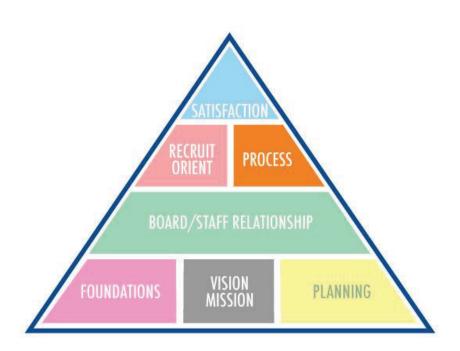# BOARD MEETINGS,

CALENDARS,

AND RETREATS

www.BoardsThatExcel.com

DISCLAIMER NOTICE: This publication is sold with the understanding that the author is providing general information about nonprofit board management only. For all legal, accounting, insurance, or investment situations, the services of a professional with specific expertise should be engaged.

Greetings –

This best practice booklet focuses on board meetings (where board decision-making takes place), the annual board calendar (so you can plan your work), and board retreats.

One of the hallmarks of a mature board is its ability to plan its work in advance. This is easier than it sounds because the fiscal year of the organization creates a natural, annual cycle around which many board and organizational decisions, reviews, and evaluations can be made. You can add a great deal of value to your organization by standardizing your board processes. Your current board will feel secure (because it knows what it needs to do) and future boards will love you because they will not have to rethink and reinvent everything from scratch.

Additional advice about your organization or board is available in two ways:

1. **By email.** If you have a brief question, please don't hesitate to email me at Alyson@BoardsThatExcel.com. In your email, let me know which booklet you've bought and pose your question. I answer all emails.

2. **By conference call.** Many boards and staffs have teleconsulted with me. Your CEO/ED and Board Chair, the executive committee, or a single committee of the board might benefit from some specific advice about a particular problem or situation. Take a quick look at **www.BoardsThatExcel.com/ask-alyson/** and see how easy it is to set up a conference call and receive cost-effective consulting directly from me.

When you're ready, there are other booklets available at www.BoardsThatExcel.com/the-market/:

For your staff and board: "Vision, Mission, and Values Statements", "Strategic Planning Template and Directions", "Quality Checklist and Action Plan"

For your board: "Purposeful Board Recruitment", and "Inspiring Board Orientations"

For your board committees: "Productive Committees", "Board Development Committee", "Finance Committee", "Fundraising Committee", and "Personnel Committee"

And here's my last piece of advice. Even if you aren't successful the first time you try to implement some of these tools, keep trying. It takes persistence to create new habits and standards. Keep at it – don't wilt - and good luck.

Warmly,

Alyson

BOARD MEETINGS, CALENDARS, AND RETREATS

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BEST PRACTICES FOR BOARD MEETINGS

1. Set up your **board meetings a year in advance**. Provide your board members with dates, times, and locations of all meetings at the beginning of each year.

2. Well-run boards focus their decision-making (and therefore their discussions at meetings) on five key areas of governance: (1) the organization's **finances**, (2) the **strategy** of the organization, and (3) the **policies** that define the standards by which the organization will do business, (4) the CEO (or Executive Director), and (5) the board's own sustainability.

3. The Board Chairperson develops the **board meeting agenda** in concert with the Board Committee Chairs and the Executive Director.

4. **Board meeting agendas** allocate time to important issues that need to be discussed prior to board-required decisions.

5. Board meetings should focus on the decisions that need to be made by the entire board. **Avoid discussing details that can be discussed and acted upon by board committees**. **Avoid discussing details that can be discussed and implemented by the staff.**

6. If board members spend your board meetings passively listening to updates from board committees and staff, their time is not well-spent. Get staff and committee members to **send out reports and updates in writing a week in advance.** Expect your board members to read this material and be ready for a discussion at the board meeting.

7. Make it a habit to have the board secretary **send out the minutes** of the meeting within a week after the meeting.

8. **Solicit changes to the minutes** and amend the minutes right away. (Do not waste your board member's time at your board meetings discussing the last meeting's minutes and how they need to be updated – that should have been done **before** the board meeting.)

Mature Board Agenda Example

NOTE : A Mature Board Agenda is comprised of a series of holistic discussions for the board with decision-making as its purpose.   In preparation for the board meeting, ask board committees and staff personnel to work together prior to the meeting to prepare complete recommendations for the board discussions **in advance.** Ask them to address all aspects of a single decision and send it to all board members a week before the meeting. Expect your board member to read these reports prior to the meeting. Be sure that the board makes a decision to either (1) approve the recommendation, (2) turn down the recommendation, or (3) to turn the question back to the committee for more review.

Mature Board Agenda Example

XYZ Organization, Board Meeting

Date

XYZ Nonprofit Organization's Mission Statement – printed here.

1. **Recommendation to expand Program "X"** (Executive Director), Impact to Program "X" (Operations Committee), Costs (Finance Committee), Staff and Volunteer Support Requirements (Personnel Committee)

2. **Recommendation for new Donor Database** (Executive Director), Benefits to the Fundraising Efforts (Fundraising Committee), Impact on budget (Finance Committee)

BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION Example

Date of the Board Meeting: 8.12.05

Committee Name: Marketing Committee

Committee Members: Marabella, Victor, Sally, and John

Other staff and board members who have approved this recommendation: Nick, Francis

Background

Since our organization's inception, we have been keeping track of our donations on a spreadsheet. To date, this has been sufficient.

Issue Requiring Board Action

The current Donor Database (simple spreadsheet) does not have enough functionality to support the future growth in Individual and Major Donors that we expect in the coming years. At a minimum, we need to have a donor database that includes the following: (1) History of Giving, (2) Salutations (Mr and Mrs. John Doe, vs. Martha and Sam, vs. Buffy and Butch), and (3) Giving Reports (current and historic).

We have explored a range of Donor Databases with the following costs and pros and cons:

Database X **–** Excellent reporting, High end functions , Future Development will cost more ($7 K)

Database Y **–** No local users, Tech Support comes from Cincinnati, Limited Reporting ($2 K)

Database Z **–**Good comments and Reporting, Used by the hospital, Excellent tech support package ($5 K)

Recommendation to the Board:

We recommend that we purchase the Donor Database Z, which will cost $5000 over and above this year's approved expense budget.

(NOTE: The Committee is submitting a grant proposal to the Q Foundation to support this purchase, but we recommend the purchase of this new database regardless of whether we are the recipients of this grant or not.)

DIRECTIONS *:* Recommendations come in the form of this one-page summary (longer reports may be attached, if necessary). Board members receive by e-mail and read all recommendations one week prior to the meeting. During the meeting (after 5-7 minutes of question and answer) a decision is made (approved, back to committee - need more research or analysis, or denied)

XYZ Nonprofit Organization – Meeting Minutes

XYZ Nonprofit Organization Mission Statement : Print here.

Meeting Location, Date and Time:

Members in attendance:

Guests in attendance:

TOPIC	DISCUSSION	ACTION/ FOLLOW-UP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE
I. Call to order	N/A	N/A		N/A
II. Approve Minutes from last meeting	N/A	N/A		N/A
III. Old Business				
IV. New Business				
V. Other and Adjournment				

Best Practices for Nonprofit Board Calendars

1. Start by looking at your organization's **fiscal year** and the financial, personnel, fundraising and operational cycles that exist already. Start thinking about how to align your board's calendar with the cycles of the organization.

2. Create a list of the **board decisions** that are related to finance (reviewing and approving the next year's budget, for example).

3. Another important decision that board members make is the **approval of new board members**. Usually, new members join boards at the same time every year – so creating a cycle for recruitment activities and orientation will help standardize this process.

4. The annual establishment of objectives and **management review of the Executive Director** are essential responsibilities of your board. While this oversight is handled by the Personnel Committee and executed by the Board Chair, it is also part of your board's annual cycle and should appear on your calendar.

5. **Fundraising Activities** should be listed on your calendar.

6. Your annual calendar should include all **fundraising events, board meetings, board orientations, and board retreats.**

NONPROFIT BOARD CALENDAR Example

	QUARTER 1	QUARTER 2	QUARTER 3	QUARTER 4
Org's Annual Operations Plan	Board reviews progress	Board reviews progress	Next Year's Draft Plan to Board Pres Next Year's Draft presented to board	**Board Approves the Org's Annual Operations Plan for next year.**
Org's Expense and Fundraising Budgets	Board reviews progress	Board reviews progress	Next Year's Draft Plan to Board Pres and Treasurer Draft presented to Board	**Board Approves the org's expense and fundraising budgets for next year.**
ED's annual Objectives and Review of ED	Board Pres reviews progress with ED	Board Pres reviews Progress with ED	ED drafts his/her Objectives for next year and reviews with the Board Pres	Annual Personnel Review of the ED by the Board Pres. Finalize next yr's objectives for the ED.
Fundraising	9.15.05 - Event	12.1.05 – Appeal Letter Signing	2.14.06 - Event	5.3.06 – Donor Appreciation
Long Term Planning Process	Board and Staff look at the 3-year view or the Longer-Term view	**Board Approves** the 3-yr view or the long-term view		
Board Officer and Committee Plans	Annual Board Retreat – (new) Committees develop and present their Annual Objectives to the board	Review status/progress of Board Committee Objectives	Review status/progress of Committee Obj. **Board Approves next yr's Board Officers**	Board Officers each present their objectives for next year Board Self-Evaluation
Board Mtgs and Retreats	9.21.05 - Mtg	12.3.05 – Mtg 10.15.05 - Retreat	3.11.05 - Mtg	6.6.06 – Mtg 6.21.06 - Orient
New Board Members	Welcome Cocktail Party Recruiting for next year	Board Holiday Social Recruiting for next year	Board Dev Committee presents likely new board members	**Board Approves new board members** Orientation Session for new board members

Best Practices for Board Retreats

1. Board Retreats should always have a **specific business purpose**. Effective board retreats focus on one aspect of the organization or board – like these:

   a. Planning (can be for the next fiscal year – or the longer term)

   b. A make improvements to a Specific Operational Program or Partnership

   c. To evaluate a potential Strategic Partnership Opportunity

2. Any board retreat will also provide an opportunity for "**team building**" for the board as a whole. Don't underestimate the benefit of this activity – even though it may not be the focus of your discussions.

3. Another secondary benefit of a board retreat is that ability to weave "**board training**" into the day. This could include finance, fundraising, operations, personnel issues, or training about board roles and responsibilities.

4. Decide if you should include all or some of the staff or volunteers in the retreat. The benefit of including more people in your discussions are these:

   a. The board, staff and volunteers get to know each other – creating better working relationships throughout the year

   b. The more minds and perspectives, the better

   c. Any decisions or changes that are made as the result of the retreat already have some buy-in from the retreat participants.

5. If, on the other hand, your board needs to wrestle with serious operational situations or needs to speak freely about the future of the organization, conducting a "board only" retreat might be a better approach for you.

6. The next page shows an afternoon retreat agenda for a nonprofit that is planning for the next fiscal year. After a summary of the organization's objectives, board committee objectives for the next year are developed and presented by each board committee.

Board Retreat Agenda Example

XYZ Organization's Mission Statement : Print here.

PURPOSE: Planning for Fiscal Year 2006 (January '06 thru December '06)

Working Lunch **–** 12:30 - Welcome and brief introductions

Budget overview

Staff Presentation **–** (1:00 **–** 1:20)

    a. Employees overview (reminder)
        a. Hours worked
        b. Job Responsibilities
    b. Program Objectives (September 2005 **–** December 2006) **–** Key Metrics for success
    c. Fundraising Summary **–** recap this year, a look at next year, improvements to strategy
    d. Budget requirements (September 2005 **–** December 2006)

Staff, Board and Volunteer Chart **–** (1:20 **–** 1:40) **–** Who's responsible for what?

Introduction to Committee Work **–** (1:40-1:50)

Committee work **–** Meet in Committees (except Exec Committee) (1:50 **–** 2:50)

    a. Make any changes to the Committee Responsibilities
    b. Outline Objectives (September 2005 **–** December 2006)
    c. Staff, volunteer and board member support requirements
    d. Estimated budget requirements
    e. Committee meeting schedule (if necessary)

Committee Feedback (2:50-4:20) **–** 15 minutes per committee

    a. Programs
    b. Budget and Finance
    c. Membership
    d. Marketing
    e. Development
    f. Long-range planning
    g. Finance
        - summary of 2006 budget estimates from other committee reports

Identifying Gaps, Discussion and Wrap-Up **–** (4:20-5:00)