

BY Elaine H. Ernest



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HOW TO HAVE a Productive Meeting

Effective land trust boards of directors are essential for the success of conservation, and that effectiveness is directly related to holding productive and compelling meetings. But meetings can be painful, frustrating and occasionally pointless.

Based on a piece first published in *Association Now*, January 2007, ASAE & The Center

By rethinking much of the way we perceive and manage them, meetings can become dynamic, passionate and focused according to the mission and goals of the group. Here are 10 considerations for board, committee and task force meetings to increase the success of the meetings, and thus the success of the land trust.

Consideration 1

Have your board and committee members held a retreat and/or informational session so everyone is acquainted with your mission, goals, strategic plan and the financial scope of your organization? To meet productively as a team, members need

- Background information about the history of the organization.
- Financial updates to make judgments that are realistic within the budgetary constraints.
- Information concerning trends about land trusts and their specific communities.

Consideration 2

Is an onsite meeting the best way to meet your goal? Do not have a meeting if

- There is no need for group interaction.
- Needed participants cannot attend.
- The relevant data and analyses for a decision are not available.

A more effective alternative might be to set up a conference call; e-mail reports, notes or a memo; or organize a chat room.

Consideration 3

How will this meeting enhance the performance of your land trust?

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- What are the subjects to be covered?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- What information do the attendees need prior to the meeting?
- How will each member yield a commensurate return on their time and energy?
- What needs to happen to make relevant decisions?

Divide the meeting into subtopics:

- Who leads each agenda item?
- What timeframe is allocated to each?
- What techniques will be used? A short PowerPoint presentation may be preferable to a lengthy lecture.

Prepare the agenda and background information at least a week to 10 days ahead of time. Whenever possible, send the materials to the participants in the format they prefer, whether electronic or hard copy.

Consideration 4

How can you ensure a smooth meeting?

Guidelines include

- Staff and leader should arrive early to greet members.
- Open the meeting warmly and on time to thank members for coming and to restate the purpose.

- If new members attend, ask everyone to introduce themselves.
- Establish ground rules, i.e., one speaker at a time, turn off cell phones and laptops (unless used to take notes), and members should adhere to the agenda and time allocations.
- Wrap up the meeting by announcing the work to be accomplished—by whom and by when.
- Thank the group, including support staff, and note any special or extraordinary contributions.
- End on time. If you must run long, get the group's permission to continue.

Consideration 5

How can you increase attendee involvement? To boost participation, a leader can

- Contact members and encourage attendance.
- Make pre-meeting contacts with key people.
- Encourage presenters to use effective technology to highlight their points rather than just reading from text or giving a lecture.
- Encourage people to ask questions and help clarify issues.
- Move deliberations forward. Don't repeat what has been stated unless for clarity.
- Judge ideas, not members.
- Give feedback constructively.

BY Megan Taaffe

- Consider the community as a whole, not just the interests of members.
- Identify options upon which consensus can be reached, but don't minimize legitimate disagreements.

Consideration 6

How can you promote clear communications? A leader can get a point across best if he or she reinforces the organization's mission through new initiatives by asking

- Is this item consistent with our mission and strategic plan?
- Will this improve the community's quality of life?
- Do we have the resources to handle this or do we know how to identify the resources?
- Is our project ethical?

Consideration 7

How can you enhance members' understanding of a needed solution? Seek input from people with various backgrounds, education and perspectives, and

- Consider all views within the community's common interest.
- Build links within the community so the group doesn't become fragmented and can seek needed perspectives prior to submitting their decision.
- Take advantage of the expertise and input of staff, attorneys and other relevant experts.

Consideration 8

How do you establish discussion rules that enhance members' creativity and knowledge? Procedural rules that are simple and group-friendly should be established, such as

- Most organization's bylaws and some states require boards to proceed under some system of parliamentary procedure, such as *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*.
- These rules are established to minimize the ability of a few to dominate large gatherings, not to facilitate the process of small groups.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT,

Community Benefits

As executive director of Weeks Bay Foundation, an accredited land trust located in Fairhope, Alabama, Walter Ernest understands how important it is to keep board members involved not only in their community, but also in the national land conservation movement. That is why he encouraged his board members to support the Land Trust Alliance as individual members in 2009.

The Weeks Bay Foundation, with more than 550 members, supports the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve through donations of land and educational exhibits, public awareness and education programs, water quality monitoring efforts and volunteer programs. Walter and his board members reached 100% participation in the Land Trust Alliance's Board Member Challenge last year and will continue to participate in 2010 and in years to come. "The benefit of receiving *Saving Land* magazine is one of the main reasons," said Walter. "Our board wants to stay informed about what's going on in the land trust movement."

Since 2005, the Board Member Challenge has worked with more than 100 land trust boards to increase the impact they have on land conservation across the county. In addition to receiving a year's subscription to *Saving Land* and acknowledgement as a donor to the Alliance, when 50% or more of board members take the Challenge, their land trust gains recognition on the Alliance's website, in *Saving Land*, and throughout Rally. A personalized plaque and invitations

for all board members and their executive directors to a special reception at Rally are some of the incentives the Alliance offers to participants. Last year, 50 land trusts reached at least 50% board participation.

Walter believes that the Board Member Challenge not only helps Weeks Bay Foundation board members stay informed, individual membership also "allows them to see firsthand the national work of land conservation. We have been able to utilize other land trust success stories to engage our board and community. We feel that by participating in the Challenge, we will encourage other organizations to participate as well. Our board recognizes that the more members the Alliance can attract, the greater influence they can have on promoting national-scale initiatives."

The Land Trust Alliance not only serves as a national voice for land trusts across the country through policy work, but also brings staff and board members together through state-of-the-art tools, information and training. It is time to take the Challenge for 2010. Together we can make a difference! 🍀

- Boards can operate by general, unanimous or silent consent or adjourn to a committee of the whole (considered by the whole group). This permits members to discuss important topics without feeling pressured to act hastily.
- Enabling wise decisions is a critical factor in any organization's success.
- Don't allow one person to influence the group's thinking. Sharing information allows members to make their own judgments.
- Members can act as devil's advocates to share and contribute all viewpoints.

Consideration 9

How can you ensure clear communications? As a leader you can get points across best if you

- Use visuals.
- Explain unique terms or acronyms. Define new or technical terms and solicit questions.
- Ask participants to paraphrase discussions.
- Clarify all action items and comments during the meeting and afterwards.
- Separate facts and opinions.
- Don't allow members to debate but rather, discuss.
- Engage members in dialogue to address problems and opportunities using teaching techniques such as the white board and brainstorming.

Consideration 10

How can you be tenacious in your follow-up and evaluation? Meeting minutes should be written clearly within the week to reflect

- Decisions made
- Deadlines for next steps
- Persons responsible for taking action(s)
- How progress will be tracked on these items

Begin preparation for your next meeting. Consider details such as

- What still needs to be discussed?
- What issues were put off?
- What actions or information are needed?



AS OF
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Board Member Challenge

These land trusts have succeeded at achieving 100% board member participation or a minimum of 50% participation since the last issue of the magazine.

To see all successful groups, learn more about the Challenge or get your board involved, contact Megan Taaffe (mtaaffe@lta.org, 202-638-4725, ext. 320) or visit www.lta.org/get-involved/bmc.

100%

Bainbridge Island Land Trust



RENEWED SUCCESS

100%



www.landtrustalliance.org

- What information or projects need to be pursued?

In the current economic climate it is especially important to hold meaningful meetings that result in pragmatic decisions. Resources for most organizations are scarce so resolutions need to be relevant, compelling and based on hard data.

Continue to enhance your meetings to engage your members and staff with

the passion that your mission deserves. Transfer good intentions into effective board leadership. 🌱

ELAINE H. ERNEST, CERTIFIED ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE, IS THE CEO OF THE ERNEST GROUP, A COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT GROUP. SHE IS THE IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR OF SCORE, A NONPROFIT ASSOCIATION DEDICATED TO ASSISTING SMALL BUSINESSES, AND A VOLUNTEER FOR STRIVE TO EXCEL, A PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAM TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT CONFIDENCE AND FURTHER EDUCATION.

Read about how meeting attendees can enhance productivity at www.lta.org/savingland.