

Better Boards: Tactics for Board Engagement

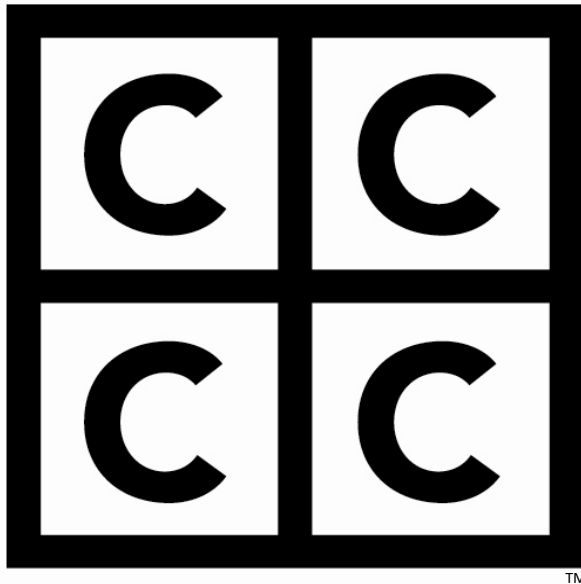
**Madison Nonprofit Day
October 31, 2019**



BOARDS CAN BE A STRATEGIC ASSET



Explore engagement through the lens of SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATIONSM



- **Seek Clarity**
- **Spark Curiosity**
- **Garner Commitment**
- **Foster Communication**



SEEK CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS



“Boards are far more than the sum of the individual values and viewpoints of their members; **they are arenas in which individual members work actively toward mutually acceptable decisions and outcomes.** But board decision making involves more than the affairs of the particular organizations the boards govern: both draw on and contribute to the sum of public values and actions.” – Deloitte Center for Board Effectiveness

Seek clarity of expectations

- Attend to the organization's long-term welfare
- Monitor quality of program/service delivery
- Ensure the organization fulfills its mission



SPARK CURIOSITY ON ISSUES



An all-too-familiar story ...

“The **typical board is locked into a pattern that seems unbreakable**. For them, board meetings are tightly scheduled, well rehearsed presentations leave little time for questions or reactions... Serious questions are considered bad form at best... The presentation seldom gives directors the information they really want or need.” – Ram Charan, *Boards at Work*



Spark curiosity on issues

- Focus conversations strategically
- Structure the meetings differently
- Rethink committee compositions



GARNER COMMITMENT TO PROGRESS



“Governance is not a structure but a process.

That process must remain responsive not only to what the constituents and the organization need, but to what the dynamic in the boardroom and between the board and the executive needs to be to get the work done in the most optimal way possible.”

– R. McCambridge, *Board stories involving humans*



Garner commitment to progress

- Ask, don't assume levels of comfort
- Infuse accountability for actions
- Make it easy to engage



FOSTER COMMUNICATION OF VALUE



“To govern knowledgeably, boards need information—but of **the right kind and in the right amount.**”

— Richard P. Chait & Barbara E. Taylor



Foster communication of value

- Leverage agendas to frame intentions
- Switch up timing on meeting minutes
- Develop documents that are meaningful



WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

WHY ARE YOU HERE?



RE: BOARD MEMBER MEETINGS



Typical Boards have typical problems.

- Strong governance hinges on **active engagement**, which won't occur if information sent in advance is repeated as the basis for the meeting.
- Board members need to **focus on what matters** for the organization's success, which becomes hard to decipher amidst information overload.
- Effective Boards have a **culture of inquiry**, which can't be built when the Board doesn't influence the agenda or the information received.
- Nonprofits **need great decisions**, which can be made if the Board isn't getting the right information.



Quick Check: How About **Your Situation?**

Information is repeated at Board meeting:

Always

Sometimes

Never

Amount of information:

Too Much

Just Right

Not Enough

Who selects the information presented:

CEO/ED

Chair/Committee

Both

Information to drive dialogue and decisions:

Right Information

Wrong Information



Tool: Meetings That Matter

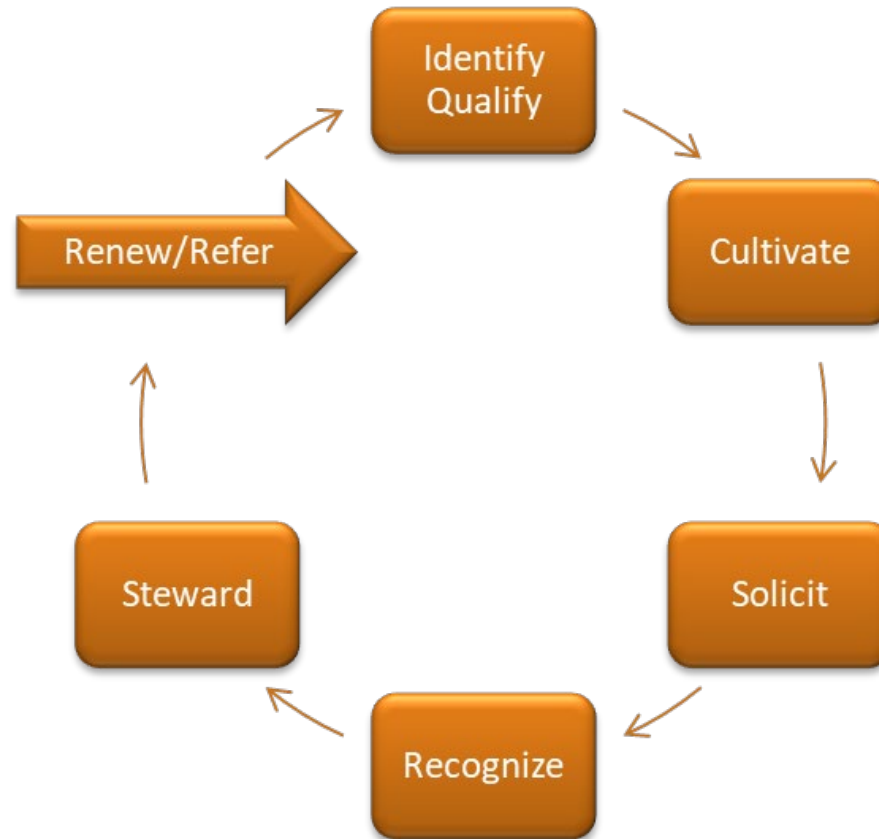
- Use introductions w/ a strategic ‘icebreaker’
- Incorporate a consent agenda
- Put Committee Reports in a consent agenda
- Focus agenda on strategic issues (no more than two)
- Put mission and/or impact statement in footer
- List upcoming meetings (at least the next two)



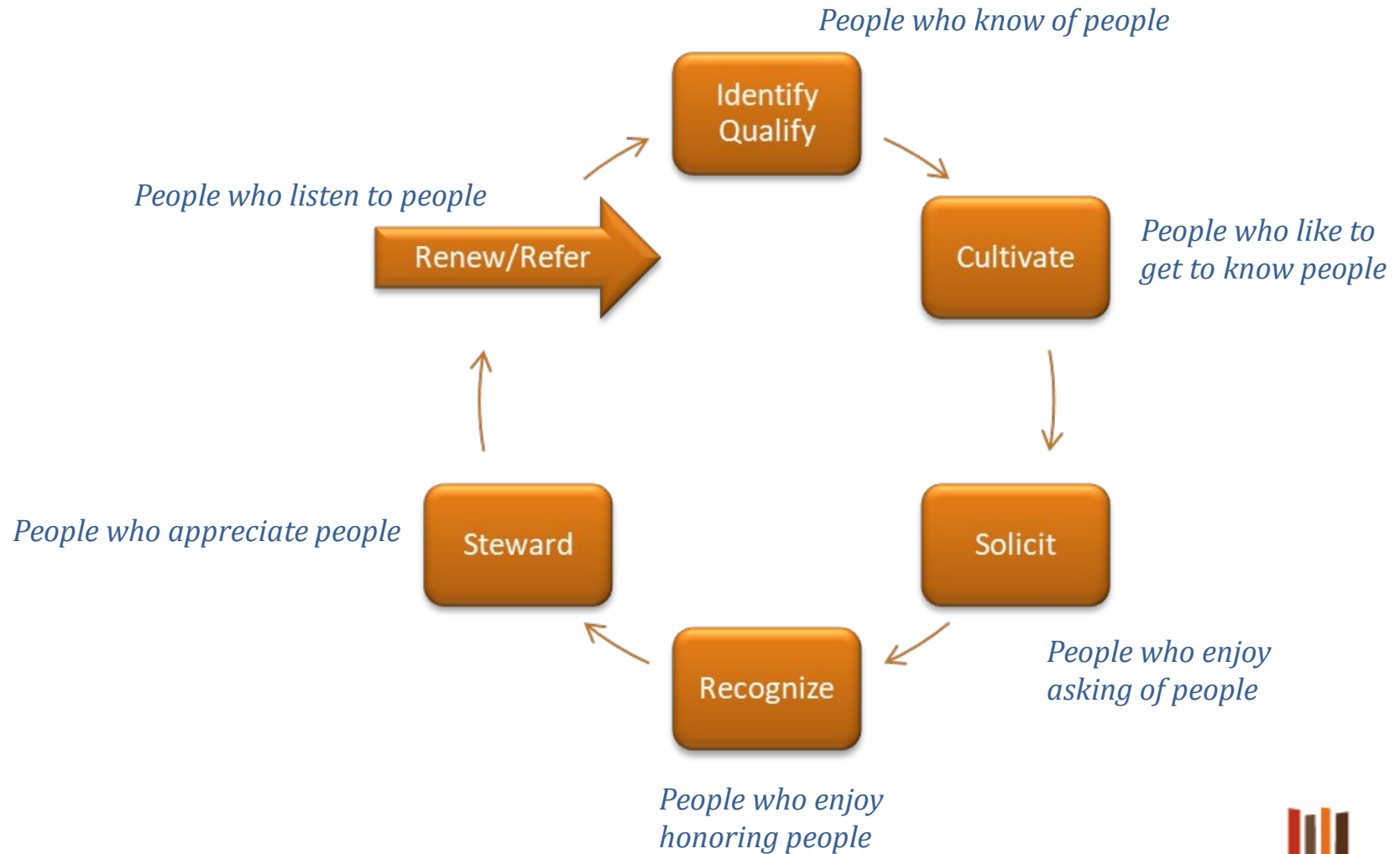
RE: BOARD MEMBER FUNDRAISING



Break down the cycle



Play to their strengths



Get specific on activities

	<i>Not at all comfortable</i>	<i>Very comfortable</i>
Identifying or qualifying potential donors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making introductions to potential donors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sending thank you notes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making thank you calls to donors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hosting/supporting an event organized by staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inviting people to attend events as my guest (I pay)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inviting people to attend events (they pay)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Posting messages to social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking at micro events (up to 5 people)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking at smaller events (up to 40 people)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speaking at larger events (up to 300 people)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promoting NPO's events at my workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promoting NPO's events among my networks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Soliciting sponsorships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Submitting guest editorials or letters to the editor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



RE: BOARD DISCUSSIONS & DECISIONS



Flexible Content Calendar

Frames Expectations

- Maps out the meeting content for the year
- Helps ensure attention to critical activities over time
- Guides agenda development and track accountability
- Adaptable for emerging issues or shifting landscapes

Typical Categories

- Pre-Meeting Activity
- Strategic Introduction
- Business of the Board
- Governance/Growth
- Logistics



Succinct **Issue Papers**

- **What** is the Issue?
- **Why** is it an Issue?
- What is the **Context**?
- What are the **Recommended** Actions?
- To Whom should **Questions** be directed?



Forward-focused Dashboards

Guidelines

- Monitors progress against stated objectives
- Provides an overview on the basics of the business and indicators for required or future discussion
- Not all-inclusive, rather a controlled number of critical indicators across standard categories

Frequent Categories

- Programs
- Impact
- People
- Finances
- Board Performance
- Compliance



“Inform + Engage + Enrich = **Ignite**”

– Joan Garry, *Nonprofits are Messy*



Continue the Conversation

Melanie Schmidt

melanie@timpanoconsulting.com

(608) 695-7320

Follow Me on **Twitter**: [@melanieschmidt](https://twitter.com/melanieschmidt)

Become a Fan on **Facebook**: “[Timpano Consulting](#)”

Connect via **LinkedIn**: [Melanie Schmidt](#)

