

TEN QUICK WAYS TO IMPROVE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETINGS (adapted from the Board Cafe by Jan Masaoka)

1. Name tags or tents for everyone, every meeting. It's embarrassing to have seen people at several meetings and wonder what their names are and later it's REALLY hard to admit you don't know their names. (Many of you do name cards already.)
2. Post an acronym chart. Make a poster of frequently used external and internal acronyms and post it on the wall at each meeting. Even though there is a hand out in the orientation notebook, it is often not handy.
3. Write an "anticipated action" for each agenda item. For example: "Finance Committee - report, brief questions and answers -no action needed"; "Nominating committee - report, form committee and create list of possible names"; or "Budget report - approve final budget to send to county."
4. Make sure that each person says at least one thing at every council meeting. This is the chair's responsibility but everyone should help. "Joe, I was wondering what you thought of this issue." "Jill, you had some good points at the last meeting. Are there issues here we aren't thinking about?"
5. No one-way communication from staff. If you have a regular COA report or program report, be sure presentations need a response from the council. Ask a few questions at the end of the report. If not, put it in writing in the board packet and just ask if there are any questions.
6. Don't include committee reports on the agenda just to make the committees feel worthwhile. If a committee has done work but doesn't need it discussed, put the committee report in the board packet. (And then in the meeting be sure to recognize the committee's good work and refer people to the written report.) Another option is to schedule committee reports in the context of the main discussion. For example, if there is a discussion planned on attracting and retaining staff, reports from the Finance Committee and the Personnel Committee may be appropriate.
7. Note to the council chair and the COA: What are the two most important matters facing the organization – economic downturn, changes in government funding, public awareness, a competitor organization, demographic changes in the county? Is one of these matters on every board agenda?
8. Encourage "dumb" questions, respectful dissent and authentic disagreements. Find a chance to be encouraging at every meeting: "Sylvia, I'm glad you asked that question. I didn't know the answer either."

"Duane, I appreciate the fact that you disagreed with me in that last discussion. Even though you didn't convince me, your comment helped make the discussion much more valuable."

9. Make sure the room is comfortable! Not too hot or cold or crowded. Offer beverages and something light to eat such as cookies or fruit.
10. Adjourn on time, or agree to stay later. Twenty minutes before the scheduled end of the meeting, the chair should ask whether the group wants to stay later: "If we continue this very interesting discussion, we will have to stay fifteen extra minutes to hear the recommendation on the budget issue. Can everyone stay that long, or should we end this discussion and move to that one immediately?"