-Josh Slocum, executive director

Has your board got one foot in the grave? Do you lurch from meeting to meeting just hoping to get a quorum? Does no one want to be on your board ever, no matter how hard you try?

You're not alone. The most common request for help we get is from local FCAs with few active board members and no new prospects. I've had time to do a lot of thinking and some experimenting over the years, and it seems clear we need to change our approach to filling seats on our boards. But first, we need to start with a fresh perspective about how our FCA runs, the purpose of our boards, and the role of members-at-large.

Step one—back away from the ledge

If your FCA is in crisis mode and you feel like it's time to shut your doors, step back and make a cup of tea. You cannot recruit effective, enthusiastic people in that state of mind. Prospects can smell the desperation a block away and they'll run. You may not even be aware that you're projecting panic but you are. Building a better board takes time and patience. Like planting a crop, you need to be willing to put the time in getting the seeds to germinate and then wait for the harvest. *This will not happen overnight and there are no magic checklists to speed it along.*

This sentiment needs repeating: You will not get a simple immediate fix by calling the national FCA office in a panic at the last minute**.** If you truly want to bolster your organization you have to be ready to commit some time and some energy in a new and different direction and wait for the flowers to bloom.

Why call an emergency meeting to talk about closing? Not a thing is going to happen to your FCA if you decided to go into low-power mode and coast for a while. Sure, there are tasks that need attending (and they may not be getting attention right now, I know). But doing the very basics is not that demanding, and eliminating everything but the essentials in the short term frees up your time and mental energy to plan for a better tomorrow.

Low-power mode

Here are the absolute essentials:

- Filing the annual form 990—This is the nonprofit version of your tax return. For most of you, all that's required is the electronic "postcard" the IRS asks small-budget groups to complete. Find out what you need to do at the IRS' website.
- Filing any annual paperwork with your Secretary of State's nonprofits division. Each state is different, but most require a brief annual report which is rarely more than a list of current board members and assets held. Check with your state government for details.
- Retrieving the mail and answer consumer inquiries that come by phone, mail, and email. This includes depositing checks that come in and promptly sending the donor a thank you and whatever your membership pack consists of. This doesn't have to be every day, but it should be regular. And it does not have to be one person; it can rotate. If your board members are really saying, "Oh goodness, that's too much," show them the door. This is such a basic, minimally time-intensive task for most small groups there is no legitimate excuse, especially from folks who've said they want to volunteer for your FCA.

What about membership donations that come in? You need to be clear to donors what they can and cannot expect. The first step is to make it clear on your website that your group is operating at a limited capacity temporarily, then give a list of what they can expect, even if it's just a funeral planning kit and a slightly dated price survey. Use this note to ask for recruits!

See the next article for specific examples of grooming and growing your active membership base.