

12 Running Effective Meetings

BOARD MEETINGS - START TO FINISH

Types of Meetings

REGULAR BOARD MEETINGS must be held in public to ensure the public's expectations of transparency and accountability. Here are some other types of meetings:

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE BOARD may be a private meeting to allow the trustees to discuss and make decisions on private matters. The Committee of the Whole Board may also meet in public to allow the Board to have a casual discussion by suspending the rules of its formal meeting procedures.

SPECIAL MEETINGS OF THE BOARD are usually called by the Chair when a matter is urgent and cannot wait until the next regular meeting.

STANDING OR PERMANENT COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD are composed of trustees only and allow for more in-depth exploration of issues than time would permit at a regular Board Meeting, thereby supporting more efficient and effective Board meetings. These committees make recommendations to the Board regarding items such as:

- Education
- Finance
- Personnel
- Property

The Board can also form **Other Committees** and **Subcommittees** that may or may not include trustees. Some examples include:

AD-HOC COMMITTEES can be task forces or work groups created by the Board to investigate specific issues and report back to the whole Board.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES are established by the Board to offer input on policy development or on other areas where the Board would benefit from the experience and expertise of other participants.

In all of the meetings listed above, you will see participants moving motions and making decisions. However, the recommendations of committees must eventually go to the whole Board for decision at regular Board Meetings.

First Meeting of the Board

A new Board must have its first meeting within one week of December 1st. If the Board cannot decide when to have their first meeting, it must be held at 8:00 pm at the Board's head office on the first Wednesday following December 1st.

ELECTING A CHAIR

The Director of Education presides at the first meeting until a Chair is elected by the Board. A Vice-Chair can also be elected to preside when the Chair is absent from a meeting. If both the Chair and Vice-Chair are absent, trustees will elect a temporary Chair for the meeting.

The Board will also elect Standing Committees and their Chairs at the first meeting.

Subsequent Meetings are determined by the Board. A regular meeting schedule is usually set out in your by-laws. Proper form of notice, including an agenda and reading material, is required and, as a participant, you must receive agenda materials in advance to prepare and understand what must be decided.

The Director of Education is Secretary of the Board. He or she must ensure that all trustees are notified of meetings. He or she also calls special meetings and is responsible for making sure the minutes of the meeting are properly kept.

ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

Every Board must implement a policy providing for the use of electronic means to hold meetings. As a trustee, you can choose to participate at a meeting in person, or via electronic means, but there is a limit as to how many meetings you can attend electronically.

The Chair, at least one other trustee and the Director of Education must be physically present at each meeting. The public may also participate in meetings electronically.

QUORUM

In order to make decisions, there must be a minimum number of trustees present at each meeting. The minimum number of trustees present to vote is known as a Quorum. To form a quorum, the majority of all Board members must be present at a meeting and this quorum must be maintained throughout the entire meeting.

Interestingly, a declaration of Conflict of Interest does not destroy a quorum as long as two trustees can still fully participate in the meeting.

A Meeting's Agenda

Agendas are created by the Chair in consultation with the Director of Education. As the roadmap for the meeting, the agenda focuses a plan for the meeting and order of business. It should be posted on the Board's website for the community to access.

The motion at the beginning of a meeting to adopt the agenda is very important. The Board must agree to the agenda to make sure they are ready to deal with each item in the order presented. Matters of substantive importance should never be added to an agenda at the meeting unless there is an emergency; doing so violates the fundamental principles of fairness and the rights of absent members.

Calls for Order of the Day is a motion that can be brought if trustees are taking too long discussing an agenda item or if items are not being addressed in the proper order.

REPORTS

Staff and Board Committees often provide reports to the Board. The Chair must ensure that the content of reports is sufficient for informed discussion. If a trustee feels they do not have enough information, they can bring a motion to postpone the agenda item. To be fair to absentees, the agenda should also note any reports that will be provided orally.

It is important to note that as a trustee you must be very careful and clear in your motions regarding what you are proposing in regard to reports received from a Board committee or administration. If a report is simply being received for information and no action needs to be taken by the Board, no motion is necessary to receive or accept the report. You may not simply adopt, accept or approve a staff report. If the Board is being asked to make a decision based on a report, the motions should be clear as to what action is being taken.

Minutes of the Meeting

Minutes are the official record of the Board's proceedings. They should contain:

- Date, time and place of the meeting
- List of those present
- A record of all motions and outcomes
- Points of order and rulings by the Chair with reasons
- Declarations of conflicts of interest
- Any motions to excuse a trustee from attendance at the meeting

You will be asked to approve a draft version of the minutes prior to your meeting, but the Board as a whole will officially approve the minutes at the meeting and they must be signed by the Chair.

As the Board's Secretary, the Director of Education must ensure that the minutes are kept. Do note that the minutes are public and open to anyone for inspection.

ADJOURNING A MEETING

Your Board's Special Rules of Order will tell you how to end a meeting. Usually, if you have covered all of the items on your agenda, the Chair can simply ask if there is more business, and if not, declare the meeting adjourned.

PUBLIC VS. IN CAMERA MEETINGS

Board meetings must be held in public if the Board is making decisions or having discussions that might materially advance the decision making process.

Meetings may be held in camera (closed to the public and media) when the matter to be discussed involves the following:

- the security of the property of the board
- the disclosure of intimate personal or financial information about a board member, committee member, board employee, student or a parent/guardian
- the acquisition or disposal of a school site
- negotiations with employees of the board
- litigation affecting the board

Education Act, s.207(2)

Board members, administrative staff, recording staff and anyone directly involved in an issue may be present for the in camera meeting. The confidentiality of the meetings must be strictly respected. All discussions, materials distributed and decisions made must be kept private. There is also a requirement to comply with legislation related to the protection of privacy.

Motions passed in camera are not legally binding decisions of the Board until the motion is passed in a public meeting. This is done by assigning numbers to the in camera motions, then moving the numbered motions in public; in this manner the details of the matter are not disclosed to the public but the public is permitted to witness the official acceptance of the in camera motions.

Who can be excluded from a Board meeting?

The Chair can expel or exclude any person who is acting improperly at the meeting. It is up to the Chair's discretion to exclude a person when their behaviour is so offensive that it impedes or disrupts the meeting.

If a trustee is in breach of the Board's Code of Conduct, the Board may impose a sanction that excludes the offending trustee from all or part of the meeting.