

Planning Productive Meetings

As Jim Collins writes in *Good to Great*, building a great organization requires disciplined people, engaged in disciplined thought, executing disciplined actions. The simple procedure outlined below is not difficult to understand but does require a great deal of discipline to execute effectively.

Well-developed meeting agendas help boards prepare for meetings and guide them through the items that must be discussed. Time spent planning the agenda **and ensuring that the agenda and supporting materials are disseminated in a timely manner** will result in more effective and efficient meetings, the type reflective of a great organization.

By providing all board members a clear set of discussion topics and action items and the time they need to read support materials and develop questions, the board will find it is better able to fulfill its responsibility to oversee the school it governs. This can be accomplished by following the three steps outlined below.

STEP 1: Backwards Mapping

Based on your board's scheduled meeting dates, board chairs should backwards-map their calendars to add due dates for the following:

- Draft the agenda two weeks prior to the meeting date.
- Solicit input from board members and other stakeholders. Be sure to maintain a short and well-defined window (i.e., two or three days immediately following the drafting of the agenda).
- Schedule delivery of your board packet and final agenda seven days prior to your meeting.

STEP 2: Coordinate with School Leadership

- Direct the school leader, or whomever is responsible for drafting and distributing the board packets, to ensure that meetings and tasks planned in step 1 are scheduled for all involved and completed as planned.
- It must be communicated and modeled by the board chair that these three events in step 1 are as sacrosanct as the board meeting date and may not be rescheduled without the same level of difficulty as rescheduling a board meeting.
- Board chairs must follow up immediately if the board packet and final agenda ever misses the target of being disseminated seven days prior to the meeting.

STEP 3: Freeze the Agenda Once Distributed

- Be disciplined in holding school leadership and fellow board members accountable to the principle that **nothing may be added** to the agenda or packet once it has been distributed.
- Board members always should have the opportunity to add items to the agenda prior to the board approving the agenda at the meeting, but this should be reserved for "life or death" items that absolutely cannot be delayed until the following month.

When board members receive board packets with only minimal time to read the materials, they are likely to become frustrated and they are not able to be as effective in their role. The simple “trick” of setting the final, **FINAL**, due date for distribution of the packet one week in advance of the meeting date will result in more effective and efficient meetings.

Sample of Backwards Mapped Due Dates

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11 Board chair and school leader draft agenda Begin compiling board packet	12 Solicit input from other board members and stakeholders	13
14	15 Await input, continue gathering packet materials	16 Deadline for input, continue gathering packet materials	17 Continue gathering packet materials	18 Compile and distribute final board packet	19	20
21	22	23	24	25 Board Meeting	26	27
28	29	30	31			