

Report

# 2019 Board Engagement Survey Results

 boardable



# About the 2nd Annual Board Engagement Survey

Nonprofit boards are nothing if not unique. Some govern established, community-fixture organizations, while others shape direction for newly formed mission-driven groups. Whether your organization is just starting out or has been around for a hundred years, you know how important keeping board members engaged is to the board's effectiveness. While every board is different, there are some common challenges that, when addressed, can help get your board on track toward advancement.

**This survey was sponsored by these partners**

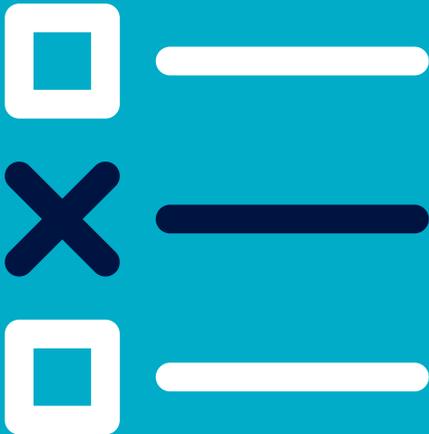


We anonymously surveyed 640 nonprofit board members, staff, volunteers, and consultants about the state of board engagement at their organization. Eighty-nine percent of respondents were from nonprofits with a board size under 20 members. Annual revenue of represented organizations was a majority under \$500,000 (52%) with 16% at \$500,000 to \$1M, 14% at \$1M to \$2.5M, and 17% over \$2.5M. The survey was conducted from November 20, 2019 to December 31, 2019. Respondents volunteered to take the survey on the Survey Monkey platform after seeing it in social media posts, sponsor communication, and sharing of the survey through word-of-mouth.

The survey respondents included:

- Board members (30%)
- Board chairs (20%)
- Nonprofit staff (38%)
- Consultants (3%)
- Other (8%)

# Key Takeaways from our 2019 Board Engagement Survey



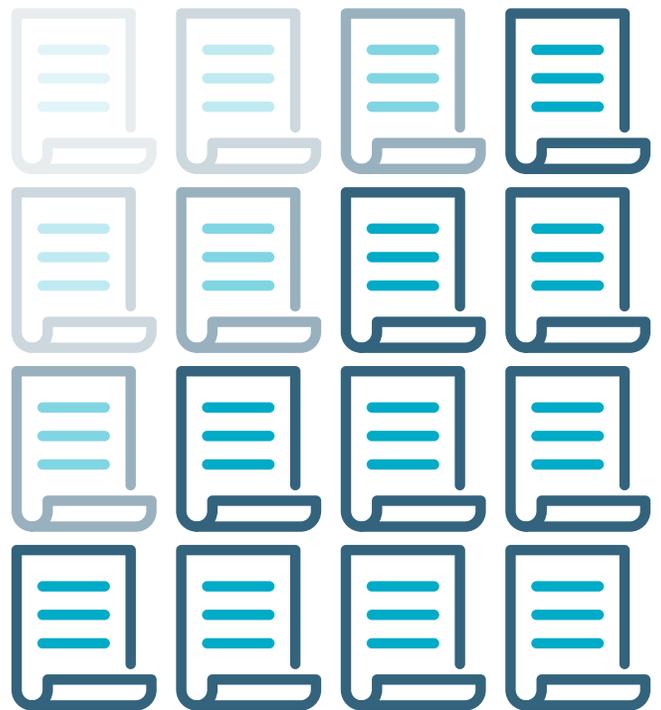
# Meeting Preparation – How are Boards Preparing Members for Meetings?

Two 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.

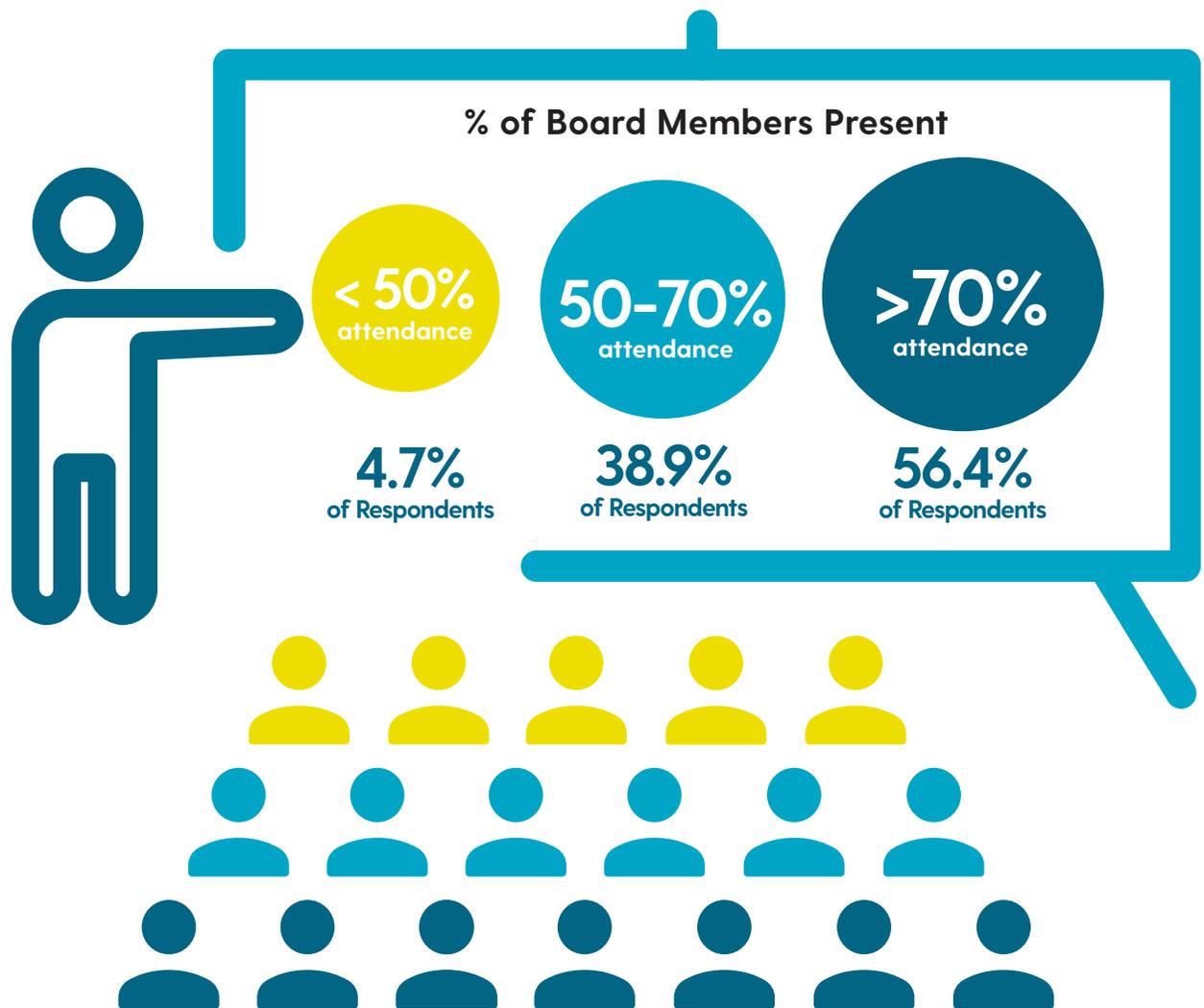
87%



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

# Board Member Meeting Attendance and Participation

On a positive note, in 2019, over half of boards responding to this survey reported full member attendance for meetings. It seems running lean may be better for nonprofits that want fully engaged and involved members.



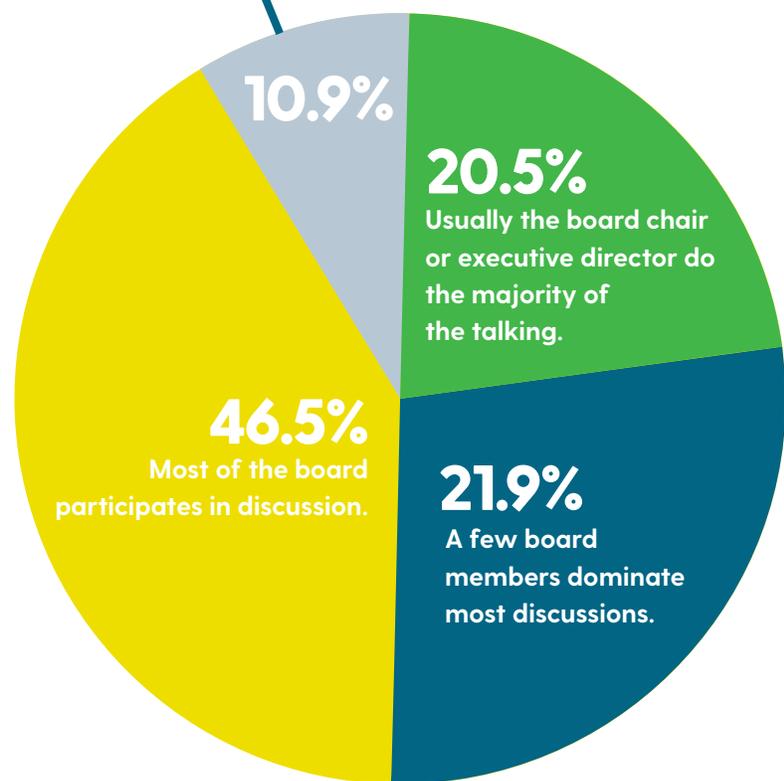
Attendance is one thing – **participation is another**. Board member participation in meetings continues to be a concern, both for voting and decision-making purposes. When board members participate, they engage more fully with the organization. Nonprofits that have fewer board members participating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

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.

My board makes a point to have every member speak during a meeting.



# 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.

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.

**15.1%**

All of our board members try to make introductions and open doors for development efforts

**28.8%**

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

**28.8%**

Board members will help, if they're asked to do something specific.

**27.2%**

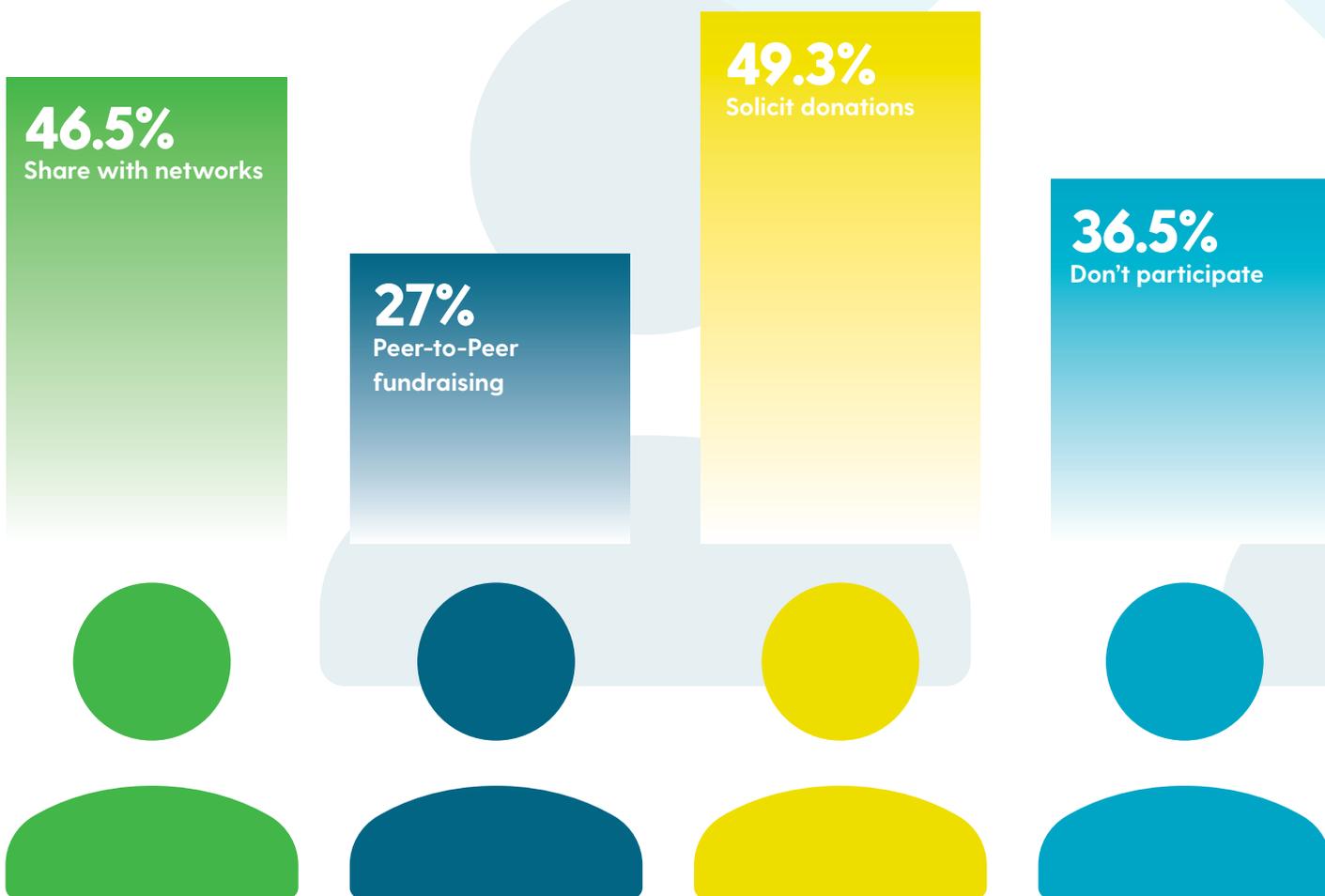
All board members are expected to, but few actually do.

“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. Fifty-nine percent 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.

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.

# Weakest Area of Board Engagement

## Most Common Phrases Used in Responses



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



# Board Engagement Trends We See

Communication, participation, and engagement are all factors that could impact the overall success of a board in 2020. For over one-fourth of survey 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.

Survey results showed that 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.

Overall, board member engagement is one of the most pressing issues for boards of all shapes and sizes in 2019. But, if your board is made up of the right people, they're connected to and well-versed on your mission, and they have the right resources to be prepared, your team can proactively create a more engaged nonprofit board in 2020.

# 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](https://boardable.com).



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