

Online Meetings

Part Two: Facilitating Meetings

As the facilitator, challenge yourself to think of multiple and ongoing ways to encourage participation, advance the agenda, gauge agreement, resolve conflict quickly, and welcome differing opinions. This tip sheet offers tips and good practices to help you host, facilitate, and engage participants online.

Facilitating Online Meetings: The Basics

Develop Group Norms

- Develop Group Norms together when meeting as a group for the first time
- Include expectations about muting microphones, being in a quiet space, camera on/off protocol, & even consider guidelines for chat usage

Give Time for Responses

- Give some time for people who don't usually speak to reflect and respond, or try a go around so that everybody has the opportunity to respond

Remember Accessibility

- When possible, identify participants' accessibility needs before a meeting
- Build in some standard accessibility tools when facilitating, such as using large fonts, high contrast font colours, visuals, and closed captions (CC)

Encourage Failure with Resilience

- Be flexible & adaptable
- Expect failure, learn, & improve for next time 😊



Information: Learn more about online accessibility on www.grassrootsdigitalhub.ca

Icebreakers Build Community

Maps

- Post a map & have participants mark where they are from or want to visit, then share together

Visual Check-In

- Use a visual “feelings check-in” (see the Frank the Cat example at the end) for participants to check in about how they are doing/feeling
- Note: these are generally humorous & can offer insight into the group's energy

Scavenger Hunt

- Ask everybody to go off-screen as they go search for an item in their house
- Example: Ask them for something important to them or something that is a specific colour
- Ask each person to come on camera to share what item they chose & why

The Big Wind Blows

- Start with a participant saying, “The big wind blows for everyone who is...” & reveal something personal about themselves (e.g., if they speak more than two languages)
- If anyone else finds it true, ask them to use an emoji, write in the chat, or write on a whiteboard

Making Time for Breaks

Group Stretch

- Do a group stretch to music playing in the background

Guided Breathing

- Consider leading breathing, meditative exercises to help the group focus & centre themselves
- Example: Boxed breathing involves inhaling for 4 counts, holding for 4, exhaling for 4, & resting for 4, repeating the cycle for one or two minutes

Off-Screen Break

- Provide a timed break for participants to be away from their screens

Activity Ideas for Increasing Engagement

Timed Check-In

- Ask a question & give everybody one minute to respond by using an on-screen timer/buzzer to stay on track
- Use a check-in for decisions before proceeding

Small Group Discussion

- Put groups or pairs in breakout rooms with guiding questions to help get people participating
- Each breakout room can present its conversation or decision to the full group for discussion

Spectrograms

- Use a spectrogram (typically an arrow across a page with a question) to speed up decision-making or highlight topics needing discussion
- Ask participants to place themselves or an emoji along the spectrum; if you do it in real time, everyone can see quickly how people feel about an idea or topic
- Create one with Zoom whiteboard, Google Slides, Google Whiteboard, or a Padlet timeline template

Pair Sharing or “Speed Dating”

- This helps for quick discussions; put participants into groups of two and then randomly switch them every couple of minutes, so they interact with a lot of people in a more intimate fashion

Fill in Charts

- Work charts help participants volunteer for tasks or share their opinions in real time
- Share a chart as a whiteboard for participants to use independently

Free Tools for Increasing Participation

Mentimeter

It is a free tool where you can set up questions for participants to answer in real time. Participants connect through a QR Code or link with a password and anonymously answer the question. Everyone can see the responses come in and discuss.

Padlet

It is a free tool where you can use a variety of templates, like having questions and responses in a single file across a page or as a timeline that people fill in or even a map!

Kahoot!

It offers a game format with music and awards points for the fastest correct answers. It is fun and engaging!

Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet

Each platform offers in-meeting tools that can be used, such as raising the emoji hand, providing a reaction (e.g., a thumbs-up), and responding via chat. A chat waterfall tells participants to hold their answers until everybody is ready and then hit send simultaneously for a stream of responses.



Security: Only those with the link will be able to access, view, and participate in the activity.



Remember: Experiment with the tools before you use them, so you can support participants during the meeting.

Remember

Engaging activities help people minimize their urge to multitask during meetings, so use a variety to keep it interesting, prioritize time for building community and connecting, and ensure everyone feels welcome and knows their ideas count!



Remember: Think creatively, be supportive, and make sure to have fun!

Sources

Kahoot: www.Kahoot.com

Mentimeter: www.Mentimeter.com

Padlet: www.Padlet.com

Rewa, J. & Hunter, D. (2-24) Leading groups online: Your essential guide to leading online courses, meetings, trainings and events. Daniel Hunter Pub.

Various (2026). www.GrassrootsDigitalHub.ca

Sunnybrook Hospital. Box breathing relaxation technique: how to calm feelings of stress or anxiety.

<https://health.sunnybrook.ca/box-breathing-calm-stress-anxiety/>

Sample—Fun Visual Check-In to Start a Meeting: Which Frank Are You?

