



7 Ways to Make the Most of Annual Meetings

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Annual meetings are important events in the life of an association, and making the most of them takes careful planning. Required by the **association's governing documents** (<https://hub.associaonline.com/ebooks/associa-decoding-governing-docs-ebook>), annual homeowners' meetings have legal and functional purposes: to **elect new board members** (<https://www.associaonline.com/management-services/association-management>), vote on assessment issues, and more. But less obvious is the opportunity for image building and the chance to show the association's value to the homeowners - both of which are often-overlooked objectives that are critical to an association's future success.

From announcing the meeting to the call for adjournment, there are seven steps an association can take to ensure the success of the annual meeting.

1. Make the most of announcements. Most documents prescribe the required notice period and general content of the meeting announcement. It is important to comply with the requirements of the governing documents in order to prevent the possibility of future

challenges as to the validity of the meeting. In addition to the official meeting notice, it is a good idea to provide reminders of the meeting as well. These can be in the form of follow-up postcards sent out shortly before the meeting, bulletins posted at the community clubhouse, announcements in the association newsletter or reminders on social networks and apps like **TownSq** (<https://www.townsq.io/>).

2. Ask all homeowners to complete written proxies. Oftentimes, communities, especially older associations, have difficulty obtaining a quorum for their annual meetings. Clearly, this poses a serious problem for the association in that the business of the community - especially the election of board members - depends upon the participation of homeowners. In order to improve the chances of obtaining a quorum, request that owners complete and return their written proxy even if they plan to attend the meeting. Proxies can always be rescinded if the member attends the meeting, but in the event he doesn't make it in person, his proxy can be used to establish a quorum and conduct business.

3. Offer incentives for attendance. Another way of encouraging actual meeting attendance is the awarding of door prizes to attendees. A number of associations offer prizes such as nursery gift certificates, movie passes, and even free homeowners dues.

4. Encourage homeowners to get involved. In conducting the meeting itself, the board should consider how it can kindle homeowners' sense of value and interest in the association. Personally invite them to attend. Welcome them. Arrive early and mingle with residents over coffee. Avoid entering at the last minute or hovering together with other board members. If the board needs to caucus, try to do it early.

5. Run an orderly meeting. Once the meeting has been called to order, conduct it like a shareholders meeting. Include a declaration that the meeting has begun, a welcome to the members, an introduction of the board members and manager, and a brief explanation of the meeting's goals. Declare each item on the agenda and what it means. Introduce reports and speakers formally; clearly state motions and their results. Maintain control of the meeting. Don't allow the discussion of an issue to stray from the stated agenda. And keep the meeting as brief as possible. These actions show that the board is in charge.

6. Be transparent. In addition to conducting the meeting in an orderly fashion, be sure that information is presented clearly. The audience at an annual meeting doesn't always understand community associations. Use the meeting to teach members about the association and its operations. Even the old-time regulars will benefit from the information. Keep in mind the phrase, "tell them what you are going to do, why you are doing it, and what you did." Use this practice in conducting new business, such as electing board members, and when acting on specific issues. Share background on why the board took a specific action and explain the results. When presenting information, such as committee reports, state the purpose of the committee, its goals, and the results it's achieved. Don't take shortcuts or speak in jargon - either of these reduces the usefulness of the information.

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7. Highlight volunteers and accomplishments. Finally, use the annual meeting to inform homeowners of association activities in a manner that is loud, clear, and celebratory. Take charge by giving a "State of the Association" report. You don't need to rehash every thought and action from the past year, just highlight the most significant activities and actions. Recognize the efforts of volunteers by mentioning their names. Discuss how a particular decision will benefit the association. When you share this type of information, it also makes it easier to field questions from the members. Many of their questions will already be answered, and they'll know that the board is in control.

Annual meetings are important to associations and to homeowners. While there is business to be conducted, boards and management should not miss the opportunity to educate and inform this unique gathering of homeowners. Use the annual meeting to discuss specific actions taken by the board and issues facing the association in the future. And, of course, use the annual meeting to celebrate the association's success.

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