Virtual Board Meetings: A Spotlight on One Health Center’s Approach
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Based on a Discussion with Alan Steiner, Board Chair, and
Lisa Riley, Executive Director, Office of the CEO and Board of Directors, HRHCare
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Health center boards must hold monthly meetings\(^1\) with a quorum present.\(^2\) Given limitations on public gatherings and recommendations regarding physical distancing during the current COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meetings are currently recommended for health center boards. The National Association of Community Health Centers has made various resources available about board virtual board meetings including Virtual Board Meetings: Tips for Health Center Boards and Legal Considerations: Board Meetings During COVID-19.\(^3\) This short article highlights tips from one health center, HRHCare (NY), that has experience with virtual board meetings.

Health Center Background
Founded over 45 years ago, HRHCare has a network of 43 Health Centers and serves 10 counties of the Hudson Valley and Long Island in New York. HRHCare staff provide comprehensive primary and preventative care, behavioral and oral health services, specialty services and care management to over 185,000 residents of the region’s diverse communities.

In December 2018, Brightpoint Health joined HRHCare with a network of 13 sites offering integrated medical, behavioral and social support services to 45,000 patients in all five boroughs of New York City.

Board Composition
HRHCare’s Board of Directors has 17 members that reflect the diversity of the region served and represent the health center’s broad geographic region, which stretches over 170 miles. A senior staff member from the center’s Executive Leadership team provides dedicated support to the Board.

Approach to Board Meetings
After the merger in 2018, the HRHCare Board migrated to a hybrid approach to board meetings with the following structure:

- Nine in-person meetings per year that were held in the Hudson Valley or in New York City to help equalize the travel time and distance for board members from across this broad region; board members from Suffolk County were given the option to meet at a local site and conference into the board meeting.
- Three conference call meetings.

Currently, given the public health emergency related to COVID-19, HRHCare has moved to fully virtual board and committee meetings.

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\(^1\) Monthly meetings are required under the U.S. Public Health Service Act Section 300-statutory requirements and this requirement is detailed in the Health Resources and Services Administration’s (HRSA) Health Center Program Compliance Manual, Chapter 19: Board Authority.

\(^2\) Quorum refers to the number of board members with a vote that must be present at a meeting for it to officially count as a meeting. Each health center board can establish its own quorum requirement (i.e., the minimum number of board members who must be present for business to be conducted) but it must be consistent with state and other relevant laws. Quorum is required for any board to officially act.

\(^3\) For additional resources, please visit [https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/priority-topics/covid-19/](https://www.healthcenterinfo.org/priority-topics/covid-19/).
Virtual Meeting Platform
Going forward the HRHCare Board will use Zoom for its board meetings which provides the opportunity for board members to both hear and see one another. All members of the board have a device (e.g., table, phone, laptop) that allows easy access to this platform. Additionally, the board uses SharePoint to provide board members with access to board meeting materials. The health center’s information technology (IT) staff have assisted board members in learning how to use SharePoint.

Helpful Virtual Board Meeting Practices at HRHCare
Alan Steiner, Board Chair, and Lisa Riley, Executive Director, Office of the CEO and Board of Directors, shared the following practices that have worked for the HRHCare Board when conducting virtual meetings, which may be helpful to other boards meeting virtually especially during the public health emergency related to COVID-19:

- **Be Realistic About Meeting Agendas**
  - Designing meetings that are 90 minutes or less in length has ensured optimal board member engagement when meeting virtually.
  - Working closely with the CEO and the leadership team to ensure board meeting agendas address urgent governance items related to COVID-19, and a continued focus on routine board business (e.g., review financial status, approve important policies, etc.) is essential.

- **Ensure Members Are Comfortable Before Meetings**
  - Providing health center staff support can be helpful in orienting members to new technology; HRHCare’s IT staff is available to assist board members.
  - Communicating with every board member individually to check-in before meetings is important. This not only helps ensure quorum but also that members are receiving information to review in advance of board meetings. HRHCare finds that texting is the preferred communication method for informal communication with board members about items such as confirming board meeting attendance.

- **Use Various Techniques to Ensure Quorum**
  - Having the board chair or designated staff person check in with board members prior to board meetings to confirm participation has helped ensure quorum at meetings.
  - Having a trusted staff member available to reach out to board members that do not join the meeting immediately has also been helpful for ensuring quorum.

- **Encourage Active Participation**
  - Looking for opportunities to actively solicit input from all members is critical. Some members that are comfortable speaking up at in-person meetings may need extra encouragement at first when a board first starts having virtual meetings.

- **Continue to Leverage Committees through Virtual Meetings**
  - Continuing to leverage committees – including Finance and Quality – can be critical to navigating some immediate issues related to COVID-19 and the impact on the center and can help ensure the performance of ongoing governance duties.

Additional Information and Questions?
- If you have a general health center governance question, please contact Emily Heard, Director of Health Center Governance at trainings@nachc.org.

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4 This should not, and is not intended to, imply an endorsement or recommendation of a particular vendor.