



Strategies for Effective Board Meetings

VSBA/VSA Annual Conference 2022

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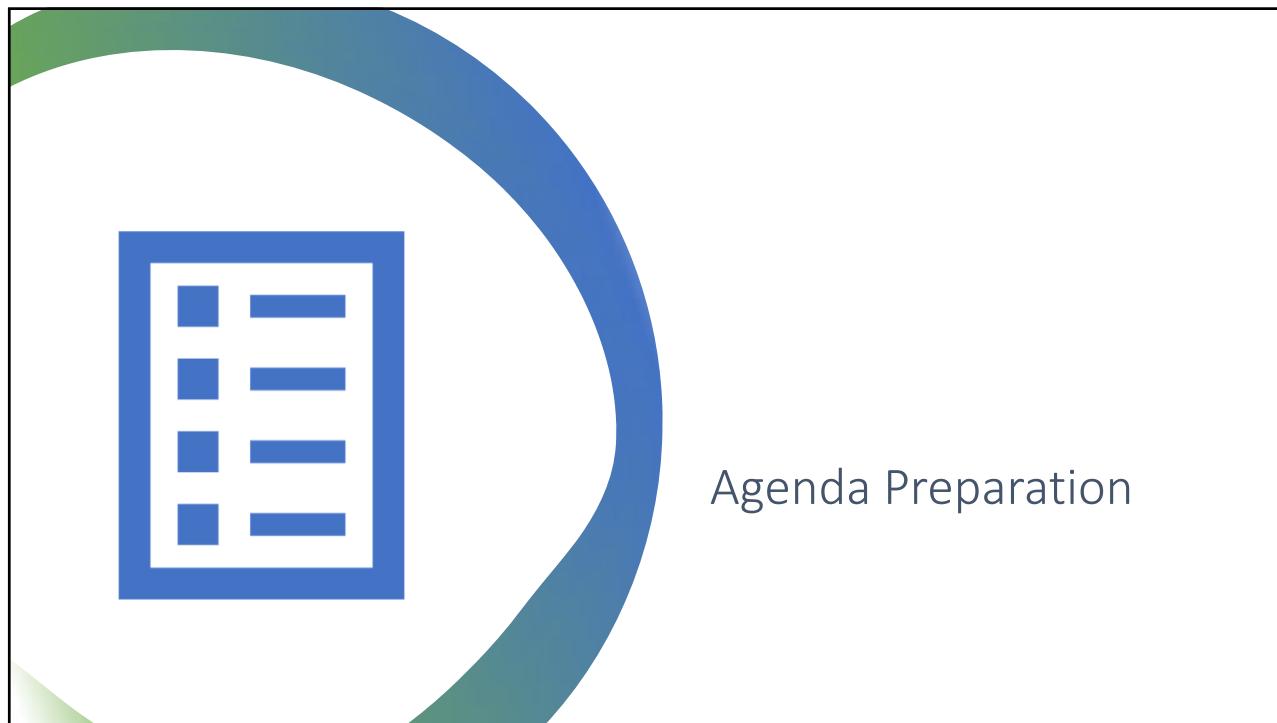
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Components of Effective Meetings

1. Agenda Preparation
2. Ethical Operations
3. Robert's Rules of Order
4. Open Meeting Law
5. Appropriate Use of Executive Sessions

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Agenda Preparation

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VSBA Model Policy on Board Meetings, Agenda Preparation and Distribution

1. Circle anything that might be a surprise to you or something you would like to learn more about.
2. Underline something you feel is important and anything your board should discuss.

BOARD MEETINGS, AGENDA PREPARATION & DISTRIBUTION

Policy

All Board meetings will be held in compliance with Vermont's open meeting law, 1 V.S.A. §§ 310 et seq.

Regular Meeting Schedule

Regular meetings of the board will be held at _____ on _____ (day of month, as the first Monday of every month) beginning at (time). The meeting schedule will be published and made available by the superintendent to any person on request.

Special and emergency meetings will be called by the chair on his or her own initiative or when requested by a majority of the board and shall be warned appropriately.¹ Only items on the agenda may be acted upon at these meetings.

Conduct of Board Meetings

Meetings will be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised.⁴ One or more members of the board may attend and participate in a regular, special or emergency meeting by electronic or other means so long as the requirements of 1 V.S.A. §312(a)(2) are met.

Executive Sessions

Executive sessions of the board will be convened only for the purposes stated in 1 V.S.A. §313. The minutes of any meeting where an executive session takes place will reflect the specific statutory reason for convening the executive session. Board members will not make public the confidential issues discussed during an executive session.

Agenda Preparation

The superintendent will prepare proposed agendas for all meetings of the board after consultation with the board chair. Items of business may be suggested by any board member, staff member, student, or citizen of the district. The inclusion of items on proposed agendas will be at the discretion of the board chair and superintendent. An item may only be added or removed from a meeting agenda as the first order of business at the meeting.⁵ Other adjustments to an agenda may be made at any time during the meeting.

Agenda Distribution

The proposed agenda, together with supporting materials, will be distributed to board members by the superintendent three days prior to regular meetings and as soon as practicable before special and emergency meetings. At least 48 hours prior to a regular meeting and 24 hours prior to a special meeting, the superintendent shall ensure that the agenda is posted in the municipal

¹ See 1 V.S.A. §312(c)(1). "The time and place of all regular meetings....shall be clearly designated by statute, charter, regulation, ordinance, bylaw, resolution or other determining authority of the public body."

² See 1 V.S.A. See 1 V.S.A. §312(c)(2) & (3)

³ See Robert's Rules of Order §9. Although action on items not on the proposed agenda for regular meetings is allowed as "New Business," boards should avoid taking action on non-agenda items at regular meetings. If necessary, emergency meetings can be called to act on matters needing immediate action.

⁴ See 1 V.S.A. §312(d)(3)(A)

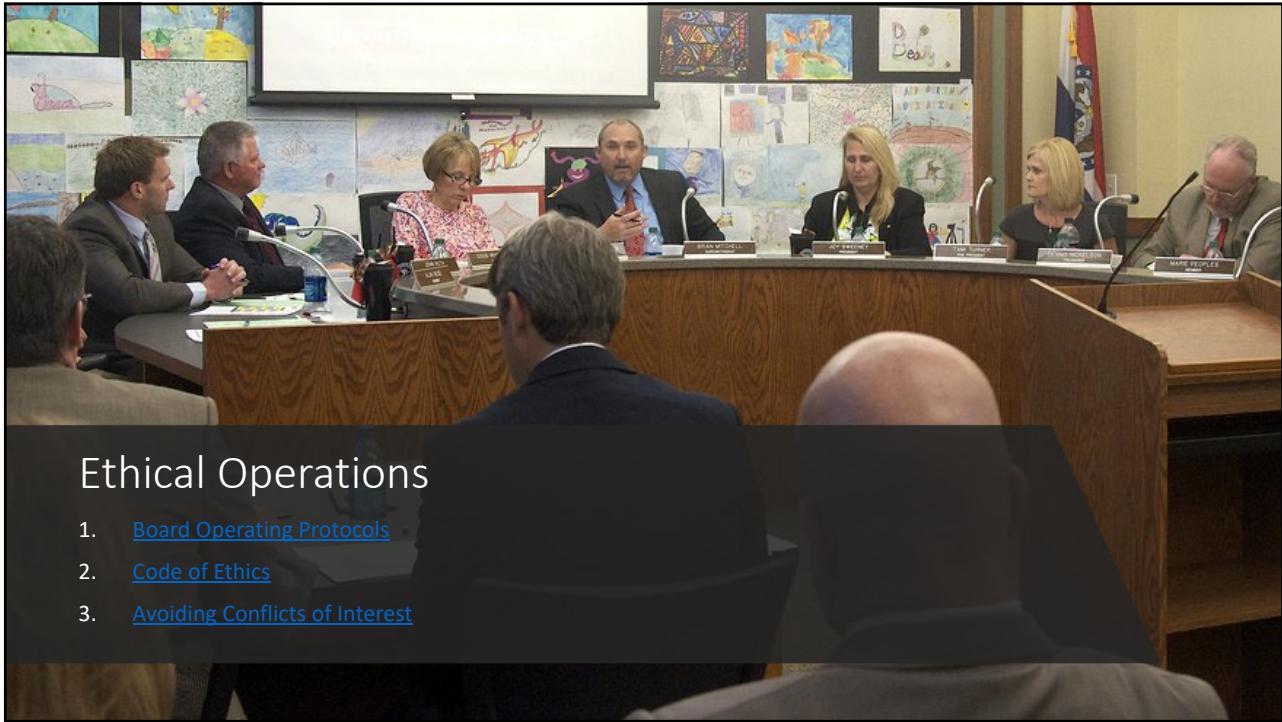
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Getting an Item on the Agenda

Fred is a new board member, who doesn't know how to get an item on a meeting agenda. He has concerns about an aspect of school bus safety. In his second meeting, while discussing the budget, Fred asks, "Have we checked into retrofitting our buses with seatbelts and sensors, so the bus cannot operate without everyone having a seatbelt fastened?"

- How might the chair respond in the moment?
- What needs to be more fully explained to Fred and understood by all members?
- How can the board ensure Fred doesn't become frustrated or lose interest in contributing his ideas in the future?

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Speaking of Ethics

Linda has concerns about the potential conflict of interest a board member has from her family selling cleaning supplies to their district. The member never mentions anything about it or recuses herself from voting on those contracts.

- What are the responsibilities of the board member with the family selling cleaning supplies to the school?
- What should Linda do?
- What if she does that and things are not resolved, what else might she do?
- Is this just a problem between Linda and the other board member?

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Robert's Rules

The board is discussing a motion, and a member offers an amendment to the original motion. Board members discuss the amendment and naturally include some of their thoughts on the merits of the original motion as part of that discussion. An audience member interrupts a board meeting by calling, "Point of order."

- How should the chair respond and why?
- How might the board over time address any concerns and changes in their processes?

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Open Meeting Law and Public Comment

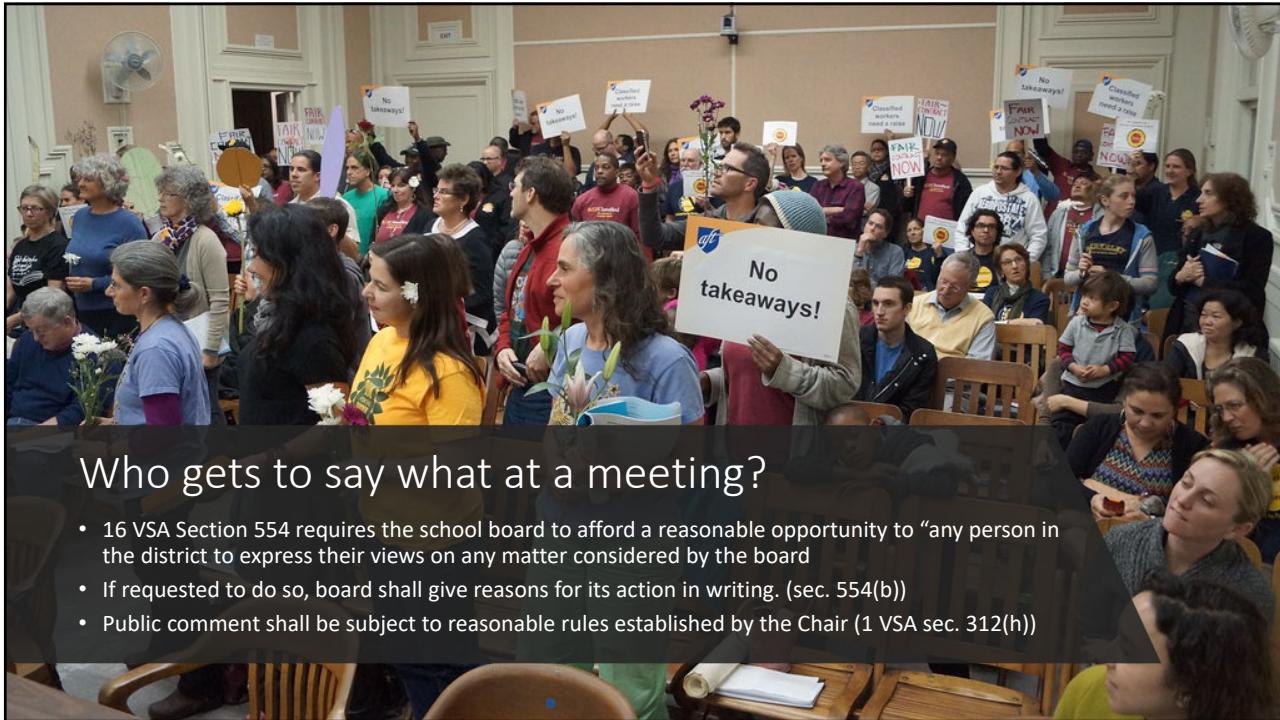


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OML and Public Comment

- All meetings of public bodies are open to the public.
- “Public shall be given the reasonable opportunity to express its opinion on matters considered by the public body during the meeting as long as order is maintained.” (1 VSA Section 312(h))
- Public comment shall be subject to reasonable rules established by the Chair (1 VSA Section 312(h))

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Who gets to say what at a meeting?

- 16 VSA Section 554 requires the school board to afford a reasonable opportunity to "any person in the district to express their views on any matter considered by the board"
- If requested to do so, board shall give reasons for its action in writing. (sec. 554(b))
- Public comment shall be subject to reasonable rules established by the Chair (1 VSA sec. 312(h))

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Public Meetings are not Conversations with the Board!

- There are provisions for public comment
- Robert's Rules of Order do not contemplate that the Board will discuss items with the public
- Robert's Rules of Order contemplate that there is debate amongst the Board
- [Meeting Management Language for Board Chairs](#)

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Open Meeting Law

In discussion of a student discipline policy, a board member mentions concerns about an issue her son had with a specific high school teacher. She doesn't use any names but refers to her one son and the one high school Physics teacher.

- How might the board chair or other members appropriately point out any concerns?
- Would it be allowable for the board to go into executive session to discuss either concerns about that teacher or their colleague's comments?
- If the board did go into executive session, what steps do they need to take to do that lawfully?

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Robert's Rules of Order

[Webinar on VSBA Website](#)

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Communications

- During board meetings
- Outside of board meetings
 - Social media
 - Emails
 - Press inquiries
- Board members wearing different hats

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Thank you for attending this session!

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