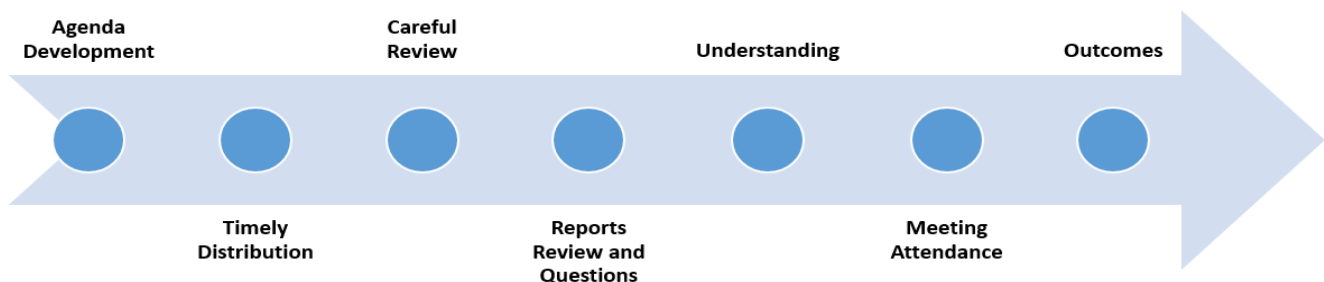




Got the Agenda – Now What?

Bob Harris, CAE



The purpose of an agenda is to ensure a meeting will be conducted in an orderly manner and discussions will lead to results. With an agenda, conversations stay on track and the meeting should end on time.

The agenda is prepared in advance through collaboration of the chief elected officer and the chief staff person (executive director). With sufficient timing, it is distributed well before the meeting with supporting information. For quarterly meetings, directors

might receive it 30 days ahead; for monthly meetings one might expect it 7 to 10 days in advance.

Upon Receipt

What directors do upon receipt of the agenda to prepare for the meeting will impact discussions and outcomes.

The agenda is a vital board tool. From its development to execution at the meeting, it has value. Directors who are unfamiliar with how to use the agenda may simply save it, add it to a folder or

read it the first time when they arrive at the meeting.

The executive director or board chief elected officer should communicate meeting expectations from the start. To guide directors, consider these applications upon receipt of the agenda. Make “agenda management” a part of new director orientation.

Date and Meeting Location

– Most agendas include the meeting date, time frame and location. Check to be certain nothing has changed since the meeting was

originally calendared. Make travel arrangements or determine if attendance is allowed via conference call. Your attendance does make a difference.

Content – An agenda will identify the substantive topics that need the attention of the board. In most cases it will identify priorities as well as goals and strategies from the organization's strategic plan. Review the agenda to determine approaching concerns and discussions.

Questions – Upon early receipt of the agenda there is time to ask questions BEFORE the meeting. A director may want to query why something is on the agenda or ask for supporting reports. Why enter a meeting with questions that could have been answered earlier?

Homework – The agenda may jog one's memory about an assignment or commitment. Use the advance notice to identify assignments that may need to be completed before the meeting convenes.

Additions – Most organizations have a protocol for adding items to an agenda. Be sure to have knowledge of when and the proper channels if items can be added. Nobody

appreciates a director arriving at the meeting and adding surprise topics.
Reports – Most agendas reference reports that should be read before the meeting. Many agendas include access to a board portal, Dropbox, or attachments. Make time to read the documents before the meeting. Nothing is more disheartening than a director who arrives and opens the agenda packet for the first time as the meeting convenes. Many organizations use a "consent agenda" to cover the non-controversial, information-only reports; these require advance reading.

Due Diligence – A fiduciary role of directors is duty of care or due diligence. Board members should ask questions. Why are certain agenda items included? What research has been conducted? What impact will the item have on the organization? Should an attorney or accountant be involved? Are sufficient resources available? How will performance be measured?

Copies – Many organizations send the agenda and supporting materials electronically, expecting directors to print the agenda and bring the attachments. Don't make an

assumption that copies will be available.

Strategic Plan – Consider how the agenda incorporates the organization's strategic plan, including mission and goals. How do the topics advance the mission and elements of the plan?

Values – Many organizations have values. These may include the guiding principles of transparency, diversity, innovation and integrity, for example. Consider how these values might frame discussions and decisions at the upcoming meeting.

Protocols – Agendas may also be used as a means to disclose conflicts of interest and notice to avoid antitrust statements. The organization's mission statement is often included on the agenda.

In summary, the agenda is a tool to use before and at the meeting. **To be an effective leader, preparations for the meeting should begin as soon as the agenda is received.** The board will recognize those directors who did not take seriously their fiduciary responsibilities.

Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates for associations and chambers at www.nonprofitcenter.com
[2016] bob@rchcae.com