



The New & Future Boardroom: A Recap & Predictions for the Coming Year

A recent survey shines light on how boards and their meetings are changing.

By Jeb Banner

The COVID-19 pandemic forced people across the world to shift from working in an office to working fully online. A study from the American Community Survey ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov)) found that less than 6% of Americans worked mainly from home in 2019. That number increased to 35% in May 2020, when 48.7 million people reported they worked from home for at least four weeks due to the pandemic.

Twenty-nine percent of Americans state they would quit their jobs if they couldn't keep working remotely, and 81% say they enjoy having the ability to work from home. Boardrooms and their members are no exception to this sudden change, and the future of the nonprofit boardroom is quickly shifting.

2022 will bring several pandemic-triggered changes to the nonprofit boardroom. To find out how much these changes will influence boards, Boardable (boardable.com) gathered feedback from 900+ customers and found several interesting trends:

Boards went remote, and they aren't going back.

After the COVID-19 pandemic sent workers online, it's highly unlikely that nonprofit boards will return to in-person gatherings for a number of reasons, such as health and safety concerns and the ease of participating in remote meetings. Though the transition to remote work may have been difficult for some, it opened up the nonprofit boardroom to numerous possibilities.

The shift from in-person to completely virtual meetings forced nonprofit boards to get creative in a new online

setting. Board members have adapted and will continue to manage in this online setting with strategies such as:

- **thinking of ways** to engage every single board member, including those who are only checking in from their computers
- **determining the end goal** of every item on the agenda
- **beginning the meeting** with the most important and engaging topics
- **taking care to adhere** to the prearranged starting and ending times for the meeting
- **sticking closely** to the agenda.

Virtual meetings have led to more diversity.

Staying remote brings many advantages, such as the ability to recruit more diverse talent. According to recent data from Boardable, more people are logging in from more geographically diverse locations. As a result, nonprofit boards are seeing an increase in the diversity of the talent.

Board diversity is a key component of a successful board, because more diversity means more unique and interesting ideas are on the table. Each board member has something different to contribute. Being able to log in from home makes board meetings easier for those with transportation, child-care, and similar challenges. Thus, remote meetings are helping to bring one-of-a-kind talent to the board.

Remote meetings are also more accessible than in-person meetings. Digital accessibility has risen in importance, especially over the past two years when most people worked from home. Accessible meetings allow all members to

participate regardless of their individual accommodation needs. Some meeting platforms offer additional accessibility features, such as screen readers and enlarged fonts, to enhance the user's experience.

People with disabilities aren't the only ones who can gain from using accessibility features. For example, these features also assist:

- **people who are using a smaller screen** such as a phone or tablet
- **board members who have trouble viewing their screens** because they're in bright, sunny areas.

Meetings run more smoothly when everyone has equal access to participate.

Remote meetings are requiring more preparation.

2021 was all about testing different ideas to see what works best in the online boardroom. Through customer data, Boardable found that board members have been scheduling meetings farther in advance, and this trend is sure to continue.

Meeting preparation looks a bit different in a remote setting because not all attendees are in one place, so meeting materials must be put together and made accessible beforehand. And the data show that meeting planners prefer to be prepared long before the meeting takes place.

According to Boardable's data, meetings are being scheduled as far as 85 days in advance. Meetings during the holiday season are planned the farthest ahead, while gatherings held in January tend to be scheduled closest to the actual meeting date.

Boardable also found that meeting agendas are typically completed between five and 12 days before a meeting takes place. That's more time than organizations spent in 2019, and it will most likely increase this year.

The time used to plan meetings and agendas gives organizers an opportunity to better prepare for a meeting. With the correct materials and software in place, users can create meetings that are useful for every member of the board.

Boards are learning how to support members' differing needs.

After two years of working from home, many are ready to return to the office for the opportunity to work in person again. However, some enjoy working from home, and some are uncomfortable with returning to the office. Some nonprofit boards offer hybrid meetings to cater to everyone.

A hybrid meeting can be defined as a meeting that includes both remote and in-person attendees. People ready for a return to the office can use hybrid meetings to maintain relationships with their colleagues while engaging virtual attendees in discussion.

Hybrid meetings are the way of the future, and they are quickly rising in popularity. Every board should know how to hold a successful hybrid meeting that includes all board members.

Holding a productive and engaging hybrid meeting requires some additional thinking on the organizer's part, such as planning exactly what will be discussed and how much time will be spent on each agenda item. Having all the documents and materials in an accessible place before the meeting ensures the hybrid board meeting will be more efficient for everyone.

Boards cannot return to the way things were before the COVID-19 pandemic. Fully in-person board meetings may be a thing of the past, and board members must be willing to move in the direction of the hybrid boardroom if they want to keep up with the current trends. 

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Help for Your Meetings & Your Board

For more ideas, see articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

Board Diversity: Your Biggest Challenge (Vol. 27, No. 3)

Powerful New Communication Tool for Your Meetings: Engaging Both Sides of Your Brain (Vol. 26, No. 3)

Zoom Exhaustion Is Real: How to Find Balance & Stay Connected (Vol. 38, No. 3)

How to Run the Perfect Board Meeting – While Inspiring Board Members to Raise Funds (Vol. 36, No. 4)

Seven Creative Ways to Energize Your Board Meetings (Vol. 16, No. 3)

A Board Member Self-Assessment (Vol. 15, No. 6)

Improving Board Meetings: Three Steps (Vol. 24, No. 6)

Risk & Your Brain (Vol. 38, No. 4)

Using Board Portals to Keep Directors Connected (Vol. 29, No. 3)

Make Your Meetings Productive (Vol. 25, No. 1)

From Bored to Blazing: Fire Up Your Board (Vol. 37, No. 3)

Use Humor to Conquer Zoom Fatigue (Vol. 39, No. 1)

It's Not Over till It's Over: Five Strategies to Improve Your Meetings (Vol. 30, No. 1)

What's Ahead for Your Digital Board? (Vol. 39, No. 1)