

How to Run your Board Meeting in 30 Minutes or Less

Running a board meeting involves asking humans (usually your friends, family or colleagues) to do something they would not normally do; therefore it creates stress in the minds and hearts of nonprofit founders who don't have lots of experience managing people and organizations. Drinks on Friday, or a walk in the park? Much easier!

The good news is, we can make this easy as well, and maybe even fun! It is our mission in publishing this material for you to not only help you "get through" the learning curve, but to absolutely feel great about it - such as walking out of a well-run board meeting, with your Directors patting you on the back and praising you for being such a "pro" - even if you feel like you have NO IDEA what you are doing going into the meeting!

We're going to cover this topic in two segments:

- Preparation and Mindset: First, we will cover a bit about setting up and managing the Board meeting, along with some crucial mindset tips)
- Second, we'll dig into our Nine-Step Agenda for the meeting itself, which matches.

The following five Board of Directors Meeting Best Practices are crucial to coming off like a "pro" - which will affect the confidence of your directors, your fundraising, etc.:

1. **Prepare the board meeting agenda in advance:** This will increase productivity during the meeting by reducing the time needed to present and review information. The agenda will help people understand what's going on at the meeting before they get there - versus trying to absorb a lot of information during the meeting. The agenda packet must be well organized, easy to read, and without a lot of superfluous materials.
2. **Make your agenda strategic:** Make sure you limit the agenda to one or two strategic goals during each board meeting. Depending on the number of your strategic goals and the number of board meetings you have in a year, you can adjust based upon your needs and available time.
3. **Start and end on time:** Time constraints are a wonderful thing, hence the name of this training "How to Run Your Board Meeting in 30 Minutes or Less". Because if you aim for 30 minutes and you end up with 45, you're worlds better off than 95% of other nonprofit boards. We recommend you share an attitude of

“gamifying” objectives (such as hitting a predetermined meeting length) by being super organized and helping keep everyone on point.

4. **Address Decisions, not Updates:** One of the ways that you can end meetings in the time allotted is to address **decisions** in your board meeting, **not updates**. At its core, the purpose of a board meeting is to present and clarify information and reports that actually contribute to decisions. Those decisions then result in written resolutions.

Requiring any information to be considered to be sent in written form well ahead of the meeting - and restricting board meeting discussion to specific questions about that information - is key. Resist getting “in the weeds” with unplanned discussions and “topic surfing”.

5. **Keep good meeting minutes.** Reliable notes are like life insurance - you hope you'll never need them but you better have them just in case! The easiest way to handle this Board meeting obligation is to simply record the meeting on a smartphone, computer, or handheld digital recording device - technology advances have taken away any excuse NOT to record the meeting. Not only does this take away the pressure on your secretary or whomever is making the notes at the meeting, but recording provides insurance for the organization should anyone challenge what was actually discussed and decided at a meeting.

Mindset of the Board Chairman - the Secret Weapon for awesome meetings!

We cannot overemphasize the importance of the chair's role in running board meetings, and in managing the board overall. On the presentation slide for this training, you'll notice a “No Squirrels Allowed” icon. The meeting dynamic is set by the chairperson of the meeting.

The demeanor and authority of the chair is paramount to keeping control of the meeting. Poorly chaired board meetings are the number one annoyance with the board of directors typically, and are among the top reasons people resign from serving on a Board. The most competent people will be the first to resign, as meetings wind up being too long, too unfocused, and ultimately too stressful.

So to keep the meeting running smoothly, the chair must have a kind but firm, authoritative tone - guiding and interjecting during the meeting to keep discussions relevant.

Often, members of your Board of Directors will, see it as their job as to ask a lot of questions and explore myriad topics. The board meeting is not the place to do that.

In reality, creating a framework for keeping meetings under control and tamping down distractions a This paves the way for strategic progress toward your organization's mission.

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 to 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!

Conclusion

It's time to Take Action! Fill out your agenda, edit and distribute it to your board members, and use it to actually run your next board meeting.

We look forward to rolling out additional trainings to help you maximize the impact of your organization and focus on your mission, instead of spending time needlessly to interpret the rules and process around bureaucratic requirements such as board meetings. We look forward to your comments and feedback, and we'll see you next time!

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