



A SERVICE OF
nrc
HEALTH

FEBRUARY 2024

Governance Notes

Advance Governance Support through a Board Portal

By Kayla Wagner, Senior Editor, *The Governance Institute*

Governance support professionals are the gatekeepers and drivers of board work.

While demands on board members' time and responsibilities increase, so does the role of governance support professionals to help ensure that governance processes are streamlined, meetings are effective, and board members are prepared for the tough decisions ahead. Board portals can elevate board support efforts—easing governance practices so the board can spend time focusing on the strategic work of the organization.

Benefits of a Board Portal

Many hospital and health system boards are realizing the value of this online tool. The Governance Institute's 2023 biennial survey of hospital and health system boards showed that 77 percent of respondents use a board portal or are in the process of implementing one.¹ Board portals provide a variety of benefits (see **Exhibit 1**). This article highlights some of the key advantages, as well as tips for maximizing use of your board portal.

Enhance Board Members' Level of Preparation for Meetings

Planning and preparing for board meetings is no simple task. A lot of effort goes into scheduling meetings, prepping agendas, developing board materials, and ensuring board members have what they need to effectively participate. In The Governance Institute's survey, 40 percent agreed that the most important benefit of using a board portal is that it enhances board members' level of preparation for meetings.

Some ways that Governance support professionals can utilize board portals to improve pre-meeting workflows include:

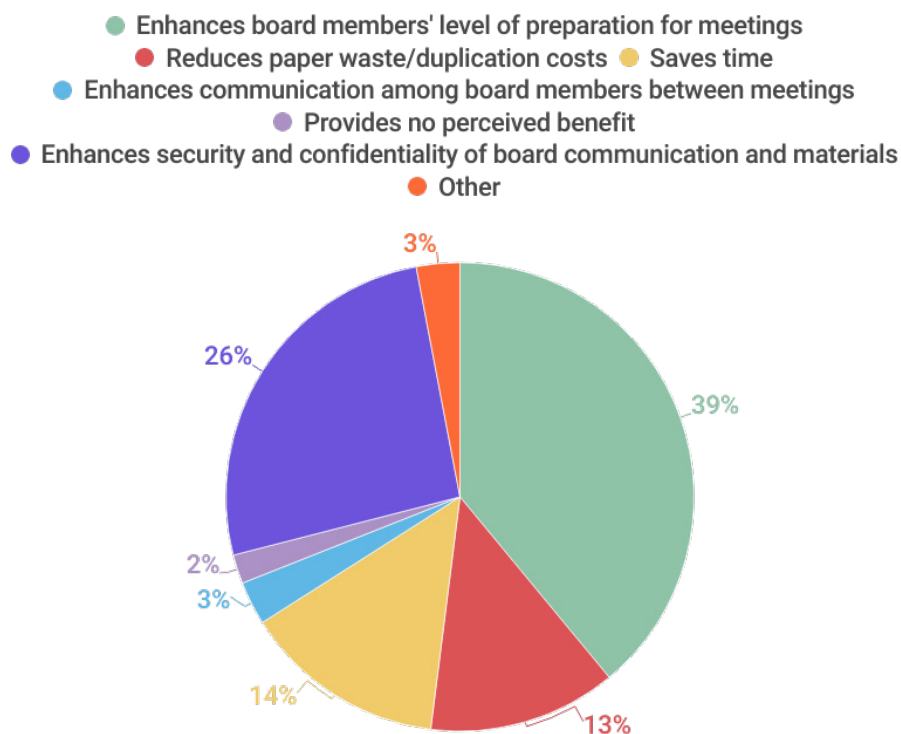
- Use meeting management tools to schedule board and committee meetings, invite members, and send reminders.
- Develop online agendas through the board portal.

1 Kathryn Peisert and Kayla Wagner, *Think Bold: Looking Forward With a Fresh Governance Mindset*, The Governance Institute's 2023 Biennial Survey of Hospitals and Healthcare Systems.

- Create digital board books that pull all board meeting documents together in one place for boards to easily review pre-meeting. Board portals also provide the ability to edit materials directly in the platform in real time.
- Utilize annotation tools to help board members prepare for meetings. Shared annotations can create new collaboration channels that encourage board members to engage in materials before meetings.
- Use communication features that allow governance support professionals, board members, and committee members to have conversations prior to the meeting.
- Review and approve items such as written consents, resolutions, regulatory matters, and meeting minutes ahead of time.

When this level of communication and preparation takes place beforehand, it frees up board meeting time for bold, strategic-level conversations around key agenda items.

Exhibit 1: Most Important Benefit of a Board Portal



Have a Safe, Secure Place to Store Confidential Information

With the increase in cyber threats and the impact cyberattacks can have on a healthcare organization, it is critical for governance support professionals to have a reliable, secure place to keep board information confidential. Twenty-six percent (26 percent) of survey respondents said the best benefit of a board portal is its enhancement of security and confidentiality of board communication and materials.

Case Study: Paperless Board Books

Valleywise Health Medical Center recently implemented their board portal. Melanie Talbot, Chief Governance Officer and Board Clerk, has found the greatest benefit so far to be eliminating paper board books. “It saves us almost an entire day by not having to create divider or separator pages for each agenda item and another day to print and assemble three-ring binders,” she said. “We also had our transportation team deliver the binders to the board members homes, and we have members that live as far as 90 miles from the medical center.” Some of the benefits she has experienced from digital board books include:

- Reduces paper waste.
- Saves time—no more manually assembling binders or transporting them to board members.
- Board books can be accessed anywhere, anytime.
- Email notifications are automatically sent out.
- They can limit access to certain pages of the executive session packet based on attendees.
- Privileged and confidential information is secure. This reduces worry about paper meeting materials or emails getting in the wrong hands.
- All previous board packets can be accessed in one place.

Board portals protect against third-party accessibility. For example, Nasdaq Boardvantage[®], The Governance Institute’s board portal provider, has multiple layers of security including strict encryption standards, multi-factor authentication, remote purge, content segregation, and documents stored on segregated servers.

Another security benefit is that you can set permissions internally so that directors see exactly what they are supposed to—and nothing more. Permissions can be set on any document within the portal, so that governance support professionals can maintain appropriate confidentiality and the integrity of board members and the organization.

“Effective governance cannot happen unless members have [timely, accurate, and consistent](#) content provided to them. When a board member is [thoroughly supported](#) administratively, they can be free to [fully engage with the strategic governance](#) taking place and [not worry about the small details](#).

—Jordan Wylie, Board Governance Specialist, Corewell Health West

Streamline Governance Administration

Effectively supporting boards and committees requires managing numerous detailed tasks. A board portal can simplify governance management and bring everything together in a central hub. “When supporting governing bodies, you will always have a mixed group of internal employed members and external executive members. Having a single platform that all stakeholders can access is a game changer,” said Jordan Wylie, Board Governance Specialist at Corewell Health West. “It significantly reduces the anxiety of version control and ensures that all users have a source of truth for their board materials and governing documents.”

Some of the responsibilities board portals can assist with include:

- **Meeting minutes:** Capture meeting minutes and track attendees directly within the board portal. The portal also ensures a safe place to store them and the feasibility to distribute meeting minutes as soon as they are created.
- **Task management:** Create, assign, and track action items that come up during a meeting. Post-meeting you can then hold individuals or groups accountable by sending reminders and notifications through the portal.
- **Centralized document storage:** Store board books, meeting minutes, board calendars, work plans, education materials, a reference manual of board bylaws and policies, and other pertinent information. For governance support professionals, having everything in one place makes it easy to search and find key documents—whether you are looking to reference a past board meeting, find information for a board member, or provide records for an audit or legal review.
- **Voting and survey tools:** Gather board member feedback and opinions through conducting votes and developing and distributing online questionnaires and surveys.
- **Board collaboration:** Tools such as in-app email and messaging allow communication to take place in between meetings.

“Everyone with portal access can see recent Governance Institute publications. Before implementing the board portal, I would email various articles and news briefs to board members, but emails get buried in your inbox. **Now the information is front and center every time they open the portal.**”

—Melanie Talbot, Chief Governance Officer and Board Clerk, Valleywise Health Medical Center

Board engagement is critical to effective governance. Having a portal means that directors can easily access all board information and communications in one place—ensuring they are always informed, on the same page, and connected to board work. Most important, simplifying administrative governance processes frees up directors’ time and allows them to home in on their key governance responsibilities. The Governance Institute’s biennial survey found that respondents that answered “yes” to using a board portal and “are in the process of implementing” a board portal were twice as likely than those that answered “no” to cite “excellent” performance in all of the board’s fiduciary duties and oversight responsibilities.

A board portal can truly advance governance processes and oversight, meeting effectiveness, collaboration, and decision making—all fundamental pieces to ensuring the board is prepared to tackle the challenges of today and beyond. Governance support professionals are key to effectively using this tool to take governance to the next level.

Nasdaq Boardvantage® is a board portal available as part of The Governance Institute’s membership. It offers all the features included in this article and more, including one login that allows access to The Governance Institute’s resources and tools and a customizable dashboard that provides a sophisticated way to present a volume of content in a single view (for example, upcoming meetings, calendars, valuable files, internal and external links, and custom content). For more information, contact your Governance Institute Service Manager or email TGISupport@nrchealth.com.

