

Active Board Engagement Ideas

Discussion leaders: Opportunity to share leadership/ownership of various issues. Designate in the agenda different board members to lead the discussion – often the chairs of the committees. A useful strategy to work on succession of leadership and mentoring with the board.

Silent starts: Opportunity for quiet reflection on an issue. Post issue on the agenda. Meeting begins with 1-2 minutes of silence for each person to contemplate their response before the discussion begins. This strategy can also be used as a way to ground everyone in the meeting space – this is especially nice if meetings come at the end of a long workday. A great strategy to help analytical thinkers and introverted learning styles.

Index cards: Comments/suggestions are written on cards and passed to the chair. Chair reads them to the group. No discussion necessarily needed. This strategy is useful to ask questions or make comments in a confidential way.

Breakout groups: Create small groups to work independently for a specific amount of time. Create an opportunity for reporting back to the full group. Assign a reporter and a recorder for each group. Excellent strategy to hear from everyone. Good for difficult topics or topics that do not have a clear resolution.

Panels: Create a panel of experts on a topic or to hear from those with different points of view on a particular topic. Provide a moderator and time for questions and answers. Opportunity to provide background, educate, and surface new perspectives on a matter of related topics.

Site visits: Appropriate for organizations that are looking to motivate and connect board members and potential board members to mission or goals of the organization. Opportunity to share real world stories.

Simulations: Role playing. Great way to practice a difficult discussion or learn a new skill. Creating a safe space for this activity is critical.

Case studies: Case studies are usually written in a way that promotes large or small group discussion. Most are written with open-ended questions to promote discussion within the group. It is easier if you have a neutral facilitator to bring the hypothetical discussion and solutions back to the concrete world of the organization. Good way to discuss a difficult dilemma without making it personal.