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Acid Test Frames Board Discussion

Bob Harris, CAE

The board convenes to listen, discuss, and decide on organizational issues and programs. Suggesting will be offered by committees, directors with good ideas, and staff making recommendations. How is it decided what should come before the board?

Help directors address recommendations by providing a framework for discussion. Without framing, groupthink may take over, distractions occur (Squirrel!), or directors dive into committee and staff responsibilities.

Mission Statement

The mission statement is the principal framer of all discussions. Display the mission on the conference room wall, board table or printed on the meeting agenda. Some groups read the mission at the start of every meeting. Frequently ask, "How does this recommendation advance our mission?"

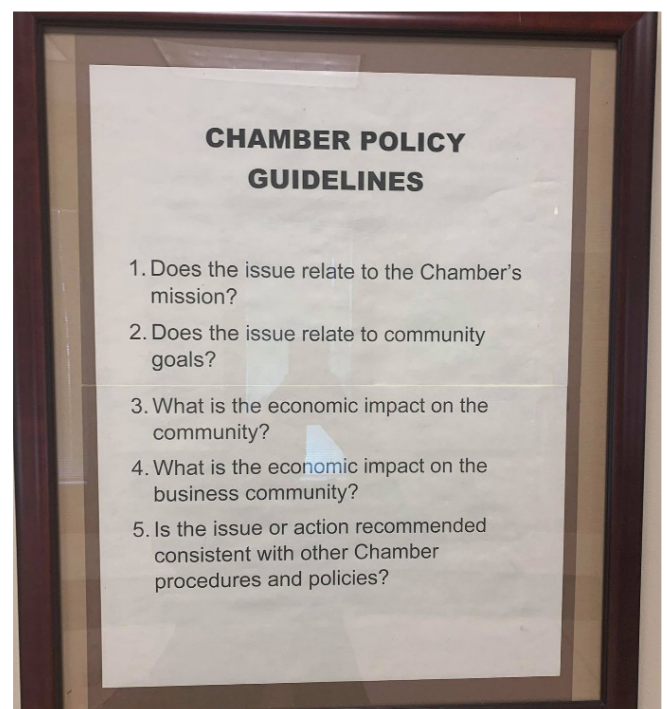
Frame the Disucssion

Develop an acid test for board discussions. The phrase "acid test" got its name from the historic use of acid to test metals for gold. If acid was applied to a metal and didn't corrode it, that meant it was real gold.

Some organizations have crafted standards against which to measure motions on the board table.

At the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce in Florida they developed five questions:

1. Does the issue relate to Chamber's mission?
2. Does the issue relate to community goals?
3. What is the economic impact on the community?
4. What is the economic impact on the business community?



5. Is the issue or action recommended, consistent with other chamber procedures and polies?

The Texas Medical Association used to display a sign on the board table to position discussions, also with five questions, with a preamble that read: To make best use of our resources and staff time, please consider these questions before you initiate a project:

1. What is the objective of this project?
2. Which goal(s) does this project support?
3. What resources will the project require?
4. What is the return-on-investment?
5. How will we measure success?

To develop your organization’s “acid test,” have the directors determine how they want to analyze the ideas that come before the board.

Guiding Principles

Many organizations have identified and adopted guiding principles. For example, the values of integrity, inclusion, and innovation should be integrated in discussions and decisions.

Strategic Plan

The plan is a multi-year roadmap for the board. As recommendations and motions are presented, directors should consider the impact on the strategic plan. Quite often new ideas are presented outside the parameters of the strategic plan, drawing resources from existing programs.

Budget

The annual budget was approved by the board. It makes sense that program expenditures or income generation should be compared against the budget. Especially for committee driven motions, be sure to ask, “How does this affect our resources?”

TEXAS MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
Physicians Caring for Texans

Good to Go?

TMA Project Checklist

To make the best use of TMA resources and staff time, please consider these questions before you initiate a project.

What is the objective of this project?
(membership growth, revenue generation, provide CME, other)

Which TMA goal(s) does this project support?

What resources will the project require?
(e.g., staff, financial, equipment)

What is the “return on investment”?
(value to members, efficiency improvement, etc.)

How will you measure success?
(surveys, income, other)

See the reverse side of this card for TMA’s vision, mission, and goals.

Altimeter

Finally, position discussions at the proper altitude. A board should be visionary and strategic. The opposite is a board into tactics and micro-management.

The board governs at 50,000-foot and above. Committees supplement the work of the board at 25,000-feet. The staff is charged with implementation at the 10,000-foot management level.

Discuss with the board how they want to frame and monitor their board time and discussions.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.