

# **You're on Mute - How the shift from in-person to virtual board meetings impacts board governance & communication**

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NPA 622: Nonprofit Data Analysis - Capstone

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# OVERVIEW

My research examines the impact of the move from in-person to virtual board meetings on board **governance** and board **communication** and **dynamics**.

Personal interest from what I observed with my organization's board. What have others experienced?

We are one year in - what does the future look like?





**The pandemic has caused the  
biggest transformation  
in governance in a century.**

**- Bob Harris**

# OBJECTIVES

To discover the **benefits** and **challenges** in board governance and communication that nonprofit association boards have experienced because of the unanticipated shift to virtual board meetings.



Create best practice recommendations for nonprofit boards that conduct virtual and/or hybrid board meetings.


**Meeting modality should not affect a board's ability to govern an organization.**

# METHODS AND APPROACHES

## 11 expert interviews conducted

- Nonprofit association ED/CEO's
- Nonprofit governance consultants
- Association management staff
- Nonprofit law attorney



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SAN FRANCISCO  
CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Thank you for taking this survey about your experience with virtual board meetings. All answers will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be used in the survey reporting.

What is the name of your association?

Please state your role

Executive Director/CEO  
 Board President  
 Board Member other than Board President  
 Other (please state)

How many years have you served on this BOD or been ED/CEO?

How many people are on your BOD?

- 32-question survey for nonprofit association ED/CEO's and board members was created.
- 145 responses were received.

# DATA ANALYSIS - Expert Interview Findings

## Governance benefits of virtual board meetings

- Allowed boards to continue to meet, more effective than telephonic meetings
- Increased attendance, ability for experts, guest speakers to attend, more voices heard
- Technology tools for deeper democracy
- Better understanding of governing documents

## Governance challenges of virtual board meetings

- Chilled deliberations - potential for groupthink
- Less strategic discussion, more operational focus
- Distractions - internal and external
- Ineffective board chair

## Board communication/dynamics in virtual board meetings

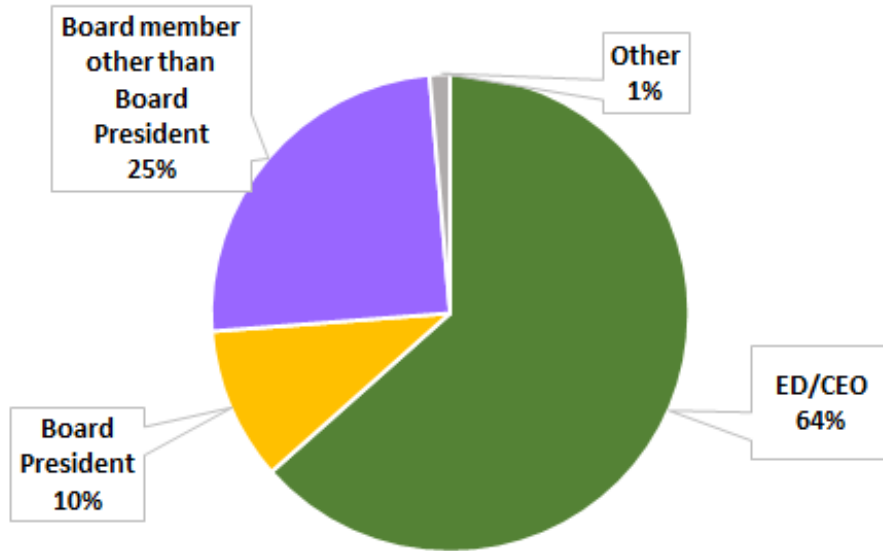
- Lack of non-verbal communication, inability to see body language
- Lack of engagement, being 'in community'
- Bad behavior from loss of trust
- Humanizing effect of seeing people at home, with family/pets

## Future of board meetings

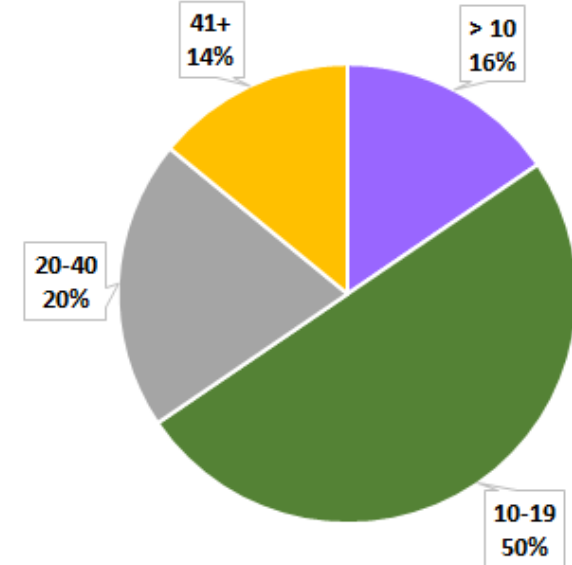
- Needed reset to consider what is most important
- Creating the 'Next' normal
- Intentional meeting planning
- Variety of meeting modalities

# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey Demographics

## Survey Respondent's Board Role

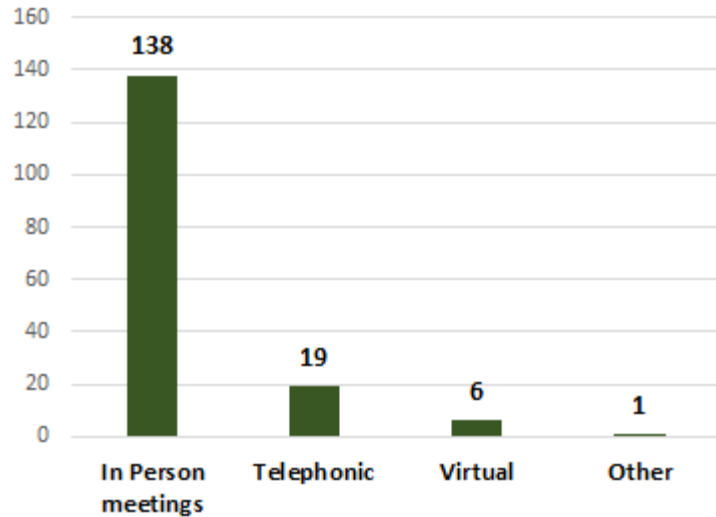


## Survey Respondent's Board Size

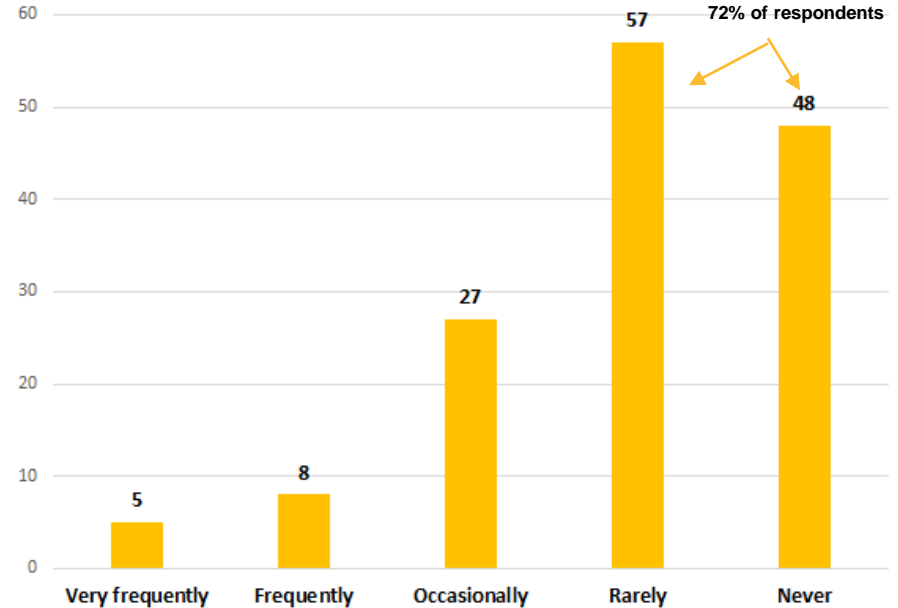


# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey

Pre-Covid Meeting Type (choose all that apply)



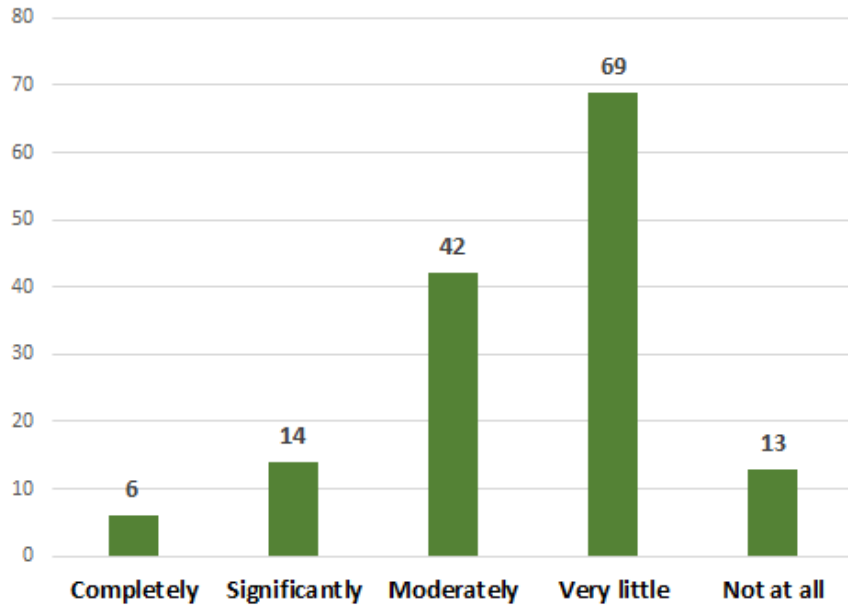
Pre-Covid Use of Virtual Meeting Platforms



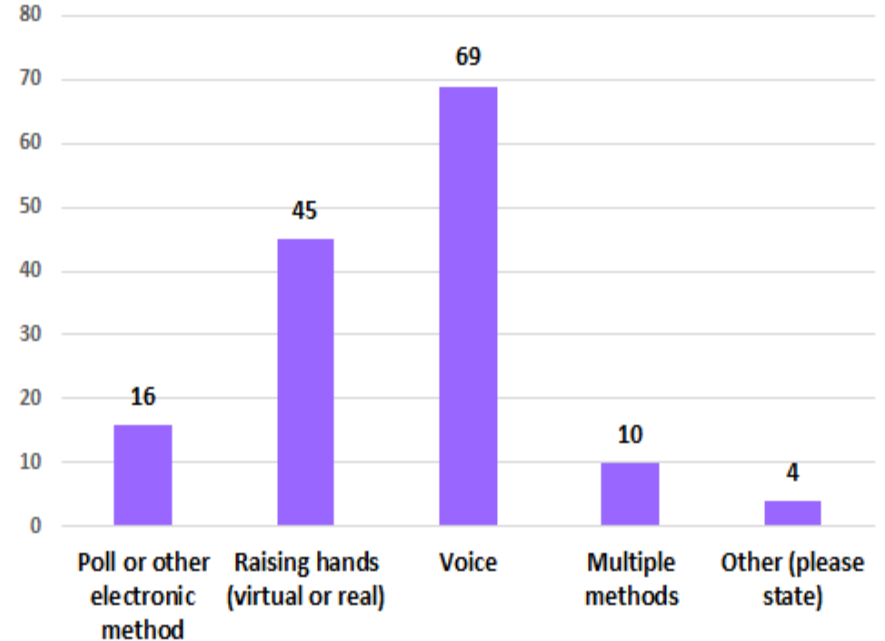


# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey

## Board meeting structure changed in virtual environment

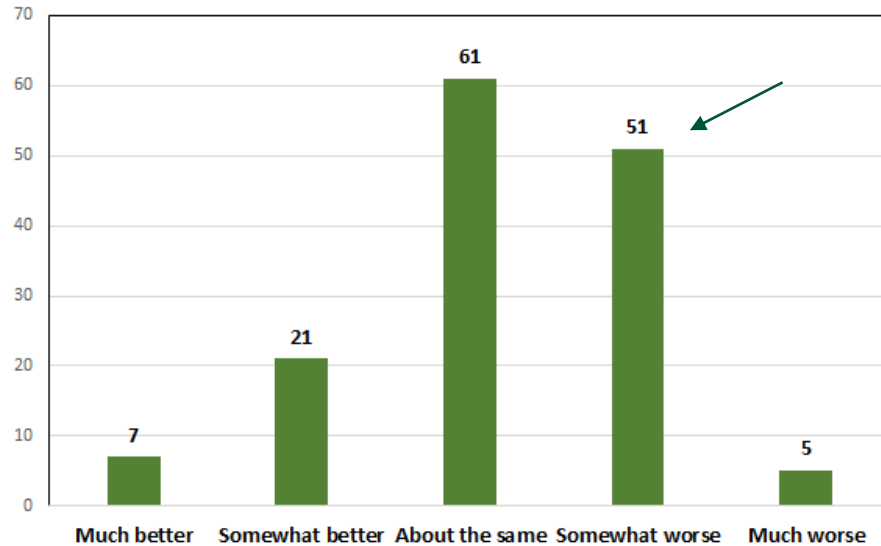


## Voting Method Used in Virtual Meetings

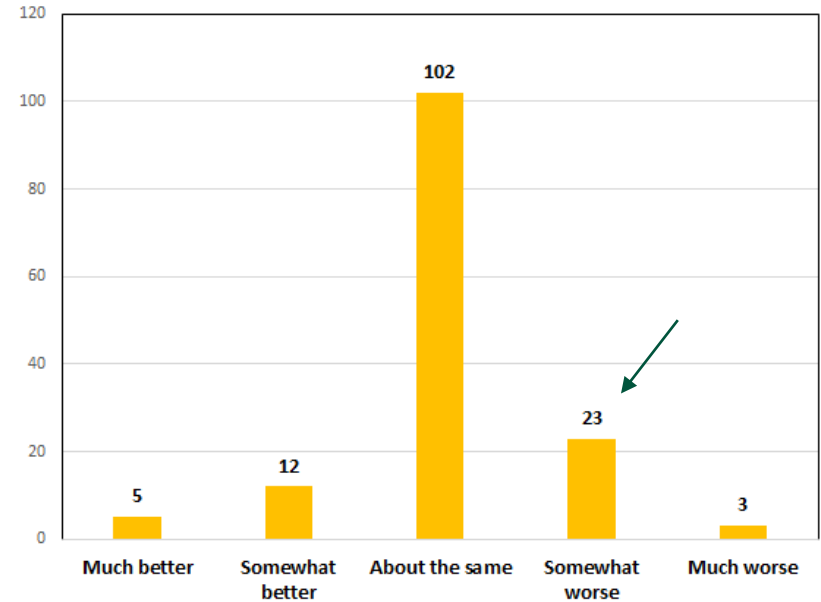


# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey

Communication effectiveness in virtual board meetings compared to in-person board meetings

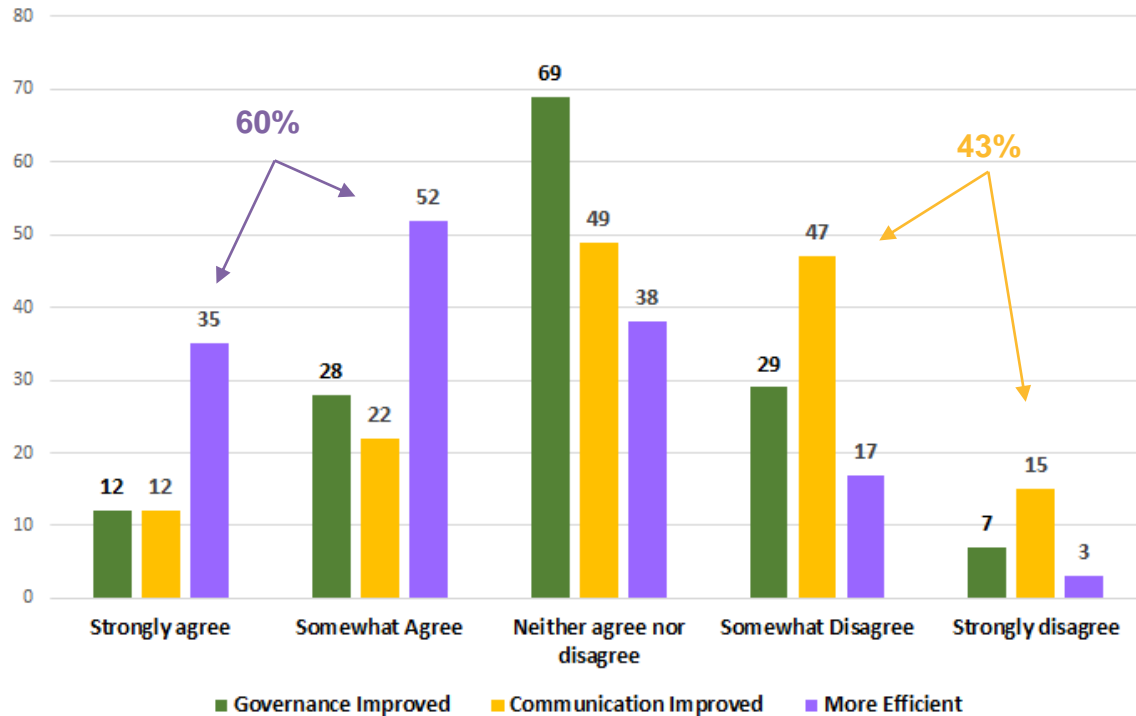


Quality of decision making in virtual board meetings compared to in-person board meetings



# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey

## Board Meetings in a Virtual Environment



# DATA ANALYSIS - Survey Comments

## Benefits of virtual board meetings

- Increased attendance
- Cost & time savings
- Improved communication
- Shorter, more efficient meetings

'To the extent that virtual attendance improved, the governance is improved. However, when a virtual meeting is over - that's it. The in-person meetings... left room for lingering issues, burning questions and general debriefing...a precious time to learn more, grapple with different personalities, brainstorm, etc.'

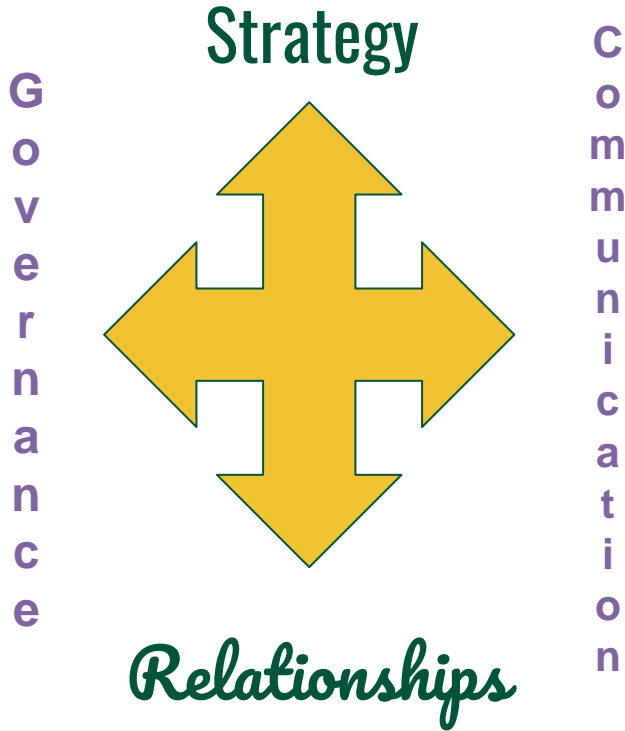
## Challenges of virtual board meetings

- Loss of social connection
- Relationship challenges
- Decreased overall discussion
- Decreased quality and depth of discussion
- Less strategic work
- Onboarding new members

**It is imperative for association boards to learn from this last year and drive looking through the windshield, not the rearview mirror.**

**- Mary Byers**

# IMPLICATIONS



**Why**

- Purpose of meeting
- Outcome needed

**What**

- Gather/convey info
- Discuss
- Approve/vote

**Who**

- Staff/committee chairs
- Experts
- Clients/members
- Community

**When**

- Urgent - asap
- Regular - monthly/quarterly
- Special topic - not urgent

**Where**

- In Person
- Virtual
- Telephonic
- Email

**How**

- Pre-work needed
- Social time/ice breakers
- Active engagement
- Hearing all voices, respectful discussion
- Ensuring accountability, commitment to decisions
- Feedback

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## STRATEGY

- Strategic meeting design
- Meeting pre-work
- Thoughtfulness over speed
- Board chair leadership

## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Work collectively
- Active engagement via technology
- Social time
- Soliciting feedback



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# YOU'RE ON MUTE:

## HOW THE MOVE FROM IN-PERSON TO VIRTUAL BOARD MEETINGS AFFECTS BOARD GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION

Theresa Hurley, MNA - Master of Nonprofit Administration - Capstone Project

### SUMMARY

Nonprofit association boards have seen changes in both board governance and board communication because of the shift from in-person meetings to virtual meetings. Some of these changes are beneficial and others are detrimental to the effective functioning of these nonprofits. It will be important for nonprofits to thoughtfully consider best board practices moving forward.

### PURPOSE

To understand how the move from in-person to virtual board meetings has impacted nonprofit association boards. Create a model to assist boards in effectively running virtual and/or hybrid board meetings to ensure they can better serve their organizations.

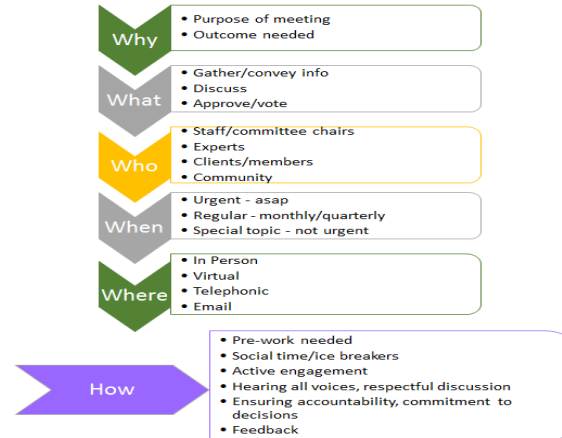
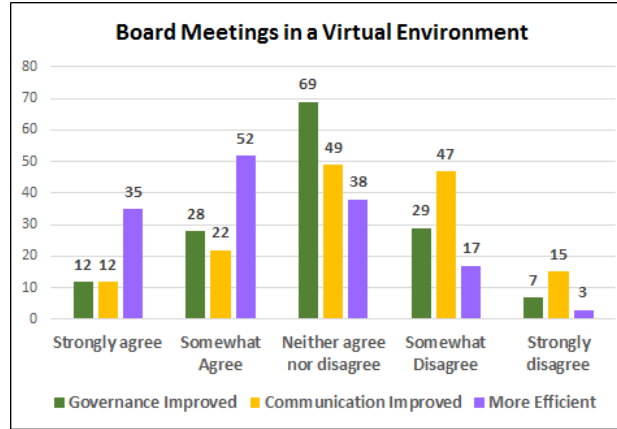
### RESEARCH

How has the shift from in-person to virtual board meetings affected board governance and communication?

### METHODS

- 11 Expert Interviews
- 32 Question Survey to Nonprofit Association Executive Director/CEO's and Board Members (145 responses)

### DATA AND ANALYSIS



### RESULTS

- The pandemic has caused the biggest transformation in governance in a century.
- Communication challenges in virtual leading to decreased in-depth discussion.
- Combination of virtual and in person meetings in future.. Hybrid meetings will require another adjustment.
- Boards must be strategic and thoughtful when designing board meeting agendas.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategic design of meeting including agenda, format, timing, interactions.
- Board chair leadership is critical - set the tone and ensure everyone feels heard.
- Utilize technology to ensure active engagement.
- Social time is even more important in a virtual environment.

### REFERENCES

Acai, A., Sonnadara, R.R. & O'Neill, T.A. (2018). **Getting with the times: a narrative review of the literature on group decision making in virtual environments and implications for promotions committees.** *Perspect Med Educ* 7, 147–155.

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