Virtual Meeting Toolkit

A guide for remote meetings and technology best practices

By Mitch Johnson & Dottie Schindlinger

Some organizations are designed for remote work. For others, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced employees, boards, and leaders into an uncomfortable transition.

According to BoardEffect users, almost all meetings now have a virtual component. Running an effective in-person meeting can present many challenges (e.g., technology, preparation, flow), which are only compounded in a virtual setting.

Whether it's a lack of engagement or security, poorly executed virtual meetings can lessen productivity, weaken camaraderie, and (most importantly) compromise sensitive information at all levels of an organization. As video conferences become an increasingly important collaboration tool for boards and leadership teams, organizations will require robust security protocols to protect the most sensitive and confidential information from leakage or attack.

"A seat at the table" has quickly become a seat in your home office. **Mitch Johnson**, Board and Volunteer Relations Manager for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and a BoardEffect client, co-presented a webinar on "Best Practices for Virtual Board Meetings During COVID-19," along with **Dottie Schindlinger**, Executive Director of the Diligent Institute and a founding team member of BoardEffect. In this guide, we frame Mitch's key insights around navigating remote board meetings successfully. You'll come away with core best practices to ensure your virtual meetings are effective, engaging, and secure.

Why Video?

Many of us shy away from using video, but it's one of the most important ways to make virtual meetings effective.

Here's why:

▶ Video conferencing is more engaging than audio conferencing. Making virtual eye contact is the next best thing to gathering in person.

▶ Humans process visual information significantly faster and better than text or audio. The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text, and 90 percent of information transmitted to the brain is visual.

▶ Visual elements affect people both cognitively and emotionally. For teams that are geographically dispersed, the emotional connection is key for deeper engagement.

Considerations, Tips and Best Practices

VIRTUAL MEETING TOOLS

☐ **Select a video conferencing platform.** Whether it's Zoom, GoToMeeting, Webex, or Microsoft Teams, there are a wide variety of platforms available to support video conferencing (all similar in functionality). Consult your IT team – if they don't already have video capabilities in place, they can make a recommendation based on the organization's current infrastructure.

☐ **Determine supporting tools.** In addition to the video conferencing platform, consider the tools that are needed to securely deliver meeting materials, support communication, and increase engagement and productivity throughout the video conference. We recommend leveraging a secure board management solution and messaging platform. Check out BoardEffect and Diligent Messenger to improve secure collaboration during virtual leadership and board meetings.

☐ **Ensure board members are well informed that sessions are confidential.** Videoconferencing should be used securely. No unidentified individuals should be allowed into the meeting. In some virtual meeting platforms, there is a "waiting room" feature that can be used to only admit board members into the meeting. You can also try individual meeting links instead of a "Personal Meeting ID" or use a meeting password option. Do not allow participants to join before the host, and make sure audio and video are not turned on by default for joining participants. Board members should also know who to contact for acceptance into the meeting if they are not initially allowed in.

MEETING PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES

☐ **Begin every meeting by laying out the meeting protocols.** Establish a set of rules specific to virtual board meetings that the board agrees to uphold. For example, decide whether all audio should remain "muted" until someone wishes to speak, and whether you will use webcams. Determine whether to allow board members to use the "chat" feature, understanding that anything they type there might need to be included in the meeting minutes. Consider whether to require board members to use headsets, to avoid having other members of directors' households accidentally overhearing the meeting.

☐ **Encourage the use of the "raise hands" feature.** This indicates that a board member would like to verbally add to the conversation and allows board leadership or staff to then call on those who have "raised their hands" for timely comments.

☐ **Make sure to allow enough time for discussion.** With virtual meetings, only one person can speak at a time - which can make conversations feel a little awkward. To help address this, make sure you are allowing a little extra time after asking for questions before moving on to the next topic. Sometimes, it could take a moment or two for a director to successfully unmute the audio and speak.

☐ **Prepare the board chair in advance for closed or executive sessions.** Plan a "run-through" with your board leadership prior to the meeting to make sure they feel comfortable with the chat feature and meeting controls. Then, during the meeting, model this style of discussion and Q&A. By the time your board comes to "closed session" at the end of the meeting, the board chair should be comfortable taking control. Staff members can drop off the call but remain reachable via text in case any technical issues or questions arise.

MEETING PROCESSES & ETIQUETTE

☐ **Divide and conquer.** Doling out key roles across your team is core to running a smooth virtual meeting. Be sure to designate one person to handle minutes, another person to keep track of who is on the line, and another person to be available to troubleshoot should any technical issues arise.

☐ **Deal with the distractions.** Working from home presents many potential sources of distraction – from pets walking across computer keyboards, to small children who make guest appearances on webcams. During virtual board meetings, it can be difficult to help directors navigate some of these challenges. The best approach is simply to discuss this issue openly. Encourage your board to have a simple "signal" any director can use to excuse her/himself for a few moments. If they will be leaving the audio, it's best that they let the board secretary know – perhaps by one-to-one chat message in the videoconference software – that they are stepping away and then alert the board secretary when they return for the sake of the minutes.

☐ **Dedicate time for virtual networking and feedback.** It's easy to feel disconnected when you're not able to socialize and interact with one another like you used to. Reserve time for a general session to gather feedback on the meeting – focus on things like how you're feeling, what you got out of the meeting, and what commitments you'd like to make moving forward.

BOARD ENGAGEMENT

☐ **Organizations need strong leadership whether during a crisis or not.** It's critical that the board chair and chief executive director commit to talking – daily if needed – until they create a clear plan to get the board's attention focused on addressing the needs of your organization.

☐ **Plan your agenda carefully.** For many, the default approach is to simplify virtual meetings and make a one-way flow of information – but your board is your governing partner during a crisis, and you need to plan for engagement. Rather than trying to cover all topics on an informative level, choose those that are most mission critical and could benefit from board participation.

☐ **Use BoardEffect's collaboration tools in conjunction with the videoconference.** BoardEffect provides convenient ways for your board, committees, and other groups to meet in private "workrooms," and to collaborate through Group Discussions, sharing files in Group Libraries, participating in Group Polls and Surveys, and facilitating Group Meetings. When used with videoconferencing software, these options help shrink the physical distance between members of the group by making it easy to get feedback, brainstorm, share files and ideas, and hold meetings.

How BoardEffect Supports
Your Virtual Meeting Workflow
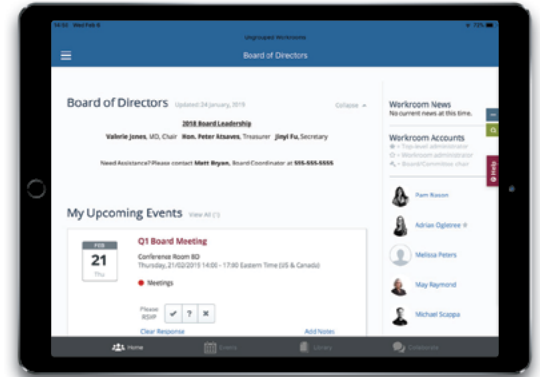
MEETING MATERIALS

- Store important notices or alerts within the BoardEffect Library, and feature links to documents, videos, or live stream video in the Welcome Message or News sections.

- Create workrooms for emergency response teams and staff to centralize and manage all emergency response content.

MEETING MANAGEMENT

- Schedule, coordinate and reschedule meetings from anywhere, at any time.

- Decentralize and streamline the process of assembling meeting materials using the Contributors and Approval Workflow features, and use integrations to securely embed your video conference link.

ELECTRONIC VOTING & APPROVALS

- Consider using the Polls feature to allow board members to record their own votes in regions where the practice is permissible. We recommend consulting with your legal counsel if you are unsure about the legality of online voting in your region.

- Gather information and feedback with the Surveys tool, and use document approvals and the Meeting Book Workflow feature to record and document your review and approval process.

VIDEO CONFERENCING & DOCUMENT SHARING

- The Meeting Video feature allows you to include your conference link as a button displayed directly in the Event, so members can simply click to join the video conference. BoardEffect integrates with Zoom and GoToMeeting for a seamless virtual meeting experience.

- Use the Discussions feature to securely manage ongoing discussions and collaborate effectively for timely decision-making.

BoardEffect provides board directors, executives, and administrators with the modern governance tools to efficiently and securely manage their board information.
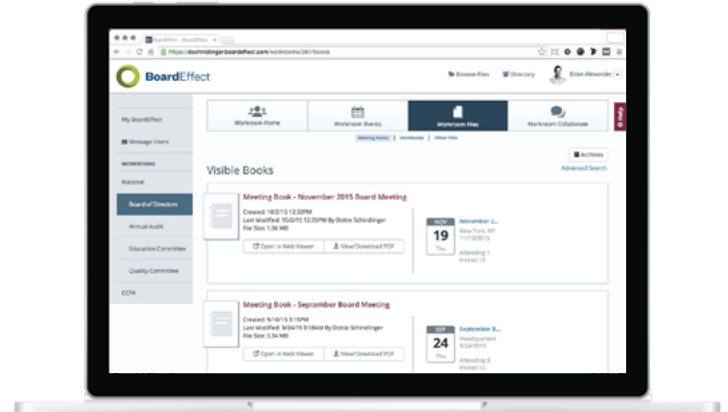
By answering the direct board management needs of organizations with different structures, missions, and goals, BoardEffect enables better communication and collaboration, while fueling efficiency at every turn.

Part of Diligent, the leader in modern governance, BoardEffect is committed to providing the best in board meeting management. We proudly serve users across a range of verticals in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors.

Learn more about BoardEffect and how your organization can better approach virtual board meetings, boost efficiency, and improve governance practices before, during and after a crisis.

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