

Virtual meetings

How can I ensure virtual meetings are effective?

Meetings often take an unexpected course or are met with disruptive behaviors. Guiding principles and ground rules are helpful if you have group agreement in advance. Hold the group accountable. Also try the tips below.

Before the Meeting

- Send out an agenda beforehand to clarify the objectives of the meeting. Schedule time for collaborators.
- Come prepared and ready to address the possibility that some of the participants may not have completed their homework or read the agenda. To prevent wasting time, read through the agenda to make sure everyone is up to speed on the objectives.
- As participants check into the meeting, display the agenda.
- Go through your PowerPoint to ensure the graphics and transitions run smoothly.



Technical Considerations

- Test your audio-visual technology (A/V) in advance
- Notify IS if you have a critical meeting and may need A/V support.
- Set up and open the virtual meeting space at least 5 minutes in advance.



After the Meeting

- Check in with your participants to help process individual feelings. Because much interpersonal information such as body language and facial expression is lost in the virtual environment, a verbal prompt allows participants an opportunity for input provides closure for the team.



During the Meeting

Audio Considerations

- Use the “mute” function when distractions like dogs barking, ruffling papers, heavy breathing, etc. arise.
- Let people know that they are on mute and use the “chat” feature to raise questions and comments.



Make the Meeting Engaging

- Use interactive technology, including Skype, instant messaging and real-time polling and collaboration workspace tools.
- Skype has a whiteboard feature that gives you visual space to capture words and phrases.
- Orient audience how to access the chat and participant features. Some participants may feel more comfortable with writing their comments than speaking them, especially if they are unfamiliar with virtual meeting space.

Connect People

- People feel more comfortable with each other in a virtual setting if they have an opportunity to introduce themselves.
- Provide opportunities for group problem solving.
- To avoid everyone speaking at once, have members note their interest in speaking in the “chat” window or by going down the list of attendees (a virtual round-robin) in the participant panel.

Ban Multi-tasking

- Often during virtual meetings, participants may be prone to multi-tasking. It’s important that everyone is mentally present.
- To encourage engagement, create constant touchpoints by asking frequent questions.
- Assign participants tasks and roles such as note taker, track action items, note deadlines, etc.