

Checklist: 8 Steps to Achieve Highly Productive Board Meetings

Well-run meetings are a hallmark of a high-performing board of directors. But how do you make the most of limited time together when there's a lot on the table? A detailed and organized approach to preparation can help you empower participants for maximum productivity during board meetings, whether they're steering a large for-profit enterprise or helping a small or mid-sized nonprofit fulfill its mission.

Thoughtful preparation sets the stage for a smooth event where board members can share individual insights and reach well-reasoned decisions. By planning ahead and assembling a complete board package before each meeting, you equip participants to contribute at their highest level and show respect for their time. The strategies and best practices in this meeting prep checklist can help you reap the greatest value from your next board meeting.

☐ STEP 1: DISCUSS

It's best to start preparing two weeks or longer before the board is scheduled to meet. Begin by talking to all relevant parties about items to include in the meeting agenda and gather data that may help illustrate discussion points and inform board decisions. Arrange for a pre-meeting conference (or several) to help executive staff prepare for the official meeting.

☐ STEP 2: PLAN

Create the meeting agenda, including items from executives, board members, staff, and others. Pre-meeting conferences are also the time to formulate the narrative for the meeting and establish how you want the discussion to flow.

For nonprofits, it's important to allow time for the board to meet without organization staff present. This helps maintain space between the board and nonprofit leaders so the board can function independently, properly fulfilling its oversight and governance responsibilities. Schedule nonprofit staff participation in board meetings on an as-needed basis.

☐ STEP 3: ASSIGN

Determine how you'll distribute responsibility for meeting tasks. Make sure that all responsible parties understand their assigned roles and duties:

- ☐ Who will present, and on which topics?
- ☐ Who is responsible for gathering specific information and documents?
- ☐ Who will prepare and distribute board meeting packages before the meeting?
- ☐ Who will take notes or make recordings during the meeting?
- ☐ Who will follow up on action items under discussion or new questions that arise?

☐ STEP 4: GATHER

Gather complete financial and operational information to share in board meeting packages. This important step ensures that meeting participants can refer to the most current reports as they discuss agenda items. Be sure to document:

- ☐ Key performance indicators and financial metrics
- ☐ Current period financial statements
- ☐ Budgets and data from the same period last year
- ☐ Financial forecasts for the next quarter and the next year
- ☐ Metrics that quantify progress toward organization-specific goals
- ☐ Quantifiable changes in performance, projections, or other significant changes

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Nonprofit organizations should gather program reporting documentation and statements that provide comprehensive financial data, including:

- ☐ Statement of financial position
- ☐ Statement of activities showing revenue and expenses
- ☐ Statement of cash flows
- ☐ Statement of functional expenses
- ☐ Side-by-side metrics that compare budget items to real-world amounts

☐ STEP 5: PREPARE

Board meetings often require action by the board, or certain board members, and some meetings involve legal matters. As you prepare a comprehensive board package, perform any prep work related to these issues and include supporting documentation:

- ☐ Finalize minutes from the prior board meeting so they're ready for approval.
- ☐ Prepare data and documents for any upcoming stock option grants.
- ☐ Establish data and documents for financial actions that require board approval.
- ☐ Get updated information about pending legal actions.
- ☐ Schedule legal counsel to participate or present at the meeting, as appropriate.
- ☐ Obtain materials for board discussion and review, including due diligence findings and transaction agreements for mergers and acquisitions.

☐ STEP 6: REVIEW

The organization's CFO and CEO should thoroughly review the board package once it's complete, working with other leaders and executive staff as needed to:

- ☐ Verify the accuracy and current status of data.
- ☐ Check that the package presents a clear picture with adequate detail.
- ☐ Identify any gaps in data, reporting, or documentation around agenda items.
- ☐ Update and refine the agenda to tell the company's story well.

☐ STEP 7: ANTICIPATE

Assess the meeting agenda and the entire collection of information through the eyes of a board member who's seeing the package for the first time, and think about their likely response:

- ☐ Anticipate the questions board members are likely to ask.
- ☐ Develop responses that address potential questions about agenda items.
- ☐ Gather new data and documentation as needed to clarify discussion points.
- ☐ Create improved graphics to convey complex information more easily, if necessary.

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☐ STEP 8: COMMUNICATE

After reviewing and finalizing the board package, distribute it to all meeting attendees. Make sure board members have the opportunity to prepare for full and active participation:

- ☐ Distribute board packages a few days before the meeting so that attendees have ample time to review the contents.
- ☐ Let recipients know that the CEO and CFO are available to discuss the board package and answer questions before the meeting.
- ☐ Build time into executives' schedules so they can meet with individual board members as needed.

GIVE YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO DO THEIR BEST WORK

Your board of directors is crucial in supporting your organization's continued progress, but they need your help to deliver optimal results. The diligence and attention you devote to meeting preparation facilitates peak performance from board members, individually and collectively. [Contact your CRI advisor](#) to discover more ways you can empower your board and drive ever-greater success for your organization.

†This is not a CPA firm.

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