

15 Increase Your Organization's Influence in Just 15 Minutes a Month

This simple idea will be transformative.

By Andrea Kihlstedt

Do you wish that your organization had more clout? That you had more access to your community's thought-leaders and philanthropists? That you could get to know the people in your community whose opinions are seen as the gold standard?

Here's an excellent way to build those relationships. It's not difficult and won't feel awkward. And your community's leaders will want to participate. It's simple: Establish a board leadership forum – a program of inviting people to give short talks at each of your board meetings.

Yes, it's this simple.

At every board meeting, schedule 15 minutes for a guest speaker. Plan for your guest to speak at the end of the meeting so you'll have time for discussion and questions, and perhaps even a glass of wine with your guest. Having an end-of-meeting guest will also push you to stay on schedule. After all, you won't want to keep an important guest waiting.

Wait – only 15 minutes?

Fifteen minutes? Is that long enough? Yes! Remember that short talks are common these days. A standard time for a TED talk is 12 minutes.

Who to invite? Here are some ideas.

Invite influential people in your community to present something they're doing that has relevance to your organization.

Ask a foundation director to talk about trends in philanthropy.

Bring in a developer to talk about changes in the community.

Ask the board chair from your local hospital to talk about challenges the hospital faces or new programs they're starting.

Consider inviting your community's lead philanthropists to speak about best practices in asking for gifts.

Extend an invitation to professors to discuss their research as it relates to your mission or programs.

This list is just a start. You'll find that when you start inviting speakers, they'll suggest others to invite.


This simple idea will bring great results.

A board leadership forum brings results:

You'll engage community leaders by having them share their wisdom with your most important people.

You'll make your board meetings more interesting so that attendance will skyrocket.

You'll increase the reach and influence of your organization as more and more thought-leaders come to know you and what you do and have a chance to meet your board members.

Not bad for only 15 minutes a month. And if you do it right, you'll have community leaders calling you to participate. It's a big win for everyone involved. 

Andrea Kihlstedt (andreakihlstedt.com) is an expert on capital campaign fundraising. Her book Capital Campaigns: Strategies that Work is used in advanced fundraising courses worldwide.

Mix It Up

For more creative ways to increase your organization's influence and engage your board members, see these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Bring a List of Names to the Next Meeting (Vol. 24, No. 5)

If You're Not Growing, You're Dying (Vol. 22, No. 5)

Creating Breakthroughs (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Success through Engaged High-Level Board Members (Vol. 34, No. 1)

Outside the Comfort Zone (Vol. 25, No. 3)

Cooperating to Survive and Thrive: Innovative Enterprises (Vol. 16, No. 3)

Gain Extraordinary Impact (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Five Steps to Turn Resolutions into Results (Vol. 25, No. 1)