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Applying hybrid working models to board meetings

Terminology

Virtual meeting – every participant joins via an online video conferencing (VC) platform such as Teams or Zoom

Hybrid meeting – some participants attend in-person and some attend online via VC



Things to consider when planning your board meeting schedule

- Help board members plan ahead by developing a calendar that identifies the meeting format ahead of time.
- Different meetings could have different formats as a standard (e.g. committee meetings may be virtual only).
- Do you have the right technology to support each meeting format? This is particularly important for hybrid meetings. If hybrid models will continue to be your norm and VC equipment is not built into your meeting room, you may wish to invest in a quality external microphone, webcam and tripod as an alternative.
- Do your board constitutions and policies (etc) reflect new ways of working?
- When onboarding new directors, make special effort to arrange an initial meeting in person. Establishing relationships in this way has shown to have strong effects on increased collaboration later, even in virtual meetings.
- Does your board have a clear position on COVID-19 vaccination status for directors, in line with organisational and legal requirements (e.g. CHO directions)? Ensure this position, expectations and legal obligations are clearly communicated to all board members before establishing your meeting schedule.



Benefits to virtual meetings

- ✓ Reduced travel time
- ✓ Increased attendance
- ✓ More opportunity to include remote guest speakers
- ✓ Improved accessibility, expanding recruitment opportunities and board diversity
- ✓ It can be easier to keep to time and maintain a focused agenda
- ✓ Voting technology and digital record keeping



Challenges in virtual and hybrid meetings

- Less opportunity for relationship building
- Less ad-hoc chats and post-meeting conversations
- Ensuring everyone has the opportunity and feels comfortable to speak up
- Ensuring all members are engaged and actively participating throughout the meeting (e.g. not 'multi-tasking' and reading emails)



Tips for virtual meetings

Practice good meeting etiquette by turning your video on during the meeting.

Mute your microphone while other people speak to reduce background noise. Remember to unmute yourself before speaking. **Use a speaker and microphone headset** (or headphones) to reduce echoing and feedback.

Be aware of your surroundings. Sit in a well-lit room, facing a light source. Use background blur or virtual background to minimise distractions. Minimise background noise.

Use names when you are speaking to someone. In a multi-person meeting, people can't tell if you're looking at or speaking to them.

Eye contact is important. If using a webcam, look at the camera rather than your own image.

Avoid interruptions and distractions. Use the meeting chat to help share resources and information during meetings without causing a distraction. It's helpful to share web addresses, contact names, spellings, and other information while someone else is talking.

Use effective engagement principles/strategies for the virtual environment, including removing slide sharing when not needed so that participants are visible; regularly changing the format, e.g. changing speaker, showing a video or moving to breakout rooms; using in-built engagement tools such as running a poll, using a whiteboard or reactions.

Good principles for virtual and hybrid meetings



Consider a 'soft start'. If you are worried about losing the social aspect of an in-person meeting, consider opening the meeting with 10-15 minutes of 'small talk' before launching into the agenda.

Make use of digital tools to capture meeting minutes, votes etc, regardless of whether they attend in-person or virtually.

Schedule breaks. Consider break regularity and duration in your meeting schedule. A short break every hour can allow an opportunity to stretch and be effective in refocusing.

Seek feedback. A quick anonymous survey may highlight what to keep, change, or leave.

Test meeting software before the meeting, allowing time to troubleshoot any potential issues.

For added security, don't record meetings even though software may now make this possible.



Tips for hybrid meetings

Wherever possible, use or hire a meeting **room with VC equipment** (camera, microphone, screen) so that all in-person attendees are captured by one device.

If you are in a room without built-in VC equipment, position one or two laptops at a COVIDsafe distance to capture as many participants as possible in the room. Importantly, ensure only one microphone is on to **avoid echoing and feedback.**

Develop 'communication protocols', such as raising a hand (both in-person and virtually) to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to speak – the conversation will flow more naturally between in-person participants.

The board chair should **ensure online participants are included** the conversation as much as in-person participants. Embedding a practice of intentionally acknowledging and opening the floor to online participants after each key point can support this.

To ensure online participants are acknowledged and to allow a more seamless line of communication, the chair may consider assigning an in-person participant to act as an **intermediary for online attendees,** or alternatively, place a **visual prompt** like a name plate or image at the table as a reminder.

Supporting resources

[Take on Board podcast. Episode 90 - Okay, my brain does what now while I'm on a Zoom board meeting. Dr Fiona Kerr explains \(2021\)](#)

[OnBoard Meetings. Why Your Board Should Avoid Hybrid Meetings \(2021\)](#)