

Governing in the Sunshine

Tips for Board Chairs at Public Meetings

BEFORE THE MEETING

At appropriate times, such as board orientation or during introductory remarks, board chairs should...

- Summarize or have legal counsel summarize open meetings/records requirements
- Remind board members that the board is responsible for conducting its work in public and for doing so with civility between board members and presenters
- Prompt board members to be clear in expressing their questions and concerns
- Encourage board members to avoid “gotcha” questions or comments that are demeaning to other board members or staff
- Save personal criticism for private conversations outside the meeting

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

At the beginning of full-board meetings, board chairs should...

- Welcome board members, staff, and members of the public
- Mention the presence of journalists or other media representatives
- Describe the purpose of the meeting, note relevant laws or regulations pertaining to it, and affirm the public nature of the event
- Outline the agenda for the meeting, including a likely adjournment time
- Explain timing and guidelines, if public participation is allowed
- Note if and why the board plans to go into executive session

DURING THE MEETING

During full-board meetings, board chairs should...

- Briefly provide context for each agenda item
- Remind staff presenters to be brief and allow time for questions/discussion
- Manage conversations in a manner that ensures that a full discussion ensues and that all sides of an issue are heard
- Strive for neutrality during discussions—especially ones preceding a vote. Board chairs should not express an opinion until all have spoken
- Model civil behavior by posing thoughtful questions and saving conclusions for the end of the conversation
- Explain the significance of the discussion or action—following a presentation or vote

AT THE END OF THE MEETING

Before adjourning full-board meetings, board chairs should...

- Summarize the major points in the board’s deliberations and discussions with a focus on next steps
- Indicate who, if anyone, will be available for questions from the media after the event
- Thank all for participating

Note: Board chairs should remind committee chairs to follow these guidelines in committee meetings.