

KEEPING YOUR BOARD FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

It is very easy for board meetings to become hobbled by too much attention to the everyday operations of a nonprofit organization. While it is a part of the board's responsibility to understand the financial situation and activities of the nonprofit they serve, the most important contribution of an active board of directors is looking ahead, above the trees, to drive the organization's mission and services into the future.

Your board of directors needs to be:

- Focusing on results and solutions, not problems,
- Thinking about the environment in which your organization operates to continue to meet a current need, and
- Looking at trends in the nonprofit world in general and your mission in particular to ensure your organization plans for future community needs.

Implementing a consent agenda will allow you the necessary time to focus on the future. But, to put this future focus into action, consider including one or more of the following items on your agenda.

MEGA ISSUE: Is there a "mega issue" facing your organization in the future? A need for new space on the horizon? Imminent changes in legislation that will affect your clients' lives or how you do business? Expected changes in a funding stream? These are future items that need to be discussed, debated, and tracked.

PROFESSIONAL UPDATES: This can include brief (e.g., 10 minutes) presentations on legislative happenings in your mission area, summaries of new research in the field or presentations from program staff on how a particular program is working. Be sure to allow sufficient time to discuss what this information might mean for your organization and how it can be used by the board in its planning.

FUND DEVELOPMENT: This may be a quick skill review on how to make an ask, a report from a board director on a recent success in development, or time spent collecting names and appointments for the next month or quarter. It might also be a frank discussion about projected shortfalls and how the board anticipates making this up. Development should be on the agenda at every board meeting in some way – it is a key part of looking to the future.

- **What are one or two mega issues that should be the focus of your next board meeting?**

- **What public policy issue, new research or unusual organizational program should be included on your next board meeting agenda? Why?**

- **Is any outside counsel required to be at this meeting?**

- **What are your most pressing fund raising issues or needs?**

- **What does the board need to do to address these issues or needs?**
