

# Virtual Meetings Guide

2020-2021



# Thank You for Your Interest in Virtual Meetings!

The Communications team at the UW-Madison Office of Sustainability has created this guide to help both hosts and attendees be more informed about virtual communications while using online platforms for meetings. Many of the suggestions will also be applicable for online events or classes that you may be hosting or attending.

The Communications team is part of the intern program at the UW-Madison Office of Sustainability. We assist in running the Office of Sustainability (OS) social media channels, creating the Sustain UW Podcast, and planning campus Earth Week events. Having spent the summer using online platforms to connect with interns and staff of the OS, we have put together some helpful tips and tricks to ensure our online meetings are successful. We have also provided resources for you to learn more about the accessibility of virtual meetings, and how to keep your audiences (or yourself!) more engaged.

If you have questions or are interested in partnering with the Communications team at the Office of Sustainability, please contact us at [oscomms@g-groups.wisc.edu](mailto:oscomms@g-groups.wisc.edu).

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# For Hosts

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## Accessibility

- ❑ Choose a platform that offers closed captioning and video conferencing.
- ❑ Before the meeting, address accessibility considerations and check out the [McBurney Center's taglines](#) for asking participants if they need accommodations.
  - ❑ Utilize UW-Madison's resources for more specific accessibility guidelines to ensure all attendees are able to participate fully. Include captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions.
  - ❑ For more information, visit the following links about how to provide such [accommodations](#) and why it is [important](#).
- ❑ Provide the agenda and notes before the meeting (or event).
- ❑ Be aware that all attendees may not have devices with functioning video, microphone, chatbox, etc.
  - ❑ People also may struggle with connectivity issues depending on their access to wifi, so consider how best to match your audience's needs before deciding on a platform. For instance, it may be helpful to record your meeting so that people can view it at a later date if necessary.
  - ❑ Encourage participants to use their video; however, recognize that this may not be possible or preferable for them.
- ❑ It is a good idea to start your meeting by going over expectations and features of the platform that will be used.
  - ❑ Show your audience members the mute/unmute button, and tell them to mute their microphone when they are not speaking.
    - ❑ Some platforms may allow the host to mute other attendees. This may be useful if an audience member forgets and there is background noise or feedback.
  - ❑ Additionally, if you expect participants to use the chat box or raise hand function, give a brief explanation of where to find these buttons.



## Background/Environment

- ❑ Find an environment to host where you will not be easily distracted. Somewhere quiet and away from other people is ideal.
- ❑ If you are going to have other devices near you, make sure that they are silenced and will not serve as a distraction.

- ❑ If possible, choose a location that has a neutral, uncluttered background if your session is using a webcam.
  - ❑ If you struggle with keeping eye contact with the webcam, try placing a picture of friends, family, or a pet right behind the camera to encourage you to keep looking at your webcam.
  - ❑ If you are going to be speaking for an extended period of time, consider standing up to mimic an in-person setting.

### **Be Prepared**

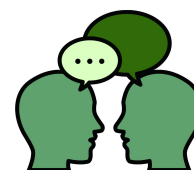
- ❑ Keep a pair of headphones nearby in case the microphone on your device does not work. Headphones can also help to block out background noise.
- ❑ Ensure that your device is fully charged before your meeting and have a charger readily available if necessary.
- ❑ If possible, have another electronic device as backup that can connect with online sessions.

### **Anticipate Technical Issues**

- ❑ The best way to avoid technical issues is to become familiar with the software. As a host, you should make sure to practice presenting and using functions of the software (such as sharing your screen and utilizing the chat box) prior to your online meeting.
  - ❑ Arrive early to give yourself time to troubleshoot any problems and become familiar with the software.

### **Keep Your Audience Engaged**

- ❑ To build an inclusive and welcoming environment, start the session with an ice breaker activity.
  - ❑ This can be a helpful way to ensure participants are able to use the microphone or chat box.
- ❑ Plan activities to incorporate and encourage participation from attendees. Consider assigning someone to field questions in the chat box so the host or presenter can respond at the end of the session.
- ❑ Use polls or the chat box to invite feedback and participation during online sessions.
- ❑ Schedule periodic breaks for participants to stretch, get water, and use the bathroom. Encourage everyone to move around and take a break from staring at their screens.
  - ❑ Providing a 15-20 minute break every 50-90 minutes will help participants stay focused during the meeting. [More information and recommendations on breaks here.](#)



- ❑ Try to vary the delivery of the message during your meeting. Use discussions, break-out groups, presentations, videos, podcasts, and other forms of communication to engage your audience. Be creative!
- ❑ At the end of the online session, ask participants to fill out a survey to receive feedback about what went well and what could be improved for the next session.

## For Attendees

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### Accessibility

- ❑ The [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) works with UW-Madison students and staff to create an accessible and inclusive educational experience. Consider reaching out to the Center if you would benefit from accommodations for virtual classes this upcoming semester.
- ❑ Speak up or send a chat message to the host if you are having difficulty hearing, speaking, or seeing during the meeting.

### Background/Environment

- ❑ Choose a quiet place where you will not be interrupted.
- ❑ Mute your microphone if you are not talking. Feedback and other noises (such as a dog barking in the background) can be distracting to the host and other participants.
- ❑ Even if you have your camera turned off, choose a location where you can stay engaged.

### Be Prepared

- ❑ Make sure to gather everything you may need prior to your meeting.
  - ❑ It can be helpful to have a notebook and pen to take notes.
  - ❑ Reusable water bottles are a great option to ensure you are staying hydrated. Also have some snacks readily available, especially if it will be a long session.
- ❑ Using a pair of headphones with a microphone can improve your experience.
- ❑ Make sure your computer is fully charged, or sit near an outlet with a charger readily available.



### Anticipate Technical Issues

- ❑ If you are unfamiliar with a virtual meeting platform, make sure to join the meeting early. Take some time to become familiar with functions such as the mute/unmute button, chat box, and raise hand button.
- ❑ Sometimes you may have to download an application to enter a meeting, especially if it's the first time you are using it on your device. Take this into consideration and arrive early in case your device needs time to install the service.
- ❑ If you experience poor connection, try turning off your video and closing other tabs in your browser. If the problem persists, you may want to call into the meeting with a phone.
  - ❑ Speak up if something is not working properly; it's possible someone else has experienced the same problem and can offer advice on how to fix it. Communication is key for online sessions!



### Stay Engaged

- ❑ If you are watching a recorded lecture or meeting, we recommend taking breaks to get up and stretch throughout the meeting. If you are unable to take breaks during the meeting, try to take some time away from the screen before or after the meeting.
- ❑ Remove distractions, such as your phone and other devices, and avoid opening other tabs in your browser. Please remember to be respectful of the host and use online sessions to practice active listening.
- ❑ Do not be afraid to ask questions or make comments! This may not always be possible depending on the presentation, but many hosts will appreciate audience engagement.
- ❑ Take notes to maximize your understanding of the session and provide feedback.

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## Thank you!

We hope this guide has answered some of your questions and offered assistance as we all navigate through online platforms. If you have any other questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to the Office of Sustainability Communications team at [oscomms@g-groups.wisc.edu](mailto:oscomms@g-groups.wisc.edu).