

ELLEN HIRZY



VIRTUAL MEETINGS UNTANGLED

PLANNING. FACILITATING.
ENGAGING BOARD MEMBERS.

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Empowering Boards. Inspiring Leadership.

BoardSource envisions a world where every social sector organization has the leadership it needs to fulfill its mission and advance the public good. Our mission is to inspire and support excellence in nonprofit governance and board and staff leadership.

Established in 1988, BoardSource's work is grounded in the fundamental belief that boards are critical to organizational success. With decades of hands-on experience working with and supporting nonprofit boards, BoardSource is the recognized leader in nonprofit governance and leadership, and a go-to resource for nonprofit board and executive leaders. BoardSource supports a broad and diverse cross-section of social sector organizations with

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- research and benchmarking of board composition, practices, and performance
- membership and board support programs
- customized diagnostics and performance assessment tools
- a comprehensive library of topic papers, publications, and downloadable infographics, tools, templates and more
- live and virtual education and training
- governance consultants who work directly with nonprofit leaders to design specialized solutions to meet an organization's needs
- a biennial conference that brings together approximately 800 board leaders for two days of learning and sharing

A note to our global readers:

The need for effective board leadership and governance knows no geographic boundaries, and BoardSource is committed to strong social sector board leadership and governance around the globe. While BoardSource uses United States laws and policies as the legal framework for our resources and recommendations, most of our resources do not focus on legal matters but rather on good governance practices, making them relevant to organizations working outside of the United States. We do suggest, however, that you refer to applicable laws in your country regarding financial reporting and other legal and transparency issues.

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FOREWORD

Baseball and board service are a big part of my life. Several years ago on the night of Major League Baseball's All-Star game, I found myself in Chicago for work. It had been a fairly busy day of travel, trainings, and meetings. What I wanted most when the business day closed was to go back to my hotel, grab dinner, and watch the Midsummer Classic. But the board I serve on was meeting that evening and my plans would have to be put on hold...or would they? I could easily order room service, turn on and mute the TV, and listen to the meeting via the online conference room that our organization uses. I could easily keep one ear on the meeting and two eyes on the game, right?

Wrong! Board members should treat each and every board meeting with the same respect: Be prepared, be engaged, and stay in the moment. And yet, I know from experience that many board members don't give virtual meetings the same amount of preparation time and attention that they give in-person meetings. Why is this? Because they've come to expect less-than-robust conversations in a virtual meeting, and this is due to a number of factors, such as some members' discomfort with the technology, to a lack of the special skills required to facilitate a virtual meeting, and an inability to see and thus interpret their colleagues' mannerisms. They go into the meeting with low expectations from both themselves and their fellow board members, and, as a result, they often let themselves become distracted. They — we — forget that board meetings are of vital importance to our organizations. As a member of a body that is beholden to the public's trust, it is our legal duty to give every board meeting our full attention and best effort — no matter where we may be sitting and how we may be participating.

There are good reasons why many boards have already incorporated virtual meetings into their board meeting calendars and why BoardSource expects this trend to continue indefinitely. Let's face it: We live in a world where virtual meetings are simply going to become an everyday occurrence, if they aren't already. So, it's time that we stop accepting the status quo, and we start trying to figure out how to get the most out of our virtual time together, remembering that having a great meeting means getting the best out of all meeting participants.

If you haven't seen the [YouTube video](#) where they re-enact what a virtual meeting could look like in real life, I encourage you to take a look. There is a barking dog, confusion about who is speaking, and a lack of clarity about when a person is or isn't on the call. It's entertaining, and a useful tool worth sharing with your board. It doesn't get to the heart of the matter, however, and provide the guidance you need to either facilitate or participate in meaningful and results-oriented virtual board meetings. This book does.

In case you are wondering, I didn't watch the baseball game that night, although I certainly was tempted to do so. For other board members, it might be e-mail, an online game, or even folding laundry that 'calls their name.' But we should never lose sight of the fact that we have a legal as well as an ethical responsibility to be in the moment, to pay close attention, and to make the best decisions on behalf of the organizations we serve, no matter what.

This book does not provide a magic spell that will grant your board the best virtual meetings. It takes work to have a great board meeting — work that can't be passed off to the board member sitting across the country. Every single board member must take responsibility for ensuring that your board meetings are productive, inspiring, and moving your organization — and by extension your community — forward. *Virtual Meetings Untangled* is here to help you do that.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Davis".

ANDY DAVIS
Director of Education
BoardSource

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the digital workplace, virtual meeting technology is transforming the way teams function. Having colleagues who work remotely is not unusual. Nonprofit boards, however, are unlikely to eliminate face-to-face meetings altogether. Board members need to build relationships and engage firsthand with their organizations' missions and programs. But meeting virtually can be a cost-effective, convenient, environmentally conscious alternative — whether just once or several times a year — to conduct the work of the board.

Virtual Meetings Untangled guides the board and the CEO or executive director toward understanding the possibilities and preparing for the challenges of virtual board meetings.

Chapter 1 helps boards decide whether, how, and how often to hold virtual meetings and then guides readers through essential practices for effective meetings, including participation ground rules, board member orientation, agenda design and meeting materials, and special considerations, such as holding executive sessions, voting, and disclosing conflicts of interest. Chapter 2 discusses planning virtual meetings and provides an overview of basic logistics to complete before each meeting. The board chair's facilitation role is the focus of chapter 3, which connects board culture and the chair's facilitation style to the evolution of a successful meeting. Chapter 4 addresses legal aspects of meeting virtually. After an organization has made the decision to add virtual meetings to the board's calendar, it can begin to evaluate the options that best fit the needs of current board members. The appendix introduces some basic facts about virtual meeting methods — strengths, limitations, and features — and suggests questions to ask when talking to external providers.