GUIDE TO CONDUCTING VIRTUAL BOARD MEETINGS – FAQ'S

The enclosed FAQ's are also available online as part of a larger 'Guide to Conducting Virtual Board Meetings.' Visit virtualmeetings.eboardsolutions.com to access all of the FREE resources available in the online guide.

1. **What are the key factors to consider when conducting a virtual meeting?**
A virtual meeting could be as simple as a conference call in which you allow the public to join. However, a conference call may get harder to manage different people speaking and limits the ability to display content for the participants. Therefore, some of the key factors to consider when conducting a virtual meeting are whether or not you have accessibility to the internet and the right tools to help you harness its power. Using a combination of a web conferencing platform and a board management system like Simbli, enables districts to create a better experience for all attendees.

2. **Are there any different notice requirements for virtual board meetings compared to regular board meetings?**
Confirm with your local board attorney and/or state school board association for specifics related to your state. Typically, a virtual meeting would require the same notice as would be required for a regular board meeting, but would also require notice on how the public can attend the meeting.

3. **How can we have a virtual meeting and still allow the public to attend?**
If your board is using a web conferencing tool like Zoom, attendees do not need to have a software license to participate, although it is a good idea for the district to acquire a license to ensure the meeting runs smoothly. Also, if you choose to broadcast the meeting on Facebook or YouTube, that too can be another way for the public to attend the live meeting. The public will simply need a link and instructions on how to join the meeting by computer and/or phone.

4. **How do we handle going into executive session in a virtual meeting?**
In most states, the school board must convene in open session prior to both going into and coming out of executive session. Thus, the board needs the ability to convene a public meeting in open session, go into executive session, and then come out of executive session to resume or close the public meeting. When trying to do this virtually, it will depend upon the technology being used. Tools like Zoom Meeting provide a breakout room functionality that allows the board and superintendent to go into a closed executive session and then reconvene later in the public meeting. Other tools might require the board to leave the public meeting completely and join a separate meeting link that has been created strictly for the executive session. Another alternative is to only allow access via Facebook Live or YouTube so that you can stop the broadcast when going into executive session and restart the broadcast when you come out of executive session. School boards should also consider whether or not they should utilize passwords to access the Zoom Meeting when it is being used for executive session. You will want to work with your board attorney to ensure you are following the best guidance as it relates to executive session. Your meeting agenda materials should already be setup and set with proper visibility permissions in Simbli.

5. **How do we ensure our virtual meeting is secure?**

If you are building your meeting agenda materials in Simbli, then you are probably already setting up the content with proper visibility permissions to ensure security of the meeting information. If you are using Zoom Meeting, you should setup your meeting using a "Generated ID", enable the Waiting Room feature so you can admit guests, and consider using the registration feature so that attendees must register in order to get the login link. If requiring registration, be sure to check with your legal counsel or school board association to make sure that the registration process complies with state law.

6. **What are the best options for permitting and managing public comments in a virtual board meeting?**

Public participation should be managed in a way that does not become a disruption to the meeting. If you are using Zoom Meeting, we recommend disabling the Chat feature or restricting it so that participants can only chat with the host and not with other participants. If you have an item that provides a need or desire to have public input, the chair can request that any participant wanting to speak on the matter, use the "raise hand" feature at the appropriate time or submit a chat to the host. At that point, one of the co-hosts can then unmute the participants line, permitting them to speak. Upon completion, the co-host can mute their line again. Depending on the requirements of state law and the nature of the meeting being held, a school board may determine not to include public participation as part of the agenda or to encourage written public participation instead.

7. **Should we modify the format of our meeting agendas for virtual meetings?**

As you plan for virtual board meetings, you might want to rethink your agenda format and be sensitive to how long the meeting might take. Try to limit the length of your virtual meeting while still ensuring that essential items are covered. There may be some items you would normally put on an agenda that simply are not necessary or are not a good fit for the virtual meeting format. Remember, individual states may have different provisions for open meetings under state of emergency status. Please consult your local attorney and state school boards association for your state.

8. **Should our board members and superintendent have their videos turned on in a virtual meeting?**

Yes. If using a web conferencing tool, having the board members and the superintendent on video allows the participants to see the board members as they would if they were attending in person. This can help to create better transparency with your stakeholders. See our best practice tips for board members turning on their video.

9. **Should we require registration for all participants?**

Using a tool like Zoom Meeting does not require registration. Although some states prohibit requiring the public to register, there may be some advantages to asking attendees to sign in to the meeting. For example, keeping attendance allows you to see who all the attendees are and may help the co-hosts manage the meeting or provide technical assistance as necessary to allow the participant to participate in public input.

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10. **Who should be setup as the host or co-hosts of the virtual meeting in the web conference?**

While the Board Chair will be running the board meeting, we do not recommend that a board member be the host or co-host of the Zoom Meeting. We do recommend that two staff members be assigned as co-hosts. One staff member can share their screen to display the board meeting agenda material in Simbli for all participants while the other co-host can manage participants and participant settings in the meeting. You may also want to consider not having the board secretary as a co-host as they will be focused on capturing the minutes of the meeting.

11. **How can we handle public comment within our virtual meeting if we have disabled the chat feature?**

Public participation should be managed in a way that does not become a disruption to the meeting. If you are using Zoom Meeting, we recommend disabling the Chat feature or restricting it so that participants can only send a chat to the host. If you have an item that provides a need or desire to have public input, the chair can request that any participant wanting to speak on the matter to please use the "raise hand" feature. At that point, one of the co-hosts can then unmute the participants line permitting them to speak. Upon completion, the co-host can mute their line again.

12. **How do we ensure that our Zoom Meeting is not hacked?**

There are settings you can turn on that can ensure that your Zoom Meeting is not hacked and that you have the right settings in place to protect your meeting. Please see the video for "How to stop "Zoom Bombing." Also, if you are using the Zoom app on your mobile device or your computer, be sure you are running the latest version. Security and feature patches come out periodically from Zoom and being on the latest version will provide additional protection against possible hacking.

13. **What kind of training should we provide to our board members?**

The goal of your virtual meeting is to ensure that it goes as smoothly as possible and avoids technical glitches. It is essential to make sure the board members are comfortable with how the virtual meeting and the tools you are using will work in order to minimize distractions from conducting the board business. We recommend that prior to your first virtual board meeting you:

- *Have your board members individually watch our recorded webinar on "Conducting Effective Virtual Meetings"*
- *Share with each member our "Conducting Effective Virtual Meetings FAQs and Best Practice Tips"*
- *Setup your own virtual training session to ensure that all board members can get connected to your video conference platform, check their audio and video, and you create a mock simulation of sharing a meeting agenda and materials, etc. If the training is provided to a quorum of the board, it would be a public meeting like a whole-board training session and thus should also be open to members of the public. Another option could be to train each board member individually and independent from one another. This option would not be a public meeting.*

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14. **Is it better to use Zoom Meetings or Zoom Webinar for my virtual board meeting?**
There are pros and cons to both. See Zoom Meeting vs Zoom Webinar for more information and things to consider related to each one.

15. **Do we need to record the Zoom Meeting? If so, do we archive it?**
The recording of a board meeting is something many boards have been doing as they have broadcasted their face-to-face meetings online or on tv. The fact that your meeting is virtual does not require it to be recorded but Zoom does have the capabilities to record meetings if you want to have it available for people to watch at a later time. The Zoom recording would be separate from any live streaming or broadcast on your social media channels that you may already record for people to watch later

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