

## **When Guests Attend Board Meeting**

Bob Harris, CAE

Board meetings are called for the purpose of governance in accordance with the bylaws, policies and state law. They require a quorum of the directors and the support of staff.

What do you do when guests attend?

Some organizations encourage members to attend. Others are surprised to see stakeholders or persons with opinions sitting at the board table.

### **Room Set Up**

Organizations expecting guests often set up a gallery for observers. The intent is to be sure guests are not interrupting or holding side bar conversations during the meeting. When only a few guests attend, they might be seated at the board table *apart* from those who have a vote.

**What do you do when you have a gallery of guests?**

Some guests may think they have a “right” to express their opinions, ask questions or even vote. They may need guidance.

Guests should understand they don’t have the floor or the right vote. They are expected to respect the same protocols as the board:

- ☐ Discussions and documents are treated in confidence.
- ☐ The chief elected officer is the spokesperson, and lines of communication have been established.
- ☐ An agenda guides the discussion; new ideas might be recognized under New Business if time allows.
- ☐ The board is expected to comply with all laws and governing documents; the same is required of guests.
- ☐ Guests should understand that the board may need to go into executive session with only board members in the room.
- ☐ The board chair will recognize persons by name before they are asked to speak.

### **Notice**

When guests attend, consider a sign-in sheet or guest appearance card. The purpose is to recognize and introduce them to meeting protocols.

The organization may adopt a policy, for example:

Meetings of the Board of Directors are open to members in good standing who wish to listen and observe proceedings. Members are asked to contact the board's chairman or the executive director to report their intent to attend the meeting and particular interests.

Guests (members) are asked to respect the fact that directors have an agenda to discuss and

there may not be time for new business. Guests will be introduced at the start of the meeting and asked to sit in an area apart from voting directors, allowing directors to sit together, converse and vote.

While guests may not introduce new topics or

speak spontaneously during the general business, they may be called upon under "New Business" to communicate their interests. If there are a number of guests wanting to talk, it may be necessary to set time limits for speaking.

At times the Board may go into Executive Session (closed door), and excuse all visitors from the meeting. Guests understand that all discussions and documents are to be treated with confidentiality and that the official spokesperson for the board is the chief elected officer or his or her designee.

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**Note:** Bob Harris, CAE, conducts board training and facilitates strategic planning. His website provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofit.center.com](http://www.nonprofit.center.com).

#### **Guest Attendance Policy Card**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_