



BOARD CHAIR'S GUIDE

A Guide for School Districts, Education Service District
and Community College Board Chairs



LEADERSHIP TO LIFT OUR PROMISE OF GRADUATION

December 2017

Dear Board Chair:

Congratulations! You've been chosen to lead your school, education service district or community college board as it strives to improve student achievement. You'll face challenges from budgeting and public testimony to reaching agreement and following parliamentary procedure. It's an important job - and OSBA is here to help.

This handbook will guide you through common issues you'll face as chair. I recommend it for everyone on your board because many issues you face as a board are governed by state and federal laws, which we've referenced in this guide.

I encourage you to email or call us with questions about public meetings, executive sessions and records procedures. Our legal and board development staff are experts in these fields!

Also, don't forget to read our helpful online Q&A about board meetings, "Ask OSBA", at www.osba.org.

We look forward to supporting you in this critical leadership role.



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The basic rule of any board of education is that no board member has authority beyond that exercised at the board table, unless authorized by the board. Only the board has the ability to set policy, negotiate contracts or make requests of the superintendent/president.

As a new board chair, you suddenly find that you are making decisions, and that “basic rule” is less defined. You will work closely with your superintendent/president to formulate agendas and assign committees, and your position as a spokesperson for the board gives you higher visibility.

Remember that your board has not elected you king or queen. You only have the authority granted by the board, and the board can still overrule you.

Your primary job as the board chair is to serve the board and public by providing leadership.

When legal questions arise, we strongly suggest that you seek advice. For members of the OSBA Property and Casualty Coverage for Education (PACE) insurance pool, PACE’s pre-loss attorneys specialize in helping members make legally sound decisions. They can be reached at 1-800-578-6722. OSBA’s Board Development and Policy staff can also assist with most questions on board meeting and governance process, procedures and policy.

The Role of the Board Chair

Board policy designates most duties and obligations of the chair, so it is important for any new board chair to review the policy for clarification on the chair's role. In reality, the chair has few statutory responsibilities.

OSBA suggests that the board identify the duties of board officers. This will help clarify responsibilities from the moment the chair and other officers take their positions.

Typical duties of the board chair:

- Presiding at all meetings of the board and performing all duties imposed by policy BCB; ORS 255.335; and ORS 332.040-057 for school districts, ORS 334.100 for ESDs, or ORS 341.283-290 for community colleges; as well as duties prescribed by other board policies and administrative rules
- Planning the board's agenda with the assistance of the vice chair and/or the superintendent/president
- Representing the district/community college and the board at official functions, except when this responsibility is delegated to others
- Being responsible for the orderly conduct of all board meetings
- Calling special meetings when required
- Appointing all committees and serving as an ex-officio member of those committees, unless otherwise ordered by the board
- Keeping the vice chair informed on all pertinent matters in case the chair is absent
- Signing any official documents that require the signature of the chair
- Assuming other duties authorized by the board

COMMUNICATION WITH THE BOARD AND PUBLIC

The primary role of the chair, other than to run meetings, is to be the voice of the board. The chair represents the collective will of the board to other community boards and commissions and to the public, including the media.

The authority to chair is conferred by all members of the board – therefore, the chair is no more powerful than any other board member. The chair can be overruled at any time by a simple majority vote of the board.

CHOOSING THE CHAIR

The selection of the board chair takes place during the organizational meeting each year.

- For school districts, this must take place no later than the next regular meeting following July 1. ORS 332.040.
- For ESDs, this meeting must take place during July. ORS 334.100.
- For community colleges, the meeting must take place after July 1. ORS 341.283.

A common issue for board members is how to select the chair. Sometimes the senior member of the board is chosen as chair or chairmanship rotates among board members. A board chair must be elected each year.

In school districts, a board member cannot serve as board chair for more than four consecutive years. ORS 332.040. ESD board chairs are limited to two consecutive years (ORS 334.100); there is no limit for community colleges.

OSBA encourages boards to closely examine individual board members' skills and abilities when selecting a chair because the chair has a unique role. The board member with the strongest leadership skills is often the most appropriate choice.

THE BOARD CHAIR AND THE SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT

The board chair and the superintendent/president collaborate on the meeting agenda and other operational issues facing the board.

The superintendent/president is a non-voting member of the district/community college leadership team and an employee of the board. The board holds the superintendent/president responsible for carrying out its policies within established guidelines and for informing board members about district/community college operations.

The board has a responsibility to work closely with the superintendent/president when outside pressures come to bear.

It is especially important for board chairs to have an open, working relationship with the superintendent/president. The superintendent/president needs to be able to discuss matters with the chair without fear of repercussions. Establishing a level of trust from the beginning will help this relationship work.

SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT AND BOARD CHAIR DIALOGUE

Keeping the lines of communication open between the board chair and the superintendent/president benefits the entire board and district/community college. Following are some suggested discussion topics that could help smooth the working relationship and clarify issues of mutual importance.

- How can we better support new board members? Whose role is it? To what extent can the board expect the superintendent/president to be involved? How does the board/superintendent/president team deal with a difficult board member? Whose responsibility is it?
- How should the team deal with public criticism or concerns about change? What is our expectation regarding the superintendent/president and board members supporting a final decision of the board?
- What are the responsibilities of the board and superintendent/president in sharing information? How much and what should be communicated to the board? Who is going to manage information in the age of technology? Should any controls exist? How will we know everyone on the team has the same information?
- How can we better organize the workload of the board to ensure that things get done? How do we plan the meeting agenda? Should the board adopt a calendar of business so things get done during transitions in personnel? Should board committees be used? If so, what are their respective functions?
- How and when should a superintendent/president job description and evaluations be developed to reflect results-oriented evaluation? Can the model be a catalyst for improved relations? What about board self-evaluations? How do the two blend or work together?
- Are we truly pursuing a policy versus an implementation role for the board? Are we encouraging the board to be involved at the vision and goal-setting level? Is the board working toward ends or means?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the board chair? What is the role of the superintendent/president in working with the board? How are they parallel? How can we prevent those roles from becoming a controlling power versus leadership service?

APPOINTING COMMITTEES

The board has the authority to appoint special committees. The entire board may also meet as a committee-of-the-whole. Committee-of-the-whole meetings, or work sessions, may be called by the chair or:

- For school districts, any three board members (ORS 332.045);
- For ESDs, by the board (334.100); or
- For community colleges, any four board members (ORS 341.283).

All meetings of special committees and committees-of-the-whole must be publicly announced, and the public is permitted to attend.

The function of special committees is deliberative and advisory fact-finding rather than legislative or administrative. Committees make recommendations directly to the board as a whole, and the board alone may take action.

It is important to remember that all board-appointed committees' meetings are subject to the same rules as other board of education meetings: legal notice, keeping of minutes, and compliance with public records laws dealing with public access.

THE BOARD CHAIR AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT

When the board chair speaks to an issue, the public and the media assume that the chair's statement is the opinion of the entire board. Consequently, board chairs must be careful and clear when commenting on any issue in public or to reporters; they must clarify whether they are speaking for the board or expressing their own opinion.

Any discussion by the chair with union leadership will be interpreted as official action. There is no such thing as an informal conversation with union leadership when you are board chair. Everything will be considered part of negotiations. When in doubt, ask for legal advice.

The Board Meeting

Most gatherings of the board of education are defined as meetings under the law, and bringing together members of the board to discuss district/community college business is subject to the Public Meetings Law (ORS 192.610-192.695). It is a major responsibility of the board chair to know the rules and ensure that the board follows them.

A board meeting occurs when a quorum is present to gather information or decide or deliberate on any public matter. The law specifies the following:

- All meetings of public governing bodies shall be conducted in public unless specifically exempted. ORS 192.630.
- No quorum of a governing body may meet in private to decide or deliberate toward a decision on any matters except those exempted by law. (Policy BD/BDA) ORS 192.630.

A quorum consists of the following:

- Three members of a five-member board
- Four members of a seven-member board
- Five members of a nine-member board

PROCEDURES

The rules of parliamentary procedure in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* often govern board meetings, except as otherwise provided by state law or board policy. (Policy BDD)

VOTING REQUIREMENTS

A majority of the members of the board (a quorum) must be present to legally conduct business. Again, a quorum consists of three members of a five-member board, four members of a seven-member board, or five members of a nine-member board. ORS 332.055 for school districts; ORS 334.100 for ESDs; ORS 341.283 for community colleges.

Affirmative votes by a majority of a board are required to transact business. Remember: It

takes a majority of the board to be a quorum; the same number must vote in the affirmative to pass a vote.

REGULAR MEETINGS

Oregon does not require a set number of board meetings. One regular board meeting should generally be held monthly at the district's/ community college's administrative headquarters or at the nearest practical location, with consideration given to persons with disabilities. *Regular* meetings are those meetings set at the July organizational meeting. *Special* meetings are any other meetings called throughout the year.

SPECIAL MEETINGS

Special meetings may be convened by common consent of all or a majority of the board members; or by the chair, upon request of:

- For school districts, any three board members (ORS 332.045);
- For ESDs, the board (334.100); or
- For community colleges, any four board members (ORS 341.283);

Special meetings are those meetings not on the calendar set by the board at the organizational meeting (usually held in July). Interested persons and local news media must receive written notice of the meeting at least 24 hours in advance. ORS 192.640.

Work sessions are generally special meetings in which the board meets but does not intend to take any action. Work sessions enable the board to gather information and discuss and review various aspects of an issue.

Emergency meetings are called only in the event of an actual emergency, and no business other than that related to the emergency can be discussed. Appropriate notice will be given to the public and the media, generally by email or phone. (Policy BDB) ORS 192.640.

EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

The board may meet in executive session to discuss subjects allowed by statute but may not take final action, except for specific instances pertaining to student matters. Executive sessions may be held during regular, special or emergency meetings for any reason permitted by law.

Members of the media may attend executive sessions, except in these specific instances: deliberations with persons conducting labor negotiations; expulsion hearings or those pertaining to confidential student medical records; and litigation involving the news media. (Policy BDC)

Content discussed in executive sessions is often considered confidential, but the media are allowed to report the proceedings unless the board requires that specific information not be disclosed, under ORS 192.660(4). The chair should specify what information is not to be disclosed, or the board may do so by motion. Under Oregon law, there is no sanction specified for media that defy any prohibition against disclosure of information in executive session.

A board may meet in executive session during a regular, special or emergency meeting to discuss certain matters. If a meeting will include an executive session, the notice must include the section and subsection of ORS 192.660 (listed reasons) or 332.061 (expulsion or medical records of a minor student) that authorize the executive session's purpose.

The board chair should also identify the section and subsection of the law authorizing executive session aloud at the meeting prior to going into the executive session. The state Attorney General's *Public Records and Meetings Manual* includes complete information about executive sessions, including a sample script for specifying what information is not to be disclosed by the media. It can be found at www.doj.state.or.us/public_records/manual/pages/index.aspx.

Boards may not meet in executive session to conduct the following business:

- Fill a vacancy in an elective office
- Fill a vacancy on any public committee, commission or other advisory group
- Consider general employment policies
- Discuss an employee's performance, unless that employee has been notified and

has been given the option of having the discussion held in public

- Hire the superintendent/president or any other employee if the vacancy has not been advertised, hiring procedures have not been adopted by the board, and there has been no opportunity for public input about the hiring

Purposes for which executive session may be called:

- To consider the employment of a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent. ORS 192.660(2)(a).
- To consider the dismissal or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or agent, unless he or she requests an open meeting. ORS 192.660(2)(b).
- To conduct deliberations with persons designated to carry on labor negotiations. ORS 192.660(2)(d).
- To conduct deliberations to negotiate real property transactions. ORS 192.660(2)(e).
- To consider records exempt by law from public inspection. ORS 192.660(2)(f).
- To consult with counsel concerning current or possible litigation. ORS 192.660(2)(h).
- To review and evaluate the performance of the chief executive officer or any other public officer, employee or staff member, unless that person requests an open hearing. ORS 192.660(2)(i).
- To consider matters relating to school safety or a plan that responds to safety threats made toward a school. ORS 192.660(2)(k).
- To conduct a hearing on the expulsion of a student or to review a student's confidential medical records. ORS 332.061(1).

Further information on executive session is available in OSBA's *Public Meetings Law, Board Meetings and Executive Sessions*.

MEETING NOTICE

The Public Meetings Law requires that public notice be given for all board meetings. ORS 192.640.

- Reasonable notice of time and place must be given for all regular board meetings.
- Twenty-four-hour notice is required for special meetings, and appropriate notice is required for emergency meetings.
- Executive session is generally an agenda item of a regular or special meeting; notice must cite the section and subsection of the statutory authorization for the executive session.
- Any meeting notice must list the principal subjects to be considered at the meeting.

OSBA has four recommendations about meeting notices:

- Make sure notice is given for all executive sessions. This is typically done by listing the executive session on the regular board meeting agenda or by issuing a meeting notice if the sole purpose of the meeting is for an executive session.
- If an unexpected event or topic arises during a regular board meeting – for instance, the need to review records that are exempt from public disclosure – the chair or presiding officer should schedule a special meeting that will include an executive session for a future date. The notice for the special meeting must be given at least 24 hours before the meeting and must include the statutory authority for going into executive session.
- When the need for an executive session arises after the regular board agenda has been published, but before a meeting, the executive session can be added to the meeting if the agenda can be changed in time to provide at least 24 hours' notice of the executive session.
- Do not automatically or routinely list an executive session on the regular meeting agenda. This can leave a bad impression with the public that you regularly meet in private.

Paid advertising to notify the public about board meetings is not required by law. You can publicize regular meetings by sending notices to local news media and to a mailing list of people who

have indicated they want to receive notice (e.g., committee members, parents, and community and business leaders), as well as posting information on the district/community college website. You must send notice to anyone who requests it.

BUILDING THE AGENDA

The agenda, prepared by the board chair and the superintendent/president, is the most important document at any board meeting. (Policy BDDC)

Arrange the agenda to most effectively manage meetings:

- **ESTABLISH A CONSENT AGENDA.** Items of routine business that require action but not necessarily discussion can be placed on a consent agenda and voted on in a block. If a board member wants to discuss an item, it will be pulled off the consent agenda and considered under its own motion.
- **SPECIFY PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS.** Although the law requires that the board meet and perform its duties in public, there is no legal requirement that the board accept public input at meetings. As boards consist of publicly elected individuals who are entrusted with public money, however, OSBA recommends that boards welcome comment from the public. Limiting public comment to 15 to 30 minutes at the beginning of a board meeting and/or placing a three-minute limit on each speaker is appropriate. Under certain circumstances it may be appropriate to allow longer speaking time, and speakers can be encouraged to submit written testimony as well.
- **LIMIT BOARD COMMENT.** The period on the agenda for board member comment and the time allotted to each board member to make comments may also have time limits.
- **CHALLENGE AGENDA ITEMS FOR THEIR IMPORTANCE.** In preparing the agenda, the board chair should always ask the following questions:
 - Does this item need to be here?
 - Is this board work or administrative work?
 - Do we have a policy on this and, if so, what does it say?

FOLLOWING THE AGENDA

The agenda delineates what needs to be accomplished in the meeting, the order in which it should be done and who is responsible for each action. The board chair should have the ability to observe and actively listen throughout the meeting, while staying focused on the agenda. If anyone interferes with the order of the meeting, it is the chair's responsibility to get the meeting back on track.

Remember that discussion should be limited to a specific topic (normally a motion on the floor) and that only one person may be recognized to speak at any given moment – that person being recognized by the chair. As each agenda item is completed, it is the chair's responsibility to move to the next item and not allow further discussion on a topic that has already been acted upon.

CONDUCTING THE MEETING

The board chair conducts the meeting. When the meeting is run well, the board will accomplish its business and end at a reasonable time. All members should have a role, and it is the responsibility of the chair to ensure that the items on the agenda are dealt with appropriately, in a way that encourages participation.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Most meetings follow the rules of parliamentary procedure, which allow the board to make decisions in an orderly manner.

It is the responsibility of all members of the board to address one item at a time, extend courtesy and fairness to all, let the majority rule, and guarantee the rights of the minority.

ROBERT'S RULES SIMPLIFIED

The chair's guide to running an effective meeting is *Robert's Rules of Order*. *Robert's Rules* specify that only one person may speak at a time and only after being recognized by the chair. When a person raises a hand, the chair must recognize the person before he or she can speak. Unless the agenda allows otherwise, the recognized speaker may only discuss a specific item on the agenda. While large-group rules would require a motion to be made prior to any discussion, small

groups sometimes need more flexibility. Most boards have adopted *Robert's Rules* modified for small boards.

The agenda might include a presentation to the board by staff. After the presentation, it is appropriate for the chair to request a motion be made and seconded before further discussion takes place. The chair should always recognize the person making the second, as well. Only then should he or she recognize a speaker, to discuss **only the motion on the floor**. The makers of the motion and the second have the right to speak first. Some boards allow discussion as people ask to be recognized, others alternate between those speaking for and against a motion. The board's policies should specify the board's preferences. When there is no motion, or after a vote is taken, it is time to move on. One phrase that the board chair should use regularly is, "In the absence of a motion, we will move to the next item on our agenda."

Motions follow two basic principles. Some motions affect the **order** of the meeting, while others generate the **substance** of the meeting. A number of motions are procedural; others help the board frame the decisions that necessitated a meeting in the first place.

There is a distinct hierarchy of motions, all designed to facilitate an orderly procession through the meeting. Motions can be **debatable**, allowing members of the board to ask questions or speak for or against the motion. In some cases, motions are **not debatable**. When a non-debatable motion is moved and seconded, the chair must call for an immediate vote.

Motions also follow an **order of precedence**. There is an order to which motions can be made, and in some cases, a motion would not be allowable because it is out of order. It is the chair's responsibility to know the order of precedence, and to govern the meeting accordingly. It is up to the chair to ensure that all motions are clear and make sense.

Gaining a full understanding of *Robert's Rules* can be a daunting task. Refer to OSBA's *Guide to Parliamentary Procedure* booklet for more information, and familiarize yourself with it. Remember that you can call or email OSBA if you have any questions related to running a meeting. See "OSBA Resources" at the end of this publication for contact information.

VOTING

The primary role of the board is to make decisions. A majority of the board must vote in the affirmative to pass a motion, regardless of the number of members present. Each member's vote on all motions is recorded in the minutes. (Policy BDD) ORS 192.650.

Board chairs in Oregon may make motions, second motions, discuss and vote on all issues. OSBA suggests that chairs view themselves as "servant leaders" who first encourage other members to make the motions, second and discuss them, but then step in and participate in each phase after others have had the opportunity. As locally elected members of small governing bodies, board chairs should not remove themselves from the process just because they are the chairs.

It is the chair's responsibility to ensure that the motion being voted on is clearly understood. The chair also has a responsibility to ensure that the process is not short-circuited by procedural errors. Remember that one of the goals of *Robert's Rules* is to protect the rights of the minority.

When debate ends or a motion to move the previous question has been made, seconded and passed by a two-thirds majority, it is time to vote. The chair should state the motion and, if necessary, explain the repercussions of the vote. Then the chair should call for those in favor of the vote, and record the number, then for those voting against, and finally for those wishing to abstain. After the vote is taken, the chair should state for the record whether the motion passes or fails, and the number of votes for each side. At that point there should be no further discussion on that motion.

The chair should check with the board secretary to make sure he or she has clearly recorded the motion and all the names associated with the vote. A simple pause, with a glance at the board secretary, and his or her nod may be all that is needed.

The chair should then move to the next item on the agenda.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The laws governing boards of education require that their work be done where the public can observe their actions. The law does not require the board to allow the public to speak before the board nor participate in board meetings. However, boards typically desire community involvement in the decision-making process. The board should have a process in place to hear from the community in a way that does not obstruct the ability of the board to conduct necessary business. Hot topics and controversial issues should be heard at a separately scheduled listening session designed for community input, encouraging all sides to be heard fully.

The public's involvement in board meetings can be limited to whatever the board believes is appropriate. OSBA suggests limiting discussion to a specific time on the agenda – possibly 15 to 30 minutes at the start of the meeting. It is also recommended that time limits be placed on each speaker; three minutes is reasonable. The key to making this work is being fair and consistent in the application of the time limit.

Most boards do not allow members of the public to speak during the regular part of the agenda. Board policies should spell out what is allowable for audience participation. If an occasion arises where the topic is an explosive one, the board chair must use strong leadership skills to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly.

PRESSURE GROUPS

On rare occasions, a hostile group may approach the board to comment on a decision that the board is considering or has just made. The chair should explain the board's procedure for handling public comment and that there is limited time on the agenda during which the public may address the board. The chair may ask if there is a spokesperson who can summarize the group's input.

Alternatively, depending on the situation, the board chair might ask the board to vote to suspend the rules and allow extra time for public comment. Be prepared for a long meeting, if this method of dealing with a hostile group is chosen. With serious issues, it might be wise to schedule a public hearing at a later time to allow everyone a chance to speak.

It is appropriate for board members to listen to public commenters and ask questions as needed. But it is the chair's responsibility to monitor such discussions to ensure they do not escalate into a heated debate. For those topics that appear to require more in-depth discussion, the chair may recommend that the board hold a listening session.

While the law does not allow you to require that members of the public register before attending a meeting, it can be helpful to have a speakers' list. It is best to announce a couple of names from the list, thus giving the first speaker notice that his or her time to speak is finite and giving the next speaker notice that he or she will be speaking soon.

PUBLIC RECORDS LAWS

Oregon's Public Records Laws govern what materials must be made available to the public and which may be withheld, as well as retention requirements.

Refer to OSBA's *Public Meetings Law, Board Meetings and Executive Sessions* for further information.

MINUTES

Boards and their committees are required to take minutes at all meetings. All minutes except those of an executive session should be available to the public within a reasonable time after the meeting. Minutes do not have to be a detailed discussion of who said what, but must give a true representation of all matters discussed at the meeting and the views of the participants.

Minutes should include the following information:

- All members of the board who were present
- All motions, proposals, resolutions, orders and measures proposed and their disposition
- The results of all votes and the vote of each member by name
- The substance of any discussion on any matter
- Any other information required by law (Policy BDDG); ORS 192.650

THE BOARD SECRETARY/ ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL

An administrative professional/board secretary provides the board with accurate records of meeting minutes, handles board correspondence and posts notices for all meetings. It is important that the board secretary is able to hear and accurately record motions and votes during the meeting. The board secretary can assist you with questions about parliamentary issues, public meetings and records requirements. Allowing the board secretary to alert you to procedural or clarity problems during the meeting can save the board future embarrassment.

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA AT A MEETING

The media are interested in what happens at your board meetings, and the media version of your board actions is what most people in your community see (or hear). Providing reporters with a press kit, including the agenda and any other pertinent information, is helpful.

Reporters have no more right to speak at your meeting than any other member of the public. Any questions should be deferred to a recess or when the meeting is adjourned.

HANDLING CORRESPONDENCE

Letters sent to the board through the board chair should be shared with other board members, but it is not appropriate to consume meeting time reading letters aloud. Copies of letters can be included in each board member's information packet and should be maintained by the board secretary in a board correspondence file as part of your district's/community college's public records.

HEARINGS

The board will hold public hearings as required by law. The board also can hold other hearings to gather ideas and opinions of the community on items of interest or to resolve questions or concerns of the board or community.

Leadership

Leadership styles vary and new board chairs will develop a style that works best for them. Talk to members of the board and the superintendent/president to find out what is going well and what needs improvement. Some board chairs hand out a simple evaluation sheet before a meeting. On it might be two questions:

1. What happened at this meeting that needs attention?
2. How can we make the meetings more effective?

Board members are encouraged to fill out the forms and give them to the chair whenever necessary. Board operations and the chair's leadership can also be part of a discussion during the board's self-evaluation.

Assuming the leadership role on the board can be especially difficult if the previous chair has served for many years. In particular, if the former chair remains on the board, other board members may defer to the former chair's judgment. The new chair's performance may be compared to that of his or her predecessor.

Communication is critical in fulfilling your new leadership role. Work to build a strong relationship with the superintendent/president and talk regularly to the former chair and other board members. Delegating some important responsibilities to the former chair will help you capitalize on his or her experience.

SHARING A COMMON VISION

The board chair should work to keep the board focused on the district's/community college's vision.

One important task of the chair is to have the board set board and district/community college goals annually. Some boards participate in a formal process like strategic planning, and others

identify a few priority areas and write goals to help guide the administration in its tasks.

It will be easier for your superintendent/president and the staff to meet the board's expectations if they have been clearly expressed by the board. The chair should do his or her best to see that goal-setting is done on a regular basis.

BOARD TRAINING

Most board members are serving in their first elected position and have little or no experience in public office. The chair should encourage board members to take advantage of professional development wherever possible.

OSBA encourages boards to set up a training process for new board members. During the orientation, provide them with materials, answer questions and help prepare them to face the myriad issues that boards face.

BUILDING CONSENSUS

The ability to get people with widely diverse opinions to agree on an issue is a skill that board chairs must develop. It takes active listening and an ability to put aside some of your own issues to be a consensus-builder. Being sensitive to board members who find themselves in the minority may be a challenge, but it is worth the effort.

The chair must use his or her authority to help move the business of the board along. Every board member has something to add to the board's collective wisdom, but sometimes personalities get in the way. It is up to the chair to try to bring board members to consensus and help a board member let go of his or her hurt feeling or defiance when the majority vote has gone the other way so that the board as a whole may be productive and do its job.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Here are some qualities that exemplify a good board chair:

- **COMFORTABLE WITH BEING IN CHARGE.** Leadership is an acquired art, not something that comes naturally to all people. A good chair needs to be comfortable with the extra responsibilities that the position brings, including public speaking, talking to the media, running meetings and encouraging other board members to work as a team.
- **LISTENER.** The chair needs to pay strict attention to everything that is said and respond accordingly. The chair must listen carefully to understand the consensus of the board.
- **HAS SENSE OF HUMOR.** Although the board is doing serious work, it shouldn't take itself too seriously. Often a sense of humor can diffuse conflict and keep people working together.
- **PUBLIC SPEAKER.** The board chair and the superintendent/president are the spokespersons for the school district/community college, which sometimes requires setting personal opinions aside.
- **RELATIONSHIP-BUILDER.** The board chair must maintain a good working relationship with the superintendent/president, other board members, staff, community members, media representatives and other elected officials.

DEALING WITH CRISIS

There will be times when crisis confronts your district/community college. Above all, don't panic. It is imperative that boards have a communications plan in place so that should a crisis occur, there is a plan to guide their actions. The communications plan should identify the spokesperson (there may be two, and one of them is usually the superintendent/president or the board chair), and board members should refer all calls to the spokesperson. In cases that may require legal action, the chair should meet with the superintendent/president and the district's/college's attorney before making a statement to the media.

During a crisis, members of the public will be anxious for information and the chair should respect their need to know. Much of their anxiety can be diffused when you calmly let them know:

- We are aware of the problem and are addressing it
- We are ensuring that students are safe
- We are following laws and policies in conjunction with law enforcement personnel
- A solution is forthcoming
- We'll get back to you as soon as we have more information
- These are the communication channels (e.g., Facebook, district/community college website) where the public can find more information as available

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

A reporter's primary job is to deliver news to the community. Your job as chair is to work with reporters to make sure the message the public receives is accurate. By building relationships with reporters and editors before a crisis arises, you can help ensure that your board and district/community college have an opportunity to tell your side of the story.

Reporters often write feature stories that are not strictly news, but offer excellent opportunities for you to inform the public about the good news in your district/community college.

Whether the news is negative or positive from your perspective, the media will fulfill their mission to inform the public, so you'll want to make sure the board's side of the issue is part of the story. Avoiding reporters usually won't kill stories, but it can ensure your position will be left out.

Your board's communications plan will be invaluable in both good and difficult times.

Some interview tips:

- Give yourself time to think when a reporter calls. Take a message, find out what the reporter wants and what the deadline is. Tell the reporter when you will call back. Take some time to think of your response before returning the call. Think of two or three main points you want to make about the issue and keep referring to them as you talk with the reporter.

- Don't say or write *anything* that you wouldn't want to see in the newspaper or hear on the air. You are a publicly elected official, and any statements you make (especially those that exist in social media) will be considered fair game by reporters.
- Be timely in your responses.
- Work *with* reporters; they will appreciate your assistance.
- Avoid educational jargon, acronyms and language that the average person may not know.
- Keep your answers short and to the point.
- Don't say "no comment." When there are situations you cannot discuss (personnel or legal issues, for example), explain to the reporter why you cannot discuss them.
- If you choose to go "off the record" when talking to a reporter, ensure that both you and the reporter have a clear understanding of what that means. Be specific about what point in the conversation you are going back "on the record." Understand that these terms are only as good as the reporter's word; he or she has no legal obligation to observe the ground rules.
- Be honest.
- If you don't know something, tell the reporter you will find out and call back with the information. Then do it.
- Call reporters with story ideas. It helps them do their job, and it's an important part of developing media relationships that can serve your district/community college well.

TIME/STRESS MANAGEMENT

Serving on a board of education is a volunteer effort that requires many hours of diligent work. Serving as board chair requires significantly more time and effort. Don't let the position of chairperson become so overwhelming that you neglect your family, employment and other interests. Learn how to say no and how to delegate work to other board members as appropriate.

Resources

OSBA RESOURCES

OSBA also publishes the following:

- *Boardsmanship for Oregon School District, Education Service District and Community College Board Members*
- *A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure*
- *Public Meetings Law, Board Meetings and Executive Sessions*
- *Budget Committee Handbook*

You can print publications online for free at www.osba.org. Click on the "My OSBA" tab, then "Member Resources."

OTHER RESOURCES

The *Attorney General's Public Records and Meetings Manual* is available from the Oregon Department of Justice: www.doj.state.or.us/public_records/manual/pages/index.aspx

OSBA SERVICES

The Oregon School Boards Association is your direct link to expert assistance with board development, policy, communications, legislative issues, public meetings law, the PACE insurance pool, labor and legal services. You will find additional information online at www.osba.org, or contact us at info@osba.org, 800-578-6722 or 503-588-2800.

For information about the full range of OSBA services,
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