

BEACON UNITARIAN CHURCH
BOARD DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

[Revised May 2009]

A. MEETING PLANNING

1. Establish clear goals for the Board meeting. Organize the agenda by priorities. Determine the issues of importance to the Board so each issue can be placed in priority.
2. The agenda should be a standard format which is open to influence and change by the Board.
3. Make sure the agenda and preparatory material is prepared and e-mailed by the Sunday before the meeting.
4. Clarify on the agenda if items are for discussion, decision, or information.
5. Board members are responsible to read this material before the meeting
6. Individual Board members should keep in touch with their liaison committees and the congregation in general. If in doubt about whether something is worth the Board's attention talk it over with the President, the Minister, or a buddy.

B. MEETING PROCESS

1. Support the chairperson. Reaffirm his/her authority. Define the role of the chair and promote its effectiveness. Any person can help to manage or to process the discussion in a difficult and complex discussion.
2. Staff may normally participate in the discussion. Visitors are normally there to observe unless they have been invited to make a presentation. A visitor may request the opportunity to be placed on the agenda up to a week before the Board meeting. Visitors may also request the opportunity to speak to an issue under discussion, and the chair has the right to approve or deny the request depending on the situation.
3. The Board will use the following general time-limited discussion process:
 - Call for information (general discussion) - time limited
 - What is important here (values and goals) - time limited
 - What are we going to do?
 - If consensus - make a motion or assign responsibilities
 - If no consensus - ask for a motion to take a position and conduct a vote or designate a person or a group to do further research
4. Focus on listening. Speak only once until everyone who has spoken. Clarify your point - if asked. Encourage and invite input from quiet people.
5. Be candid. Don't agree just to be nice. We value and need our differences.
6. Be respectful. Let people finish what they are saying without interruption. This means you may have to tolerate an uncomfortable silence while the speaker formulates his/her thoughts.
7. Respect confidentiality. Be clear on what information belongs inside the group and what information can be shared. When in doubt, ask.
8. If there are differences of opinion, avoid getting locked into positions. Rise above the specific problems and situations and focus on underlying issues, criteria and values. Don't discuss solutions until you come to a common understanding of the problem.
9. Unless you are specifically delegated to speak for a group, speak for yourself. Speak

from your own thoughts, feelings, and opinions. If others need to speak, concentrate on finding a way for them to speak for themselves rather than doing it for them.

10. The chairperson does not vote except to break a tie.
11. Staff and visitors attend meetings to present reports and answer questions in their areas of expertise. They may request permission of the Board to participate in other discussions. Staff and visitors do not vote.

C. MEETING FOLLOW-UP

1. Minutes should be prepared and e-mailed no later than one week after a meeting.
2. A “To Do List” will accompany the minutes telling what is to be, by whom and by what date.
3. Communication should always be a prime consideration in implementing any decision of the Board. (Who needs to know and what methods will be used to let them know?)
4. Operating from goals and values will give us a sense of energy and pride that will become a model for committee chairs and congregants.