RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE ONLINE MEETING USING MICROSOFT TEAMS

"ONLINE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE", TOOL #1

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Additional resources:

https://padlet.com/kenneth28burns/uvpu626mvd5k

INTRODUCTION

The ONLINE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE series was created to support front-line social work staff, managers, teams, and community and voluntary agencies to transition some of their work online during the pandemic period. The full series of resources can be accessed here. Social workers / teams need to evaluate the suitability of online conferencing software to ensure that their use is permitted by their organisation *and* to ensure that their usage does not lead to harm for individuals, families, communities or groups. A recent NSA report (USA) provides comprehensive information on the safety of conferencing and collaborative software platforms.

PREPARATION

An effective online meeting begins with preparing for the meeting:

1. Microsoft Teams works best when you download the app to your device, rather than running Teams in an internet browser.

2. Key questions to consider: Is a video call necessary / the best option? (telephone call, circulate video of key information points, etc.). What information can I send in advance to reduce the length of the meeting? (video calls can be tiring) Who needs to attend? (smaller online meetings work best) What staff have care and other responsibilities? (watch a recording of the meeting back at a later time)

3. Ask delegates to join the meeting 10-15 mins early to problem solve and test their ability to join the meeting. Key preparation items:

a) Where is the best quality internet signal and the most practical place in your building to join an online meeting? Run a speed test to check your device's internet speed: speedtest.net or fast.com.

b) If you have a choice of Wi-Fi or connecting with a LAN (network) cable, always connect using the LAN (network) cable.

c) If your broadband is slow, restart the router and/or internet fibre box before the meeting, and ask other household members to stay off the Wi-Fi for the duration of the online meeting, where practicable.

4. Send a reminder to delegates about the meeting a few days in advance: include a copy of the agenda, request that relevant delegates share documents in advance and provide instructions on how to join a Teams meeting. Many online meetings are delayed due to delegates not being able to find the join button in the Microsoft Teams calendar and problem-solving device / internet issues.

5. Delegates with newer devices can blur or change their background in Microsoft Teams to improve privacy. Images are better when cameras are faced towards a wall rather faced towards a window.

6. If meeting delegates advise that your microphone sound is too low, a quick solution is to connect the headphones with built-in microphone that came with your smartphone to your laptop. Guides on how to turn up your microphone volume on Windows 10 / Apple Mac.

7. Read the Irish Data Protection Commission's guidance on how to manage personal data when working remotely. One practical consideration when joining an online meeting is whether others in your building could overhear the content: use headphones to reduce the risk of a data breach.

RUNNING THE MEETING

How you set up and run an online meeting will depend on the purpose of the meeting and number of delegates. All effective meetings begin with a clear agenda, items pre-allocated to delegates who should attend with their tasks completed, minutes and to-do-items from the last meeting should be circulated in advance, and an effective chairperson should lead the meeting. Facilitating participation in online meetings can be challenging as the usual inter-personal signals can be diminished or delayed, leading to meeting delegates talking over each other. Large online meetings for information purposes can work well, but interactive meetings may work best with smaller numbers.

1. Ask delegates to mute their microphone (to limit background noise) upon joining the meeting. Colleagues who are new to online meetings may need a quick tutorial on key features of Microsoft Teams (how to use the mute and chat buttons). Asking delegates to also turn off their video may help participants with slow broadband.

2. At the beginning of the meeting (depending on meeting size) ask delegates to introduce themselves or do a quick check-in with delegates (they may need to be reminded to turn on their microphone).

3. Key documents to read in advance of the meeting can be added in the Microsoft Teams meeting calendar entry.
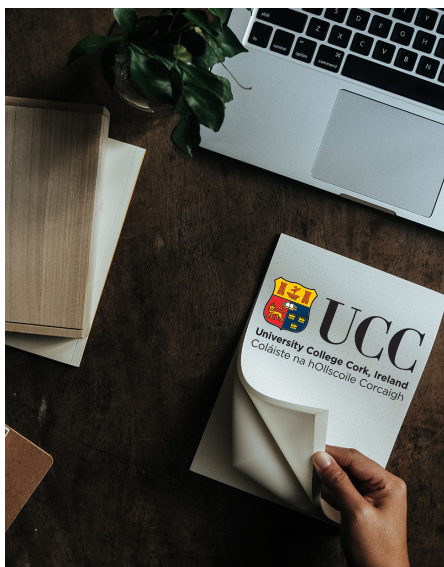
4. The chairperson should explain the ground rules for the meeting and describe how the meeting will be run. It can take time to establish new norms and to develop skills for chairing and running online meetings. Try out a few models to see what works best for your team. Ground rules usually include asking delegates to turn off their microphone after speaking, to close email and other apps that could be distracting, no mobile phones, to dress appropriately, to be aware of backgrounds, no food, to be present and participate, maintain eye contact (raising a laptop's height with books can be helpful), and to reduce background distractions, where practicable.

5. Chairpersons should be flexible and understanding with delegates with care responsibilities who are joining from home. Keep meetings as short as possible, and where appropriate, record the meeting so that colleagues with care and other responsibilities can watch the meeting back later on if they can't attend or have to leave early.

6. In Microsoft Teams, you can only view a maximum grid of 9 delegates (3x3) participants. In a small meeting a visual hands up can indicate to the chairperson that a participant wishes to contribute. Microsoft Teams also has a raise your hand button. A useful technique is to ask meeting delegates to type their point(s) or question(s) into the conversation (chat) function. These can then be picked up by the meeting chairperson once the opportunity arises and delegates can be invited to speak to their point/question at an appropriate time.

7. Teams has record the meeting and live captions (transcription) features for note-taking purposes (may depend on your version of Teams and the age of your PC). While delegates are automatically advised by Teams that they are being recorded, delegates should be advised how the recording and / or transcription will be used.