

# Guidance in Using a Consent Agenda

---

Nonprofit boards of directors are increasingly adopting the “consent agenda” concept, used for years by municipal boards, to streamline the approval of regular and/or routine agenda items and increase the amount of time spent on issues of a strategic nature or that otherwise could benefit from board discussion. Items that are listed as being on the consent agenda are typically dealt with in a single vote, after offering board members the opportunity to remove specific items for later discussion.

Typical consent agenda items might include minutes from the previous meeting, the executive director or president’s report, and staff reports. It may also make sense to include routine reports from committees and other items that can be easily read and reviewed in advance of the meeting (even if they don’t technically need a vote). If you anticipate discussion, or want to encourage discussion, *don’t* include the item on the consent agenda. We also do *not* suggest that the treasurer’s report or other financial reporting be dealt with on the consent agenda.

Here is some advice we offer to organizations that are interested in using the consent agenda:

1. All consent agenda items should be clearly identified and included in the board pre-mailing. Be sure to send the message that board members must review these materials in advance of the board meeting, as they will otherwise be dispensed with in a single vote.
2. While some organizations put their consent agenda items at the end of the agenda, we encourage our clients to handle them at the start. The board chair can then ask, “Is there any item on the consent agenda that you would like removed so that we may discuss it later in the meeting?” If someone answers in the affirmative, the board chair can indicate where in the regular agenda that item will be discussed. Leave it up to the chair to determine that placement based upon his/her knowledge of the flow of the meeting.
3. After checking to see if any items should be removed from the consent agenda, the chair typically ask for a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented (or as modified) and a vote follows.
4. There is no standard way for the consent agenda to appear on the printed meeting agenda, but consider the following (including the instructions about removing items):

#### Consent agenda\*

- Meeting minutes from <date>
- Executive director’s report
- Staff reports
- Marketing committee report

\* No verbal report will be presented on the items listed here unless a board member asks to have the item removed from the consent agenda.

5. Make the most of the meeting time you save! Get the board focused on items of a strategic nature or on those items and issues that can really benefit from their discussion.