Good practice meeting guidelines

The board’s meeting
Remember this is the board’s meeting not management’s. As such it focuses on two key areas:

1. Progress towards stated outcomes together with factors impacting the organisation’s ability to deliver those goals.
2. Risk factors that could impede or disrupt your ability to achieve those results.

Future focus
- You can’t influence what has already happened. Too many boards get bogged down in the day to day and risk becoming spectators to management activity.
- Spend your time (60–70%) on things that are important but not urgent.

Meeting plan
- The chair owns the agenda. Time is allocated to agenda items.
- Meet at a time and place convenient to the majority of directors.
- Get to the core strategic issues early, leaving noting and compliance matters until later.
- Prepare well and have questions ready.
- Board papers are set in a strategic context, concise and clearly stating what is being asked of the board.
- The board pack is not voluminous and filled with backgrounders, correspondence and for-information pieces irrelevant to the governance conversation.
- Use committees as required to explore issues ahead of the meeting.

Inside the meeting
- A board meeting is a dialogue. An informed conversation leading to great decisions.
- Tackle the issue, not the person.
- Explore options before moving to consensus (divergence before convergence).
- Listen more than talk, respect others’ opinions.
- Understand your policy environment making sure you are not debating something twice.

The chair will...
- make clear the key items to be addressed in the meeting
- manage time
- keep discussions on topic
- resolve conflict and park what cannot be agreed on today
- prevent drift into management’s business.

The chief executive will...
- provide monitoring reports in content and form as required by the board
- report on progress toward agreed outcomes
- alert the board to changes in the operating environment
- report on anything within board policy that is negatively impacting ability to operate
- act as the board’s primary consultant.

Avoid:
- revisiting earlier decisions through the minutes or matters arising
- tabling unnecessary correspondence
- staff reports not in a governance context and purposeless backgrounders
- ‘nice to know’ presentations
- reports and approvals not required by the board.

A fuller discussion of meetings is found in Step 5 of the Nine Steps to Effective Governance and summarised in the associated quick reference guide at the back of the publication.