

Best Practices: Hosting a Virtual Meeting



Virtual meetings provide an opportunity to gather people in different locations efficiently. In order to make your meeting as productive as possible, meeting hosts should consider the following best practices.

Meeting Planning:

Prior to scheduling your virtual meeting, consider the following regarding the structure of your meeting:

- **Length:** Virtual meetings are generally shorter than in person meetings. They are most effective when agendas are clear and time within the meeting is structured to focus on agenda items. If your meeting will be longer than one hour, break up the structure into segments with clear timelines so that participants can maintain focus.
- **Meeting Agenda:** Develop a meeting agenda with clear objectives and timelines to share with participants in advance of the meeting.
- **Hosting:** Where possible, have one person facilitate the meeting and another person monitor the participants and focus on chat and technical issues.
- **Group Norms:** Consider and identify group norms including how participants will use audio/video features, how and when to interrupt and ask questions (ex: raise hand feature, chat box, unmute and talk) etc. Ensure you are familiar with the options within the meeting platform you will be using.
 - Audio options for participants
 - Headsets or headphones, mute/unmute options
 - Smaller groups – participants have control over mute/unmute
 - Larger groups – host may want to have full mute/unmute control
 - Video options for participants
 - Smaller groups – have video on for all participants to encourage connection but be aware of background and distractions.
 - Larger groups – might want to limit video unless there is a specific purpose (ex: participants are sharing an example during an exercise) then can start and end at those specific times only to minimize distractions.
 - Phone only option is available as last resort but will limit participation.
- **Interactivity:** To make your meeting as interactive as possible, consider engaging participants by responding to a poll, entering their responses in the chat box, or brainstorming together on a virtual whiteboard.

As you make planning decisions, consider your expected group size as you will need to have different strategies for a large group (more than 10) than for a small group.

Sharing Information & Scheduling Meetings:

Share information with participants before the meeting. If requiring participants to review material before the meeting, send several days in advance. Best practices include:

- Scheduling the meeting and sharing the link to the meeting together through a calendar invitation.
- Sharing a meeting agenda in advance.
- Sharing handouts and any pre-work that is expected of participants before the meeting.
- Sharing best practices for participants along with any specific instructions for the meeting. If working with participants unfamiliar with the meeting platform, additional instructions may be necessary.

Technological Considerations:

Verify that you have all necessary equipment prior to the meeting date. Best practices include:

- Ensure that you have the necessary camera and microphone for videoconferencing. Note: computer microphones are generally designed for only one person speaking. If you have a group in a room, you will need to add an external webcam and microphone for quality audio/video.
- Use a quality headset to ensure good audio and minimize background noise.
- Ensure that you have sufficient connectivity/bandwidth in the location where you will be hosting.
- Always bring a power cord!
- Select a location that has the necessary technology or bring it with you (ex: large screen, double monitors, external webcam/microphone).
- Using two screens (or a split screen option) is helpful. If you are presenting slides, use one screen for your presentation and one to monitor participants and the chat box.
- Test all equipment prior to the meeting. Do a practice run before the meeting to ensure that all aspects of the meeting work and are viewable by participants.

Hosting the Meeting:

- Open the session at least 15 minutes early to allow participants to test the technology and troubleshoot. You may need more time depending on group, more new people would need more time.
- Close all irrelevant applications before screen sharing (email, internet browsers, messaging, etc.)
- Begin and end the meeting on time.
- At the beginning of the meeting, have a slide to share with participants reviewing meeting norms and best practices for participants.
- If recording, notify participants prior to starting recording.
- Throughout the meeting, ensure that there is active coordination. These tasks may be shared by more than one person during the meeting:
 - **Facilitate Discussion:** Ensure that group norms regarding interaction are adhered to, management of time and agenda items, ensure that participants have opportunities for input.
 - **Monitor Participants:** Monitor the chat box and raise hand feature to ensure that comments and feedback are not lost.
 - **Technical Issues:** Designate a person to address technical problems during the meeting.

Hybrid Meetings:

Hosting a hybrid meeting, where there is a group of people in person and some members participating virtually requires additional considerations:

- **Staffing:** In hybrid meetings, it is essential to have a second person who is focused on managing the online participants so they are not left out of the process.
- **Equipment:** In order for all participants to be able to be fully involved, there are additional equipment needs. Ensure that you have video and audio equipment necessary for this type of meeting. This may include two screens and a microphone capable of high quality audio in a group. A laptop computer will not be sufficient for this type of meeting.
- **Materials:** Ensure that any materials shared with in-person participants are shared in advance with participants who will be included virtually.
- **Interactivity:** If there are interactive components of your meeting agenda, such as brainstorming activities, plan in advance how you will include online participants.

More Information: Larry Barker, larry.barker@unh.edu
Sue Cagle, sue.cagle@unh.edu
Casey Porter, casey.porter@unh.edu