



13 Practical Ways to Streamline The Work of Your Board

Ways to
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the work
of the board

Clarify the role of the board

#1 Many directors come from a management background and can easily slip back into a management role.

“The board has three fundamental duties – set or approve the strategic direction of the organisation, appoint a CEO to execute the strategy, and evaluate and monitor the performance of the CEO,” says Rainer Jozeps. “Anything outside that remit is a waste of its time and skills.”

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Use technology to reduce preparation time

#2 Preparing, photocopying, collating, binding and distributing documents is extremely time-consuming.

Putting all of the information online and automating the agendas, the minutes and follow-up action could halve the time spent on manual handling.

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Make information available online

#3

Searching for relevant information takes time and can disrupt board meetings. When directors have easy online access to strategic plans, policies, procedures and guidelines as well as past board papers, meetings can run more efficiently.

Digital content can also be passed to the board immediately rather than taking days or even weeks to research, produce and distribute.

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Include images and videos in digital board papers

#4 Graphs, infographics, photographs and videos often convey information much more quickly and succinctly than written reports.

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Keep track of actions arising from the meeting

#5 Recording agreed actions online holds directors accountable and can also provide valuable information when the board evaluates the performance of the CEO.

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Set a well-structured agenda

#6 Electronic board portals make it easier to set both the annual and individual agendas. Taking time to formally review and approve the agenda will help the meeting to flow more smoothly.

A tight, well-presented digital agenda can also help the chair to steer the meeting and ensure it finishes at the agreed time.

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- ✔ Are you passionate about making your organisation the best it can be?
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BoardWise is a professional development platform that provides your entire board with cost-effective remote learning.

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Provide directors with the tools they need to operate efficiently

#7 Directors used to be provided with ink and paper. Today, a home internet connection and a laptop or tablet will help them to do their job to the best of their ability.

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Streamline your board papers

#8

Succinct, well-written board papers are easier to read and assess. “A modern template structures the information so that directors can see immediately what the paper is about and then read the rest of the paper with a questioning mind,” says Mary Morel.

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Establish a sound social media policy

#9 Social media provides time- and cost-efficient ways to communicate with stakeholders and engage donors. However, the communications must be very carefully managed.

“There must be very clear policies and procedures governing the use of social media and the board must have the final say,” says Sallie Saunders. “Nothing that might have an impact on the wellbeing of the organisation should go online without board approval.”

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Use virtual meetings judiciously

#10 Virtual meetings can save travel time and enable boards to appoint directors from further afield. However, as the social dynamics of face-to-face meetings are very important, electronic options should ideally be used to supplement rather than replace them.

“At the Australian Sewing Guild we now manage a lot of the operational work and some of the board work online using the Our Cat Herder board portal, but the board still gets together about three times a year,” says Saunders.

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Appoint an IT champion to the board

#11 A director with IT skills can reduce anxiety in the boardroom by introducing technology at an appropriate level and ensuring the whole board understands its use and its value. An IT champion can also help the board to stay up to date with emerging technologies.

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Invest with care

#12 “The technology needed to streamline boardroom operations is relatively inexpensive,” says Klaus Zimmerman AM. “When you add the extra security and the convenience of filing papers it is definitely worth the investment.”

An unbiased opinion can help the board to locate the most cost-effective solutions. There are professional advisors in this field and some university computer science departments may provide free assistance to small and medium NFPs.

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Be sensible about security

#13 Properly encrypted and protected by a password, the materials stored in an online portal are far more secure than their paper equivalents.

However, boards need to be confident that appropriate steps have been taken to ensure the safety and security of the organisation and the directors themselves. Recovering from a breach of security or a cyber attack consumes significant resources as well as directors' time.



Klaus Zimmerman AM is a non-executive director of HESTA Superannuation Fund, ISPT Super Property Trust, Commonwealth Association for the Ageing Ltd, Southern Cross Care SA&NT and Masonic Care Tasmania. He sat on the state and national aged care industry board for many years and is a past National President and Chair of ACSA, the major lobby organisation for the NFP aged care sector. In 2014 he received the Order of Australia for services to the Aged Care Sector.



Mary Morel works with organisations to improve the quality of their board packs. She is the author of *Write to Govern: How to Write Effective Board Papers* and a regular facilitator and presenter at the Governance Institute of Australia. She has developed online writing courses and writes about writing and grammar in her monthly e-newsletter. She has worked with a large range of organisations including AMP, Teachers Mutual Bank, AustralianSuper, REST Industry Super, Telstra, Westpac, St Vincent's Health Australia, YMCA, Brisbane Airport Corporation, Argyle Housing and the Sydney Opera House.



Rainer Jozeps has held leading executive roles in a number of Australia's major cultural institutions including the Elizabethan Theatre Trust's Melbourne Orchestra and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. He has provided consulting services to the Graduate School of Management (Uni SA) and the Northern Territory Museums & Art Galleries, and held board positions at the Crafts Council of SA, State Heritage Authority (SA) and the Elder School of Music (Adelaide University). He and his wife Kate Gould developed the Our Cat Herder boardroom portal to help not-for profit-organisations operate more efficiently.



Sallie Saunders has been involved with not-for-profit organisations for over 45 years as a worker, educator, management committee member, board member, academic and researcher. She has five years' experience in the public sector and spent 13 years as a senior lecturer in the Faculties of Education and Business at the University of Technology, Sydney. She consults with many nonprofit organisations nationally and internationally and has co-convoked the Building Better Boards National Conferences. Sallie is a regular presenter at the Better Boards Conferences.



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