

10 Minute Supervisor Trainings



September 2025

Best Practices for a Successful Culture

What does creating a successful culture look like? Building an environment where values, behaviors, communication, and relationships fit together to foster trust, teamwork, responsibility, and a common goal. This helps organizations reach their short and long-term goals successfully.

Rules of order: Your board's policies should include a statement about the specific parliamentary procedures it will follow, such as "Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition," which is the most common resource. The latest edition offers rules for small boards, providing flexibility and informality that can help your board work more effectively. If your board prefers not to follow all the rules, you can include a special rule of order in your written policies to specify your preferred procedures. These special rules are permanent and tailored to your board, helping it operate smoothly. Keep in mind, Robert's Rules isn't the only authority—your board may choose other guides like the American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code or Mason's Manual.

Be courteous and respectful: Your chair and board must always promote courtesy and respect, which are essential for a fair and democratic meeting. This means avoiding personal comments, insults, attacks, or interruptions. No side conversations or disrespectful body language. If any of these happen, they should be calmly and firmly stopped. Board members should set a good example by being respectful themselves and encouraging the public to be respectful as well.

Provide board members equal opportunity to express views: Sometimes, during discussions, dominant members may speak too much, which isn't fair and can lead to poor outcomes and discord among members. All board members have equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities. A helpful policy to include is one that says no one can speak a second time until everyone who wants to speak has had a chance to share their thoughts on the topic.

One thing at a time: A helpful way to make your meetings more efficient is to have a policy that the board stays focused on one topic at a time. If the group wants to move on to something else, they should make a clear decision to end the discussion first and outline any action items for the current topic. This means avoiding jumping from one topic to another and being intentional about how each item is handled.

Consent agenda: A useful tool for making meetings quicker and more efficient is a consent agenda. This is when several routine items, like approving minutes, paying bills, or staff training, are grouped together into one item on the agenda. These items are not discussed separately; instead, they are approved with a single vote. The items on the consent agenda should be shared with board members before the meeting, and the chair and secretary usually decide what goes on it. At the start of the meeting, the chair asks if anyone wants to remove an item for discussion. If so, that item is moved to another part of the agenda to be discussed later. Then, the board votes once to approve all remaining items on the consent agenda. If your board wants to use this process, it should be included in your policies or rules and recorded in the minutes.

The chair is a servant of the board: All board members are equal and work together as peers, with the chair serving as the leader among equals. The chair is not the boss but has the important job of making sure meetings follow proper procedures. The board makes its own decisions and is responsible for its performance, while the chair's role is to support the board. The chair should not make motions themselves. Instead, they should ask others if they want to propose a motion, like, "Does any member care to make a motion?" If the chair wants to speak during discussion, they should do so last. Since leaders often get more respect, they can unintentionally influence others, so it's better for everyone's input that the chair encourages equal participation by stepping back a bit.

Public comment period: The public comment period at a board meeting is a chance for community members to share their views, but they should not participate in the decision-making process directly. Their input helps the board make informed decisions. While not legally required for soil and water conservation districts, having a public comment period can improve your relationship with the community and help manage tensions during times of public concern. To keep things organized, set a specific time for public comments with clear start and end times, and limit how long each person can speak. Speakers should not transfer their time to others. At the start of the comment period, review the guidelines and provide printed copies if possible. Explain that this time is for residents to share their opinions, and the board will not engage in dialogue during this period. The board can limit topics, speaking time, and the number of speakers, but these limits must be neutral and fair, not favoring any particular viewpoint.