

Virtual meetings: the logistics

COVID-19 control measures mean governing boards are spending more time together on screen than they are meeting in person. This information sheet provides advice to help boards conduct successful virtual meetings. Information covered includes:

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NGA have also created [a guide to virtual governance](#) which covers virtual meeting dynamics, monitoring and induction.

Getting the technology right

Most governing boards are now regularly using a virtual meeting platform. There are plenty of platforms to choose from, so it's worth making sure the technology you are using is the most suitable for your board. The Chartered Governance Institute have created [a guide which details the key features and benefits of the most popular platforms](#) (see page 20).

It's important that everyone involved in governing board meetings feels confident using the technology and is able to actively participate. In most cases, online tutorials are available, for example:

- [Microsoft Teams video training](#)
- [Zoom live training webinars](#)

Some schools have adopted a single virtual meeting platform that is used for internal staff communications and for delivering remote learning. It may be beneficial for governing boards to use the same software given that staff are already familiar and may be able to provide support to governors where needed.

Setting clear expectations

A [virtual meeting protocol](#) should be in place to detail the board's arrangements for virtual meetings. The ground rules should be clearly understood by all in order to make sure meetings run smoothly. Make clear the importance of:

- joining on time
- signing a digital attendance sheet
- keeping to the agenda
- using your mute button to minimise background noise
- allowing additional time for participants to refer to documents
- encouraging everyone to use their webcams if possible – this helps keep everyone engaged
- using chat functions as agreed– a useful feature for some boards but can be a distraction if the expectations for use are not clear

Adapting the agenda

Some agenda items are quicker when carried out virtually, others take longer - appropriate time should be given for each item. In order to make sure meetings run smoothly and all participants remain engaged, consider the following principles:

- cover the most important topics first
- limit meetings to a maximum of 2 hours
- include one or more breaks in longer meetings
- consider breaking longer meetings into shorter sessions
- a timed agenda may help everyone to stay on track and engaged, if a topic has not been covered within the given time, it may be better to cover in a subsequent meeting

'Hybrid' meetings

In time, many board meetings and strategic discussions with senior leaders will rightly go back to being in the same room, but with the opportunity for some who might otherwise have missed it to join remotely (in a 'hybrid' format).

This way of meeting may provide additional flexibility as and when COVID-19 control measures make it possible for some face-to-face meetings to re-start. Whilst most technology platforms can be adapted for this purpose, hybrid meetings can bring about additional technology challenges so it's advisable to:

- Practice using the technology, equipment and physical meeting space in a 'hybrid' scenario in advance of the meeting.
- Think about how you will move from one speaker or agenda item to another – you may wish to group items accordingly.
- Ask virtual participants to join the meeting early (if all virtual participants are logged in 10 minutes in advance of the face-to-face participants arriving, any teething problems can be resolved, and the meeting can get started promptly).
- Have a back-up in place – most virtual meeting platforms provide a dial-in alternative such that if virtual participants have a problem with their internet connection, they can use a phone line to dial-in to the meeting instead.

Advice for the chair

- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak – directly invite questions where needed (a reminder to contributors to unmute might be helpful).
- Be clear about which agenda point is being covered as the meeting progresses – it might be useful for the chair (and others) to print the agenda so it can be readily referred to.
- Work with your clerk to make sure everyone can access virtual meetings – signpost training and offer support where required.

The importance of professional clerking

- Clerks and governance professionals are fundamental to the smooth running of meetings.
- Clerks can support with most administrative tasks relating to the organisation of virtual meetings, for example, distributing joining instructions (allowing chairs to focus on leadership and strategic responsibilities).
- Professional clerks and governance professionals also provide procedural advice, such as on voting procedures, that give boards the clarity they need to make the most of their meeting time.

Signing minutes

As is normal practice, the minutes of each meeting must be reviewed and confirmed to be an accurate record of the meeting and any decision making. Minutes can be 'signed' (i.e. approved) via email or using any available method of obtaining digital signatures.

Further reading

- [A guide to virtual governance](#)
- [Example virtual meeting protocol](#)
- [Parental engagement: ensuring stakeholder voices are heard during this difficult period](#)
- [Remote education: expectations, support and monitoring](#)
- [Parent governor and trustee elections: requirements and approach in the current climate](#)

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) has provided an essential service to all governing boards with governance questions during the COVID-19 period. As of September, the service is once again available for NGA GOLD members only.

Our annual GOLD membership is £275 for boards and provides access to all our best practice resources and expert tailored advice. [Sign up](#) to help your board save time and develop professional governance.