



February 6, 2016

What is a Consent Agenda for a Board Meeting?

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The terms consent agenda and consent calendar are interchangeable terms. A consent agenda is a board meeting practice that groups routine business and reports into **one agenda item**. The consent agenda can be approved in one action, rather than filing motions on each item separately. Using a consent agenda can save boards anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour. A consent agenda moves routine items along quickly so that the board has time for discussing more important issues.

What Kinds of Items Appear on a Consent Agenda?

The types of **items that appear on a consent agenda** are non-controversial items or routine items that are discussed at every meeting. They can also be items that have been previously discussed at length where there is group consensus. The following items are typically found on a consent agenda:

- The meeting minutes
- The financials
- CEO report
- Program or committee reports
- Staff appointments
- Volunteer appointments
- Committee appointments
- Correspondence that requires no action
- Perfunctory items-formal approval of items that had much past discussion

A consent agenda can be an efficient tool to help boards make productive use of their meeting time when it's used appropriately. There are specific rules for using the consent agenda.

How the Consent Agenda Works

The chair takes the lead role in utilizing a consent agenda. The chair prepares an agenda package that includes all of the items on the consent agenda. The package should be distributed to board members soon enough so that they have time to read through the documents prior to the meeting. This is a part of the overall board materials that are distributed pre-meeting. **Typical steps** for using a consent agenda include:

1. The chair decides which items will be placed on the consent agenda. The consent agenda can appear as part of the normal meeting agenda or it can be attached separately to the meeting agenda.
2. The chair distributes the consent agenda and associated documents in time for board members to read and review.
3. At the beginning of the meeting, the board chair asks members if any of the consent agenda items should be moved to the regular discussion items.
4. If a member requests that an item be moved, it must be moved. Any reason is sufficient to move an item. A member can move an item to discuss the item, to query the item, or to vote against it.
5. Once the item has been moved, the chair may decide to take up the matter immediately or move it to a discussion item.
6. When there are no items to be moved or if all requested items have been moved, the chair or secretary reads out loud the remaining consent items. The chair can move to adopt the consent agenda. Hearing no objections, he can announce that the items on the consent agenda have been adopted. It's not necessary to take a vote on consent agenda items.
7. The secretary should include the full text of the resolutions, reports, and recommendations that were adopted as part of the consent agenda.

Steps to Take When a Member Needs Clarification on a Consent Agenda Item

Make sure that all members understand the consent agenda process to help expedite the meeting. If a board member needs clarification on a consent agenda item or if he just has a question, he should ask the appropriate member prior to the meeting. It's possible that other members have the same question. This should give the member being asked time to prepare an answer and distribute it to all members prior to the meeting. Consent agenda items shouldn't be pulled from the agenda just to have a question answered.

Steps to Take When a Member Disagrees or Suggests Discussion

If a member disagrees with the consent agenda item or wants to move it to the regular agenda, the member would request that the item be pulled from the consent agenda. The chair would ask if the members are in favor of approving the consent agenda minus the pulled item, pause for objections, and then adopt the consent agenda as noted in step #6, above.

Sample of Consent Agenda

1. Welcome/Introductions
2. Consent Agenda
 1. **Board meeting minutes**
 2. Executive Director report
 3. Marketing committee report
 4. Approve insurance renewal
3. Old Business
4. New Business

Misuse of Consent Agenda

Problems in using a consent agenda occur when members approve consent agendas without first reviewing documents. The result is that consent items can be hastily approved and result in a cover-up. For example, if members are not reviewing financial items, overspending or wrong spending can occur without appropriate oversight. Remember that consent agenda items are routine and non-controversial, but even routine items should be reviewed by the entire board. A diligent, well-rounded board holds each other accountable.

A consent agenda is an effective and efficient tool when used appropriately. It can save precious meeting time so the members can attend to other matters. Transparency and accountability are key parts of using a consent agenda. All board members have a responsibility for making sure that consent agenda items are distributed in enough time to review them prior to the meeting. Each board member also has a responsibility to read and review consent agenda items and address any concerns prior to the meeting.

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