

Ten Tips to Turbo-Charge Your Trustees to Max. Performance



You'll find below ten low cost, handy steps that can be implemented at your Foundation without spending Foundation resources.

- 1) **AN INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TRUSTEE DUTIES** – For onboarding new Trustees or ensuring that current Trustees fully understand or are refreshed in their duties; the NY Attorney General's office publishes **RIGHT FROM THE START** and also **INTERNAL CONTROLS AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**. What better way that having a neutral, authoritative voice review the Duties of Care, Loyalty and Obedience in a clearly written dispassionate prose?
- 2) **START WITH THE TOUGH TOPICS** - At Board or Committee Meetings, address the toughest topics first, do not let them hide deep in the agenda. Everyone is freshest and most alert at the beginning of the meeting. The priority topics will also ensure that Trustees join the meeting at the start. Ensure that there is a published time limit for each agenda topic.
- 3) **PROPOSED MOTIONS SHOULD BE DRAFTED IN ADVANCE** - Draft proposed motions **BEFORE** the Trustee meeting. This ensures a thorough drafting, unrushed by time pressures. It also provides a document to speak to and use as a gauge. The meeting also does not devolve into a word-smithing exercise that eats up valuable Trustee time. If multiple motions are needed or pro- and con- motions, those also need to be shared with the Trustees before the meeting. (Ideally via a link to Cloud storage.)
- 4) **FUTURE TOPICS** - Provide a list of planned topics on a rolling 3 quarters in advance so that Trustees know when major recurring topics will be addressed. They can also anticipate what projects might be helpful to align with the timing of future meetings.
- 5) **TIMELY SCHEDULING OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS** - Require that periodic Committee meetings be scheduled at least ten days to 3 weeks before the actual Board meeting. This ensures that information distilled will be current and avoids a rush analysis in order to place items in the "Board Book" in preparation for an actual Board meeting.

6) **RECORD THE BOARD MEETINGS** - It helps resolve disputes about what was said and ensures the accuracy and timeliness of the Board minutes, even if they are written weeks after the actual Board meeting. (Recordings can be deleted after one year or on a pre-agreed basis.)

7) **FOUNDATION EMAILS** - Require all corporate information to be communicated on Foundation emails, which means that all Trustees are assigned foundation-domain email accounts. As a potential compromise, Trustees may continue to use their personal accounts, but ALL emails need to be cc'd to their foundation email accounts. (The latter is not best practice but may be a viable work around if not abused.)

8) **SOCIAL CAPITAL** All groups work best together if there is social capital built up. You should not solely rely on telephone meetings. There should be periodic meetings in person, even if only on an annual basis. The annual meeting or at least one meeting per year should be held at the site of the Foundation's location or activities.

9) **INSURANCE** – You absolutely need to review ALL your insurance coverage on an annual basis and in-depth. Risks and coverages change, and insurance gaps provide a potential for a major loss to a Foundation if not properly addressed. Trustees may want to focus on D & O coverage and be conversant with any “indemnity” coverages that the Foundation has agreed to provide, typically in its bylaws.

10) **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST POLICY**– There are few topics other than conflicts that can cause as much damage to a Foundation, either reputationally or financially. With the Internet, scandal spreads quickly AND permanently. Your policy must allow for Audit Committee review, especially in a case of first impression. Avoid any appearance of conflict. An outside law/audit firm review could help.

Want to learn more?

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