



If you manage an association, standards group, or consortium, any major organizational decisions must be made with the governing board's consent. And if your board is like most, it is comprised of industry leaders who are running their own successful businesses, traveling, speaking, and seemingly booked 24/7. So, holding board meetings remotely has become a way to ensure higher attendance and greater participation from board members, while also respecting hectic schedules.

But are remote board meetings really as effective as gathering your group of thought leaders in one place and allowing ideas to just flourish?

There are pros and cons to holding virtual board meetings. Some of the pros include:

- Stronger communication and participation among members
- Cost savings associated with onsite meetings
- Reduction in the time needed to reach a consensus

Of course any of us who have sat through one of these calls knows that they can also be excruciating. Some of the cons of remote meetings include:

- Format issues when not everyone can easily access the same platform nor are amused by recent technology that show them present in avatar form
- Underperformance from presenters who feel limited by the lack of visible, initial feedback
- The potential for presentations to come off more like a cartoon full of gimmicky graphics than a professional conversation about important organizational issues

So if you do hold a remote board meeting, how can you make sure that you avoid the potential pitfalls, communicate effectively, and achieve your desired results?

Here are 10 strategies for making a remote board meeting more effective:

1 Know the limits.

There are some topics that don't lend themselves to remote meetings – sensitive topics requiring reading of non-verbal communications, white board discussions, brainstorming, etc. Complex voting matters can be very awkward on a call when no one is sure who is going to talk first. Save the most important discussions for in-person meetings.

2 Set a time frame.

Remote meetings become less effective the longer they are. You'll lose board members' attention to email, other calls, and distractions. The shorter, the better. Avoid going over 90 minutes. Also set a target duration for each agenda item and stick to it. Meandering discussions will lose participants very quickly and give the impression that the meeting host is disorganized.

3 Technology can help.

Including a video component is a great way to keep participants engaged. When they know everyone can see them, they're less likely to be checking email or text messages.

4 Technology can hurt.

Only use technology platforms that all participants are familiar with and have used prior to the meeting. In your initial invitation, make it very clear which technology platform you'll be using and suggest that members sign up for accounts if they don't already have them. This avoids wasting 15 minutes trying to walk one misguided member through logging into WebEx.

5 Engage everyone.

Because it is so easy to multi-task when on a group call, participants can become disengaged quickly. This could result in a false consensus if a vote is taken or potential action is being "agreed upon" when not all members are giving it their undivided attention. The key to avoiding this is to have an experienced facilitator who draws individual opinions out periodically and makes a point to check in with all participants. Another option is to assign different topics for each member to present so that participants don't tune out a single voice that's doing all the talking.

6 Set ground rules – and reinforce them before the call begins.

These can be simple things like how people should announce themselves before they speak, the suggestion to mute phones when not contributing to the discussion, and a strategy to prevent participants from talking over one another, which can cause a great deal of frustration.

7 Schedule a pre-meeting between the executive director of the organization and the board president.

This will help determine the agenda and give the president a heads-up on staff issues, funding opportunities, and items for which you need the board's support. If the president has bought into the goals of the meeting, he or she is much more likely to engage other members and be an influential leader for decision-making.

8 Create a pre-reading packet.

Having a board sitting on the phone for an hour to review slides isn't a good use of its members' time – or yours. Allow your board members a chance to read and digest key information before the call so that you can use the call to answer questions and discuss content strategically. This packet can include: minutes from the last meeting, committee reports, financial statements, and background research that the board may need to reference during the meeting.

9 Follow up with a quick actions summary.

For many groups, big decisions are made on conference calls. Reinforce a sense of urgency by distributing a succinct list of actions taken during the call and those committed to by members for future action. Participants are more likely to follow through with tasks when they are fresh in their minds and they have a clear list that spells out what will be done, by whom, and when.

10 Thank your board!

Board members are volunteers who give time, money, and expert advice to an organization. You don't have to be overly formal, but an email of appreciation or a mention in newsletters and media releases is a great way to let them know that their leadership matters.



It is important to consider that different states have different requirements for where, how, and when a board meeting can take place. Consult your legal counsel to ensure that you are complying with your state's regulations. Some regulations get pretty detailed, like this one from California: "Participation in a meeting through use of conference telephone constitutes presence in person at that meeting only if all members participating in the meeting are able to hear one another."

That returns us back to the point about selecting the best technology platform and educating members about it prior to the call. A company called [Directorpoint](#) has just launched an online platform dedicated solely to remote board meetings. So, while GoToMeeting may be your go-to technology, it never hurts to give others a try. [See some other recommended tools here.](#)

If you'd like help making your board meetings – remote or otherwise – more effective, consider consulting an association management company. At Virtual, Inc., we provide strategic consulting and management services to associations, standard-setting organizations, and technology consortia at all lifecycle stages – from start-up through growth phase and maturity. To learn more, [contact our team](#). Ask about our [practice areas](#), our [solutions](#), and our proven track record of success.

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