

Delivering A World-Class Customer Advisory Board

Ignite Advisory Group | www.igniteag.com | info@igniteag.com

You Must Master Different Elements

A customer advisory board (CAB) can provide your organization with a tremendous amount of value in terms of strategic and product direction, closer customer relationships, and even sales momentum. **However, these high profile initiatives can also prove to be very damaging if they are not managed successfully.**

- You need to first ensure the CAB is built on a solid foundation designed to yield the type of insight the company desires.
- Second, the right members have to be targeted and recruited.
- Only then can you begin thinking about the “Delivery” stage of your board. This is where the tires really hit the road in terms of content, meetings, subcommittees, etc.

5 Key elements to consider when delivering a world-class CAB include:



Charter Document



Member Recruitment



Annual/Biannual Face-to-Face Meeting



Agenda Creation



Meeting Facilitation & Follow-Up

Charter Document

Components of a CAB Charter Document

Mission & Theme

Scope

Objectives

Duration

Time Commitment

Member Benefits

Member Estimated Costs

Roles – Host Company and Members

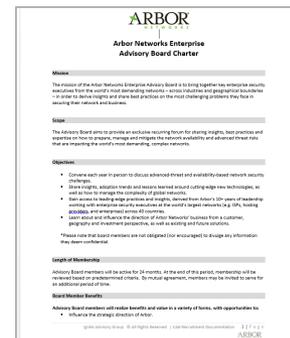
The CAB's charter is the official document for the Board that gives an overview of its purpose, theme, mission and scope, focus, roles, rules, and responsibilities.

Along with being useful internally, you will need this official charter document to recruit members— you send them a hard copy of the document once they join.

The charter should live in two different formats once drafted:

1. **Graphically-treated booklet in PDF format** that is emailed to prospective members once they have expressed interest.
2. **Printed booklet** that is FedEx'd to members once they officially join the board.

Both documents contain the exact same information.



Member Recruitment

Selecting the slate of candidates for your advisory board is an exacting task and critical milestone as you form your Customer Advisory Board.

Create an ideal member profile and collect nominations.

Identifying criteria that delivers a balanced group of peers – in role, function and level – offers the desired depth of dialogue, insight and value your company needs. Some items to consider: Size/significance of account? Familiarity with your products/services? Will the person voice his/her opinions? Based on the criteria, gather nominees from your internal CAB steering committee and sales team.

Invite potential members. After creating branded invitation materials (the official charter document and invitation letter), force ranking target members, and assigning and training recruiters, begin the invitation process.

Onboard members. Begin an onboarding process immediately after acceptance–FedEx a thank you note from the Executive Sponsor and the printed charter. Follow up with a 30-minute onboarding call to welcome the person and gather input on top-of-mind topics for the face-to-face meeting.

Top 5 Recruitment Tips:

1. **Peer-to-peer membership: Ensure that members are “birds of a feather”** – they see each other as peers at the same level of responsibility and roles (and they have been vetted internally).
2. **Personal invitations by select team members are vital** – accompanying talking points ensure consistent messaging by executives extending the invitation.
3. **Face-to-face meetings have the highest success rate for recruitment.** Think about any customer touch points/meetings within your recruitment deadlines to invite target CAB members.
4. **Multiple invitation waves are useful** to land “anchor clients” before progressing to the next tier of your slate.
5. **Recruiting never ends** – unfortunately, once your membership is assembled, you must be prepared for subsequent promotions or departures by your board members. Your advisory board must be continually refreshed.

Annual/Biannual Face-to-Face Meeting

“

The face-to-face meeting is the most significant opportunity to meet members in person. It must go off without a hitch. The inaugural meeting sets the tone for the board moving forward.

”

Your face-to-face meetings are the big get-togethers that enable your executive team and the members to get to know one another. Members themselves also have an opportunity to build rapport with colleagues and your management team.

To facilitate this relationship building, you need to design meetings so they allow for such one-on-one/group interaction. This goes far beyond the sessions themselves. You need to consider having breaks that are long enough for members to use the restroom and then also chat for a little while. When planning your meals, encourage executives to mingle and have conversations with the members. Members often times all sit at one table, which is fine. It gives them an opportunity to bond. You can also encourage your executives to pair up with a member during a meal or two to foster a strong rapport.

A successful board comes down to relationships and the members' willingness to openly share and discuss their insights.

Don't forget about team building or networking exercises/events. Yacht cruises work well and so do tours of local museums or attractions. Check with the hotel staff for ideas.

Don't underestimate the planning and implementation time required leading up to the face-to-face meeting: allow for 6-8 months of lead time.

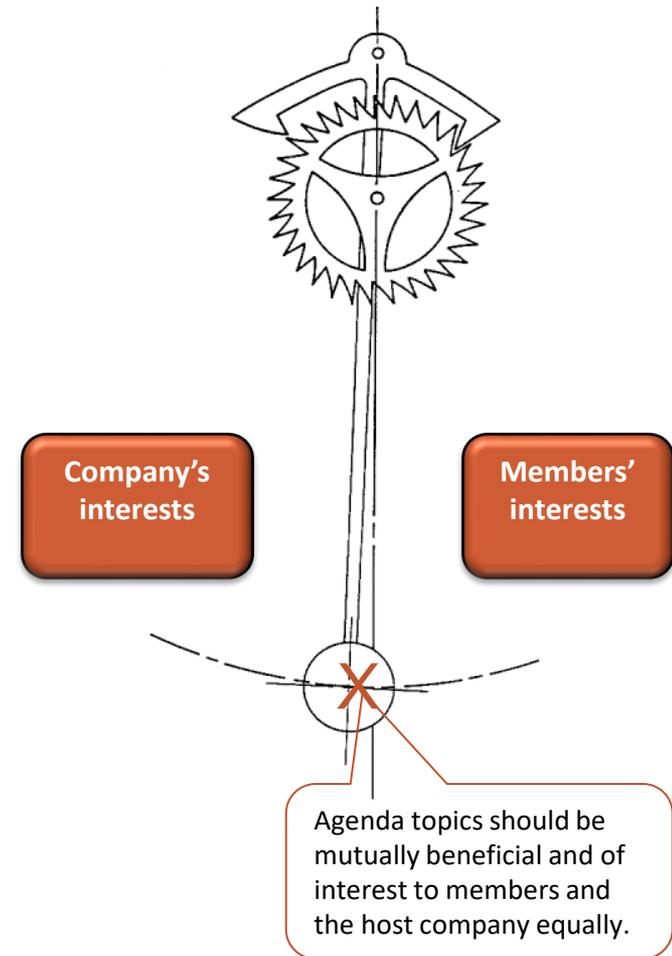
Agenda Creation

Your meeting agenda should be interactive and comprised of topics that are of interest to both your executive team and to the members themselves. It is very important to consider a pendulum and shoot for it to be right in the middle. You do not want it to swing too far to one side or the meeting will wind up being somewhat one-sided.

The best way to craft such a mutually beneficial agenda is to interview your members and ask them what topics are most important to them. First, start off with a list of topics your

executive team thinks are most relevant and useful. Run those by members and ask for their feedback and any additional/replacement recommendations.

From the interviews with members, you will be able to craft an effective, customer-driven agenda. You can then use the feedback you garnered from members to prime certain individuals to comment on a particular topic during the meeting (one that was important to them).



An effective meeting agenda features content that satisfies the interests of **both** the host organization and the members.

Agenda Creation: Session Content

The host company needs to carefully prepare the content it plans to present in each session of your meeting. A good rule of thumb is to present for 10-20 percent of the time and leave the rest for open discussion. Members come to your advisory board meetings to learn from each other and to gain insight into what your company is doing. As such, they want to hear from you about your strategy and product/service roadmaps, but they also want ample time to provide feedback.

You may choose to start each session on your agenda with some PowerPoint slides or with a brief verbal presentation of your company's view/standpoint on the specific topic and what your plans are in the specific area. The balance of each session would then be open discussion.

To help you plan out the content for each session, you should utilize a session plan, consisting of the following:

Session Plan:

1. What are the company's objectives for the session?
2. What value does the topic bring to board members?
3. How does the topic build on any member interviews or subcommittee discussions?
4. Are there any pre-reading materials members should be asked to review in advance of the meeting?
5. What will the flow of the session look like?

The content has to be engaging, thought provoking and succinct. The host company cannot present the entire time. It must be a two-way open dialogue.

Meeting Facilitation

The most successful advisory board meetings have ample participation from all members of the board – obviously with some contributing more than others.

Some members will likely be more open and talkative than others and they can have a tendency to dominate airtime. While their contributions are imperative and you do not want to stifle them, you must be sure to also find opportunities for quieter, more reserved members to speak as well. Their insights are just as welcomed and valued.

A good way to ensure participation from all members is to occasionally pose an important question to the group and go around the table asking for feedback from each member. You don't want to do this too often because it does take a lot

of time, but when you do it you are sure to gain perspectives from all members.

As a meeting facilitator, you must constantly read the vibe in the room and note the members' non-verbal cues, facial expressions and gestures. You will be able to tell if a member wants to say something but can't get a word in. You will also note any members that disagree with something said but do not verbally interject. You can then pause the discussion momentarily when this happens and ask the member for his/her point of view.

It is equally important that you monitor how much the host company's executives are talking, beyond the session presenters themselves. You want the ratio to be somewhere around:

Top 6 Meeting Facilitation Guidelines:

1. Everyone must participate
2. No side conversations during discussions
3. Only one person speaks at a time
4. Let the facilitator guide the discussion
5. Extraneous topics will be tabled
6. 80/20 Rule of Conversation

80% of the
time
members
speak

20% of the
time
executives
speak

Meeting Follow-Up & Capturing Key Insights

“ If you’re focused primarily on planning a one-off CAB meeting, you are doing it wrong. It’s a continuous process throughout the year. What happens before and after the meeting makes all the difference. ”

Driving compelling results for your advisory board and maintaining its growth over time depends on ongoing engagement and a follow-up/communications plan. Capturing key insights and action items during the face-to-face meeting is critical.

Be prepared to produce and deliver a comprehensive CAB face-to-face meeting report post-meeting soon after the meeting ends. As part of our facilitation process at Ignite, we use session key takeaway forms to gather feedback from host company employees. A member feedback survey filled out on-site at the end of the meeting provides quantitative and qualitative insights. Promptly distribute the meeting report to key internal stakeholders as well as to CAB members.

Schedule an on-site rehearsal at the face-to-face annual/biannual meeting and review each account, overall CAB meeting objectives and each session. **As soon as members depart the meeting, convene your team.** Discuss overall takeaways and actions per session and account.

Develop a yearly engagement plan with various touchpoints – quarterly calls, subcommittee meetings, company updates, webinars, etc. As part of the face-to-face meeting facilitation process, gain agreement on the engagement plan with CAB members. Include the engagement plan inside the CAB meeting report. Create and use subcommittees or working groups to drill down on key topics and produce specific deliverables (like whitepapers, other thought leadership pieces, reports).

Need Help Forming/Running an Advisory Board?

Contact Us

IGNITE ADVISORY GROUP

The Leading Advisory Board Experts

Tel: 888.667.7027

Email: info@igniteag.com

Contact Us Page:

www.igniteag.com/contact

CAB Resources

Website: www.igniteag.com

Blog: www.igniteag.com/blog

Resources: www.igniteag.com/resources

CAB Manager Training:

www.igniteag.com/training/

