

Report

2019 Board Engagement Survey

 boardable



The State of Board Engagement in 2019

Boards are continuing to shrink, according to respondents in Boardable’s “The State of Board Engagement in 2019” survey.

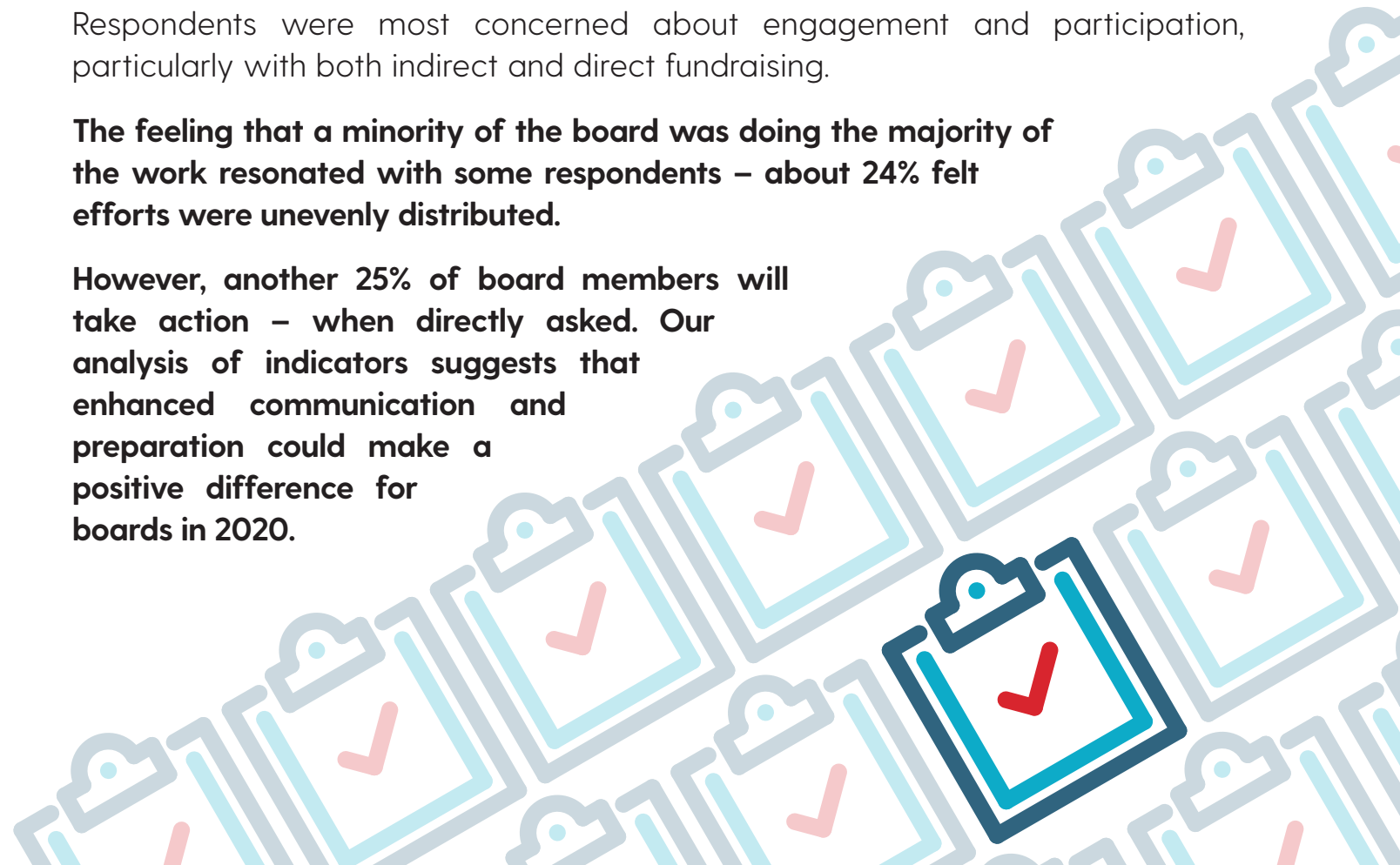
Boards with fewer than 20 members are in the majority, with almost half (42%) of boards comprised of 10 members or less. Small boards can stay agile, but the shrinking of the average board means that existing members need to be active and engaged.

Low attendance can have a negative impact on any board, but it can be devastating for a small one. In 2019, over half of all boards reported full member attendance for meetings; running lean may be better for nonprofits that want fully engaged and involved members.

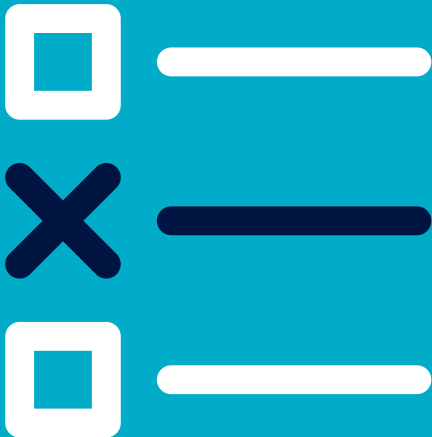
Respondents were most concerned about engagement and participation, particularly with both indirect and direct fundraising.

The feeling that a minority of the board was doing the majority of the work resonated with some respondents – about 24% felt efforts were unevenly distributed.

However, another 25% of board members will take action – when directly asked. Our analysis of indicators suggests that enhanced communication and preparation could make a positive difference for boards in 2020.



Key Takeaways from our 2019 Board Engagement Survey



Meeting Preparation – How are Boards Preparing Members for Meetings?

2 hours a month. That's the average amount of time that most boards meet – and there is a lot to accomplish in those two hours. Time constraints make meeting preparation absolutely critical. Over half (52.5%) of all boards meet once per month, with only a tiny minority (3.1%) meeting more frequently. When the full board gets together, most (49.69%) meet for about two hours total. Of the boards surveyed, about a third (33.39%) meet for just a single hour. Because time is limited, preparation is essential.

Of the boards surveyed, over 80% have materials and documents in the hands of board members before the actual meeting, prioritizing preparation. Good preparation allows for reviewing agenda items, notetaking, and formulating questions in advance so that no time will be wasted within the meeting itself.

The early preppers include those who provide all board members with full documentation a week in advance (61.13%) and those who provide this critical information a day early (26.02%). The remaining 12% of boards don't provide specifics or documents until they are seated at the table.

87%

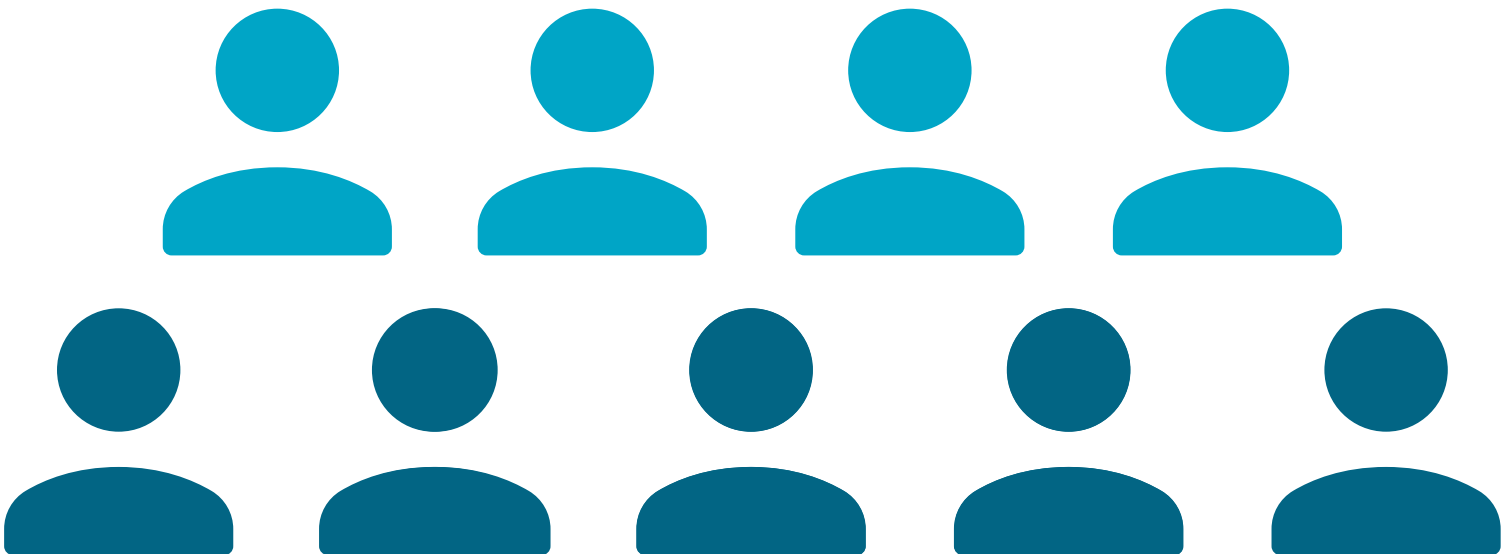


A full 87% of all boards provide their members important documents and details before meeting.

Board Member Meeting Attendance and Participation

Monthly meetings seem to resonate with board members in 2019; over half of respondents (54%) enjoyed full attendance at board meetings during the year. 39% saw most members attend, while just a handful of nonprofits reported low or sagging attendance; 4.7% of boards had meetings with less than 50% attendance.

Attendance is one thing – participation is another. Board member participation in meetings continues to be a concern, both for voting and decision-making purposes. When board members participate, they engage more fully with the organization. Nonprofits that have fewer board members participating in meetings may find that they struggle to obtain buy-in from all members.



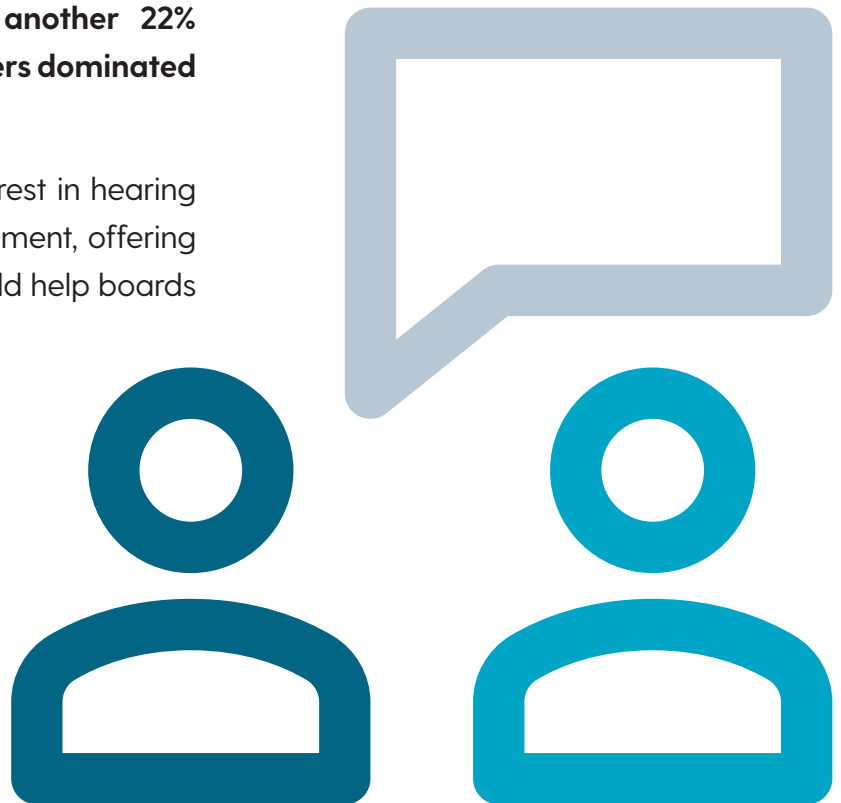
Board Members and Conversation – Who’s Doing the Talking?

Members that attend meetings are more likely to participate fully in conversations and decisions; 47% of respondents indicated that all members had the opportunity to speak during a meeting and took the initiative to do so. Another 10% ensured that all members had a voice, requiring each to participate in the conversation and make room for diverse voices.

That time allowance is important, as about half of the boards surveyed indicated that the Director or Board Chair did the majority of the talking.

21% had very chatty leaders, while another 22% indicated that one or more board members dominated the conversation at meetings.

Since many boards also indicated an interest in hearing from diverse voices and boosting engagement, offering opportunities to speak and contribute could help boards achieve these goals in 2020 and beyond.



Fundraising Efforts – Are Board Members Raising Funds?



Boards benefit from active, engaged members, particularly when it comes to fundraising for the organization. Just over half (52%) of all boards surveyed required board members to make monetary donations at some level, while others did not have this requirement. Fundraising is about more than just adding your own capital, though, and board members gave generously in 2019. 50% of all board members worked to solicit donations for the organization they served in 2019.

According to respondents, some board members clearly do more for fundraising than others.

Just over a quarter of respondents (28%) stated that one or more members shouldered the bulk of the work when it came to board member fundraising.

Others (28%) found that board members would help, but only when specifically asked, highlighting the need for excellent communication between the executive team and the board and the need for outstanding meeting preparation, especially regarding fundraising goals.

About a fourth of all boards (27%) were disappointed by the board's efforts, stating that while fundraising was a significant board responsibility, few members followed through with assistance.

We have a few board members who do the majority of the board's development work.

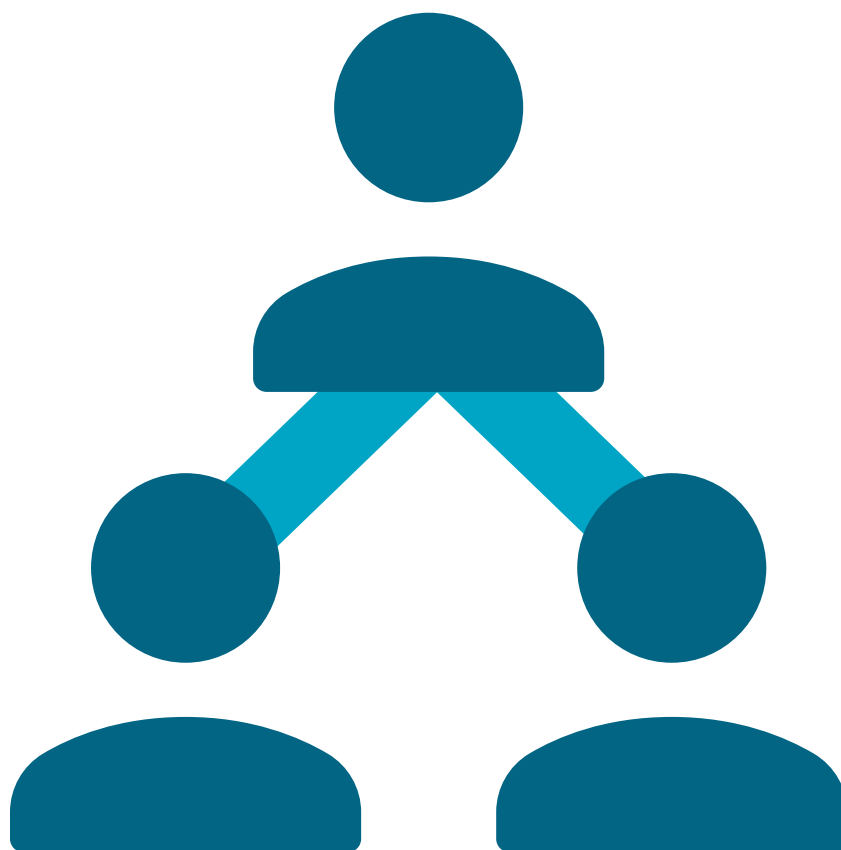
Sharing the Mission



Board members are doing a great job of boosting awareness and sharing the mission of the organization they serve, according to respondents. 59% of board members consistently shared the nonprofit's goals and missions on their own private social media pages, while others spread the word through social connections, networking, and other events.

Board members invited guests to tour the organizations' facilities (47%), asked friends to volunteer (33%), and asked members of their network to buy event tickets or contribute to fundraisers (49%).

These are all activities that boost awareness of both the organization and its missions and could enhance the amount of funds raised or assistance gathered.



Desperately Seeking Engagement

Boards in general express concerns about both engagement and fundraising; these components are closely aligned since the more a board is involved, the more motivated they will be to assist. Tracking “to-do” lists and projects through conversations between meetings could help boost board engagement.

Of the boards surveyed, the majority (64%) did not have protocols in place to track the progress of “to-do” items or projects between meetings, and a whopping 60% had no interaction or communication between members outside of meetings.

A few people might interact between meetings, but there isn't much whole-board communication.



The majority of boards (82%) are not actively tracking key performance indicators for engagement, participation, or fundraising; lack of awareness could contribute to lower overall performance and the uneven division of labor reported by some boards.

Q.21 What do you feel is your weakest area of board engagement?

donors management staff BOD one support Volunteering ideas involvement without Attendance seem new members Maintaining Recruitment busy events opening doors Chair board members engaged Leadership opportunities diversity involved new future ask know engagement plan make interest committee information follow areas Fund raising regular time think work leading organization Governance Development things board members programs board participate fundraising Financial meetings projects members talk Communication training lack goals giving hard participation enough activities others new board members full commitment much people ED engaged responsibility efforts many Personal never Strategic planning little need good attend role accountability understanding active Regular communication help contribute everyone enough time outside Sometimes will direction expectations find Fund Development try

Boardable anonymously surveyed 640 nonprofit board members, staff, volunteers, and consultants about the state of board engagement at their organization. 89% of respondents were from nonprofits with a board size under 20 members. Annual revenue of represented organizations was a majority under \$500,000 (52%) with 16% at \$500,000 to \$1M, 14% at \$1M to \$2.5M, and 17% over \$2.5M.

What Changed in 2019?

2018 saw a shift towards smaller boards in general, and 2019 continued to reflect that trend. One enduring interest for boards is strengthening diversity with 70% expressing either an active interest in recruiting diverse members or a desire to do so in the future.

Fundraising maintained its importance with board members; some listed fundraising as their highest priority, while others showed continued concern about engagement and participation.



Communication, participation, and engagement are all factors that could impact the overall success of a board in 2020. For over one-fourth of respondents, board members followed through when directly asked to perform specific tasks. Committing to enhanced communication could help convert these well-intentioned but reserved members into a powerful force.

About Boardable

Built by nonprofit leaders, for nonprofits. Boardable empowers you to work more effectively with your boards and committees. We know the frustration you feel (and the hours you lose) just from organizing a meeting via email, phone, and text. We've lived it. We're from the nonprofit world, too. After looking around for the right tool but not finding it, we decided to build it. Boardable is a software platform that centralizes all communication between you and your board. Find the best meeting times, securely store all of your documents, archive discussion threads and more—all in one place.

For more information, to schedule a demo, or to sign up for your FREE 14-day trial, visit us at boardable.com.



Copyright © 2020 Board Management Software, Inc. All rights reserved.

Any reproduction, modification, distribution, transmission, publication, translation, display, hosting or sale of all or any portion of the contents of this document is strictly prohibited without written permission of an authorized representative of the publisher.