LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOPICS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

The Organized Agenda: A Vital Tool for Efficient Meetings

A well-prepared and organized agenda is an important tool for helping groups hold orderly, efficient meetings. An organized agenda is not thrown together in a few minutes. Thought and planning are necessary to develop an agenda that provides meaningful information but does not become a lengthy narrative document. In addition, a carefully prepared agenda can influence the outcome of a meeting.

Tradition, policy, or law may determine the form of an agenda. Many local government bodies have a "standard" agenda on file. Several samples of agenda formats are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

A meeting agenda may be relatively brief and sketchy or longer and more informative. No matter its form, a good agenda helps members prepare for the meeting, and during the meeting, it helps participants follow the order of business and provides a place to take notes.

The following steps are essential to developing a good meeting agenda.

- Determine the level of attention appropriate for each agenda item. Questions to consider include these: Will an announcement be sufficient? Will discussion be in order? Will a vote be required?

- Carefully consider the order of topics on the agenda. It is important to plan how much time to allocate for each agenda item, particularly if the group has specific start and end times. List those items that require immediate attention first, in case time runs short.

- Indicate on the agenda which group member is responsible for each agenda item, what outcome is needed or possible, and any background information that will help members understand the issues involved.

The Illinois Open Meetings Act requires that an agenda be posted at the office of the public body or at the meeting site 48 hours prior to the meeting.

Consent Agenda

One way to streamline meeting procedures is to adopt the use of a *consent* agenda. The consent agenda, also called a consent calendar, allows groups to take care of routine business items in one action. Those items that are standard, noncontroversial, and/or self-explanatory can be consolidated and approved with one motion and vote. Examples of such items include previous meeting and committee meeting minutes, routine correspondence, office reports, and confirmation of actions required in the constitution.

Many groups are in the habit of discussing every topic on the agenda. Not all items require discussion or deliberation. Furthermore, some items may have been discussed and explained previously, and additional discussion will be repetitive and unnecessary. A consent agenda guards against unnecessary discussion, thus saving time for the more important issues. As the name implies, items on the consent agenda assume general agreement, or consensus, on the approval or vote.

For a consent agenda or calendar to be useful, the agenda and information for each item must be distributed to the group members well in advance of a meeting. This practice permits thorough examination of all agenda items without using valuable meeting time. The category "consent agenda" should be listed as an item on the meeting agenda, and each item covered by this category should be identified separately in the

document. If a group member has a question, it can be directed to the person responsible for that item prior to the meeting. If the question is not resolved to the member's satisfaction, the member may request, during the meeting, that the item be removed from the consent agenda and discussed separately before a vote.

Sources:

Chait, Richard, Thomas Holland, and Barbara Taylor. 1996. *Improving the Performance of Governing Boards.* Westport, Conn.: Oryx Press.

Davis, Melissa.1999. "Board Forum—Improving Board Performance: Consent Agendas." *Discovery YMCA* (Spring).

Sample Agendas

Sample 1

Name of Group
Date

Roll Call
Minutes
Treasurer's Report
Unfinished Business
New Business
Next Meeting

Sample 2

Name of Group
Location

Date   Start Time   End Time

Call to Order
Roll Call
Pledge(s)
Approval of Minutes
Announcements/Communications
Committee Reports – Person to Report – Outcome Desired
Unfinished Business
New Business
Wrap Up (next meeting, assignments, agenda items)

Sample 3

Name of Group
Date

Call to Order
Roll Call
Consent Agenda
     Last Meeting Minutes
     Financial Report
     Committee Minutes
     Correspondence
Old Business
New Business
Wrap Up and Adjourn