



Foundation
Management

Tips for Managing a Solid Foundation



Governance 101: How to Run a Productive Meeting

We often get questions on how to run meetings. We help many of our clients by planning and facilitating their board meetings, and we also do consulting in this area. We wanted to share a few highlights you might find useful as you plan and lead your meetings, whether board, committee or staff discussions.

Meetings in General

- Evaluate if a meeting is needed. If a phone call or email will answer the question, you may not need to meet.
- Always have an agenda and send it out ahead of time to allow people to be clear on the purpose of the meeting and prepare their thoughts, as well as any necessary materials.
- Invite those who are needed. (This will vary based on the purpose of the meeting.)
- Determine how long the meeting should be and set the time. Not all meetings are equal: a lot can be accomplished in 30 minutes on one topic or you may need a 3-hour deeper dive. Avoid always setting one-hour blocks.
- Be clear on who is leading the meeting. Assign a note taker.
- Start on time and end on time. If you need to “run over,” ask permission from the group to do so or schedule a follow up meeting.
- Stick to the agenda. Schedule follow-up discussions for other topics.
- Confirm action steps at the end of the meeting and assign “doers” and deadlines.
- Set the next meeting before you adjourn, while everyone is together, to avoid back-and-forth scheduling emails, as possible.
- Send out any follow-up notes to those who weren’t able to attend to keep them informed and help them be prepared for the next discussion, if applicable.
- Evaluate your meetings from time to time to see how they can be more effective, enjoyable and efficient. Could meeting at a different time be more productive? Is there a better location? What one thing could we do to make this meeting more useful to our cause?

Board Meetings in Particular

- Determine what you most need to accomplish at each meeting and adjust the format of your agenda if necessary. For example, if there is an important discussion that needs to happen, consider putting it closer to the top of the agenda rather than at the very end.
- Use Consent Agendas when appropriate.
- Sent packets out in advance so the board has plenty of time to prepare.
- Encourage questions ahead of time if research is needed to give a proper answer at the board meeting.
- Be sure minutes are taken, following guidelines to ensure proper documentation and business history.
- Agree on whether your group strictly adheres to Robert’s Rules, uses them as a guide, or follows other meeting protocol. Deciding this ahead of time keeps things running smoother when there is spirited discussion.
- Be sure you have the President and Minute Taker sign the minutes from the previous meeting once they are approved. File them in the board book and scan them to save digitally.

Foundation Management serves private foundations, charitable organizations, and nonprofit communities across the United States.

With more than 200 years of combined experience, the Foundation Management staff can successfully assist organizations throughout various development stages. Services include policy development, administrative services, strategic planning, succession planning, board development, board retreats, facilitated conversations, foundation start-up, and implementation of charitable giving programs.