



The Business of Prevention Councils

Some Prevention Council members have asked, “Why should we be so formal in how we conduct business? We all know one another, and isn’t it just easier to get together and get things done?”

That is a fair question. It’s true—it is nice to be able to come together and get things done. And it works when everyone is already in agreement. But what happens when there is disagreement about how to proceed? What should you do when people have different ideas about what things are most important?

The first thing to remember is that a Prevention Council is a business. As a business, it makes sense to be clear about the “whys and hows” of meeting goals.

Here are some basics for making sure your Council conducts business in a clear fashion:

1. **Know your mission** and be able to describe it to anyone in under thirty seconds. Be sure every Council member can do this.
2. **Keep your bylaws up to date and follow them.** Review them once a year and ask yourselves, “Do these bylaws reflect how we actually conduct business?” If the answer is “no,” it’s time to determine whether you need to change your procedures to fit the bylaws or whether you need to revise your bylaws.
3. **Keep accurate meeting minutes** and make sure all Council members receive copies. Minutes are the legal record of decisions and actions of the Council. Don’t assume anyone will remember what you decided at a meeting six months ago! *Write it down.*
4. **Keep accurate financial records.** This includes donations received, expenses paid, and monthly financial statements.

5. **Have at least two signers on your bank account.** If your Treasurer departs suddenly, it's best if someone else on the Council can access your bank account.
6. **If you can't afford a full audit, at least have someone review your financial records once a year.** Often CPAs will do this at a low cost or as a donation of services. Having a system of checks and balances makes it less likely that funds will go missing.
7. **Vote in new members.** Whenever a new person joins your Board, vote him/her in and note the vote in the minutes. Sure, this seems silly when you're a small group. But if a Board member becomes troublesome, it's difficult to vote the person off the Board if you never voted him on in the first place.
8. **Provide an orientation meeting for new Board members.** Just because someone expresses interest in preventing child abuse doesn't mean they understand how your Council addresses the issue. Be clear from the start.
9. **Have a Strategic Plan and follow it.** There are thousands of creative ways to live out the mission of primary prevention. Decide together what your Council wants to do, and determine the specifics: what you will do; why it makes sense; when you will do it; what success will look like; and who will do it.