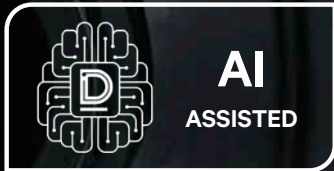


Hybrid board meetings

A practical governance guide



Hybrid meetings are now a permanent feature of governance practice. When well designed and chaired, they can improve access, resilience and diversity of perspective, broaden the pool of potential directors, and better support organisations operating across locations and communities. When poorly run, they can privilege those in the room, weaken decision quality and erode trust.

This guide is designed for boards, chairs, company secretaries and senior executives. It balances technical considerations including technology, process and legal requirements, with cultural and behavioural factors such as power dynamics, facilitation and inclusion, recognising that both are essential to effective governance. The guidance builds on established board meeting practice and adapts it for hybrid and virtual settings.

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1. Choosing the right meeting format

Boards should consciously decide whether meetings are held:

- Fully in person
- Fully virtual
- Hybrid (some participants in the room, others joining remotely)

The choice should reflect:

- The size and composition of the board or membership
- Geographic spread and accessibility
- The nature and sensitivity of agenda items
- Technology capability and support
- Legal and constitutional requirements
- Organisational culture and maturity

In-person meetings can play an important role in building trust and shared understanding. Informal interactions before, during and after meetings strengthen interpersonal relationships and deepen understanding of different perspectives. This relational foundation is particularly valuable for newer boards, or when navigating complex or contentious issues.

Fully virtual meetings can be effective for geographically dispersed boards and are often well suited to shorter meetings, such as committee sessions. They reduce cost and travel time, and can support accessibility and participation. However, they rely heavily on technology and strong facilitation, make it harder to read dynamics and limit informal trust-building over time.

Hybrid formats offer flexibility, but they also create two different participation experiences. Without active facilitation, in-room participants are advantaged through proximity, eye contact and informal cues. This can affect discussion quality and decision-making if left unaddressed.

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2. Notices and pre-meeting communication

For AGMs and other member meetings, the notice of meeting should clearly frame the process (consistent with legislative and constitutional requirements) including:

- The meeting format
- How participants can attend (physically and/or virtually)
- How questions may be asked (orally and in writing)
- How voting will occur (real time, in advance, or both)
- Any identity verification requirements

For board meetings, expectations should be reinforced through the agenda, chair's briefing and pre-meeting communication.

Regardless of format, the environment must promote genuine and effective interaction among participants.

3. Technology as an enabler

Technology should support governance, not distract from it.

Pre-meeting preparation

- Test microphones, cameras and connectivity in advance
- Ensure camera placement allows remote participants to see speakers clearly
- Confirm that remote participants can hear in-room discussion without distortion or delay
- Distribute agendas and papers well in advance
- Confirm voting functionality and backup arrangements

During the meeting

- Use platforms that allow real-time participation, including voting and Q&A
- Avoid reliance on physical tools (such as whiteboards) that exclude online participants
- Use shared digital tools where interaction is required

Technical top tips

1. Test everything, then test again.
2. Assign a dedicated technology moderator.
3. Assume something may fail and plan accordingly.
4. Use widely accessible platforms unless complexity is unavoidable.
5. Protect the integrity of voting and records.

4. The cultural challenge of hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings are not neutral. They create predictable participation biases:

- **Proximity advantage:** those physically present are more visible and influential
- **Interruption bias:** in-room participants can interject naturally; online participants must signal and wait
- **Cognitive load asymmetry:** side conversations are manageable in the room but become noise online
- **Attention drift:** when people turn to each other physically, online participants are sidelined

These effects are structural, not personal. They require conscious governance responses.

5. The role of the chair

The chair plays a pivotal role in ensuring equitable participation.

In hybrid meetings, this includes:

- Explicitly acknowledging the hybrid format and setting expectations
- Actively managing turn-taking
- Monitoring both the room and the virtual space
- Drawing out quieter voices, particularly online participants
- Summarising discussion so all participants stay aligned
- Being deliberate about relationship-building where participation is mostly remote

When some board members regularly attend remotely, chairs and boards may need to be more intentional about creating opportunities to build relationships and shared context outside the formal meeting. This might include periodic in-person meetings, informal board dinners, or other face-to-face engagement where feasible. These interactions support trust, mutual understanding and more effective engagement when difficult issues arise.

In meetings involving heightened emotion, contention or crisis, this role becomes even more critical.

Practical techniques include:

- Opening key agenda items with a brief round-robin
- Alternating between in-room and online contributors
- Pausing regularly to invite online input
- Restating or summarising in-room exchanges for clarity

Cultural top tips for the chair

1. Acknowledge the hybrid format and its implications for participation.
2. Slow the meeting pace intentionally.
3. Discourage side conversations.
4. Chair the meeting actively, not just the agenda.
5. Do not assume silence online equals agreement.

6. Managing questions and discussion

Hybrid meetings change how questions surface and how discussion flows. In-room participants can raise issues informally or respond immediately, while online participants rely on explicit facilitation. Without deliberate chairing, questions may go unanswered, discussion may be dominated by those physically present, and important perspectives may be missed.

Managing discussion in hybrid settings is a core governance responsibility. It requires clarity about how questions will be asked and addressed, how discussion will be paced, and how contributions from all participants will be invited and considered.

Top tips for staff presentations

1. Clearly state the purpose of the agenda item and the decision or input sought from the board.
2. Present key messages, risks and assumptions clearly during the meeting.
3. Allow time for questions from both in-room and online participants.
4. Avoid reliance on informal follow-up conversations after the meeting.
5. Ensure presentation materials are accessible and easy to follow on screen.

7. Voting and decision-making

Voting requirements differ depending on the type of entity and meeting.

Boards and organisations should ensure:

- Voting methods comply with legal and constitutional requirements
- Virtual and hybrid voting processes are secure and auditable
- Participants understand how and when to vote
- Results are communicated clearly

For AGMs, care should be taken to ensure virtual participants can vote in real time or in advance, as permitted.

8. Managing tension, disruption and disengagement

Hybrid meetings can amplify tension or disengagement if not actively managed.

In fully in-person meetings, chairs can more easily call short breaks, reset the room or use informal conversation to defuse heightened emotion. In hybrid settings, these options are less visible and need to be handled more deliberately.

At the same time, online participation introduces additional risks:

- Private messaging or side conversations that are invisible to the chair
- Disengagement through multitasking, emails or other work
- Reduced emotional cues, making it harder to read the room

Chairs should set clear expectations about attention, conduct and participation for all participants, regardless of location, to support effective deliberation and decision-making.

Managing tense or disruptive hybrid meetings

1. Acknowledge tension early rather than letting it escalate.
2. Use structured turn-taking to slow heated exchanges.
3. Call a formal break if needed and be explicit about when the meeting will resume.
4. Avoid resolving issues through private side channels that exclude part of the group.
5. After the meeting, check in with participants who may have disengaged or been impacted.

9. When technology fails

Even well-planned meetings can experience technical disruption.

Good governance practice includes:

- Having a contingency plan
- Identifying likely points of failure in advance
- Providing clear troubleshooting guidance
- Offering a backup contact method where feasible

Provided the technology used is reasonable and widely accessible, organisations are not responsible for individual connectivity failures.

The chair retains the authority to manage disruptions to ensure the proper conduct of the meeting.

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10. Cybersecurity and integrity

Cybersecurity risks should be addressed, not used as a reason to avoid technology-enabled meetings.

Boards should ensure:

- Meeting access is secure
- Host controls are actively used
- Unauthorised participants can be identified and removed
- Virtual voting integrity is protected
- Decisions about recording, minute-taking and publishing meetings are legally informed and aligned with organisational policy

Meeting arrangements should align with the organisation's broader cybersecurity and incident response plans.

11. Special considerations for AGMs

AGMs differ from board meetings in scale, formality and stakeholder expectations. The use of technology must support members' legal rights to participate, ask questions and vote.

Key considerations include:

- Accessibility for members or shareholders
- Clear explanation of participation rights and processes
- Management of large volumes of questions
- Balancing efficiency with genuine engagement

Hybrid and virtual AGMs should be designed to replicate, as closely as practicable, the participation experience of an in-person meeting, including the ability to observe proceedings, ask questions and vote.

NFP and membership organisation AGMs

Not-for-profit and membership organisations often have diverse and geographically dispersed memberships. Hybrid and virtual AGMs can significantly improve accessibility, but they require careful design to maintain trust and legitimacy.

Boards of NFPs and membership organisations should consider:

- Member expectations regarding voice, visibility and fairness
- The importance of clear chairing and process transparency
- The risk that perceived exclusion – intentional or otherwise – can undermine confidence in governance

Where simpler or low-cost platforms are used, boards should ensure:

- Members can ask questions both orally and in writing
- Voting processes are clear, auditable and well explained
- Protocols are in place for managing disruptive behaviour or heightened emotion

For many NFPs, the AGM is one of the few direct touchpoints between the board and its members. How the meeting is conducted sends a strong signal about organisational values, accountability and respect.

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12. Continuous improvement

Boards should incorporate hybrid meeting effectiveness into regular board and chair evaluations, including post-meeting reviews and formal performance assessments.

Useful evaluation questions may include:

- Did all participants have a reasonable opportunity to contribute, regardless of location?
- Did the chosen format support robust discussion and sound decision-making?
- Were power imbalances or participation gaps identified and actively managed?
- Did the chairing and facilitation approach support equitable engagement?
- What should be adjusted for future hybrid or virtual meetings?
- Have sufficient opportunities existed for board members to build trust and shared understanding, particularly where participation is primarily remote?

Hybrid meetings are not simply a technical issue. They provide a practical test of board culture, chair effectiveness and governance discipline.

Boards that review hybrid meetings deliberately are better placed to strengthen participation, decision quality and board performance over time.

Further resources

[Board Meetings Practice Guide](#)

[Board meeting templates](#)





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