Effective Board Meetings for Good Governance

The best board meetings leave us focused and energized: the goal of the meeting is clear, our team is motivated, the process is smooth, and there are well-defined outcomes. Not-so-great meetings, on the other hand, drain energy and lower morale because of the perceived waste of time.

We've pulled together 10 tips and a number of resources to help you set the stage for meetings that are strategic, outcome-oriented, and productive for all. Here are our favorite meeting hacks followed by a curated list of resources for more effective board meetings (although many of these ideas apply equally to other types of meetings):

1. **Rotate which committee/board members or participants lead each section of the meeting.** Listening to a new person can help reengage board members, and being responsible for sharing information or facilitating discussion builds leadership skills.

2. **Co-create the rules of engagement** for the meetings, such as sharing meeting norms and expectations. Example: what's the expectations for the use of cell phones during meetings? If your meetings are virtual, is it acceptable for members to turn their video screen off?
3. **Send out the agenda beforehand**, so everyone knows what to expect and can prepare as necessary: basic but important! Should the board meeting agenda include an executive session (BoardSource)? Some support adding a placeholder for an executive session to each board meeting agenda, just so it's there as needed and not a "red flag" that there is a problem. Others only include it when it's clear that the board will need to meet without staff present.

4. **Give each agenda item a set time frame.** Sticking to the timeframes on the agenda consistently shows board and committee members that they, and their time, are valued.

5. **Noncontroversial items can be voted on** as part of a consent agenda to save time during the meeting for deeper discussion on more strategic issues (BoardEffect).

6. **Collect RSVPs** in advance to ensure enough people will attend to make the meeting worthwhile.

7. **Note off-agenda topics and agree to set them aside for discussion at a later date** to make sure the primary agenda is addressed first and to get participants in the habit of focusing and not being sidetracked by tangents.

8. **Use periodic self-assessment or post-meeting surveys** to ensure there is a regular feedback loop so attendees can share their views of how meetings are working for them. Use the feedback to improve meetings and help the board be most effective.

9. **Document decisions!** Board meeting minutes are legal documents; committee meeting minutes are also important, both to document institutional memory and to document whether a committee's actions created a commitment by the organization. Guidance on keeping corporate minutes (Probono Partnership).

10. If your meeting will be virtual - everyone should **test out the technology in advance of the meeting!** Make sure you offer any accommodations needed for virtual meetings.

### Tips and Tools for effective meetings

- [12 ways to liven up your board meetings and your board](Gail Perry)
- [12 handy tips for running remote meetings](Hubspot )
- [Four researched-based tips to maximize your meetings](Happy Brain Science)
- [Working group meeting warm-ups and toolkit](Collective Impact Forum)
Related Insights & Analysis

- Board Engagement
- Board Roles and Responsibilities
- Smooth sailing into your next board meeting

Additional Resources for Effective Meetings

- Meeting and Exceeding Expectations: A Guide to Successful Board Meetings (BoardSource)
- Parliamentary Law and Practice for Nonprofit Organizations (Rosenthal)
- Virtual Board Meetings (BoardSource)
- What Makes a Board Meeting a Home Run (Joan Garry)

Disclaimer: Information on this website is provided for informational purposes only and is neither intended to be nor should be construed as legal, accounting, tax, investment, or financial advice. Please consult a professional (attorney, accountant, tax advisor) for the latest and most accurate information. The National Council of Nonprofits makes no representations or warranties as to the accuracy or timeliness of the information contained herein.