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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)

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