**THE CONSENT AGENDA: A TOOL FOR IMPROVING GOVERNANCE**



**Meeting Challenges, Challenging Meetings**

Board meetings are the ultimate venue for executing the complementary responsibilities of oversight and strategy. Collectively, the board must satisfy legal requirements and provide programmatic, financial and ethical oversight.

More often than not, however, nonprofit board members find themselves in meetings that are filled with the least interesting and least challenging issues. Many board members and chief executives struggle to make board meetings valuable to the organization and the individuals in attendance.

A consent agenda can turn a board meeting into a meeting of the minds around the things that matter most. A consent agenda is a bundle of items that is voted on, without discussion, as a package. While not difficult to use, a consent agenda requires discipline in working through the following seven steps:

1. Set the meeting agenda
2. Distribute materials in advance
3. Read materials in advance
4. Introduce the consent agenda at the meeting
5. Remove (if requested) an item from and accept the consent agenda
6. Approve the consent agenda
7. Document acceptance of the consent agenda

With a consent agenda, what might have taken an hour for the board to review, takes only five minutes.

**Commonly Found Items on Consent Agendas**

1. Minutes
2. Confirmation of a decision that has been discussed previously
3. Committee reports
4. Informational materials
5. Updated organizational documents
6. Routine correspondence

**Inappropriate and Questionable Items on Consent Agendas**

1. Audit
2. Financial reports
3. Executive committee decisions

**The Ultimate Benefit: Better Board Performance**

The main purpose of a consent agenda is to liberate board meetings from administrative details, repetitious discussions and misdirected attention. The main benefit is better governance. Consent agendas allow the board to regularly dig deeper on strategic issues rather than take a superficial pass on a lot of issues. The consent agenda removes one of the obstacles – limited time – to engaging the board meaningfully.