that can derail the meeting. Board members' opinions and input are important; however, it is also important to make sure to manage when and where some of those conversations happen.

Design a consent agenda. I see a lot of organizations that spend their board meeting time verbally "reporting out" on the operations of the organization. Snooze-fest! This is not what board meetings are for. Instead, use written board reports prior to the meeting to keep board members informed and to give them the opportunity to come with pertinent questions.

Collecting and compiling the reports a week in advance of the meeting from staff and committee chairs will help the board chair and ED to create a consent agenda that is informed by the work being done. The reports are used to help keep the governance priorities the focus in the board meeting.

Rotate responsibilities. Did you know that the board chair is *not* the person who has to facilitate the board meeting agenda? Or that the secretary does not *have* to take all the meeting minutes? It depends on your organization's bylaws, but, for most boards, there are no hard and fast rules about who needs to play these roles. These individuals are often responsible for *ensuring* that these tasks happen, but they are not the ones who absolutely have to administer them.

It helps to increase accountability across the board if responsibilities are shared. For example, board members can rotate responsibilities for the following if needed:

- Taking meeting minutes (the secretary ultimately needs to edit and submit for approval)
- Agenda facilitation
- Sharing a “mission moment”
- Time keeper
- Coordinating food (you should always have food of some kind at a meeting — no matter what!)
- Securing a meeting location

Stay on time. Creating consent agendas can help with this, along with assigning a facilitator/time keeper to ensure the meeting stays on track. One of the biggest problems with board member retention is that board members end up at meetings that run for hours and hours when they were originally promised to be much shorter.

Some people will show up late to board meetings or unprepared, which can delay meetings as well. Out of respect for the others who are on time and who are prepared (and to set the standard for board service!), stay on time. Start on time, end on time. Speak directly with individuals about any problem with their attendance or preparation for meetings.

Encourage differing opinions. Conflict is a great way to get to creative solutions. Yes, you read that correctly! Relying on the common or homogeneous wisdom of a group is not enough. As board members, we represent the public’s oversight of an organization. That means it’s important to ask the tough questions. To challenge the status quo. Use a decision-making rubric, screening process, or even your own strategic plan to keep the mission and priorities front and center. Asking the questions about what, how, and why will help to better serve the mission and its sustainability in the long run. Putting your personal needs and comforts aside for the sake of the organization is what makes a great board member.

Join me at BLF 2017 to explore more detail to these tips and learn about more resources to help you on your way to better board meetings!

Questions for you:

- *What is your experience with meeting facilitation?*
- *Do you have specific examples that have worked well you can share?*
- *What would you recommend for others facilitating board and committee meetings?*
- *What other questions do you have that we can cover at the BLF session this fall?*