

Summary of Key Learnings: In Camera Sessions

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In-camera sessions can be a helpful tool for boards when discussing sensitive or confidential matters. These sessions can be called during a regular board meeting, and can enable board members to speak privately and have free-flowing discussions.

When are in camera sessions used? In camera sessions should be used carefully, for times when there is a genuine need for confidentiality. They may be appropriate for times when open discussions in the regular board meeting could create legal, financial, or other risks for the organization. In camera sessions are a useful governance tool for sensitive matters such as discussing board conflict of interest, personnel issues, legal advice, litigation risks, negotiations, or other discussions where privacy is necessary to protect the organization or the people involved. Depending on the topic, individuals may be asked to leave or remain in the meeting.

Should minutes be kept during in camera sessions? In camera sessions are generally best used for discussion, with decisions and resolutions made only after the in camera session concludes and the board returns to the regular meeting. Minutes do not need to be kept during an in camera session although directors may want to take personal notes, which are typically not considered a part of a board's "official record". Unless your bylaws specify certain restrictions to records, all of your society members have the right to access board minutes and resolutions. The *Societies Act* (British Columbia) does not distinguish between a boards' in camera minutes and regular minutes.

A trauma-informed approach to In-Camera Sessions: Boards should approach in-camera sessions with an awareness of the ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities. For example, private or "closed-door" discussions can create power imbalances and may echo harmful experiences rooted in a colonial past. In camera sessions should not become the default way to handle difficult conversations. If they are overused, they can undermine transparency, accountability, and trust at the board table. A clear, trauma-informed policy on in camera sessions helps boards use these sessions consistently and with care. The policy can outline when they are appropriate, who attends, how the board moves into and out of the session, and how any records are handled. Clear expectations reduce confusion and support good governance practice.

In camera sessions work best as a narrow and thoughtful tool, not a routine practice. They can support candid discussion where confidentiality is truly needed, but boards should always balance that need against transparency, accountability, and the organization's values.