



RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE ONLINE MEETING USING VIDEO CONFERENCING SOFTWARE



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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.

PICKING A PLATFORM AND EVALUATING SECURITY FEATURES

There are many video conferencing software packages: some are free and some require a subscription. Popular video conferencing software apps, include: [Microsoft Teams](#), [Zoom](#), [Cisco WebEx](#), [Join.Me](#), [Google Meet](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Slack](#), amongst others. Articles examining the pros and cons of these platforms can be found [here](#). For services and professionals where security is a priority, 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. Video conferencing software works best when you download the app to your device (laptop, smart phone), rather than opening them through 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? (can 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 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 meeting using your platform. Many online meetings are delayed due to delegates not being able to find the join a meeting button and problem-solving device / internet issues.

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



7. Read the Irish [Data Protection Commission's guidance](#) on how to manage personal data when working remotely. 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 your video conferencing software (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).

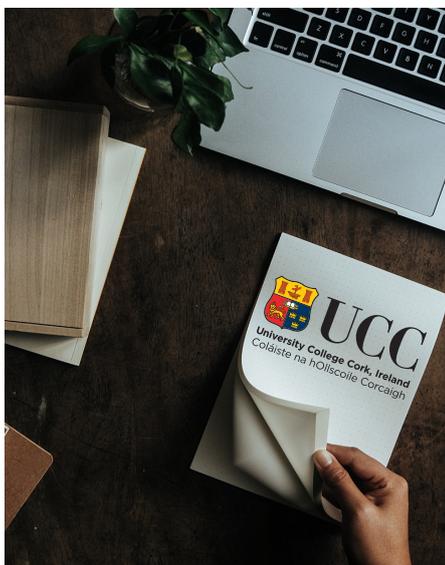
3. **Key documents** to read in advance of the meeting can be circulated by email and/or the collaboration features in your video conferencing software.

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.

6. Most video conferencing software platforms will be able to show you most of the meeting participants on screen. In a meeting of 4 persons or less, a visual hands up can indicate to the chairperson that a participant wishes to contribute. In a larger meeting, this may not work as some delegates are off-screen. One solution 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. Some platforms have a digital "hands up" feature that could also be used.

7. If you are using the **record** or the **live captions** (transcription) features for note-taking purposes, delegates should be advised that these features are being used.



ABOUT THIS SERIES

The [ONLINE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE](#) series was created by [Dr Kenneth Burns](#) and [Dr Fiachra O'Súilleabháin](#), School of Applied Social Studies (social work), University College Cork, Ireland. The full series of resources are available on our [Padlet with free resources](#) with information

on online meeting platforms, practice advice, GDPR (data protection), and so on. The Padlet is open access and anyone can contribute links and resources. Original artwork by [Harry Venning](#).

TOOL 2, VERSION 1

[BURNS AND Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN, 2020](#)