VIRTUAL MEETING TOOLKIT

Introduction

Many of our Affiliates, caches, teams and participants have not thought about virtual meetings previously when it comes to Touch Football. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all, boards, leaders, coaches, players, referees and members, into an uncomfortable transition.

The new normal for a little while yet, almost all meetings will now have a virtual component. Running an effective in-person meeting can present many challenges (e.g., technology, preparation, flow), which are only compounded in a virtual setting. Whether it's a lack of engagement or security, poorly executed virtual meetings can lessen productivity, weaken camaraderie, and (most importantly) compromise sensitive information at all levels of an organization. As video conferences become an increasingly important collaboration tool for us all, organizations will require protocols for the running of such engagements.

Why Video?

Many of us shy away from using video, but it's one of the most important ways to make virtual meetings effective. Here's why:

◁ Video conferencing is more engaging than audio conferencing. Making virtual eye contact is the next best thing to gathering in person.

◁ Humans process visual information significantly faster and better than text or audio. The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text, and 90 percent of information transmitted to the brain is visual.

◁ Visual elements affect people both cognitively and emotionally. For teams that are geographically dispersed, the emotional connection is key for deeper engagement.

Considerations, Tips and Best Practice for Board/Executive/Committee Meetings

VIRTUAL MEETING TOOLS

☐ **Select a video conferencing platform**. Whether it's Zoom, GoToMeeting, Webex, or Microsoft Teams, there are a wide variety of platforms available to support video conferencing (all similar in functionality).

☐ **Determine supporting tools**. In addition to the video conferencing platform, consider the tools that are needed to securely deliver meeting materials, support communication, and increase engagement and productivity throughout the video conference.

☐ **Ensure board members are well informed that sessions are confidential**. Videoconferencing should be used securely. No unidentified individuals should be allowed into the meeting. In some virtual meeting platforms, there is a "waiting room" feature that can be used to only admit board members into the meeting. You can also try individual meeting links instead of a "Personal Meeting ID" or use a meeting password option. Do not allow participants to join before the host, and make sure audio and video are not turned on by default for joining participants. Board members should also know who to contact for acceptance into the meeting if they are not initially allowed in.

MEETING PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES

☐ **Begin every meeting by laying out the meeting protocols**. Establish a set of rules specific to virtual board meetings that the board agrees to uphold. For example, decide whether all audio should remain "muted" until someone wishes to speak, and whether you will use webcams. Determine whether to allow board members to use the "chat" feature, understanding that anything they type there might need to be included in the meeting minutes. Consider whether to require board members to use headsets, to avoid having other members of directors' households accidentally overhearing the meeting.

☐ **Encourage the use of the "raise hands" feature**. This indicates that a board member would like to verbally add to the conversation and allows board leadership or staff to then call on those who have "raised their hands" for timely comments.

☐ **Make sure to allow enough time for discussion**. With virtual meetings, only one person can speak at a time - which can make conversations feel a little awkward. To help address this, make sure you are allowing a little extra time after asking for questions before moving on to the next topic. Sometimes, it could take a moment or two for a director to successfully unmute the audio and speak.

☐ **Prepare the board chair in advance for closed or executive sessions**. Plan a "run-through" with your board leadership prior to the meeting to make sure they feel comfortable with the chat feature and meeting controls. Then, during the meeting, model this style of discussion and Q&A. By the time your board comes to "closed session" at the end of the meeting, the board chair should be comfortable taking control. Committee members can drop off the call but remain reachable via text in case any technical issues or questions arise.

MEETING PROCESSES & ETIQUETTE

☐ **Divide and conquer**. Doling out key roles across your team is core to running a smooth virtual meeting. Be sure to designate one person to handle minutes, another person to keep track of who is on the line, and another person to be available to troubleshoot should any technical issues arise.

☐ **Deal with the distractions**. Working from home presents many potential sources of distraction – from pets walking across computer keyboards, to small children who make guest appearances on webcams. During virtual board meetings, it can be difficult to help directors navigate some of these challenges. The best approach is simply to discuss this issue openly. Encourage your board to have a simple "signal" any director can use to excuse her/himself for a few moments. If they will be leaving the audio, it's best that they let the board secretary know – perhaps by one-to-one chat message in the videoconference software – that they are stepping away and then alert the board secretary when they return for the sake of the minutes.

☐ **Dedicate time for virtual networking and feedback**. It's easy to feel disconnected when you're not able to socialize and interact with one another like you used to. Reserve time for a general session to gather feedback on the meeting – focus on things like how you're feeling, what you got out of the meeting, and what commitments you'd like to make moving forward.

BOARD ENGAGEMENT

☐ Organizations need strong leadership whether during a crisis or not. It's critical that the board chair and executive commit to talking – daily if needed – until they create a clear plan to get the board's attention focused on addressing the needs of your organization.

☐ Plan your agenda carefully. For many, the default approach is to simplify virtual meetings and make a one-way flow of information – but your board is your governing partner during a crisis, and you need to plan for engagement. Rather than trying to cover all topics on an informative level, choose those that are most mission critical and could benefit from board participation.

☐ Use any collaboration tools in conjunction with the videoconference. Some provide convenient ways for your board, committees, and other groups to meet in private "workrooms," and to collaborate through Group Discussions, sharing files, participating in Group Polls and Surveys, and facilitating Group Meetings. When used with videoconferencing software, these options help shrink the physical distance between members of the group by making it easy to get feedback, brainstorm, share files and ideas, and hold meetings.