

Board & Administrator

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Use committees properly to save board time

The board should expect its committees to research and study an issue, and then come to the board with a recommendation. When used properly, committees can save the full board a great deal of time. Here are some tips on making your committees as effective as they can be.

1. Define the committee's purpose. Give the committee clear assignments and objectives so that its members understand exactly what their job is. Tip: Give each board committee a job description.

The Exeter Township School District Board in Reading, Pa., uses the following job description for its business functions committee.

"Business Functions Committee: Reviews and monitors issues related to the school district budget. Recommends adjustments and modifications to the school district's budget, and recommends cost-effective and efficient projects and initiatives for full school board consideration."

2. Give the committee a deadline. All committees should have a specific life span. If committees do not have deadlines, they can wander about and never really accomplish much.

3. Allow committees to meet only when they have work to do. Committees should

never meet without a purpose, and that means work to finish or reports to review. Tip: Do not allow your committees to meet without an agenda for each meeting.

4. Ask committee chairs to summarize information for the full board. A one- or two-page summary of the committee's work can be included in the board meeting packet. That is a good communication practice. Tip: Ask committees to verbally report at meetings only when they have a recommendation for the board. You will find a sample board committee report format on page 2.

5. Evaluate committee performance. Do this annually for standing board committees. The evaluation can tell the board whether the committee is needed any longer or give the board a chance to offer suggestions for improved committee work.

6. Don't undermine your committees. Boards often do this when they rehash committee work at board meetings by drilling down into the details of the committee's efforts and redoing its work. This defeats the purpose of the committee and creates unnecessary work for the full board. ■

Avoid marathon board meetings

The Arizona School Boards Association offers this tip for controlling board meeting length: "To be efficient and effective, long board meetings must be avoided. Points are to be made in as few words as possible; speeches at board meetings

will be minimal. If a board member believes s/he doesn't have enough information or has questions, either the superintendent or board chair is to be called before the meeting."

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