



Cooperative Management Series

Building the Board Packet

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Introduction

The board packet is a highly useful tool in increasing the effectiveness of your board meeting. This paper will consider the purpose of the board packet as well as its format. The packet's contribution to the meeting can be substantial if it is properly done, but it requires a little extra preparation.

Purpose

The purpose of the board packet is to gather all of the information for the meeting in one place and make it accessible to the directors before the meeting. It cuts down on the paper scattered on the board table and makes specific items easier to find during the meeting. Another benefit of the board packet is that directors can consider issues to be discussed before the meeting and read the background on the issue.

An informed director makes an informed decision and the board packet helps make that happen. Packets keep discussion focused on the issue at hand and promotes following the agenda closely. It also makes the minutes easier to record and distribute. Well-prepared packets help reinforce the practice of having proposals for action in writing, in advance of the meeting, or at the very least a general topic of action that needs to be taken.

Format of the Board Packet

As you can see the packet holds a very important function for the board decision making process, and takes up a little more time than regular preparation. The format of the board as discussed below involves the same documentation you would otherwise have to organize and distribute during the meeting.

The board packet is most effective if it is put in a three ring binder with pockets on the inside covers. The front cover should have the director's name and office if applicable. The same binder can be used for each meeting, just with new information. The pages should be numbered with the date, source of information and the type of agenda item it refers to.

The by-laws of the cooperative and the mission statement may be provided in the pockets of the folder. Other items that might be put in the pockets include a director's code of conduct or the goals of the board. Also, the duties of the particular office that person holds may be included in the pockets. The information in the binder part may include the following.

Logistics

If the meeting is somewhere other than your regular board room you might consider directions to the location as well as the time and room number. This will probably only be pertinent for your strategic board retreat. A time and date should be included in every packet whether or not it is at your usual location.

Agenda

The meeting agenda is perhaps one of the most important pieces of paper in the board packet. It should be a timed agenda with information, discussion, and action items identified. A sample agenda is provided in Figure 1.

As you can see the Agenda is in a three-column format. The first column identifies the time at which each item will be discussed. This time limit allows for discussion to be controlled. However, a motion can be made to extend the time limit if the board feels that more discussion is needed on a subject.

The second column lists the item to be discussed during that time period. It also discusses whether that item is an action item or an information item. Along with the provide example, there are many different types of items that could be discussed.

The third column describes who will be responsible for presenting many of these items. The board chair would carry out the majority of the items, but committee chairs or board members at large could present some of the others.

The agenda will not be a long document in many cases, but it is a very important one. Time and diligence should be put into the creation of the agenda and it should be placed at the beginning of the board packet.

Background

The amount of background information will vary from meeting to meeting; however, it is very important to provide this information to directors before the meeting to give them time to digest the information.

In addition, if background is being provided for an action item, other information should be presented at this time. This information may include needs for the action, recommendations for the action, the pros and cons of the action, and why that particular action is being considered.

Timeline

The board packet should be put together at least a week before the meeting and will probably be designed by the manager and the board chair. It should be sent out three to four days before the meeting.

Conclusion

The information listed in this paper is only the beginning of the possibilities that the board packet offers. This tool can be formatted for each individual board and should be made most efficient for your particular board. The board packet is a proven tool to make your meetings more efficient.

Figure 1. Sample Agenda Format for a Board Meeting.

Time	Item	By
6:00 pm	Call to Order	Doe
6:00 pm	Minutes of Last Meeting	Smith
6:05 pm	Approval of Agenda	Doe
6:10 pm	Approval of the Budget (Action)	Doe
6:20 pm	Plans for New Accounting System Adoption (Information)	Jones
6:50 pm	Report from Lender (Information)	Banker
7:05 pm	Accounts Receivable Problem (Action)	Smith
7:20 pm	Report from Branch Manager (Information)	Ingles
7:30 pm	Old Business	Doe
7:35 pm	New Business	Doe
7:40 pm	Adjourn	Doe

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