

Worksheet: Effective Board Meetings in Chaotic Times

*Companion to December 4, 2025 TREC Webinar: **Effective Board Meetings in Chaotic Times.***

As boards and leaders struggle to focus in the face of the current political, social, and financial landscape, chaos, board meetings can trend toward burnout and defaulting to low-value report outs instead of engaged, strategic conversations. This worksheet will help staff and board co-create ideas to keep boards motivated and focused, and above all, helpful in guiding EDs as they make mission-critical decisions in these turbulent times. Use this worksheet as a reflection tool to develop your Board's work plan for the following year or use it during board meetings to increase engagement.

Section 1: Diagnosing the Moment

What new challenges is your board experiencing right now?

Check all that apply and add specifics.

- ☐ Attrition
- ☐ Burnout
- ☐ Lack of people interested in serving
- ☐ Lack of strategic clarity
- ☐ Uncertainty about the board's role in addressing the moment
- ☐ Low meeting attendance/difficulty reaching quorum
- ☐ Low engagement during meetings
- ☐ Increased tension or conflict among members
- ☐ Other: _____

Reflection: What feels most urgent to address?

Section 2: Reclaiming Attention

What are 2–3 things your board could STOP doing in meetings? (e.g., long report-outs, detailed financial walkthroughs)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What is one thing you could move out of the meeting (into a video, email, or pre-read)?

Section 3: Designing for Engagement

Choose 2 facilitation techniques you want to try at your next board meeting: (Examples: polls, 1–5 scale check-ins, “one strength/one challenge,” imperfect lists)

- 1.
- 2.

What agenda item could benefit most from structured participation?

Section 4: Strengthening Connection

Why are you on this board? (Write 2–3 sentences you could share in a meeting.)

What is the simple 5-sentence story you tell about the organization? (share this at your next meeting and identify differences and similarities in board members’ messaging)

Section 5: Asking Better Questions

Which of these 15 powerful questions feels most relevant for your board right now? Circle one or write your own.

1. **The One Big Thing:** "What single change, decision, or action would make the biggest difference for our mission right now?"
2. **What is our role in private lands conservation given the shifting landscape of public/Crown lands?** How should we balance public land protection, private land stewardship, and partnership with landowners as land-use politics evolve?
3. **What value do we uniquely bring to the conservation field today?** What *differentiates* us from peer organizations, and what is becoming less relevant?
4. **What peer relationships would strengthen our work?** Where does our work complement the work of peer organizations, and how can we deepen our relationship for collective impact?
5. **How do we strategically navigate increasing political polarization?** Where do we need to build unlikely partnerships to keep conservation moving forward?
6. **Are we operating at the right geographic scale?** Should we be more place-based, more regional, or more national to achieve impact in the current political landscape?
7. **Where are our levers for change and influence:** In the venues where we have influence, what is our most powerful lever for change right now? Where can we have the greatest influence in the near term (consider federal/state/provincial/territorial legislative and executive branches, courts, communities).
8. **We need to invest our limited resources wisely.** Between our conservation advocacy, stewardship, and education programming, what should we dial down and what should we dial up? Where should we invest most in the near term?
9. **What is the minimum level of resourcing we need to maintain organizational credibility and impact across our portfolio?** Where are we currently spread too thin?
10. **What is our plan for operating under increasing attacks on environmental/conservation/climate work, science, and DEI?** Are we prepared to defend our values publicly?
11. **What political, financial, or reputational risks do we face in the current climate?**

Which risks are worth taking to advance our mission, and which are we unwilling to take?

12. **Do we have the leadership, board composition, and staff capacity required to meet this moment?** What skills, voices, or lived experiences are missing?
13. **Is our current funding model aligned with our mission and future strategy?**
Where are we overly dependent on a single funder or revenue stream?
14. **How resilient are we to funding volatility?** What is our strategy if major funders shift priorities or economic conditions worsen?
15. **What long-term investments (e.g., endowment, land assets, signature programs) would most strengthen our resilience?**
16. Other: _____

Write the exact wording you want to use:

Section 7: Scenario Planning

Choose one scenario, flesh out the details, and sketch your board's first steps.

Scenario:

- Budget shortfall (25–50%)
- Major agency or partner loss
- Public lands threat
- Misinformation surge
- Public lands sell-off
- AI boom
- 2026 mid-term elections indicate no significant changes in the next few years.
- Other: _____

What are the top three actions we would take to address this scenario?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Section 8: Passion & Strengths

What is one strength your board already has?

What is one gift you personally bring to your board?

(share this to right-size individual board member responsibilities to better tap into strengths and passions)

Section 9: Experimentation

Read [this TREC article on Reimagining Boards](#) and answer:

Which experimentation pathway feels most promising for your board? (Check one or add your own!)

1. Operating a leaner fiduciary board and shifting some strategic thinking and responsibilities to an advisory council
2. Experimenting with [multi-entity models](#)
3. Rotating leadership roles or shared leadership
4. Using [sociocracy](#) or distributed governance models

One small experiment you can try next year: