THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ON A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Decision-making segments of meetings require structure to keep members focused on the problem at hand. It might help for the Board as a whole to consider the steps in the problem-solving process.

Problem Solving Model

Define the Problem	The Board discusses and defines the problem.
Establish Objective	The Chairperson states the desired outcome and confirms the group's agreement to the problem statement.
Generate Alternative Solutions	There are several methods which can be used, including simply calling for suggestions or brainstorming. A word or caution: *At this step in a meeting, the Chairperson should not let anyone discuss or evaluate suggestions.* The intent at this phase is just to get out tile ideas, not to weigh their merits.

Some suggestions:
List all ideas from the group Encourage thoughts – practical or not Don't worry about repetition
Don't rush this step - allow plenty of time

Establish Criteria for Evaluation	The Chairperson asks the group to define the elements of a good solution. For example, that clients continue to be well served during a merger or that staff are fully informed about organizational restructuring. This step allows the Board to consider ethical and mission-related issues.
Evaluate Alternatives	It is appropriate to have the group rate or rank alternatives numerically.
Choose an Alternative(s)	How the group arrives at a solution will depend on the size of the group and the sensitivity of the issue.

The most common method of choosing is to *vote*. This should be used only when the issue is relatively minor. *Strive for consensus*. It may take longer, but this highly interactive process will gain the most support for the decision.

Some guidelines:
When consensus isn't reached quickly look for alternatives, the next-best solution.
Don't discourage differences of opinion. They're healthy and often enlightening. Every opinion should be listened to and considered.
Don't change your opinion simply to avoid conflict.
As Chairperson, state your position logically and fairly.

Note: If, during the discussion, you decide that the alternatives are not satisfactory or the problem needs redefining, do interrupt the decision-making process. Get the groups permission to defer the decision rather than proceeding with the vote.