

FIVE HABITS OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC AGENCY BOARD MEMBERS

This tool is designed to help public agency boards and commissions clarify the expectations of appointed or elected members. This is a companion piece to LRI's related tool, "The Five Habits of Highly Effective Public Agency Boards."

Here are the five habits of highly effective public agency board members:

Habit 1. Act as Ambassadors

Highly effective board members serve as positive ambassadors for the organization, championing what it does and communicating their support. They share why they believe in the organization and are involved in it. They seek opportunities to communicate the organization's mission and highlight its work. They project a positive image of the organization to the public. They leverage their social media communications to share the organization's news. And they are quick to volunteer their time to serve the organization, whether it's volunteering for a committee or showing up at an event.

Habit 2. Be Diligent and Prepared

Highly effective board members show up to meetings on time and are prepared. They read materials in their board packets in advance and decide what questions or issues they want to raise at the board meeting. They effectively manage their schedules so they can best support the organization, including planning vacations around important events. They respond in a timely manner to emails and communications from board staff. They manage any conflicts of interest proactively.

Habit 3. Build Positive, Inclusive Relationships

Highly effective board members take the time to build positive relationships with other board members as well as the staff of the organization. They get to know their colleagues on a personal level and express appreciation for their contributions. They are quick to praise; slow to criticize. This is instrumental to building trust and lays the foundation for people to hear diverse viewpoints and find common ground.

Habit 4. Be Clear About Your Role

Highly effective board members understand that their fiduciary responsibilities don't include managing the organization. They let the CEO or Executive Director, together with staff, run the organization. They don't contact staff without copying the CEO. They recognize that they don't have individual power; their power is in the collective action of the board. When wearing their board member "hat," effective board members are also clear that their primary responsibility is to that organization, not to another organization that they may also represent.

Habit 5. Lead Through Inquiry

Highly effective board members are inclusive, seeking to understand everyone's point of view before coming to a conclusion. They practice the art of leading through inquiry. Rather than placing primacy on asserting their own views, they seek to understand their colleagues' views and to gather expert viewpoints before coming to their own conclusions. They find ways to actively participate in board meetings, where questions are asked, and issues are resolved through collaboration and mutual agreement.