

Maximizing Success with Virtual Meetings

Virtual meetings have become an essential tool for nonprofits, advocacy groups, and families to connect, collaborate, and achieve shared goals. This section of the guidebook will help you to plan, participate in, and facilitate virtual meetings effectively.



What is a Virtual Meeting?

A virtual meeting connects people in different locations through technology that supports video, audio, and text-based communication in real time. Participants engage in discussions, share content, and collaborate as if they were in the same room.

How Virtual Meetings Work

Most virtual meetings are scheduled in advance, with participants receiving a link to join. These meetings can be accessed using various devices (computers, smartphones, tablets) and platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx. Typically, participants can share screens, use chat functions, and access accessibility tools like live captions. Meetings may be led by a single presenter or be collaborative, with all participants contributing.

Types of Virtual Meetings

Virtual meetings vary in format based on purpose:

- **Teleconference:** Audio-only discussions.
- **Video Conference:** Video enabled meetings for face-to-face interaction.
- **Web Conference:** Presentations and collaborative tools for a larger audience.
- **Virtual Event:** Large-scale conferences or seminars with interactive elements like breakout rooms.

Benefits of Virtual Meetings

Virtual meetings provide many advantages, including:

- **Global Accessibility and Inclusivity:** People from diverse locations can connect without the need for physical travel, expanding participation, breaking geographic and mobility barriers.
- **Accessibility:** Features like captions, interpreters, and screen readers ensure equitable access.
- **Productivity:** Promote focused discussions and easy sharing of resources.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Virtual meetings eliminate the expenses of travel, venue rentals, and accommodations.
- **Information Sharing:** Real-time sharing of multimedia and the option to record for later review enhances information accessibility.
- **Reduced Carbon Footprint:** Without travel and physical resources, virtual meetings are more environmentally sustainable.



Virtual Meeting Etiquette

For a productive and respectful meeting environment, consider these etiquette guidelines:

- **Be on Time:** Punctuality reflects respect for others' time and minimizes disruptions.
- **Mute When Not Speaking:** Background noises, like typing, dogs barking, or just breathing, can be disruptive. Keep yourself muted when not actively participating.
- **Dress Professionally:** Appropriate attire shows professionalism, even in virtual settings.
- **Limit Multitasking:** Focus fully on the meeting to contribute meaningfully and avoid missing key points.

Participating in a Virtual Meeting

Tip: Say your name before speaking.

Announcing your name before speaking helps those who are using captions or interpreters to identify who is talking, especially during open discussion. It also helps to ensure accuracy for anyone recording meeting minutes.



Preparing for a Virtual Meeting

To ensure a smooth experience:

Test Technology: Check devices, internet connections, and platform tools before the meeting date.

- Ensure a stable internet connection; if not, consider joining with audio only.
- Ensure compatibility of devices and update apps or browsers.
- Use the meeting link to join or dial in via phone for audio access if necessary.
- Test your microphone, speakers, and camera in advance.
- Confirm availability of captions, interpreters, or other accommodations.
- Request shared resources in accessible formats.
- Request setup assistance from the organizer if needed.



Participating in a Virtual Meeting

- Choose a quiet space and ensure assistive devices are ready.
- Communicate through chat during the meeting if speaking is not an option.
- Use the "Raise Hand" feature or notify organizers for breakout room needs.
- Enable captions and request accessible materials if needed.
- Rejoin the meeting via the same link if disconnected.
- Create a distraction-free environment; use headphones if needed.
- Request breaks during long meetings.

Post-Meeting Follow-up

- Request meeting minutes or captioned recordings for review.
- Ask organizers any questions that were not addressed during the meeting.
- Provide feedback to organizers to improve future accessibility.

Resources

- [Navigating Meetings Virtually](#)
- [Zoom Accessibility Guide](#)
- [Teams Accessibility Features](#)
- [Google Meet Accessibility Guide](#)
- [WebEx Help Center](#)



Facilitating a Virtual Meeting

- **Set Clear Objectives:** Share a detailed agenda with goals and any necessary documents at least 24 hours ahead.
- **Engage Participants:** Use icebreakers, polls, and breakout rooms to foster interaction.
- **Moderate Discussions:** Balance contributions and manage time effectively.
- **Test Technology:** Ensure audio, video, and tools work seamlessly before starting.

Facilitating an Accessible Meeting

- **Making the Virtual Meeting More Accessible:** Consider accessibility features to create an inclusive virtual environment.
- **Captioning:** Enable live captions for participants who may be hard of hearing, or coordinate with a professional captioning service.
- **Keyboard Shortcuts:** Share platform-specific shortcuts for screen reader users and those with mobility impairments.
- **Record the Meeting:** Recordings allow participants to revisit content and share with those unable to attend.
- **Accessibility Gaps:** Ensure meeting materials are available in accessible formats and provide ample notice for accommodations requests. Record the meeting and include captions or transcripts for post-meeting review.



Post-Meeting Follow-Up

Effective follow-up ensures participants leave with a clear understanding of the meeting's outcomes:

- **Send Meeting Notes and Recordings:** Summarize key decisions, action items, and provide links to any shared documents. Include captions and accessible formats.
- **Request Feedback:** Gather feedback to improve future meetings and address any accessibility issues noted by participants. Use surveys to identify areas for improvement.



Resources

- [7 Virtual Meeting Tips & Best Practices for More Interaction](#)
- [Why Every Great Meeting Needs a Great Facilitator](#)
- [How to Make Your Virtual Meetings Accessible to All](#)
- Guide to Screen Reader Software: [NCDAE Screen Reader Guide](#)
- Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI): [Guidelines on making virtual meetings accessible](#)

Facilitating a Virtual Meeting

Virtual meetings may present several barriers preventing participants from being fully engaged. Here are some tips for encouraging active participation in virtual meetings.

Overcoming Common Virtual Meeting Challenges

Conducting an Inclusive Virtual Meeting

Inclusivity is key to effective virtual meetings:

1. **Accommodations:** Provide captioning, interpreters, and accessible formats for materials.
2. **Encourage Video Use:** Physical separation can hinder non-verbal communication cues. Encouraging the use of video, allowing for non-verbal communication, helps build rapport and engagement, creating a warm, open environment.
3. **Identify Speakers Clearly:** For clarity, announce your name before speaking, especially in larger meetings.
4. **Establish Ground Rules:** Establish guidelines for respectful and equitable participation. For example, allow all participants to contribute and respect turn-taking, to foster trust and openness. Recognize potential cultural differences in communication styles.
5. **Interactive Tools:** Use features like chat or open microphone to encourage contributions. In larger groups, encourage hand-raising or other tools to facilitate orderly participation and prevent interruptions.
6. **Keep Presentations Brief:** Attention spans can be shorter online, so maintain concise and focused presentations.
7. **Engagement and Focus:** Use dynamic visuals, brief presentations, and interactive tools to keep attention focused. Plan regular breaks for longer meetings.



Technology Barriers

Connectivity issues or lack of access to certain technology can affect participation.

- Test all technology ahead of time.
- Provide support resources for participants with limited access.
- Offer dial-in options for those without internet access.
- Share guides for enabling accessibility features on the platform.

Resources

- **Internet Assistance Programs:** If your internet connection is unstable, you may qualify for programs that provide free or reduced-cost internet access. Check resources like [EveryoneOn](#).
- [Overcoming the Challenges of Virtual Meetings](#)
- [The Four Barriers of Virtual Meetings and How to Overcome Them](#)

Highlighted Wisconsin Resource

Access to Technology: If you need support with access to technology, resources are available on the [DPI's Broadband page](#). For those who do not have Internet access at home, The Public Service Commission created the Internet and Phone Helpline number 1 (608) 267-3595, designed to help families explore connectivity options and offers. Additionally, PSC has created an [interactive drive-up public Wi-Fi map](#), which provides the locations to free, public Wi-Fi sites.

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