

# Resilience Series: Board Agenda

Let's face it, board meetings can be extreme. They can be short and unengaging or they can be long and in-the-weeds. Neither of those is effective.

The board should be focused on:

- **Big picture policy**
- **Mission**
- **Budget**
- **Organizational priorities**

They *shouldn't* be figuring out the coffee situation for the monthly morning meet-up or evening event. The board agenda is a critical, yet sadly under appreciated tool to keep your focus in times of positive momentum and during emergencies.

Here are some ideas to help your organization be efficient and to help bring the focus to your mission and your role as a board.

## Agenda Structure

1. **Have a timeline and stick to it.**  
Aim for 1.5 hours for a regular meeting, 2 hours in an emergency.
2. **Have a consent item.** This item is a package of actions and updates that the board votes on without discussion. If an item needs to be pulled from the consent item for discussion it can be, and board

can vote on the rest of the consent item. This helps keep you out of the weeds. It is the quick action items that don't need much discussion, but can lead to rabbit trails. The consent item contents should be fully described with documentation in the board packet and the board is informed prepared to approve without discussion. It should include regularly reviewed items that require board approval (monthly budget update, meeting minutes, staff report, regular expense approval, etc.) and committee reports. This is short and just takes a vote. This should stay around 5 minutes.

3. **Have action items.** These are items that need some discussion and action to move forward. These should be limited to one 15-minute agenda item.
4. **Have discussion items.** These should be 10-20 minutes long and limited to two for a regular meet and three for something that needs immediate attention or in an emergency. Or there can be one longer item for a 30-minute discussion. This is when you discuss the big picture issues. Establish work items and/or committees to move these forward.

- **Have training.** Three to four times a year add a 30-minute training on topics like Board health, budget, fundraising, board roles & responsibilities, employer laws, ethics, etc., or some component of the work you do (interpretation, collections care, historic preservation, social media, etc.)

## Annual Discussion Schedule

Here is a suggested schedule to make sure the board is well informed and you are thinking of all of things that need to be addressed. Take some time at your next board retreat to adapt this to your organization's calendar or fiscal year.

### MONTH 1

- **Mission & Vision Check-In** – Not to change them, but to discuss whether or not the current work is addressing them, find out what in these drive the board members to be on the board, re-affirm commitment to them.
- **Budget** – A deep dive into the annual budget. Remind the board of their budget responsibilities. Does the board understand the



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document? Perhaps, even a quick training. Don't just ask if there are questions. Include review of all current and prospective grants. Consider timing of the budget meeting to match things like end of quarter, next fiscal year projections, major income period (city or county funds, major grant period, etc.), before your fundraising check-in, etc. Check in on revenue goals and expense projections. Are you where you planned to be at this time? Why or why not?

## MONTH 2

- **Staffing (paid OR volunteer)** – Remind the board of their responsibilities around employment. Check in on updated laws. Review the reporting structure (the entire board should NOT be directing one person) and make sure it is working. Schedule or check in on staff reviews including the executive director. Do your hiring and management practices support equity and inclusion for all employees?
- **Disaster Preparedness** – Review and update assignments and contacts. Check-in on plan if there is one or priorities. Schedule the annual first responder tour and snacks. Schedule the annual fire inspection and check the extinguishers. Establish one work item.

## MONTH 3

- **By-Laws** – Review your by-laws and make you are following them. If you are not, determine whether they need to be adjusted to better align with how you are functioning or want to function. Or use it as an opportunity to get back in

alignment with how your by-laws are designed. Make it an action item for the year.

- **Volunteers** – Check-in on the volunteer program. Are they being tracked and documented? Are there work descriptions? Are actions for equity and inclusion happening? Have you thanked them lately? Check in on goals for outreach, recruitment, evaluation and retention. Are you fulfilling your strategic plan or priorities?

## MONTH 4

- **Budget** – Yep, this should be quarterly. It is a big responsibility.
- **Fundraising** – Check in on annual fundraising plan. Is it on track? Are there new sources of funding to be considered? What creative funding might you come up with?

## MONTH 5

- **Communications & Outreach** – Check-in on goals and results for the year. Are the goals appropriate? Are the results what is suspected? Who is in your community. Are you reaching everyone? What audiences are you missing and how can you connect with them? Does this work still fit within the strategic plan or priorities?
- **Partnerships** – Are you meeting partnership goals in your strategic plan or priorities? What are creative partnerships you can cultivate to help you reach people you are not serving? Which organizations have aligning missions or are your neighbors? How might you reach out them? Generate simple ideas to enact immediately.

## MONTH 6

- **Disaster Preparedness** – "Really, again, I hate talking about this?!?!" Yes, again, it will never get done and we all know it is really important.
- **Programming** – This is normally in the realm of committees and staff/volunteers. Be sure to stay out of the weeds and think big picture. Does your programming still fit the mission, vision, strategic plan? Does it serve the entire community and the specific audiences you are focusing on now? Is your programming welcoming?

## MONTH 7

- **Budget** – Here we go again.
- **Staffing** – Twice a year is solid.

## MONTH 8

- **By-laws** – Twice a year is good. You'll have new board members and the reminders are important. Also, you can combine one with your annual meeting if you wish.
- **Volunteers** – This can be the same meeting as By-laws again, talking about volunteers is fun. Schedule your volunteer recognition.

## MONTH 9

- **Facilities & Technology** – How are your facilities? Do you have a maintenance plan, is it being followed? Is your operating budget enough for maintenance? What big ticket items are coming? Do you have an equipment upgrade/replacement plan in your



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operating budget? Are you equipped in case of emergency? What are future technology needs based on priorities or a strategic plan?

- **Strategic plan or priorities check-in** – Are you still within your plan? Do your actions still address your goals? Do you have completed items to check off or new items to put in the parking lot for a future plan? Check the timeline for a plan update or new plan.

#### MONTH 10

- **Budget** – See you in the new year!
- **Disaster Preparedness** – One more time. Its only three times a year, you can handle it. Invite some firefighters and make it fun.

#### MONTH 11

- **Fundraising** – Bring it on again! Money is great, and you are the key to getting it.
- **Advocacy** – This pairs nicely with fundraising. Have board members bring a favorite story of your organization’s work from the year. Share them, then discuss who should be told about this good work. School board, tourism organization, city council, etc. Check in on the strategic plan or priority goals and actions for advocacy. Assign an advocacy action to each.

#### MONTH 12

- **Board Roles & Responsibilities** – Check-in and make sure everyone knows what they are supposed to be up to. Have each board member to pick one item from the board manual they think is critical. Or pick two to discuss.

- **Value** – This a great to pair with roles and responsibilities, it will help remind them why they took on these roles. Discuss they why? Share what is important about this work, what niche does it fill? Where and how are you communicating this value (year-end reports, city council presentations, etc.)?

#### Additional Resources

- Nonprofit Association of Oregon:
  - [Governance Resources](#)
  - [Financial Oversight Resources](#)
- Boardsource:
  - [Productive Meetings](#)
  - [Virtual Board Meetings](#)
- [National Council of Nonprofits: Effective Meetings for Good Governance](#)
- [Board Development Without a Strategic Planning Retreat](#), post on Oregon Heritage Exchange Blog
- [Oregon Heritage MentorCorps](#): Mentors provide board trainings or project planning assistance

***The Resilience Series of Heritage Bulletins helps organizations keep their focus on best practices during recovery.***



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