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Sign In at Board and Committee Meetings

Bob Harris, CAE

The board secretary said, “I’m passing around a sheet of notebook paper, please sign it for our records.”

While signing in may not be a requirement, it is a good practice. Collecting signatures serves multiple purposes, including risk avoidance.

Rather than a blank sheet of paper, create a template that works for board and committee meetings. Members of the board and committees should sign as well as all guests.

Chuck Michaels, CAE and CEO at the Pensacola Association of REALTORS said, “There are a number of components that contribute to successful meetings. The sign-in sheet underscores the importance of the mission for attendee while protecting the interests of the association.”

The act of signing will improve awareness of the purpose of the meeting as well as facilitate risk awareness. Keep the document short, preferably a single page with room for signatures and some important reminders.

Vicki Farmer, IOM, CAE and CEO at the Arkansas Optometric Association offers, “Adding reminders about confidentiality, antitrust, and conflicts of interest to our sign-in sheets at board meetings sets the tone for professionalism and accountability for our board members. Including the mission statement is a great reminder to stay focused on the big picture.”

There are six elements of a carefully crafted sign-in sheet. The same form can be used for board and committee meetings.

Header – Include the name of the organization, meeting name and date. A record retention schedule might suggest keeping the completed form for seven years (check with legal and accounting counsel.)

Signatures – Some forms provide a space for the printed name, signature and date.

Multi-purpose sign in sheet to record attendance, promote the mission statement, and increase awareness of antitrust, conflicts and confidentiality. (Sample for adaptation.)

Meeting Sign-In Sheet

Meeting Date _____ Location _____

ATTENDEES SIGNATURES REQUIRED

ANTITRUST AVOIDANCE

Meeting attendees are reminded that state and federal laws prohibit the exchange of information among competitors regarding matters pertaining to price, refusals to deal, market division, tying relationships and other topics which might infringe upon antitrust regulations, and that no such exchange or discussion will be tolerated during this meeting. These guidelines apply not only to the formal meeting sessions, but to informal discussions during breaks, meals or social gatherings.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There is a fiduciary duty to disclose any conflict or potential conflict of interest at the meeting. Should a conflict arise, please inform the chief elected officer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Meeting discussions and handouts are for the purpose of discussion and deliberation. Please respect confidentiality after the meeting and recognize that the chief elected officer is the spokesperson for the board unless otherwise specifically indicated.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the organization is to advance and protect.....[insert your mission statement.]

Confidentiality – Attendees must understand that discussions and documents are to be treated with confidentiality. The meetings should be a safe place for discussions without fear that information will be shared inappropriately. This also reinforces that the meeting chair or chief elected officer acts as spokesperson for the organization, not individuals attending the meeting.

Mission – If it's a board meeting, include the mission on the sign-in sheet to remind everyone of the organization's purpose for existence. At committee meetings, include the purpose of the committee. The mission should frame all discussions at the meeting.

Antitrust – When any two persons in related businesses collude on price fixing, bid rigging or boycotting, for example, there may be state and federal antitrust law violations. In 2009 the FTC suggested all trade associations have a measure in place to avoid antitrust violations. Fines can reach up to \$10 million.

Conflicts – The IRS suggests board members annually disclose conflicts of interest. It is expected that an association policy exists and the IRS Form 990 asks, "Did the organization regularly and consistently monitor compliance with the policy?"

Each element of a sign in sheet has a purpose. Create a template for use at all board and committee meetings. Directors will be reminded of their duties and the document will verify that policies were understood.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provided free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.

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