

Tips For Holding Inclusive Virtual Meetings



Timing Matters. Set meetings to last 50 Minutes or start at ten minutes past the hour so that breaks are built in. If meetings are longer, factor breaks in so that people can stretch their legs, get away from staring at a screen and make a drink/take a comfort break etc. Remember 'Zoom fatigue' is real!

Pace should be a lot slower than you are used to in meetings to allow people to contribute in turn. It is also important to bear in mind that participants may be using remote captioning, live subtitling or sign language interpreters and they will be at least a sentence behind hearing participants.



Support. Have a meeting facilitator/chair at all meetings who is responsible for setting the tone and ensuring that participants are made to feel comfortable and are invited to share their views **especially** if they are different from the consensus. The facilitator should guide the conversation and keep the meeting on track. You should let people know how they should contribute to the meeting, e.g. using the raised hand gesture, (written) chat functionality or switching their video on. Try this out early on the meeting and stress that this will be the only way to contribute so that it is clear that there should be no interruptions. It may be useful at larger meetings to have a co-host who can deal with accepting latecomers, sorting technical issues and managing questions being raised in the chat etc. If required, someone should be assigned to take notes.



Preparation. If you know you are going to be sharing presentations, or other documents, consider sending them in advance of the meeting using a file exchange service if they are very large in size. You do not know the speed or quality of people's connections and screen/application sharing sometimes breaks down and can have a heavy load on network connections. You may want to reduce the number of animations or complicated slide transitions to make it easier for people to follow your talk and add slide numbers so that you can refer to the slide number if needed.



Inclusivity. Be mindful of being inclusive: Use the displayed participants names to speak directly to people and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute and be heard. Otherwise the loudest get most air time as in 'in-person' meetings. Remind participants that Teams has live Closed Captions (subtitles) that they can try if they have difficulty hearing/are in a noisy environment. It is useful to have a camera switched on when participants are relying on lipreading/signing). If participants are using lipreading, special care must be taken to make sure that your lips are illuminated and can be easily seen.





Etiquette. Taking part in virtual meetings can be a steep learning curve for most people and making sure you are set-up before the meeting starts can reduce anxiety, not just for yourself but for everyone. Wear whatever you are comfortable in but remember that you may need to stand up unexpectedly! Set up your video considering (a) lighting (e.g. light your face not the back of your head), (b) camera view (e.g. tablets often point towards the ceiling if not on a stand), (c) what could accidentally be seen during the call (e.g. if you are sitting in front of a window consider closing the curtains).

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If asked to speak, introduce yourself: say your name, you may choose to spell this out as the computer can assign you a random ID; and share your pronouns (it's good practice) as people may not know how you sound on the call. If you are hosting the meeting, include this as an introduction/icebreaker at the beginning. It can also be helpful for people to test if their equipment is working.

For large meetings, consider turning off your camera unless you are presenting/leading the discussion, when you are speaking or if you are asked to keep it on. It can be useful (and socially encouraging) for people to 'see' each other, but this is not always necessary, and it can also consume significant bandwidth. As background noises, feedback, and other issues may distract others, mute your microphone when you are not talking. This is also a good way of implementing turn-taking.

 **Tools.** Use the functionality that online meetings provide. For example, brainstorming will probably need to be approached differently. Use Polls to get engagement in topics or reach decisions. Use breakout rooms for smaller discussions and feedback and video to make content more engaging in presentations. Regular developments are being made to tools as remote working has become so prevalent in such a short time frame. The default length of meetings can be changed in your Outlook settings to automate in-built breaks. Look out for technological advances and how these might help enhance your meetings.

 **Relax!** Distractions during the meeting may and probably will happen (e.g. pets, children or others also working at home), relax and remember that everyone is working under difficult circumstances and often have lives beyond your meeting.
