



Keep nonprofit board meetings short and sweet

Whether your not-for-profit is continuing to hold videoconference board meetings or is back to in-person gatherings, you don't want to waste members' time. Board meetings need to be long enough to accomplish agenda items and keep your organization on track, but not so long that the meetings become tedious and unproductive. The key is good planning.

Cover pressing concerns

Once you've set a meeting date, prepare an agenda. Email board members to ask if there's anything they want to add. This will help ensure all pressing concerns can be covered and minimize the chances of "surprise" issues hijacking the meeting.

For each item, the agenda should provide a timetable and assign responsibility to specific members. Include at least one board vote to reinforce a sense of purpose and accomplishment, but be careful not to cram too much into your agenda. Otherwise, the meeting is likely to feel rushed and some items may need to be postponed.

Email a board packet at least one to two days before the meeting. This packet should consist of the agenda, minutes from the previous meeting and materials relevant to new agenda items, such as financial statements and project proposals.

Stick to the agenda

Start with a short pre-meeting reception that allows members to chat. Some board members have little time to spare, but most will welcome the opportunity to get to know their colleagues.

Once the meeting starts, your executive director and board chair should stick to the agenda and keep things moving. This means imposing a time limit on discussions and calling time when necessary — particularly if one or two individuals are dominating the conversation.

Encourage a vote after a reasonable period. But if your organization requires a consensus (as opposed to a majority vote), the board may not be able to reach a decision in one meeting. If members need more time to think about an issue, postpone the decision to a future date and move on. Be sure to end the meeting on a positive note by thanking members for their time.

Complete post-meeting tasks

Board meetings can't be effective if there's no follow-up. Find answers and supporting materials for any questions that might have arisen during the meeting and make sure unresolved items are placed on the next meeting's agenda.

Also ensure that board members are fulfilling their commitments to your organization and fellow members. If their busy schedules are impeding them, step in and help. If the issue continues, consider replacing the board member.

What matters

Your board members are likely busy professionals who volunteer to serve your nonprofit. Respect their time by focusing on what matters during meetings.