

The following is an excerpt from *Nelson, K. (2025). County and municipal boards. In C. B. McLaughlin (Ed.), County and municipal government in North Carolina: 2025 edition (pp. 40–41). UNC School of Government / Longleaf Services.*

Shared Expectations of Board Chairs and Mayors

1. The chair/mayor effectively manages governing board meetings by
 - presiding at the meetings,
 - being a good timekeeper,
 - keeping board members' dialogue on track,
 - focusing on the job at hand
 - staying on topic,
 - paying attention to the board's feedback on the conduct of meetings, and
 - avoiding introducing and making important decisions at the same meeting.
2. The chair/mayor serves as liaison to the governing board by
 - staying informed of matters coming before the board,
 - overseeing relations with stakeholders,
 - testing the board's preliminary ideas with key stakeholders, and
 - asking external stakeholders to provide input on strategic issues.
3. The chair/mayor facilitates communication by
 - treating everyone in an even-handed and fair manner,
 - managing board members' contributions so that no one member dominates,
 - encouraging board members to express opinions and perspectives,
 - engaging more reticent members in discussion,
 - fostering healthy participation, especially among those with different views, and
 - employing effective group processes, making it safe to explore alternate views.
4. The chair/mayor serves as spokesperson for the governing board by
 - being a strong advocate and credible representative of local government and the board,
 - honoring the 'one voice principle whereby a vote of a majority of members is recognized as the board's final decision,
 - speaking knowledgeably and energetically about the board's accomplishments and opportunities for the community,
 - using the Five F's (Fast, Factual, Frank, Fair, and Friendly),
 - thinking before speaking (imagine what statements will sound like on the evening news before speaking, don't say more than necessary),
 - staying on message,
 - not answering questions "off the record,"
 - remembering the role of the media and the part it plays in democratic government, and
 - talking with the press in advance of a big issue to help reporters anticipate Important stories.

5. The chair/mayor helps in county/municipal government team-building by
 - gaining the trust and respect of fellow members,
 - building positive and productive relationships with the manager or administrator,
 - acknowledging the contributions of governing board members,
 - developing and maintaining teamwork between board members and professional staff, being aware of and seeking to improve board dynamics,
 - learning to "lead from behind so that others can share in accomplishments, and
 - creating a positive culture and establishing expectations that the board and management will work as a team.

 6. The chair/mayor manages conflict by
 - increasing governing board consciousness of group dynamics;
 - promoting desirable outcomes of matters relating to group norms, value differences, diversity, honesty, questioning, conflict, and dialogue;
 - suspending judgment until all perspectives have been shared;
 - being independent (able to disagree without being disagreeable); modeling good listening and inquiry skills; and
 - managing conflict on the board constructively.

 7. The chair/mayor shapes the governing board's agenda by
 - actively working with board members and the manager or administrator to identify agenda items,
 - working with the manager and others (as locally determined) to establish the board's agenda, and
 - planning meetings to allow enough time for members to discuss and explore issues and viewpoints.

 8. The chair/mayor promotes a high-performing governing board by
 - demonstrating an understanding of local government and the environment in which it operates,
 - learning skills in managing group dynamics,
 - using techniques to help the board look at things differently and from alternative points of view,
 - giving the manager and senior staff opportunities to contribute to the board's dialogue,
 - making sure members of the board read materials in advance and ask for necessary information in a timely and efficient manner,
 - being prepared for meetings,
 - offering and inviting constructive feedback,
 - seeking out opportunities to develop the board's effectiveness,
 - supporting the board-manager or board-administrator relationship, and
 - mentoring newer members.
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