



# Preparing for Effective Board Meetings

## Organizational Leadership Briefs for RDO Executive Directors

This brief is part of the seven-part series *On the Road to Success: Organizational Leadership Briefs for Executive Directors*.

These briefs cover a wide range of issues important to RDO senior leadership, including:

- Creating Relevance in Your Region
- Building and Nurturing Relationships
- Developing Revenue Strategies
- Doing More with Less
- Executive Director Qualifications
- Financial Reporting
- Preparing for Effective Board Meetings

The full set is available online at: [www.nado.org/leadershipbriefs](http://www.nado.org/leadershipbriefs)

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Effectively leading a regional development organization requires an educated, engaged, and committed board of directors. Sometimes organizations diminish the impact their board could make by failing to recognize the importance of structuring a meeting that provides clear and concise information and opportunities for dialogue.

There are a host of strategies that can enable strong and impactful organizations get great value from their board members while at the same time recognizing and respecting their time commitment to the organization.

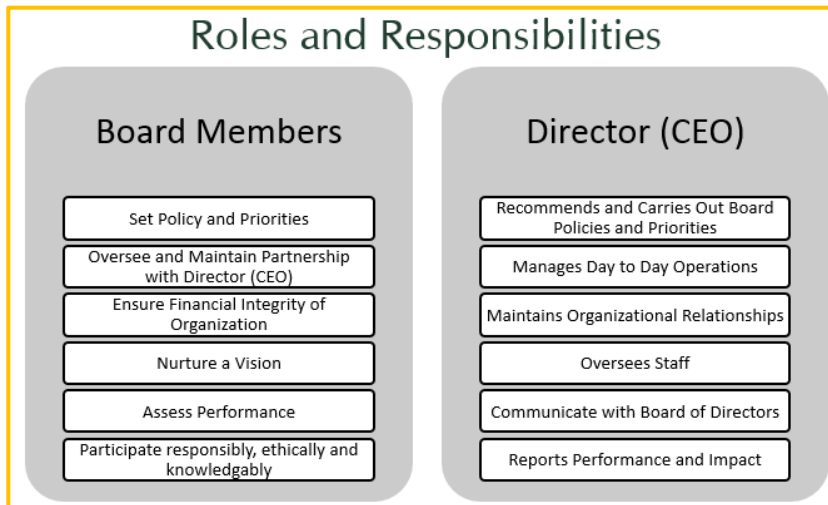
Below is a compilation of best practices, tips, techniques, and strategies designed to help effectively run a board meeting.

### BOARD MEETING TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

- Set the meeting at the most convenient date and time for your members to meet, not just what works best for you or what has always been done.
- Meet with your chairperson in advance to set the agenda and discuss agenda items.
- Develop an agenda and stick to it.
- Respect members' time by starting and ending the meeting on time.
- Provide ample notice for the meeting date time and location to encourage full participation by the board.
- Send board packets out a week in advance of the meeting with an agenda, minutes, financials, policies, action items, and reports.
- Have at a minimum coffee, water, and light refreshments.
- Arrange the room so members are facing one another to promote good dialogue.

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- Make sure you have a PA system, if necessary.
- Use A/V as needed, but don't overdo the PowerPoint presentations.
- Control the room temperature and anticipate the impact of a large crowd.
- Allow the chairperson to run the meetings and let him or her to defer to the director for additional information.
- Provide the chairperson with an annotated agenda with key information about each topic. The organization should strive to make the chairperson look competent about the subject matters.
- Know where the director and the staff should sit during the meeting.
- Ensure that staff understand whether and when their active participation in dialogue is appropriate.
- The director should personally greet the board members when they arrive.
- If the organization has a large board with unfamiliar members, prepare name tents or name badges.
- Introductions of board members can be appropriate; however, manage the amount of time this may take.
- If assigning seats for the board members, know any personality conflicts that may exist.
- Don't overdress for board meetings. Professional attire should be worn but recognize the culture of the region.
- Be prepared to accommodate the press and the public.
- The director should always be prepared to offer a recommendation. After all, that is what they are paying the director for.
- Provide meeting content that is of value to the members. Meetings just for the sake of having a meeting deters attendance.



- Address board members by their title, not their first name.
- Correctly pronounce the names of board members.
- Turn off your cell phone during the meeting.
- Avoid passing out papers during the meeting. It is best to have them at the table or send out in the meeting packet in advance of the meeting.
- Use colored paper for different topics to manage handouts for quick reference.
- Avoid using acronyms with the board.
- Know the organization's by-laws and Robert's Rules of Order.
- Use committees as appropriate and beneficial

to streamline discussion and decision-making.

- Always be prepared for the meeting, anticipate questions, and prepare for the unexpected.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOARD MEMBERS

Working for, and with, a board of directors requires the director to build trusting relationships with the board members. However, building relationships with board members can be challenging and tricky. Missteps in this area can undermine the ability of the director to lead and blemish the reputation of the organization.

Here are a few best practices for developing and maintaining relationships with board members:

### Do's

- Learn all you can about your members—spouse's name, children, occupation, etc.
- Remember important events such as election cycles and years in office.
- Communicate with your members between meetings using email, handwritten letters, phone calls, or visits.

- Invest time in your members because you are asking them to invest time in you and your organization.
- Be consistent in all your communication and tell all board members the same thing. Don't gossip.
- Address board members by their title and last name. It's a sign of reverence and respect. To get respect you need to give respect.
- Encourage diverse voices on your board and encourage youth participation where appropriate.

*Successful, impactful organizations share a common feature—they have a board of directors that is engaged, understands their role, and contributes their talents and expertise to the success of the organization*

*The author wishes to recognize trusted friends and colleagues who have served as guides and mentors —and to which the authorship of this list belongs.*

### **Don'ts**

- Avoid personal relationships with members.
- Don't ignore phone calls or emails from board members.
- Don't get involved with politics and elections.
- Don't pretend to have all the answers.
- Don't give lengthy technical or detailed responses to a question - be concise and informative.
- Don't be defensive, and accept constructive criticism.
- Don't only talk to your members about activities. Reinforce the mission, purpose, and strategic objectives of the organization.