

EFFECTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Structuring Agendas & Decision-Making



WHAT YOU'LL GET OUT OF THIS GUIDE:

This guide helps experienced board leaders and executive directors of arts organizations refine board meeting practices to enhance clarity, efficiency, and impact. Whether managing dynamic creative projects or strategic governance, board meetings should support thoughtful decisionmaking and focused, action-oriented dialogue.

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DESIGNING A STRATEGIC AGENDA

A. STRUCTURE WITH PURPOSE

Create a repeatable structure that aligns with your board's governance calendar and key milestones in your organization's artistic and fiscal year.

Suggested Agenda Framework:

- 01.** Welcome & Approval of Minutes – **5 min**
- 02.** Mission Moment / Artistic Highlight – **5 min**
- 03.** Executive Director's Report (brief, strategic) – **10 min**
- 04.** Financial Overview – **10 min**
- 05.** Key Strategic Discussion / Decision Point – **30–45 min**
- 06.** Committee Reports (only with decisions/asks) – **10–15 min**
- 07.** Action Summary & Next Steps – **5 min**
- 08.** Executive Session (if needed) – **Optional**

Tip: Label each item with the purpose: "For Information," "For Discussion," or "For Decision."

B. PRE-DISTRIBUTE THE BOARD PACKET (72 HOURS MINIMUM)

- Include clear memos for decisions sought.
- Highlight background, recommendation, and implications.
- Use visuals (dashboards, timelines, flowcharts) to simplify complex info.

FACILITATING FOCUSED, ACTION-DRIVEN MEETINGS

A. ROLE OF THE CHAIR / FACILITATOR

- Steer discussions toward strategic impact, not operational details.
- Keep timing on track—consider using a timekeeper role.
- Gently redirect tangents: “Let’s park that for committee follow-up.”

B. USE THE 80/20 RULE

- Spend 80% of time on forward-looking strategy and key decisions.
- Spend 20% of time on updates, reports, and retrospective info.

C. ACTIVATE ALL VOICES

- Use a round-robin or “go-around” format for major decisions.
- Invite quieter members with open-ended prompts: “Alex, from a fundraising lens, how does this feel to you?”



DECISION-MAKING BEST PRACTICES

A. CLARITY BEFORE CONSENSUS

Before seeking agreement:

- Confirm the decision to be made
- Clarify available options
- Articulate potential impacts

Use a decision brief:

- Issue Proposed Recommendation
- Alternatives Considered
- Risks & Mitigation

B. CAPTURE DECISIONS & ASSIGN ACCOUNTABILITY

- Record who will do what by when in the minutes
- Use a running action log tracked between meetings
- Send post-meeting action summaries within 48 hours

TOOLS TO KEEP MEETINGS STRATEGIC

Tool	Use Case
Consent Agenda	Approve routine items (e.g., minutes, committee reports) in one vote
Dashboard	Track KPIs like ticket sales, donor engagement, program reach
Decision Matrix	Support complex choices (e.g., venue changes, staffing plans)
Strategic Priority Tracker	Visually align discussions with board-approved goals

POST-MEETING FOLLOW-UP

- **Action Review:** Confirm task owners and deadlines.
- **Feedback Loop:** Ask for meeting feedback quarterly—anonymous or open.
- **Committee Activation:** Assign deeper dives to the right working groups.
- **Minutes Review:** Ensure accuracy, especially around motions and assignments.

CONTEXTUAL TIPS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

- Begin meetings with a “mission moment”—a short artist presentation or story from the field to anchor in the organization’s purpose.
- Stay alert to balancing artistic integrity with financial sustainability.
- Use board meetings as a culture-building tool—celebrate successes, acknowledge volunteers and donors.

QUICK CHECKLIST: IS YOUR MEETING EFFECTIVE?

- Every item had a clearly defined goal (inform, discuss, decide).
- 80% of meeting time was dedicated to forward-thinking items.
- All board voices were given the opportunity to contribute.
- Decisions were clearly recorded and assigned to specific individuals.
- Next steps and accountability were confirmed before adjournment.

Live Facilitation Prompts

- **Opening:** “The purpose of this meeting is to accomplish...”
- **Timekeeper:** “The group is halfway through the agenda-are we on track?”
- **Round-Robin:** “Each member may share one insight or concern.”
- **Refocus:** “This topic will be tabled for committee work so today’s goal can stay in focus.”
- **Before Decision:** “The specific decision is...The available options are...”
- **After Decision:** “Responsibility for this action lies with...and the deadline is...”
- **Closing:** “The next steps are...”

04. Project Description / Program Narrative

1. Elements that worked well to keep the meeting on track:

2. Points where the meeting drifted or became stuck:

3. Level of board member engagement: Fully clear Partially clear Unclear

4. Clarity of decisions with ownership and timelines: Fully clear Partially clear Unclear

Adjustments for next time (format, tone, tools, participation):



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