

Virtual Meeting code – A guide for facilitators

As part of the remit of the Future Acousticians Committee, this guide has been prepared to address inclusion and diversity in the meetings and events hosted by the Association of Noise Consultants.

Meetings and events must be inclusive and accessible to attract all ages, genders, races and nationalities. Research shows that women and ethnic minorities are more prone to hold back and be interrupted. By following a few simple steps, meetings can be richer, and discussions more productive.

Think of your role more like a facilitator instead of a chair. You are not sitting watching the meeting unfold, but you help to achieve a productive outcome.

To achieve this, in online events it is useful to have a second in command to act as an assistant. Some of the important tasks that they can provide include, but not limited to, muting people, turning cameras off, setting the order of raised hands and reading questions from the chat window. This way you can be free to guide the dialogue.

Before the event, send attendees a message with important info about the meeting, such as the agenda (if any), joining details and ground rules (more on this later). If the event is going to be recorded, please ensure you have the explicit permission of all attendees by including a disclaimer in the message.

When the meeting starts, it could be a nice touch to address attendees personally at the beginning, so everyone feels welcome. Depending on the meeting, you could ask additional questions such as 'Let us know if this is your first meeting' or 'What are you particularly interested in from today's agenda?' This is dependent on the size of the meeting, of course.

Once attendees start joining, your assistant should mute everyone's microphones and disable cameras. These should be disabled during presentations to avoid distractions. Only the people who are presenting, talking or asking a question should be visible. On some virtual meeting platforms it is possible to mute all microphones when setting up the meeting invite.

During the meeting, be aware of serial interrupters and those trying to dominate the conversation. Have zero tolerance to interruptions. When someone interrupts the dialogue, interject and redirect the conversation.

In the case of meetings, be aware of who is talking too much and who is not talking at all. Find a way of keeping everyone engaged and participative. It is probably the case that the person that is not talking has things to say, but feels drowned out by those talking all the time.

At the same time, there is some basic etiquette for attendees. These points can be read before the meeting or included in the pre meeting message to ensure everyone is aware of the rules:

- Be kind and respectful to others. Abusive language will not be tolerated.
- When joining, mute your microphone, say hello on the chat window and include your name and affiliation for everyone to know who you are.
- Ask questions in the chat window, so they can be read once the presentation is finished.

We hope that by following these simple steps, meetings and events can be more productive and enjoyable for all. Your role as facilitator is a very important one.