How to organise and run (an effective) virtual Board meeting

Why Virtual:

Although trustees understandably tend to prefer in-person discussions, most 'underwhelm' with the idea of video meetings is because they've always only been 'Plan B' and not set up or run to maximise their potential. In fact there can be significant benefits to the quality and breadth of discussion when participants start to utilise chat, polling, white board and break-out functions that many software providers offer; and 'all virtual participant' meetings are far easier and more effective than the split in-person meetings with one or two trustees calling in.

Here are some key points for consideration when running an effective virtual non-profit Board meeting.

Legality:

- Check your constitution for rules on remote participation (by phone or video link) and quorum. The following points apply if your constitution says that meetings should be in person.
- (UPDATE 19th March: this has just been released by the Charity Commission on their website, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector also see Bates Wells https://bateswells.co.uk/2020/03/charity-trustee-meetings-a-coronavirus-guide/)
- Therefore, at the start of the virtual Board meeting trustees can discuss, decide, vote and minute that this virtual meeting has equivalency to an in-person meeting, and the constitution will be updated in due course. Preferably attendees should see each other (i.e. video conferencing)
- After the end of the meeting, agreed decisions and actions should be emailed by the secretary, and all trustees present respond provide written (email) confirmation of those decisions. This is in addition to the future minutes which will be circulated as usual.
- Review and update your constitution as soon as possible.

Software options:

- Decide which video conference software to use by reviewing online. Personally, I use Zoom but that may not be necessary for your purposes. See https://blog.techsoup.org/posts/understanding-the-videoconferencing-tools-available-to-your-nonprofit.
- Note that Zoom's free version has a 40-minute limit on group meetings; full info about pricing and functionality here https://zoom.us/pricing, but charities can access the Pro Plan more cheaply (£52+VAT) here: https://www.charitydigitalexchange.org/partner_catalogues/Zoom
- For more on Google hangouts go here: https://it.umn.edu/compare-zoom-google-meet
- Skype is also still popular: https://support.skype.com/en/skype/all/start/

Prior to the meeting:

- Send meeting participant guidelines to all attendees.
- At least three days before and again one hour before, email the meeting link, the backup videoconference telephone number, date, time and also the telephone number of the person who is designated to help resolve technical issues.
- As trustees will not be travelling you *should* be able to justify extending the duration of the meeting by 30 minutes. This will allow you to deal with any technical issues and takes account of the fact that online discussions can potentially run a little longer as the Chair checks to ensure that all points of view have been heard.
- If there is still reticence from some trustees you could offer a 15-minute familiarisation call.

At the meeting:

- Model ‘good etiquette’ and arrive 10 minutes early!
- As others join, say hi and chat just as you might in a face to face gathering
- Establish the roles of Chair, facilitator, minute-taker, technical support and time-keeper as needed. It’s hard for one person to cover all of these.
- Have email and/or telephone numbers of the participants to hand and clarify who is communicating about tech issues or with late attendees.

- At the start, give a brief overview of the software functions and tools to be used in the meeting. Remind people to mute when they are not speaking.
- Explain how people should indicate that they want to speak. Possibilities include

    a. Raising their hand in person
    b. Utilising the raise hand function on the software
    c. Posting a comment into the chat box

- If you intend to record the meeting for missing attendees or to assist with record keeping, then you should ask or advise participants and minute the response. Plus, remember to press record!
- During discussion, keep track of levels of participation from each member of the group; it is helpful to have a quick check in with all trustees at the end of an agenda item to ensure all opinions have been heard. The meeting could run a little more slowly than usual if this is not standard practice.
- Where appropriate use engagement tools. These include annotating content, screen share, video breakout rooms, sticky notes, polls and surveys. You will find technical support for those on your software providers website.

- At the end evaluate the success of the meeting and any lessons learned.

If you would like to have an informal chat about running virtual Board meetings, or how I could support you with day-long workshops or Away Days online, please drop an email to jane@omnianda.com