

# HOW TO HOST A VIRTUAL MEETING

In light of COVID-19 and the new normal that virtual meetings represent, guidance on preparing for, attending, and facilitating meetings of this nature has become very important. This document outlines key considerations and tips that will lead to engaging, inclusive virtual meetings, thereby developing existing relationships and maintaining organisational values.

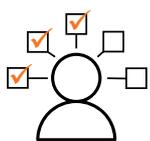
## ETIQUETTE

It is important to set some ground rules for all attendees<sup>1</sup>. These can either be circulated prior to the meeting, such as within the meeting invite, or run through at the start of the meeting. In addition to joining the meeting on time, making sure their faces are visible and muting when not speaking, the following tips should be circulated:



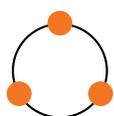
### EYE CONTACT

Attendees should look at the camera, rather than the screen, when talking. This creates a stronger connection with others, just the same as eye contact does in person.



### MULTI-TASKING SHOULD BE AVOIDED

Responding to emails, finishing a task or chatting to colleagues will leave attendees unable to fully engage with the virtual meeting<sup>2</sup>. Attendees should focus on what is being said, just as they would if attending in person.



### INCLUSIVITY

Facilitators should call on people by name if they notice that specific attendees are not contributing as much as others.

## PURPOSE AND ROLES

It is important to define the type of meeting that has been organised (decision-making, brainstorming, update/check in). It may help to decide the desired outcome and work backwards<sup>3</sup>. Equally important is allocating roles, each of which play a part in the meeting purpose being achieved.

### AGENDA

It is important for an agenda to be distributed prior to the meeting. It should summarise the purpose of the meeting, and outline discussion points (agenda items), which you may have engaged your team to develop. If an agenda is provided ahead of the meeting, attendees are more likely to feel prepared and ready to participate<sup>4</sup>. Even more so than face-to-face meetings, the agenda timings need to be strictly followed, as following up is no longer as simple as walking into a colleagues' office.

### ROLES<sup>5</sup>

The Facilitator/Chair will organise the meeting, develop the agenda, facilitate the meeting and drive discussion. It is important that they guide the conversation and provide all attendees with a chance to participate. The Note taker will minute the meeting, noting any key takeaways and action items that arise. These will then be distributed to the attendees. If a Note taker is not available, or the meeting was particularly important, the option to record the meeting is available.

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## FACILITATION TIPS

### SETTING THE TONE

The Facilitator should welcome each attendee with a greeting and a smile. This deliberate interaction will make attendees feel safe and valued right from the start<sup>6</sup>.

### IMPORTANCE OF CHECKING IN

During this uncertainty, it is important to lead meetings with compassion and understanding<sup>7</sup>. Checking in with attendees, including those you know have children at home with them or those who are new to the organisation, is important for building relationships and allowing everyone to understand the circumstances of others.

Examples of check-in questions can be found [here](#).

### AVOID DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY

If everyone is responsible for providing the answer to a question that has been posed, then no one feels the weight of that responsibility. It is important for everyone to feel engaged and participate in the meeting. Breaking the attendees into groups to discuss how they are feeling, what they are working on, or developing a response to a question will boost engagement levels from those who may otherwise remain silent<sup>8</sup>. For smaller groups, each person should be given the opportunity to contribute.

### MINIMISE PRESENTATION LENGTH

Conversation/discussion should be prioritised during virtual meetings to maximise time spent engaging with one another. If a presentation is involved, it should take up minimal time and the screen sharing function should be utilised<sup>9</sup>.

\*\*It is important to consider confidentiality when sharing resources during virtual meetings. Consider whether the audience needs to see the document/correspondence, or as an alternative you could provide a screenshot of the important section or your own summary. Consider why you were given access to the resource, and whether it was meant to be shared further.

## PLAN INTERACTION

### UTILISE THE WHITEBOARD FUNCTION

Zoom enables the meeting facilitator to share their screen and select the whiteboard option. This allows all participants to contribute, without taking too much time.

Facilitator could ask each person to type one word that describes how they are feeling/how their week has been/how they are feeling about work (or similar). This will create a word cloud for everyone to take a look at. The Facilitator can discuss any similarities and allow for reflection. This is a good way for people to relate to each other, and fosters a sense of connection, understanding and empathy.

### LIVE POLLS

Online polls can include fun questions like, "What is one nice thing you would like to do for yourself today? (Multiple choice poll: Spend some time in the sun, Call a friend, Do some exercise, Buy yourself a gift)", and more serious questions like, "Which of the following options best describes how worried you are about COVID-19? (Multiple choice poll: Not too worried, a little worried, very worried).

### ICE-BREAKERS/ENERGISERS

Important for reinforcing interpersonal relationships, especially when people are feeling more isolated. These tools also provide a structured opportunity for staff to engage with one another<sup>10</sup>.

Examples:



#### Bring your pet to zoom day

Perhaps a 15-20 minute zoom session with staff introducing their pets to each other. A good way to build relationships and bond over what we have in common, even when we are separated by distance.

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## Holiday

When entering the meeting, attendees should set their background as a photo from their favourite holiday. Attendees are then put into breakout rooms to discuss the adventures. This is a good way for attendees to continue developing relationships with each other, when hallway and lunch time chats are no longer possible.



## Genie in a bottle

Ask the question, “If you had three wishes, what would they be?” Attendees could think about one personal, professional, and societal wish. Each attendee could then pick one and write it on the virtual whiteboard, then pause to look at others. This is a good way to make people think about what they value and are driven by, and also consider the wishes of others.



## Blast from the past

Prior to the workshop, all attendees should send a photo from when they were younger (if comfortable doing so). A slide/mural showing all of these photos can be presented during the meeting, and attendees could use the chat function to guess who each photo is of. This is a good way to build relationships and connect/reflect on childhood memories.



## Are we together? (Throughout longer meetings)

Every time the Facilitator says “are we together” attendees respond with “yes we are!” and puts their hands in the air. This should be done a few times until they are loud. This will get people engaged and bring back their attention. Very simple and not time consuming.

The above guidelines will help all meeting attendees feel prepared, remain engaged and stay connected. Incorporating some of these techniques into your meeting design should help staff facilitate purposeful, interactive meetings that help all of us adjust to our current reality.

## IN-TEXT CITATION

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglazer/2020/03/19/what-you-need-to-know-about-holding-productive-virtual-meetings-during-covid-19/#7434c42f231d>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lifescienceleader.com/doc/how-to-facilitate-great-virtual-meetings-during-a-pandemic-or-any-other-time-0001>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nexightgroup.com/stop-wasting-time-the-three-ps-of-effective-meeting-facilitation/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.advisory.com/daily-briefing/2020/03/18/virtual-meetings>

<sup>5</sup> <https://blog.sli.do/remote-meetings-tips/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/04/best-practices-for-hosting-a-digital-event/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ebsco.com/blog-corporate/article/leading-from-afar-managing-remote-employees-during-covid-19>

<sup>8</sup> [https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-get-people-to-actually-participate-in-virtual-meetings?referral=03759&cm\\_vc=rr\\_item\\_page.bottom](https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-get-people-to-actually-participate-in-virtual-meetings?referral=03759&cm_vc=rr_item_page.bottom)

<sup>9</sup> <https://dynamicbusiness.com.au/topics/technology/how-to-survive-all-of-the-virtual-meetings-and-video-conference-calls.html>

<sup>10</sup> [https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-get-people-to-actually-participate-in-virtual-meetings?referral=03759&cm\\_vc=rr\\_item\\_page.bottom](https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-to-get-people-to-actually-participate-in-virtual-meetings?referral=03759&cm_vc=rr_item_page.bottom)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional resources, please visit [heti.nsw.gov.au/virtualenvironments](https://heti.nsw.gov.au/virtualenvironments)

- Effective Virtual Facilitation
- Tips for Teaching Online
- Let's Get Engaged...Online!
- IT Resources and Applications
- Virtual Meeting Room Step by Step

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## REFERENCES

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