

Slide 1



Hello! And welcome to this e-learning session on Great Meetings, brought to you by Columbia Basin Trust, and presented by Vantage Point.



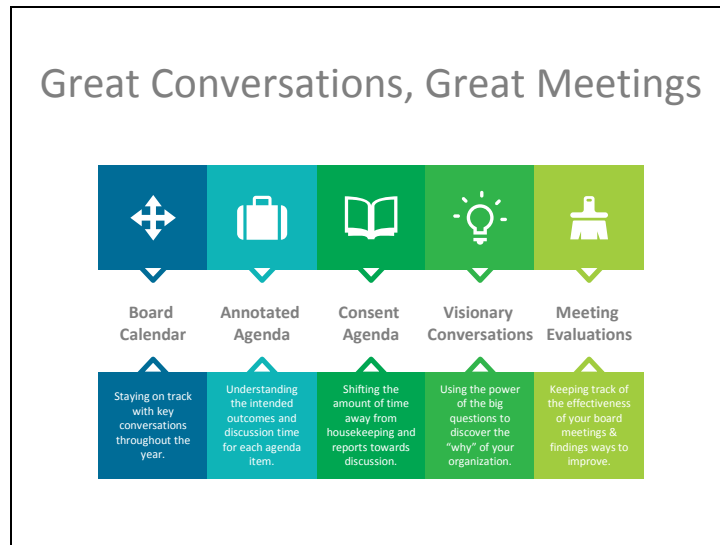
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My name is Mark Friesen and I'm the Consulting Manager at Vantage Point. Vantage Point is a not-for-profit organization that supports other not-for-profits by providing foundational, advanced and online learning opportunities. We work with more than 500 organizations and nearly 3000 not-for-profit leaders across BC.

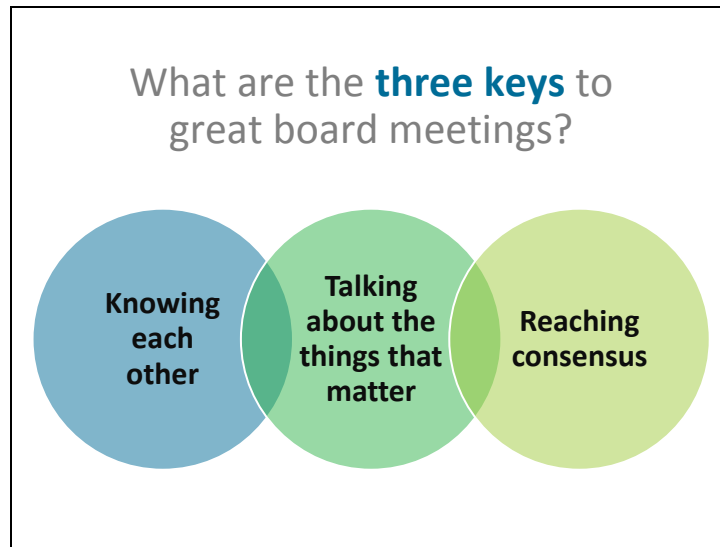
Today, I'll be your e-learning facilitator, sharing some best practices and tools for GREAT board meetings

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Boards generally spend way too much time on items that aren't relevant to the board table. We're way out at the fringes instead of honed in on what really matters.

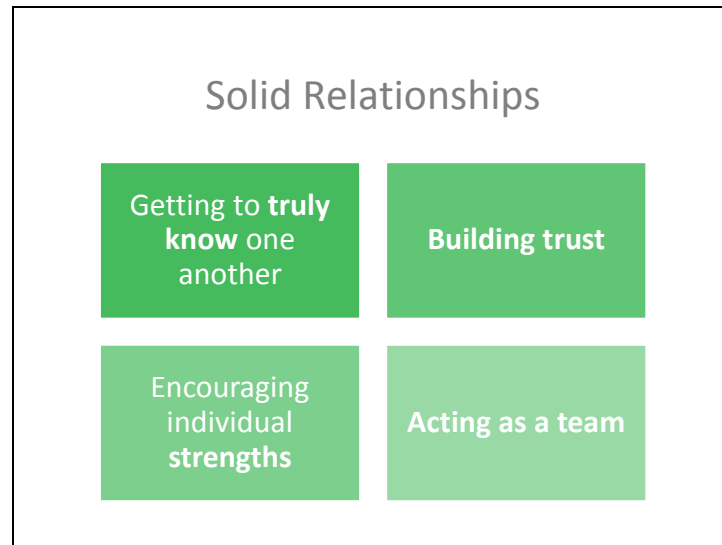
Over the next fifteen minutes, we will take you through three keys to having great board meetings. So let's get started!



In this session, we will be exploring three keys to board meetings: Knowing each other, talking about the things that matter, and reaching consensus.

Some questions you might want to consider as we move through this session:

- What do great board conversations look like?
- What would meetings look like to an outsider?
- How would board members feel?



Relationships are incredibly important to board conversations yet often overlooked. If solid relationships are not in place, everything else is challenging.

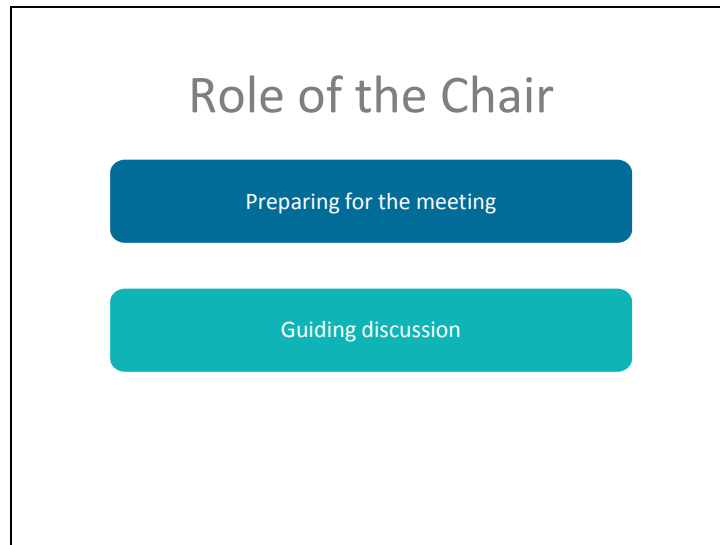
So there's a great opportunity to discuss how to build the relationships, where the trust and respect come from. I want to make it clear that this does not mean that everyone has to agree all the time. In fact, differences of opinion can be very healthy in reaching the best decisions for your organization! What I want to emphasize is this: with solid relationships, people *feel comfortable* disagreeing with and challenging each other in a *productive manner*.

The board needs to work together as a team not as a group. Is your board on the bus more like the one with the high school basketball team to a championship game or a bus taking morning commuters to work? In the first scenario, people have a shared goal and purpose, they know each others' strengths and have a strong dynamic. In the other scenario, you have people who are simply occupying the same space.

**Some ideas to share to build relationships include:**

- Having a roundtable with personal updates before the meeting starts
- Eating a meal together during the meeting or through informal get-togethers

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The Board Chair has an important and unique role, and it impacts meetings in two ways:

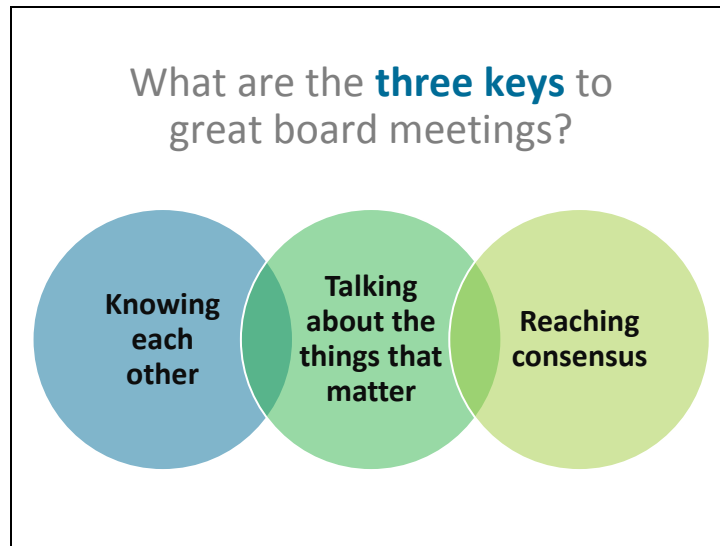
The first happens before the board meeting. That's when the Chair, in partnership with a Leadership Staff person (for example an administrator or coordinator), will prepare the agenda, and make sure any pre-reading such as previous meeting minutes, reports, get put into the meeting package. The Chair and senior staff person will work together to make sure the board has all the materials they need to read and review before they show up at the meeting.

The second part happens during the meeting. Here, it may be useful to think about the example of the lily pond: as chair, you've clearly laid out which ponds you plan to visit (i.e., topics or themes up for discussion), you've highlighted the important features to pay attention to (covered in briefing docs, etc.), and you've anchored the conversation – you've signalled which lily pad (or general area of the pond) you're going to focus on.

You may have to leap across many lily pads to get there. The conversation may take many twists and turns, but you are heading forward. You are creating momentum and energy for action. If a board or committee member attempts to pull the entire group out to the far, deep end of the pond, you skillfully pull that individual back into the group.

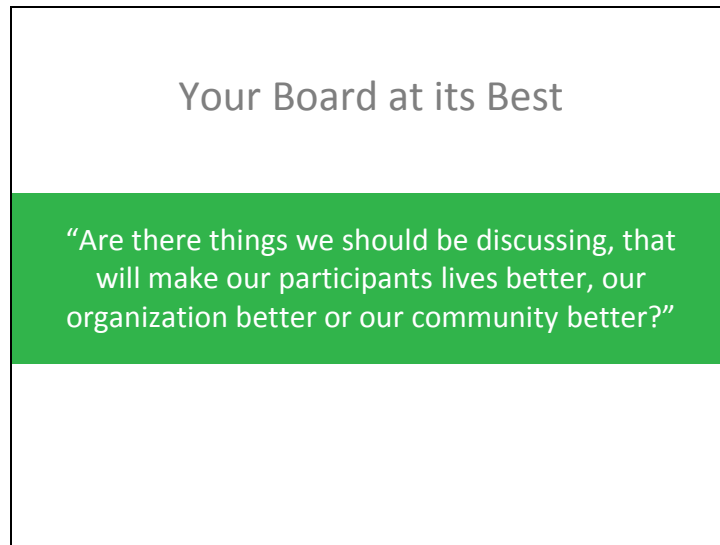
So, thinking about your own board, what type of facilitation or meeting management does this take?

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Next, let's look at how to focus your conversation and talk about the things that matter!





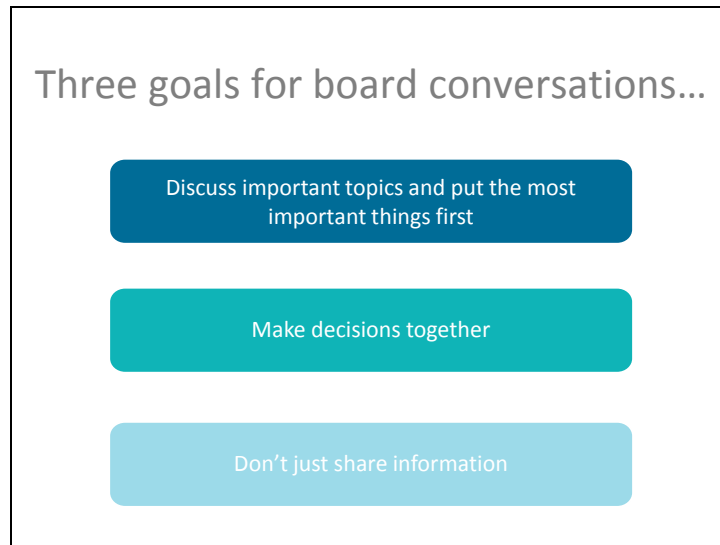
Here’s a quick fire test of your current board meetings. It’s also a good question to ask your fellow board members.

I want you to think about the best decision your board made in its last 3 meetings. What made it the best decision?

Which of the following categories would you put it into: Would you say that the decision moved us towards...

- making the community a better place to live
- improving the lives of your clients and/or stakeholders
- making your employees more highly engaged in their work
- strengthening the capacity of your organization

These four questions are good criteria to determine if you are making the best decisions around the board table. If your decisions aren’t moving the dial in any of these areas, you may not be focusing on the right things. For boards that are working boards, it can feel more challenging to focus on the big picture and governance when you also need to discuss operational matters. One trick to doing this is to have separate meeting agendas: one for the governance matters you need to discuss; and another one for operations.



Remember, most boards spend less than 25 hours *per* year together around the board table! So every conversation matters.

You have lots of conversations to choose from. The real trick is being able to focus on what really matters – to cut out the clutter and say ‘no’ to things. Think of what is urgent versus what is important – is your board able to get to the important conversations, or are you always looking at urgent matters? Have the Board Chair discuss what are the two most important matters facing the organization— it might be an economic downturn, changes in government funding, or long-term succession planning, for example. Make sure one of these matters is on every board agenda.

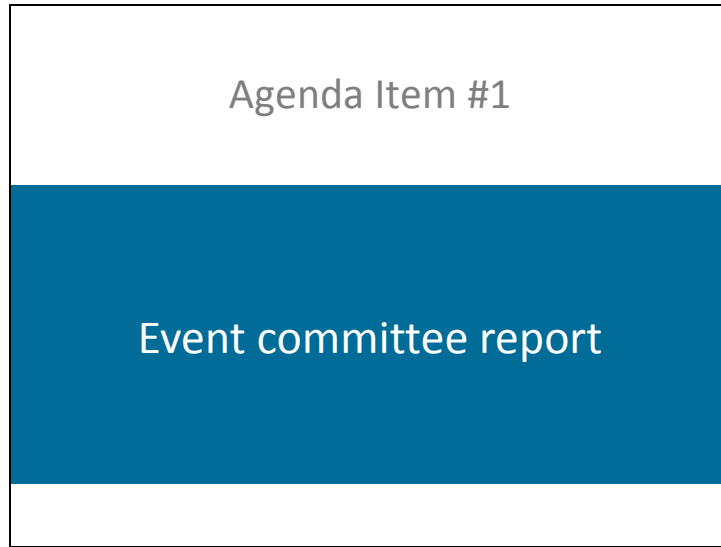
So now, I am going to explore what a great board meeting looks like in a tactical way through an activity.

I am going to present some sample agenda items – and ask you what the better approach to each agenda item would be.

A few reminders about this:

- The goal is to make sure you stay in *governance mode* and not wade into *operations mode*
- Think about how to engage in asking questions from the strategic and *visioning* perspectives

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Imagine you have a report from the events committee coming to the board. How would you handle it?

Better Use of Board Time

Analyzing the event funder expectations and how well you meet them

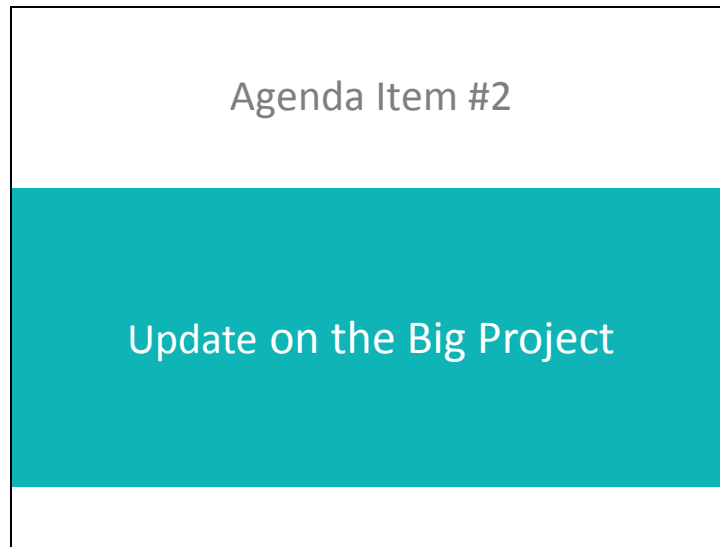
-or-

Reviewing committee reports of activities and events

Would it be analyzing what the funder of the event would like to see? Or reviewing the report from the committee?

The answer? The first option! Ideally, all of the board members have already read the committee report and asked any questions ahead of the meeting. Once you're around the board table, you have a great opportunity to set direction for the event at a governance level by talking about the big picture.

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Imagine you are going to get an update on a major project at your next meeting. How would you handle it?

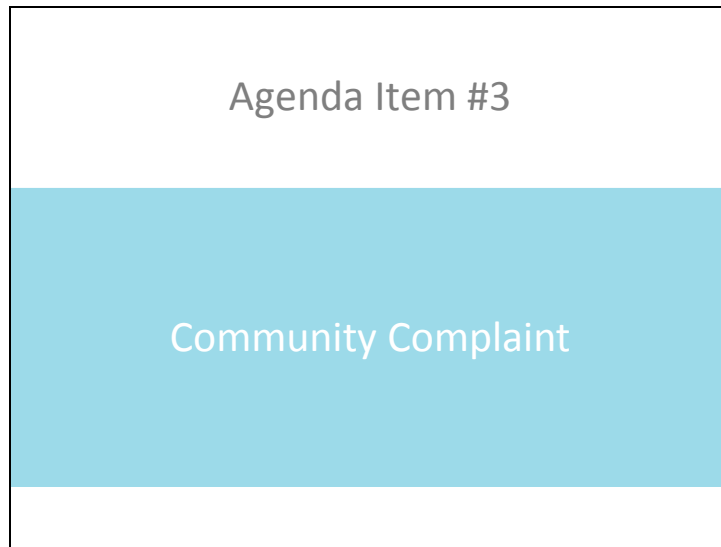
Better Use of Board Time

Trouble-shooting project details  
-or-  
Developing a risk management strategy to avoid  
the big crisis

Would you want to trouble shoot the details? Or come up with a strategy that would avoid a crisis?

The answer is option B – developing a risk management strategy. Why? Because that’s where the board can provide the best support to the people managing the project. The board is uniquely qualified to take on the work of creating a risk management strategy. It’s a key governance activity that can’t be delegated away. And by looking ahead and looking to the external, the board can help chart a course that will set up the organization for success, even if the project has a few bumps along the way.

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Now imagine that your board has to deal with a complaint from someone in the community

Better Use of Board Time

Stepping in when a community member complains about a volunteer

-or-

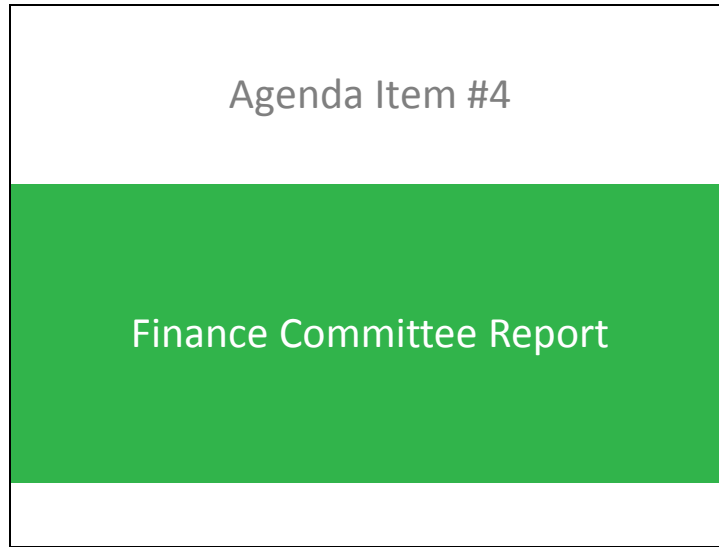
Ensuring there are guidelines for dealing with community communication and complaints

What do you do as a board when this comes up at a meeting? Do you focus your conversation on how to step in when there's a complaint brought forward? Or do you focus on ensuring there are guidelines?

The answer is option B. Why? Because, depending on the type of programs and services you provide, receiving complaints from time to time might be par for the course. And so, why not work to make sure there's a common set of expectations and guidelines on how to deal with community complaints, rather than deal with each issue as it comes up? Doing this will lighten the workload of the board and allow them to focus on more governance conversations.



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In our last scenario, I want you to think about how the board should handle reviewing a finance committee report.

Better Use of Board Time

Reviewing the itemized cheque ledger of project spending

-or-

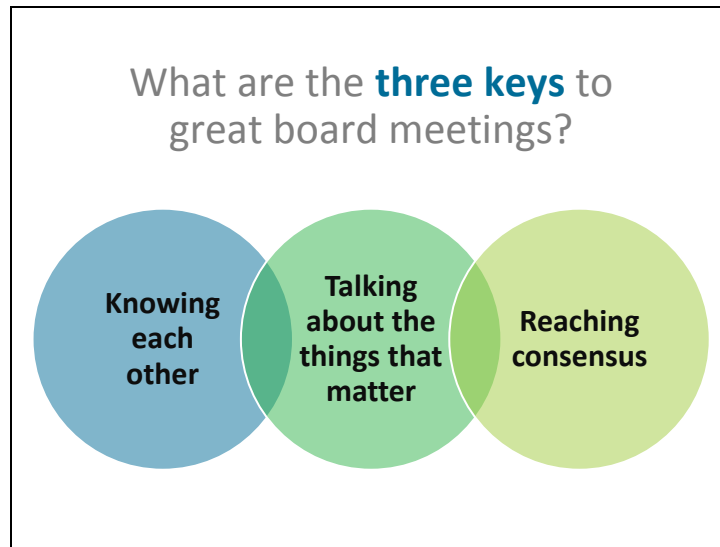
Reviewing a quarterly report that compares money spent compared to budget & results achieved to performance targets.

Should they review the cheque ledger for every project expense? Or look at the quarterly report that compares how much was spent compared to what the budget forecast?

The answer is option B!

The board might feel like it's exercising due diligence by reviewing things line by line, but is that the best use of its time? No. Because the board's job is to focus on the big picture. Oversight is making sure the organization is following through with the plans that it makes. And that's what we want to emphasize here – the board won't necessarily plan for every single expense that shows up in the ledger. But it will plan for program costs, or event costs through the budget. And that's why it's important to focus the board's energy at that level: looking to outcomes and making sure revenues and expenses are in line with expectations.

Some boards will create a policy that means that spending above a certain dollar amount has to get board approval.



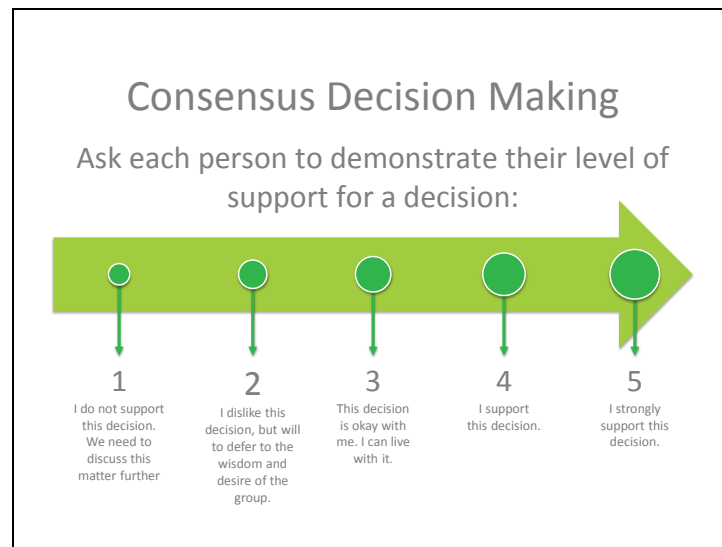
Now, let's move onto the third key: reaching consensus.

I want to start by exploring by taking a step back and first looking at decisions.



Great decisions:

- Are made based on your mission, vision and values.
- Once a decision is made, there is a discussion around how to follow through with that decision?
- And, as part of that, is there clarity on whether the actions required will be taken by the board, staff or other volunteers?



Now let's talk about making a consensus decision. What is its value?

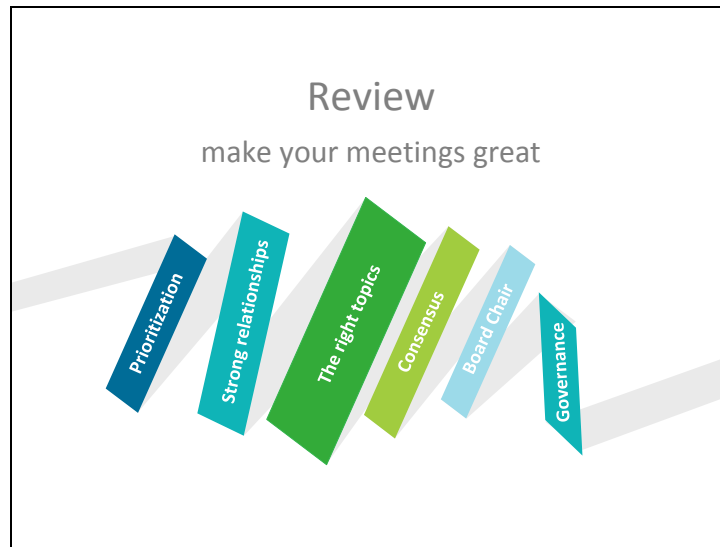
Consensus is a process that provides group members an opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, be heard by the group, work towards mutual agreement, and support a final decision that reflects the full participation and best thinking of everyone. It is not understood to mean "everyone agrees". But board members must get behind decisions that are made whether they agree or not.

We can think of it as having 5 levels:

- 1: I do not support this decision. We need to discuss this matter further.**
- 2: I dislike this decision, but will to defer to the wisdom and desire of the group.**
- 3: This decision is okay with me. I can live with it.**
- 4: I support this decision.**
- 5: I strongly support this decision.**

This is a scale that the board chair could use now and then to test the group's feelings around a decision before it is officially made. If there is a large amount of disagreement or many people at the 1 and 2 level it may be a sign that the topic requires further discussion or information gathering. If there is disagreement, it should be voiced around the board table first. This is what I meant earlier when talking about differences of opinion. It might be that a board member has different knowledge or insights that could be useful for the rest of the board to know.

You always want to aim for Level 4 or Level 5. But, if some members are at Level 3, that can be okay. It might be helpful to remind people who aren't enthusiastically and strongly supporting a decision that it's important that the board present a united front about the decision once it is made, especially when talking to people who are not on the board.



Meetings are where the board governs!

And making your board meetings great will have a positive ripple effect – starting with your work as a board member and moving throughout the whole of the organization.

Join Us Again  
info@thevantagepoint.ca



The slide features a decorative footer bar with five colored segments: light blue, dark blue, teal, green, and lime green. On the right side of this bar is a light blue square containing a white paper plane icon. A blue line with a dashed end connects the email address above to the paper plane icon.