

Tips For Being Effective Commissioners

1. Learn all you can about your district including its history, operations and finances.
2. Devote sufficient time to studying the present and future problems of your district.
3. Don't burn yourself out on the little things. Save your energy and time for the important matters.
4. Don't let honest differences of opinion within the board degenerate into personality conflicts.
5. Remember that you represent all district residents, not just neighbors and friends.
6. Don't act as a committee of one...governing a district requires a multiple team effort.
7. Take your budget preparation job seriously, for it determines your district's options for years to come.
8. Establish policy statements. Written policy statements let staff and the public know where the commission stands. The policy statements help the board govern, and writing them provides a process to develop consensus.
9. Make decisions on the basis of public policy, and be consistent. Treat similar situations similarly, and avoid favoritism.
10. Don't be misled by the strong demands of special interest groups that want something done now, their way. Your job is to find the long-term public interest of the district.
11. Don't be afraid of change. Don't be content to just follow routines of predecessors.
12. Listen to what your chiefs, staff, volunteers and public say and strive to support good ideas. Politely turn down bad ones.
13. Don't give quick answers when you are not sure of the real answer.
14. Don't rush! Few final actions should be taken at the first meeting that they are considered.
15. Don't make promises you can't deliver! Remember that most decisions require approval of the entire board.
16. Remember that you have legal authority as a governing board member only when the board is in session.
17. Don't spring surprises on fellow commissioners or your staff, especially at public meetings. If a matter is worth bringing up for discussion, it's worth being on the agenda.
18. Participate in official meetings with the dignity and decorum fitting those who hold a position of public trust.
19. Conduct your official public meetings with some formality, and follow rules of procedure. Have an agenda and follow it.
20. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is one of the ways we learn. But do your homework by studying the agenda material before meetings.
21. Vote yes or no on motions. Don't cop out by abstaining except when you have a legitimate conflict of interest. A pass does not relieve you of responsibility when some decision must be made.
22. Respect the letter and intent of the open meetings law, but also keep private and confidential matters to yourself—don't spread gossip – this just erodes the team effort approach.
23. Retain competent key employees, pay them fairly, define and approve their authority as specifically as you can, and then recognize their authority and responsibilities. It's always ok to disagree-but do so respectfully.
24. Don't let anyone bypass the system if you have a chief or administrator available for day to day operations.
25. Encourage imaginative solutions. Learn to evaluate recommendations and alternative courses of action. Ask staff to provide options and recommendations – then have the aboard deliberate and set final policy.
26. Be concerned about the future of the district. Avoid short-term gains at the expense of long-term losses.
27. When determining the public interest, balance personal rights and property interests, the possible harm to a few versus the good of the many. Recognize in many situations, everyone can't be a winner.
28. Learn to listen—really listen—to your fellow commissioners, other county officials and the public. Hear what they are trying to say, not just the words spoken.
29. Be effective with the media. Set clear written policy on who will speak to the media for the district and how.
30. Maintain your sense of humor. Don't take yourself or the business of government so seriously that you don't enjoy it. It should be fun as well as a rewarding experience.

Note: These tips were formulated from several ideas for commissioner effectiveness found on the Internet and are listed for consideration only. ISFCA presents this and other information contained in the Blaze as a service to our members and other readers. None of the information contained herein is intended to be viewed as legal advice or mandatory requirements.