

Meeting the Challenges

Okay, so there will be times when boards and commissions can have challenges working effectively. But don't despair! Your board or commission can overcome these challenges! Here are some steps your board or commission can take to work more effectively and harmoniously.

▶ **Set Goals**

Establish goals annually. Go on a retreat and use a facilitator to help your board/commission identify its goals for the year. Engage in team building exercises during the retreat to solidify working relationships.

▶ **Continually Review and Update Goals**

Setting goals annually is not enough. Periodically review goals during meetings, monitor their progress, and revise as needed in order to maximize the effectiveness of your board/commission.

▶ **Use Committees Effectively**

Committees are ideal when wrestling with complex issues. Establishing a committee to develop specific expertise on a complex issue and to return with viable alternatives can be highly effective. Don't think that every board member must become an expert on every single issue. Using committees effectively is a good way to give board members meaningful roles, while at the same time developing expertise and a sound basis for decision-making.

▶ **Social Opportunities Help**

Getting to know somebody personally is the first step to understanding their perspective, and even developing friendships. Conflicts are rarer between people who understand each other and have engaged in friendly, social conversations. A board dinner or social event can serve as a way for board or commission members get to know each other better and develop mutual respect and amity.

▶ **Show Thanks**

Politeness and respect are the keys to effective relationships. Take a moment to recognize and thank a fellow board member when you appreciate the work they've done. Receiving that kind of recognition from a peer is a powerful team building ingredient.

▶ **Parliamentary Procedures**

You don't usually need to be a rigid parliamentarian, but it is helpful to use parliamentary procedures as a foundational guide during your meetings. Parliamentary procedures help ensure that order is maintained during the meeting, that the meeting's business is done in a timely manner, and that equity prevails so that all members (and the public) are heard. Ultimately, the will of the majority prevails, but parliamentary procedures ensure the integrity of how your board or commission gets to that majority decision. You'll do well to invest some time training *all* board/commission members in parliamentary procedures.

▶ **Disarm the Critic**

President Bill Clinton was expert at silencing his policy critics by charging them to find a better solution than his proposal. In other words, it wasn't enough to just complain. This is a good way to disarm the consistent critic. Another way is to focus on facts. Make factual information the basis for sound decision making by your board/commission, and equally require facts of critics to substantiate their criticism.

▶ **Communicate Effectively**

Communicating effectively is key to success for every human organization. Good communication can reduce ambiguity, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation. Feedback is fundamental to effective communication. Inviting feedback, from other members as well as the public, helps enhance chances for successful outcomes. And do use feedback objectively; if you don't intend to use feedback, don't ask for it! Also, don't rely too much on technology (e-mails)-it can lead to miscommunication.