Common Complaints

- Not showing up for board meetings
- Not participating fully if they do come
- Not giving generously themselves
- Not asking leadership questions at meetings
- Not being good ambassadors or fundraisers
- Not showing up for organizational events
- Not following through on commitments

These behaviors stem from systems issues
One of those systemic barriers is how we shape meetings

Picture Your Agenda

Most Agendas
- Too much one-way communication (reporting)
- Too much talking about the past
- Too much committee work at board meetings
My list of ingredients for a kick-ass board meeting

Elements of a great meeting

• Offer opportunities to build community
  - share food
  - answer a question during introductions

Elements of a great meeting

Helping leaders feel connected to one another increases accountability
Elements of a great meeting

- Offer opportunities to build community
- Create opportunities to re-inspire people about the mission

Asking board members to share stories about the impact of your mission re-inspires them, and equips them to represent you powerfully in the community

Elements of a great meeting

- Offer opportunities to build community
- Create opportunities to re-inspire people about the mission
- Use a consent agenda
Elements of a great meeting

*Consent agendas remove reports about the past and focus board conversations on the future*

Ways to ensure accountability

- Embed something surprising in reports
- Give pop quizzes from time to time
- Send reports through a system that tracks who opens them
- Have responsible leaders ask others to join them by arriving prepared to lead, based on what they read ahead of time

Elements of a great meeting

*Employing consent agendas engages the whole board and focuses attention on leading into the future*
Elements of a great meeting

- Offer opportunities to build community
- Create opportunities to re-inspire people about the mission
- Use a consent agenda
- Help board members understand the field you’re in by offering context at each meeting

Topics for Board Education

- What does the latest research tell us about how we should be addressing the issue?
- What are other organizations with similar missions discovering as they do their work?
- How are economic or demographic shifts in the community affecting our work?
- How will proposed/new legislation affect our work?
- What have we learned from recent articles or conferences or blog posts?

Elements of a great meeting

**Offering relevant news and data about the field we’re in helps board members make more informed and strategic decisions**
Elements of a great meeting

And it offers them interesting items to share with others as they talk about the organization in the community.

Take a moment...

...to think about what you wish YOUR board knew or understood about the context within which your organization works.

Jot down a couple of ideas.

Elements of a great meeting

- Offer opportunities to build community
- Create opportunities to re-inspire people about the mission
- Use a consent agenda
- Help board members understand the field you’re in by offering context at each meeting
- Build trustees’ skills by incorporating training about governance in every meeting
People complain:

- Our board members don’t know how to read the financial statements, so they’re always asking stupid questions about the budget.
- Our board members don’t know how to talk with legislators or advocate on our behalf.
- Our board members don’t know how to work a room when they’re representing us at events.
- Our board members don’t know how to ask compellingly for money, or sponsorship, or in-kind gifts, or anything!

Elements of a great meeting

**Integrating brief training modules into each or every other board meeting ensures that all of your leaders are equipped to be competent, responsible, powerful and effective governors.**

Imagine that the first five ingredients take 30 minutes total:

- Build community
- Remind people about the mission / impact
- Vote on the consent agenda
- Educate the board about the field OR
- Train the board on governance skills
Elements of a great meeting

That leaves a good hour to have a deep, meaty, satisfying conversation about governance!

About What?

About your strategic priorities!

Could your board tell me your organization’s top three priorities?
Why Not?

• There aren’t any
• There are too many (it’s an operations plan)
• They didn’t create them
• No one’s using them to shape your work

Make sure...

• ...your board is engaged in setting your strategic goals,
• and then use them to drive your agendas at every meeting

Governance as Leadership

Research shows there are three modes boards operate in:

1) Fiduciary
2) Strategic
3) Generative
Roles & Responsibilities

- In Fiduciary, their responsibility is **Oversight**
- In Strategic, their responsibility is **Foresight**
- In Generative, their responsibility is **Insight**

What does each mode look like?

- Fiduciary, heads down, pens out, looking at tiny type
- Strategic, sitting at a table, looking at one another, discussing the future of the organization
- Generative, leaning back with their hands behind their heads, asking: “What would happen if we thought of it THIS way?”
We usually...

... start with fiduciary and spend so much time there, we never get to generative.

We need to START with generative, then set strategic goals to achieve the dream, then make sure the organization’s ducks are in a row to get there smoothly.

Elements of a great meeting

Creating opportunities for strategic and generative conversations engages board members, uses all the gifts they have to offer, and makes them want to work hard to bring their dreams to life.

Beware!

• One board member might be discussing a fiduciary issue, while another is considering a strategic posture, while yet another is asking a generative question.

• Know which conversation you’re having!
Make sure...

... you’re creating opportunities for your board to operate in all three modes

Engaging in Governance

• What conversations do you want your board to engage in?
• How could you tee up those conversations to elicit rich, informed discussions?
• What will you do to make room in your agendas for deeper conversations about important things?
• Who will you enlist to help advocate for this?

Close Each Meeting Well

• Go around the table and ask each leader to share
  - one key take-away that made it worth attending, and
  - one thing they commit to do to ensure progress is made between this meeting and the next one. (keep track!)
• Invite them to fill out a quick evaluation of the meeting, e.g.,
  - did you feel prepared for the conversations we had?
  - did you feel like you were able to contribute?
  - did you learn anything that will help you lead better?
  - what could we do to improve future meetings?
• Make sure minutes are distributed immediately afterward, with action steps and names highlighted in red!
Next Steps

- Companion worksheets
- Helpful resources: [www.susanhowlett.com](http://www.susanhowlett.com)
  - how to deal with food at board meetings
  - questions to ask during introductions
  - more on consent agendas
  - governance topics others have addressed

* Boards on Fire! Book by Susan Howlett

Questions?

Thanks for joining us!
Good luck!