



REGIONAL  
GOVERNMENT  
SERVICES

SERVING PUBLIC AGENCIES SINCE 2002

# **Board Norms: High-Functioning Boards**



# *Board Norms*

- **The norms are intended to serve as guidelines for Directors to maintain the credibility of the District and foster public trust.**
- **Unspoken standards of conduct and equity**
- **Standards of behavior the Board expects from one another**
- **Include:**
  - ✓ **Patterns of communication**
  - ✓ **Meeting preparation**
  - ✓ **Decision-making**
  - ✓ **Succession planning – helping the next Directors**

# What sparks interest in becoming a Board member?

- Desire to make a difference
- Improve communities - sense of civic responsibility
- Address societal issues and create positive change
- Advocate for specific issues
- Represent underrepresented groups
- Contribute personal experience or expertise
- Promote transparency and accountability

*To work together with others  
who are also invested in these motivators!*

# What is a Board member's individual responsibility?

- **Learn about rules and regulations related to governance, e.g., the Brown Act, the Public Records Act, and the Political Reform Act**
- **Prepare for meetings**
- **Talk to community**
- **Be engaged individually with other organizations**
- **Bring life experience's forward**
- **Be open to new or other ideas**

# What is a High-Functioning Board?

- **Each member brings their experiences, expertise, and curiosity to the public discussion with the hope of benefiting the community**
- **Communicates considerately and encourages dialogue and sharing of different perspectives**
- **Has meetings through structured agendas and facilitated discussion. Comes to consensus through collaborative decision-making and taking votes**
- **Has common objectives – shares the Mission and Vision**

## Unity of Purpose

- **Common goals and shared accountability**
- **Board members recognize that each member plays a role in the board's success**
- **A unified board upholds standards and works toward strategic alignment**

The idea of a "*Board as one body*" emphasizes the importance of unity, collaboration, and shared responsibility among board members.

# High-Functioning Boards:

- Understand that sharing, collaborating, bringing dialogue, and disagreeing, is part of their job.
- Hear public comment - it is welcomed and heard by the Board before they vote.
- Know how voting works and solidifies a decision. Once a vote is taken, the policy decision or approval has been determined as a group. The Board is acting as a whole entity, not as individuals.
- Understand that once a decision has been made, it's no longer relevant as to *who* said what. It is the decision that is vital. The discussion taking place around an item is the *process* to make a decision – not the decision itself.
- Ensure public statements, social media statements, op-eds or letters to the editor that do not reflect the policy of the majority of the Board are cited as personal opinion.

# High-Functioning Boards

**This concept of unification:**

- **Encourages Board members to speak candidly and transparently – knowing that the decision is the joined statement made by the whole group. Directors attempt to persuade other Directors through reasoned debate and accept the majority’s decision graciously and as policy of the Board.**
- **Permits Board members to freely air their thoughts and ideas, encouraging true transparency, discourse, and collaboration.**



# *Before the Meeting - Items on the Agenda*

**Agenda items are driven by:**

- **Strategic goals and objectives that reflect the priorities that have been established previously**
- **Input from stakeholders**
- **Regulatory and compliance requirements (audits, reports, etc.)**
- **Historical context and precedents (minutes from past meetings, recurring topics)**
- **Emerging issues: infrastructure, contracts, crisis**
- **Prioritization and planning**

**Process to agendize items – usually stated at the end of the meeting**

# *Board Responsibilities*

## *Staff Responsibilities*

<i>BOARD</i>	<i>STAFF</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on the “<u>what</u>”</li><li>• Policy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on the “<u>how</u>”</li><li>• Implementation</li></ul>

# *Board and Staff Responsibilities*

<b>BOARD</b>	<b>STAFF</b>
Policy Decisions	Operational Decisions
Strategic Direction	Day-to-day
Hiring, supporting and evaluating Staff	
Set agency priorities	Determine operational priorities on a day to day basis
Maintains fiscal responsibility	To work within the budget established by the Board
Give direction as a group	Implements Board (group) direction

*Mandatory Trainings*  
*Ethics and Sexual Harassment*

*Optional: Ralph M. Brown Act*

*Public Records*

*Conflicts-of-Interest*

*Thank you!*

## Disclaimer

The information provided in this presentation is not legal advice. This information is based on current (September 2023) understanding and interpretation of Board Best Practices. Questions related to adherence to, or potential violation of, the Brown Act should be directed to your agency's legal counsel.