

Best Practices for Inclusive Virtual Meetings

Facilitating virtual meetings presents unique challenges that are not present in face-to-face meetings. Here are some things to be aware of regarding the nature of virtual meetings and basic techniques that can be of great help to facilitators.

Common Issues

1. It is more difficult to avoid speaking at the same time or interrupting another speaker in a virtual meeting. This is due to the time it takes for the audio and video to be sent and received over the internet.
2. It is very common for meeting participants to use the chat feature instead of speaking. Monitoring the chat while presenting can be challenging at first, but most presenters are able to adapt.
3. For meetings of more than five to six participants, microphone noise from those who are not actively speaking can prevent participants from hearing and seeing who is speaking.
4. Requiring the use of video can be an accessibility and usability issue for some users:
 - Many users do not have web cameras available.
 - Those with slower internet connections may not be able to connect reliably using video.
 - Video may increase fatigue and be a distraction; especially for participants with attention deficits.
 - For a variety of reasons, some users may not feel comfortable sharing video of their place of connection.
5. For large meeting groups, it is not possible to see the video thumbnail from all of the participants at once. This can make it difficult to gauge participant's engagement and understanding of the discussion. It is also difficult for participants to know who else is in the meeting.
6. Those who connect via dial-in (i.e. using their phone) will be unable to see who is speaking and who is in the meeting. This can lead to confusion and the participant disengaging from the discussion.

Virtual Meeting Techniques

The techniques in this section are written to address meetings via Zoom, but they are applicable in general to virtual meetings conducted via any of the major video conferencing software applications.

1. **Orient participants to the Mute, Raise Hand, and Chat features** of the Zoom interface. It is important not to assume that participants know how to use Zoom simply because they have been able to connect to the meeting.
2. **Ask participants to state their name before speaking.** This will do four things:
 - Those who are participating via dial-in will be made aware of who is speaking
 - Anyone using a sign language interpreter service will be able to more fully engage in the meeting. The sign language interpreter will convey the speaker's name to the participant who is deaf or hard-of-hearing.
 - Transcription services will properly identify a speaker if participants introduce their name before speaking.
 - Facilitating the meeting is easier if two or more people speak at once.
3. **Ask all participants to mute their microphones** when they are not speaking.
Note: Those joining the meeting via dial-in cannot easily mute or unmute their microphones, as they will not be using a meeting client. They will also be unaware if the presenter has muted them.
4. In a large meeting, **designate a co-facilitator whose job it is to monitor the chat** and bring questions and comments to the attention of the main speaker.
5. For large meetings, **ask participants to use the Raise Hand feature** when they have a question or wish to make a comment. This will reduce the likelihood of people speaking at the same time.
Note: Those connecting via dial-in will not have access to this feature.
6. **Describe key points of visual information.** Users who are blind rely upon this information to understand what is being discussed. Descriptions of this type can increase comprehension for all participants.

7. **Use a live captioning service or sign language interpreter** if any of the participants require it. Captions can increase comprehension for all.

Note: Captions are not useful without proper punctuation and reasonable accuracy. Avoid any captioning service that does not provide this. Assigning someone to type captions does not work. People speak up to 150 words per minute, and typing is between 40 and 50.

Breakout Room Techniques

8. **Provide a task for breakout room participants** to accomplish.
9. **Give a clear indicator of time allowed.**
10. **Give a 2-minute (or longer) warning breakout room(s) will be closing.**
11. **Ask participants to introduce themselves** when entering a breakout room. This will help those who do not have access to video to see who their fellow breakout group participants are.