



Board Meeting Basics

Regardless of how you feel about them, board meetings are more than just something your community association chooses to do. They are something your community association must do. Why? Because your community association operates as a corporation. As such, it must hold regular meetings of its officers and shareholders – in this case, board members and homeowners.

Board meetings are also crucial to the governance of your community association. If they aren't run effectively, chances are your association won't function well either. Poorly run board meetings can make it difficult to achieve your association's goals and can thwart your efforts to recruit new members in the future.

So what can you do to ensure that your board meetings are well run? Whether you're a new member or have been on your board for a number of years, following best practices will help you keep your meetings on track. The following board meeting fundamentals are a good place for any board to start.

1. Hold the appropriate number of board meetings.

What's the right number? Your association's bylaws or the laws in your area may dictate the minimum number of board meetings you need to hold. If not, it really depends on the size and complexity of your association. A small association might meet quarterly, whereas a larger one would meet monthly. Anything beyond that would be rare and would only occur if you need to discuss something urgent.

2. Set guidelines for participation.

Board meetings require a quorum – meaning that you can only conduct one if you have the required minimum number of board members in attendance. To maximize participation and ensure you're providing ample notice (per your community's governing documents and local statutes) it's important to send meeting notices to homeowners a specific amount of time in advance, as per your association's governing documents.

Bylaws and statutes dictate who can attend a board meeting. In general, homeowners may attend and speak at open meetings, but you should make sure your governing documents stipulate guidelines for homeowner participation. This will prevent anyone from monopolizing meeting time or derailing the conversation.

In some cases, non-owners – such as family members, vendors, potential homebuyers and other interested parties – may also be allowed to attend meetings. We believe it's a good idea to allow renters at board meetings. A renter could become an owner some day.

Closed meetings, or “executive” meetings, are for board members only. Sometimes a board will decide to close a portion of a board meeting to discuss a legal matter or a specific homeowner's financial situation, for instance. Any actions that board members need to take based on the discussion, however, must occur in the open portion of the meeting.

3. Set the agenda.

Having an agenda – and sticking to it – is one of the best ways to ensure board meeting success. Think of your agenda as a meeting road map – a valuable tool to keep participants on topic and facilitate a successful outcome. Your agenda must be publicized in advance of the meeting. For optimal efficiency, you should follow a strict format. The ideal agenda should include opening the meeting, taking roll call, reading the minutes and treasurer's report, and time to make motions and vote, as well as for discussion and questions.

Any decision the board plans to discuss and vote on needs to be on the agenda. If you don't follow the agenda, you open yourself up to challenges from the homeowners. In addition, sticking to an agenda helps keep discussions focused, according to Lebrevelec

4. Take minutes.

Taking the minutes at each meeting and reading those from the previous session are important aspects of board meeting proceedings. The minutes provide an official record of your association's meetings, and most bylaws and statutes give homeowners the right to see those records.

The minutes should not be a verbatim transcript of the meeting. Rather, they provide a summary of motions made and actions taken. Although the board secretary is generally responsible for managing the minutes, we recommend allowing your property management company to assist with the preparation of the minutes.

5. Follow parliamentary procedure.

Parliamentary procedure establishes rules and methods for running meetings. Although there are different types of parliamentary procedure, the one that is most commonly used is “Robert's Rules of Order,” a how-to guide for conducting business in democratically elected organizations. Its enduring popularity is based, in part, on how well it prescribes guidelines and formalizes meeting procedures and conduct. This helps ensure your meetings are fair, inclusive and efficient.

6. Keep it formal.

Aim to keep open meetings no longer than 90 minutes (that includes 30 minutes for an executive session), and leave any socializing until your meeting is over. This requires staying to the agenda and being efficient.

It's better to have more meetings if needed because you lose people's attention. They then make decisions just to end the meeting, which means you don't get good decisions."

Even if you're friendly with your fellow board members, remember that the purpose of a board meeting is to conduct business, not to socialize. Gossip, off-topic conversations and other distractions that veer discussions away from association business will prevent you from accomplishing the tasks at hand and ultimately waste everyone's time. In addition, an informal tone can make it challenging for the board to address serious issues. Choose a business-like venue, such as your community meeting room, to hold your meetings. If your community is professionally managed, you may be able to meet in one of the management company's offices or conference rooms.

As a volunteer board member, you know how critical it is to address your community association's needs, keep your operations running smoothly and preserve your property's continued viability. Having effective board meetings is a key part of this.