

Facilitating Virtual Meetings: Tips for Success

We are transitioning into a new reality in how we communicate and get our work done. More and more groups, organizations and collaborations are transitioning from *in-person* interactions to *virtual* ones. Platforms such as GoToMeetings, Zoom and Canvas are becoming common spaces to meet and work virtually. This requires some adjustments to our facilitation practice so that our meeting participants can fully engage with each other and the topic.



Here are suggestions for supporting facilitation and participation:

- ✓ **Carefully assign roles when planning your meeting.** Decide who will be the facilitator, the scribe, the timekeeper, the tech support and monitor of the chat box. Be sure key participants remain free to engage as *content contributors and full participants*.
- ✓ **Be clear about what the group is seeking to accomplish.** Consider the most effective way to approach each agenda item. *Specify who will* contribute for each topic, how the time will be used, sequence of items, if participants have adequate information, and how and when decisions will be reached and documented.
- ✓ **Make use of visual focal points to deepen engagement.** Many virtual platforms allow screen sharing. You can share a PowerPoint slide with instructions for a task, a website that contributes additional information, or visual representations of decisions.
- ✓ **Make the meeting relevant and engaging.** Give everyone an *active role* with something to do and ask for their input regularly. Spend time in advance getting to know the platform. An *advance agenda* can help participants to consider when and where their input will be requested. If people feel the meeting is irrelevant, struggle with the platform, or sense that their participation is not needed, their attention will decrease.
- ✓ **Ensure a strong structure and facilitation.** Your meeting structure may need to be stronger in a virtual context than in-person where body language allows the facilitator to “read the room.” Even when there is video capability and recording, facilitators need to be clear and transparent. Many platforms have *chat boxes, hand raising features and polling functions* which can also be use in a virtual meeting.