

USING A CONSENT AGENDA

One way to save time and enable a board to refocus its limited meeting time on issues of substance is to use a consent agenda to deal with routine items. A consent agenda combines such items into one large item for the board's approval.

The consent agenda should be composed of items requiring board action that the board generally agrees upon and that don't need to be discussed before a vote. It should include routine, standard, non-controversial, and self explanatory items. Some examples include:

- Committee and previous board meeting minutes.
- Approval of the agenda.
- Minor changes in a policy or procedure.
- Updating board documents.
- Confirmation of conventional actions that are required by the by-laws.
- Formal board resolutions required for grant applications, leases, contracts, etc. that have already been the subject of board discussions or actions that have received prior approval.

The consent agenda and any necessary supporting materials should be distributed prior to the meeting. People should have ample opportunity to review the materials and ask questions or make comments in advance of the meeting. The rules for using a consent agenda are as follows:

- Action on the consent agenda should be the first order of business once the meeting is called to order.
- Any member can ask for any item to be removed from the consent agenda and opened for discussion after action has been taken on the agenda.
- Removing an item from the consent agenda does not require explanation, discussion or action. If somebody asks for the item to be removed, it is removed.
- If nobody asks for removal of any items, the entire package is voted on at once without any discussion.
- Once any items have been removed from the consent agenda, the items that remain on the agenda are voted on as a package without any discussion.
- Items that have been removed from the consent agenda are then integrated into the meeting by the chair as appropriate given the remaining business on the agenda.

Consent agendas prevent lengthy discussions about issues that regularly come up at meetings and that don't require much debate or decision making. They also help the board to realize where its priorities are. By placing some items on the consent agenda, the board can see that they should not warrant much discussion, while items not on the consent agenda should receive more time and attention.