

Ease the Burden for Time-Strapped Board Members



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By: *Tim Ebner*

A few time management and meeting planning strategies can make board service more efficient and effective for your volunteer leaders.

Does it feel like your board is always in a time crunch? That's a common feeling among association boards and CEOs, says Carol Hamilton, principal at Grace Social Sector Consulting. One culprit: poorly executed meetings that take away from time that could be better spent on strategic discussions.

"Too often board meetings aren't constructed so well," says Hamilton. "There's a lot of time spent listening to reports or doing work that perhaps doesn't need to be done at [the] face-to-face meeting."

According to [a 2019 report from the National Association of Corporate Directors](#), 74 percent of board members predict they'll need more time to fulfill their leadership responsibilities in the future.

"I think that means there has to be an upfront conversation with your board about how to facilitate meetings and handle information efficiently and effectively," Hamilton says. "Boards that do this carve out time for strategic conversations but also have some space for learning—maybe it's about an issue in the field or how they [as a board] work together."

One mistake Hamilton sees associations make during board recruitment is downplaying the time commitment necessary for a volunteer to serve effectively in a board position.



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— Carol Hamilton, Grace Social Sector Consulting

"I've been the victim of this too," she says, regarding her own board service. "People will try to say, 'Oh, yes, it's just a couple of meetings each year.' But then you find out it's actually a lot more than what you first expected."

Honesty and transparency are key in recruiting board members, Hamilton says. Staff should provide specific information about when, where, and for how long the board meets and how members work together outside of scheduled meetings.

"At the same time, the board needs to look at the expectations it sets, to see if they fit the reality of peoples' lives," she says. "If they don't, maybe you switch things up and try hosting a meeting virtually. There are different ways to do work" that might help board members better manage the time required for board service.

Smart planning and information sharing before meetings are critical, she adds—but beware of information overload.

“One of the downsides of giving good information is that there’s a tendency to supply too much,” Hamilton says. “I think staff have to be more strategic about how they present information, so that it’s possible for [board members] to do their homework and come prepared to each meeting.”

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