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## Best Practise for preparing Nonprofit Board Packs

Board packs are one of the key gateways for board members into the organisation they govern. The clarity and accessibility of board packs is vital to ensuring an effective board and well-governed organisation.

Follow the four stage “board meeting reporting cycle” for board packs, as below

- A. Identifying the information the board requires
- B. Commissioning the papers
- C. Assembling the pack
- D. Distributing the pack

### A. Identifying the information the board requires

Certain items will be on every board meeting’s agenda:

- Establishing quorum and noting apologies
- Approval of the previous set of minutes
- Declaration of any conflicts of interest
- Review of financial performance
- Review of operational performance

Take particular care to ensure that the financial information sent to the Board is accurate and up-to-date and that the key performance indicators used to review operational performance encourage a strategic and forward-oriented discussion.

While an agenda template can be useful, boards should avoid following the exact same agenda at each meeting. Different items will be of relevance over the course of the year and there should be a calendar of planned items for each meeting as well as flexibility within the agenda template to reflect this.

An iterative process between board and management should be established to ensure there is clarity about what information the board needs, why and when. There are times when issues are brought to the board where it is not necessary for the board to have been involved. To prevent this, it is advised that the management and the board agree a set of [Matters Reserved for the Board](#) and [Chief Executive Scheme of Delegation](#).

Careful planning of the agenda will determine what papers the board should receive. Setting the agenda is usually a task for the combined effort of the company secretary and the chair.

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The division of responsibilities for producing the board pack will depend on the size, structure and resources available to the organisation.

Conduct regular reviews of the board pack format and preparation process to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

### **B. Commissioning board papers**

The authors of individual papers need to understand clearly what they are being asked to advise the board on and why.

#### Roles

- The **coordinator** – the person with overall responsibility for commissioning the papers, setting deadlines, monitoring progress, and collating the pack. Typically, the company secretary or equivalent.
- The **gatekeeper** – the person or body responsible for ensuring that all board papers have met their brief, follow formats and are quality checked. This could be the secretary or another board member or the CEO.
- The **sponsor** – responsible for producing the paper on time and for any formal review/approval necessary. They may or may not be the author.
- The **author** – writes the paper and co-ordinates contributions where needed.

The coordinator should set clear deadlines for authors to submit papers, which allow time for edits and reformatting if necessary.

The Gatekeeper should establish a “house style and format” for both papers and the overall board pack, resulting in a clearly signposted and presented pack. This should be communicated to all authors of board papers. The “house style” include font style and size for headings and body of text, and the format of cover notes for papers.

Ensure that all papers include a cover note which clearly lays out:

- What the item is
- Who the author is
- Whether it is being provided for information, discussion or decision
- If it is a proposal for decision, it may also include:
  - The proposal’s relevance to the overall strategy
  - Benefits and risks
  - Cost and other resource estimates
  - A draft resolution and other options considered

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The positioning of an item on the agenda and the reason it is there i.e. for decision, discussion or information – should have a bearing on the length and level of detail of the paper and whether there is a need for a paper at all.

Regardless of the journey of the paper, two dates must be set: the date by which it needs to be sent to the gatekeeper for a quality assurance review and the date on which it is to be sent out to the board. Well timed reminders can reduce the frequency of late papers, which is a common complaint from boards.

### **C. Assembling the pack**

When the papers are returned, this is the gatekeeper's opportunity to review all papers and ensure each paper:

- Is written in the house style and format
- Includes a cover note with key information
- Is no longer than it needs to be

Sometimes it is beneficial to impose limits on length of board papers to force authors to think about what information is important for the board. A well written paper should interpret and report historical data but also should draw the board's attention to relevant external developments, explaining implications of both to the future success of the organisation. The use of graphics and charts can be useful once they're clearly presented and explained.

### **D. Distributing the board pack**

The pack should be distributed at least 7 days before the meeting itself. Remind all board members that they must have read the contents of the board pack prior to the meeting and the chair should not allow detailed reviewing of the pack's contents during a meeting.

The pack must be clearly presented and signposted, just as individual papers are, so that board members don't spend time working out which paper belongs to which agenda item.

Consistent presentation of board packs across different meetings helps board members find the information they require with ease. A clear and simple "navigation system", such as an annotated agenda and visual aids should be utilized with the end-user experience in mind throughout.