

## **Curriculum Guide for Presentations on:** ***Effective Boards and Committees***

- Goal:** 1) To highlight the importance of group decision-making in Seventh-day Adventist Church ethos,  
2) To understand structural designs and social dynamics that contribute to effective, efficient and consequential board and committee meetings  
3) To adopt leadership practices that facilitate effective performance of boards and committees

**Points to cover:**

1. Reasons why group decision-making (boards and committees) is so important in the Seventh-day Adventist Church:
  - a. Highest authority in Church is in a group (executive committee/constituency session) rather than in individuals.
  - b. Most important decisions in the Church are made by groups. Therefore denominational structure and leadership life involves considerable time in meetings of one kind or another.
  - c. Good group decision-making does not arise spontaneously; it requires deliberate structural design and good social dynamics.
  - d. Effective group decision-making builds trust in the organization.
2. Leadership awareness of the most common complaints about boards and committees:
  - a. Meetings consume valuable time but are largely unproductive
  - b. Deficit in substantive discussion on major issues affecting the organization (cannot easily talk about the “elephants” in the room)
  - c. Decisions made without adequate information
  - d. Preoccupation with near-term results, lack of long-term perspective
  - e. Lack of clarity about mission, vision, values and roles
  - f. Failure to differentiate between governance roles and management roles
3. Elements of structural design that contribute to effective boards and committees:
  - a. Competency-based membership with appropriate range of skills pertinent to the business of the board/committee. (General practice in the Church is to ensure proportional representation. Most governance documents fail to address the need for specific skills needed in boards/committees.) Discussion time: What can be done to ensure that when boards/committees are elected/appointed there is sufficient attention to the range of skills needed for the group to function and fulfill its assignments? What are the professional competencies needed on a board/executive committee of a church unit, hospital, school, publishing house, media center, etc.? What are the personal competencies (behavior, attitudes, relationships, communications) needed by members of a board/committee in order to function in ways that ensure effective meetings?
  - b. Trustee orientation and on-going education. Includes orientation to organizational structure, mission/vision/values, policies and procedures, governance documents, strategic plans, challenges and opportunities in the “business” environment of the organization.
  - c. Awareness of trustees fiduciary obligations:

- i. Duty of care: level of competence expected is that of an “ordinary prudent person”; duty to attend meetings, be informed, show independent judgment when voting; duty to rely exercise diligence, rely on/delegate to trusted sources; duty of risk management
    - ii. Duty of loyalty: requires faithfulness to the organization and its mission, corporate position or property not used for personal advantage, undivided allegiance to organization when making decisions, maintaining confidentiality of privileged information
    - iii. Duty of obedience: ensuring that organization remains obedient to its purpose and role (fulfills its mission while remaining faithful to Seventh-day Adventist mission, beliefs, culture, policies, practices); duty of compliance with law; duty of fulfill commitments including previous commitments
  - d. What is expected of board/committee members? Includes frequency of meetings, amount of time, attendance obligations, advance preparation for meetings, participation in meetings, service as an ambassador for the organization, compliance with organization’s conflict of interest policy, obligation to maintain confidentiality of sensitive information, etc.
  - e. Frequent assessment of decisions in light of organization’s mission, vision and values.
  - f. Agenda preparation and presentation includes “window to the past”, “window to the present” and “window to the future”. (Many meetings fail be spending inordinate time reviewing/rehearsing the past and insufficient time on looking to the future.)
  - g. Boardroom facilities: seating arrangement/lighting/sound system (everyone can be seen and heard), access to agenda and support materials, absence of distracting noise, physical comfort of members, etc.
  - h. Efficient and effective board committee structures (specific assignments or terms of reference, utilize professional skills of members, perform groundwork for the board, ensure issues discussed thoroughly, etc.)
  - i. Timely production and circulation of minutes.
- 4. Social dynamics in the boardroom:
  - a. Board culture:
    - i. Attitude: commitment to excellence, enthusiasm about mission
    - ii. Attention: effective use of time, agenda management so that important issues are not dealt with near the end of the meeting
    - iii. Atmosphere: boardroom is a safe place to talk
    - iv. Altitude: governance not management, big picture/future context
  - b. Equal opportunity/obligation to participate in discussion
  - c. Commitment to candor and respect of other viewpoints
  - d. Intentional questioning of assumptions/exploration of options or alternatives
  - e. Rules of order used to facilitate discussion and decision-making
  - f. Commitment not to use cell phones, computers, private conversations during the meeting
  - g. Conflicts of interest managed
  - h. Awareness of risks accompanying “groupthink”:
    - i. Adopt the view of the leader or influential spokesperson for an idea
    - ii. Uncritically supporting an idea because it appears to be popular
    - iii. Unwillingness to listen to dissent

- iv. Unwillingness to express dissent in order to retain a favorable opinion of others
- 5. Adopting leadership practices that facilitate effective performance of boards and committees:
  - a. Conduct board performance self-assessment
  - b. Discuss “999 Plans”:
    - i. What can be done to improve Board functioning in the next 9 days?
    - ii. What can be done to improve Board functioning in the next 9 weeks?
    - iii. What can be done to improve Board functioning in the next 9 months?