

Engaging Board Members

Getting and keeping Board members involved is as important as the process to recruit some of the best individuals you can for your organizations. Most people learn by doing so whenever possible, include hands-on activities, live demonstrations, field trips, games, role-playing and other interactive activities as part of your Board meetings. Remember that variety is what keeps people interested.

Meet & Greet 5 – In an effort to get people up and moving, this activity lasts about 10 minutes. The first five minutes are spent meeting five different people in the room, spending just about 1 minute per individual. This one minute meeting includes a handshake, exchange of names, organization to which they belong and one other piece of introductory information. After meeting five different people, time is called and the last “pair” introduces their partner to the entire group.

Think, Pair, Share – If you need to consider some new ideas for your organization, this activity gets everyone involved quickly. Present the idea/issue to the entire group and ask individuals to **think** for two minutes about all the potential options/solutions, making notes for themselves as needed. Then ask participants to **pair** with one other person to discuss “best of the best” ideas they both have identified. This pair then **shares** with other smaller and/ or the entire group ideas that warrant further consideration.

Talking Circles – This one engages everyone in a quick round of sharing. It can be used as an introductory, discussion or summarizing activity. Ask participants to form two concentric circles - one inside the other. The outside circle is facing in and the inside circle is turned to the outside, so that everyone is facing a partner when both circles are formed. Give participants a topic to discuss for 1 minute with their “circle partner”. After this initial time, ask folks to move to their right one or two spaces; this will pair them with someone new to discuss the next topic or issue. Talking Circle can be used as a transition activity from one topic to another during a meeting or simply as a way to ask individuals to share next steps on a particular project or initiative.

Issues and Answers – When faced with a long list of issues to tackle, rather than attempting to address them as a whole group, post the problems around the room on large sheets of flip chart paper. Put only one issue on each sheet of flip chart paper. Ask all members to go to one of the issue sheets and discuss that problem with others drawn to that sheet. Encourage people to distribute themselves evenly, with at least three people per issue. Allow up to five minutes for the sub-groups to work to come up with possible solution/options to the problems posted. This first group makes notes about their collective recommendation on the top of the page. Ring a bell, and have participants move to another issue sheet. As the new group arrives, they read the

problem, the recommendations of previous group(s) and add their recommendations. Continue the group rotations until the groups arrive back at their original issue sheet .To end the process, have everyone walk by each sheet, read the solution and check off (colored dots can be used for this voting as well) the one or two ideas they think are best. When everyone is seated again, go through the ideas together and ask small work groups to create an action plan for the ideas on the various sheets.

That's Me - is a quick get-to-know who is in the group activity. As a meeting is beginning the group leader makes a statement like: "I've spent 30 minutes exercising today". Anyone who can relate and/or agree with the statement stands and says, "That's Me"! Time can be spent sharing among the people who are standing or you can move to the next statement and keep the activity going. This activity helps others get to know who else is in the group and some possible commonalities that can be explored during a break or at another time.

A Penny for Your Thoughts - If your meetings tend to be dominated by a few people try passing out 5 pennies to each meetings attendee. Attendees must "spend" a penny each time they talk. By the way, there is no borrowing of pennies allowed.

Agree/Disagree is an activity that can start with the group members making simple choices that they can easily agree or disagree with. An example might be "I prefer winter snow sports to warm weather water sports". The individuals who agree to that statement move to one side of the room, while the ones who disagree move to the opposite side of the room. The group can be lead into tougher decision making with questions that show individual preference that may lead to more in depth discussion. An example of a tougher question maybe: "Our board needs to discuss the Executive Director performance".

Window Paning technique can be used to help group members retain ideas quickly and with more permanence. Critical pieces of information are easier to retain by being able to recall the pictures that give the concept, rather than just presenting a traditional list of information. Keys for window paning include: no more than 9 boxes, use simple hand-sketched line drawings, allow people to fill in theirs as you do yours (aids retention). After presenting main points, give participants a blank windowpane. Let them draw their own icons and have them share with others. This serves as a great review of concepts – one they are likely to remember.

Brain Drain/Brain Storming – these activities are similar in that they encourage everyone to share their ideas without threat of judgment. Brain drain is all about gathering as many ideas as possible, in a short timeframe responding to a given topic or issue. Brain drain is most effective in small groups within the larger group, creating controlled competition. The competition encourages individuals to think beyond their usual way of thinking and come up with more creative ideas. After 5-7 minutes stop discussion and ask for a count of ideas from each group. Each group is given 1 more minute (don't repeat ideas) to continue finding new ideas. Stop again and count ideas. Give each group one more minute. Now add up all the ideas from all the groups and ask each group to report on its ideas. The next step is to sift through the ideas to find which ones are feasible alternatives.

Brainstorming is a useful tool you can use to develop highly creative solutions to a problem. During brainstorming sessions there should be no criticism of ideas, encourage free rein of creative ideas. This activity is designed to encourage participation by all group members. Define the problem you want solved clearly and lay out any criteria to be met. Select a recorder than ask all group members to offer ideas as rapidly as they can. To encourage participation take only one idea from each person as you move around the group, this is especially important if one or two people are dominating the idea sharing. Keep the session focused on the problem. Ensure that no one criticizes or evaluates ideas during the session. Ideas should only be evaluated at the end of the session. At the end of the session, evaluate ideas and prioritize so the group can proceed with decision making and action plan development.

Post-it Notes creator, Art Fry, must have realized the importance of participant-centered involvement on Boards. Post-it notes are great tools to generate ideas, share solutions and brighten up any meeting room. Post-it notes can be used in a variety of ways for introductory activities, to during-the-meeting discussions and in summarizing next steps at meetings end. Provide a stack for your Board members' next meeting and create some involvement yourself!

Trickle of Knowledge can generate a lot of pre-meeting discussion and sharing of information among Board members even before the main part of the meeting begins. Design a list of questions ~ true/false, fill in the blanks or completion ~ and have it available as board members are gathering. Ask participants to work independently to answer questions, and then pair with another person or two to determine correct answers. This activity will help insure folks are on the "same page" from a board members perspective.

Tossed Salad – Place an empty salad bowl on the table. Give out small slips of paper and ask people to write down one good idea per slip, putting the slips into the bowl. When people have finished, have someone toss the salad. Pass around the bowl so that each person can take out as many slips as he/she tossed in. Go around the table and have people share ideas before discussing and refining the most promising ones.

Ideas for Forming Groups

Another challenge for some organizations is determining how to get individuals into groups. Here are a couple of ideas to try at you next meeting.

Grouping Cards

Determine how many participants will be attending the session and how many different groups you may want throughout the session. In a group of 20, you may want an activity in four groups of five, another in five groups of four, etc. You can code these groups by using colored dots (red, green, blue and yellow) for four groups; different stickers in a common theme for groups of five and a number for different groups. Randomly place a number, colored dot and a sticker on a card for each participant and include with other meeting materials.

Puzzles

Use six-piece jigsaw puzzles or create your own from magazine pictures mounted on cardboard. Your own puzzles you can cut into desired shapes and number of pieces, depending on number of groups you want to create. Mix up pieces and give each participant one puzzle piece. When it is time to form groups, have participants find others who have pieces that make a completed puzzle.

Playing Cards

Use a deck of cards to designate groups. Use jacks, queens, kings and aces to create four groups of four. You could form four groups using suits: clubs, spades, diamonds and hearts. By adding additional number cards, you can form more groups or make larger groups. Shuffle the cards and have participants select a card at the beginning of your meeting. When time to form groups, have participants locate others with similar cards.



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