

9-Step Board Meeting Agenda

Let's Define Each Agenda Item

AGENDA ITEM #1: Recognize a Quorum (One minute)

The first order of business is to recognize a quorum - which means “the number of directors required to be present to authorize call the meeting to order”. The chair will determine if a quorum (as defined in your organization's bylaws) is present. If you were provided bylaws as part of our nonprofit formation package, a quorum is defined as a simple majority of eligible directors.

AGENDA ITEM #2: Call to Order (One minute)

The Call to Order is next. The Chair will announce “this meeting is hereby called to order”. We recommend you refer to the exact time on a clock everyone can see, and ask the Secretary (or other designated note-taker) to start a timer or make note of the time. Again, the number one frustration expressed regarding board meetings is poor focus, resulting in long boring meetings.

This is the time to set the tone for the meeting. Inside this minute, you'll address everyone with a polite greeting and thanks for their attendance, welcome new members, and thanking any special guests. This is also the time to ask everyone to turn off their cell phones. Some people even collect them in the middle of the table (a wonderful binding moment of vulnerability!) and make sure they are turned off.

AGENDA ITEM #3: Approve the Agenda (One minute)

So following the Call to Order and polite acknowledgements, the chair moves to Approve the agenda. If the chair has done their job, they've completed a board agenda template prior to the meeting, and sent it ahead of time, so that this step can simply consist of asking if all voting members present have had the opportunity to review the agenda.

If so, the chair will ask the members to approve the agenda, and kick the meeting into high gear. If a member requests amendments to add or subtract items from the agenda, the amended agenda may be approved without a vote.

AGENDA ITEM #4: Approve Previous Meeting Minutes (5 minutes)

Approving the previous meeting's minutes is a little bit more involved, so it typically takes longer. Before conducting any official business and making decisions, the board will usually approve the minutes of the prior meeting. Here is another reason why it is important to circulate the previous meeting's minutes to directors ahead of the meeting. The chair will ask if there are any corrections to the minutes. If there are no corrections, the chair will announce, "The minutes of the previous minutes are hereby approved as written" and then the document gets added to the organization's corporate records.

This may be done without a formal vote. Should have dispute arise regarding an amendment to the minutes, the chair may ask for a vote as to whether the amendment should be adopted. Once the minutes have been approved, the chair shall announce, "If there are no further corrections, the minutes stand approved as corrected". The secretary would then record any amendments to the minutes and the chair would sign the minutes to make them official.

AGENDA ITEM #5: Reports and Communications (5 minutes)

Next up, reports and communications. This will take more time minutes as well, as it represents another meaty segment of the board meeting, consisting primarily of receiving the reports that are important to running the organization. Often the executive director will report - even if that person is also a director - since staff are responsible for day-to-day operations.

Reports or recommendations by any special committees may be considered for a formal vote and adopted in a resolution. The highlight of this meeting segment is often the treasurer's report - hopefully read at the simplest, highest level. Generally, no discussion or action needs to be taken on financial reports; a vote is normally taken only after the annual official or audited financial report.

AGENDA ITEM #6: Old Business (5 minutes)

Old business consists of items previously discussed that are ready for formal approval. Perhaps they were brought up in a previous meeting but not voted on; if additional discussion is required, the chair asks for approval to move those items to the discussion portion of the meeting. All other items should fall into three buckets: (1) Items that are being voted on; (2) Items being postponed and, (3) Items being tabled.

AGENDA ITEM #7: New Business (5 minutes)

New Business also takes five minutes, and is the area to watch for the verbal "rip tides" that can suck your board meeting into topic-surfing oblivion. The chair will announce new business items, one at a time, and allow for discussion - making sure to keep those discussions very focused. The chair may request the members

rearrange the order of items for efficiency and relevance. The chair should invite discussion, discussion and facilitate debate as needed.

We recommend the chair limit the discussion to a certain length (perhaps one minute) and use a timer if possible, so everyone can follow. The item may be either (A) voted on, (B) amended, (C) tabled, (D) moved to a committee for consideration or (E) postponed.

The Chair may want to take items needing further development (projects or initiatives, for example) out of the domain of the Board for a time, and put them in the hands of a committee who are working on a certain topic or project.

AGENDA ITEM #8: Other Business (3 minutes)

The Other Business segment can be relegated to about three minutes. Following New Business, the chair will invite those present to bring up non-discussion items such as announcements, ideas, or items for future discussion. This allows time for consideration prior to adding them the agenda of a future meeting. So if someone says, "I have an idea for a future discussion item" - perhaps a decision around an initiative or an expenditure - this is the time to bring it up and put on the list for a future meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #9: Adjourn the Meeting (3 minutes)

Adjourning the meeting should take about three minutes. The Chair will review actions from this meeting as needed, and confirm the date and time of the next meeting. He or she will then thank everyone for attending and declare the meeting adjourned. As an important final step, the chair should follow up with the executive officer and review any aspects of the meeting they need to discuss prior to the secretary writing the formal, record of the meeting in the form of Minutes.

The total of the 9 Steps as provided here is exactly 29 minutes, so you've still got one to spare! Of course, if you've got a lot of discussion items, a robust agenda, or a large board, a meeting can take much longer - but if you aim for 30 minutes to cover a simple nonprofit board meeting and limit the number of topics covered, your organization will probably remain much healthier for much longer.

Instead, your board is going to be able to roll up their sleeves and do things for the organization instead of getting mired down and demoralized!

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