SPRITE+

Security, Privacy, Identity, Trust, Engagement, NetworkPlus

Hints and Tips for Running Interactive Virtual Meetings

Background

From the outset, SPRITE+ has had a strong emphasis on virtual engagement as a way to connect academic and non-academic communities to build collaborative relationships and new ways of working. Running meetings virtually offers many advantages such as greater inclusion; lower costs; less time; no travel; and it's better for the environment.

We are lucky enough to work with our brilliant partners at Know Innovation who are experts in running virtual events and micro labs. Here we present our guide for running successful virtual meetings, packed with hints and tips that we've picked up along the way.

For more detailed information, see a recent webinar from Know Innovation about how to take your meeting online. There is also a thread on the SPRITEHub discussion board with further guidance. We encourage you to share you experience here too.

For presenters

Running a virtual meeting can be a daunting task, particularly if you've never done it before. Many people run virtual meetings in the same way that they'd run a face-to-face event. It's important to remember that the rules are different because people respond differently when they are interacting in a virtual setting. Here are our hints and tips to get you started:

1. **Decide which software to use**

There are lots of services to choose from including Zoom, GoToMeeting and Google Hangouts to name a few. Make sure you have the app or client downloaded – this is more reliable than running the meeting from your browser. Our partners at Know Innovation prefer Zoom for its flexibility, so we tend to use this for larger, more complex events.

2. **Make sure you have the appropriate hardware**

Use headphones to improve sound quality and minimise background noise.

3. **Practice**

Test the software ahead of time and familiarise yourself with the functionality. You'll have enough to think about during the meeting itself without worrying about the technology.

4. **Use video**

Personalise the conversation and keep your participants engaged by using video. It's important for people to see each other's facial expressions and body language.

5. **Always provide an audio dial in option**

It's important to note that video conferencing relies on a strong internet connection, which not everyone will necessarily have access to. People need the ability to dial in but make it clear that video is the preference.

6. **Assign a facilitator if you can**

It can be difficult to manage a virtual discussion, particularly if you're also a contributor. Assign someone to manage the conversation and take questions to ensure all voices are heard. The facilitator should also be able to answer any technical questions.

7. **Remember standard meeting practices**

Prior to the meeting send an agenda and any pre-reading. During the meeting, try to stick to the plan, take breaks and capture any actions.

8. **Don't try and do too much**

Be aware of the limitations of running meetings online – be realistic about what you can achieve within the timeframe. We suggest that virtual meetings should last no longer than 90 minutes for maximum engagement. If you need longer than 90 minutes, consider scheduling a short break in between agenda items.

9. **Keep presentations short**

It can be difficult to maintain people's interest, particularly in a virtual meeting. Keep presentations brief and to the point. These meetings should be more of a discussion so send any background information before the meeting starts.

10. **Ask attendees to create a virtual name badge**

This is really useful if your meeting includes attendees from different organisations who might not know each other. Consider asking participants to change their name when entering the meeting to give other people an idea of who they are. See some examples below. This also makes life a lot easier when breaking people into smaller groups for interactive discussion – you can ensure that you've got a mix of people in the 'room'.

E.g. John Smith – Academic, Data Science; Laura Jones – Industry Partner, BT

11. **Split your meeting into smaller separate sessions**

Depending on the size and content of your meeting, it might be important for participants to move into smaller, more interactive groups. Consider Zoom or Google Hangouts to place attendees into virtual meeting rooms for break out discussion.

12. **Consider interactive tools to maximise engagement**

Collect feedback in real-time by using:

- Polls/questionnaires to survey how participants feel about issues and ideas e.g. Menti or Slido
- Whiteboards for exploring ideas and action planning e.g. Google Docs, Trello or Well Sorted

For attendees

As a virtual meeting attendee there are a few steps you can take to ensure that you get the most from the experience. We recommend the following:

Download the appropriate software app or client, this is usually essential in order to join any breakout sessions.

Test your camera and microphone before the meeting starts. Most software will prompt you to do this before you enter the meeting.

Arrive a few minutes early to give yourself time to complete the checks and

Turn your camera on to fully engage in discussion.

Use a headset to minimise echoes and for better sound quality.

Mute your microphone if you're not speaking to minimise background noise.

Introduce yourself before speaking to remind everyone who you are.

Speak clearly and don't talk too fast to give the note takers chance to catch up!

Use the chat box to ask questions in larger meetings.

If your internet connection drops don't worry. Re-join the meeting when you can and consider the audio only option if the problem continues.

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Try and be somewhere quiet to minimise distractions.

Treat it as if it were an in person meeting. Block out time in your diary and take regular breaks.

Use two screens if you can to see the video on one and participate in the interactive elements in the other.

Get involved, have fun and enjoy yourself!

Security

We are aware of the ongoing security issues regarding the reported vulnerabilities and privacy issues with the Zoom platform. Zoom has taken action to make its platform more secure, introducing enhancements to help meeting hosts manage secure meetings. However, there are a number of steps, which can be taken to ensure Zoom meetings are as safe as possible:

Lock the meeting

- Use a unique Zoom meeting room number and password every time
- Use the 'waiting room' feature to require attendees to request admission to the meeting
- Lock the meeting when attendees have arrived

Know who's invited

- Keep meetings private
- Only invite the people you want in your meeting room
- If you have an open event, make attendees register and provide each with the room number and password

Share with caution

- Avoid sharing the link to your meeting via social media
- Only allow the meeting host and their designees to share screens or content

Useful references

- https://medium.com/sigchi/a-remote-video-presentation-guide-93957c63aa7a
- https://www.ukauthority.com/articles/running-an-away-day-virtually/
- https://knowinnovation.com/2020/03/you-too-can-go-virtual/
- https://www.ukauthority.com/articles/running-an-away-day-virtually/
- https://www.rsaconference.com/industry-topics/blog/protecting-online-meetings

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