Best Practices for Online Meetings

Online meetings bring great benefits to groups including increased productivity, completing work more efficiently, and significant savings in travel expenses. They're also great opportunities to build engagement, trust and candor among teams.

The Alaska Synod and numerous partners welcome the use of online meetings into communication processes. Here are some tips to ensure the maximum value:

Lighting is key. Few things will ruin a video faster than a shot that is either too light or too dark. Choose a brightly lit setting, and ensure that your primary light source is even and consistent.

Keep the camera steady. Others will be better able to focus on your ideas if the video has a smooth picture quality.
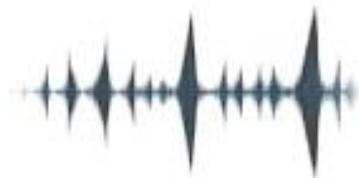
Check the acoustics of your location. Is there an echo or ambient noise? If so, try and find somewhere else to connect. Also, if your meeting agenda includes topics that are confidential, you may need to sit in a private room.

Be familiar with your online meeting tool. The "right" tool depends on your needs. Do you need to be able to see everyone's reactions as you share new ideas? Do you need everyone to be able to work on a document collaboratively? Do you need everyone to watch a presentation in real time? Does your tool include useful features like screen-sharing and recording capabilities?

Additional Ideas for Online Meeting Participants

- Know the online meeting goals. Take the time to define them for your context.

- Know / learn about the other online meeting participants. One of the keys to successfully sharing is to make sure that HOW you are sharing and WHAT you are sharing actually connects with the other participants.

- Keep your sentences and sections organized and short. Promote a "video-first" approach – when possible, use visual language to demonstrate challenges and solutions.

Additional Ideas for Online Meeting Facilitators

- Preparation
  - Conduct a test, checking connection, lighting, and sound.
  - Create a clear meeting agenda.
    - Eliminate or minimize report-outs.
    - Allow for some silent time to absorb the content.
    - Give people different tasks in the meeting, rotated regularly, such as timekeeper, note-taker, and conversation assistant.
  - Schedule the meeting and invite participants (if applicable, remember time-zones). Keep in mind: too many people and the meeting becomes ineffective and confusing.

- The Online Meeting
  - State the meeting objectives and the online meeting norms. Confirm clear lighting and sound.
  - Conduct a short icebreaker to strengthen team connection.
  - Be positive. Also, maintain a steady pace; usually, 30 to 60 minutes is a good duration to follow when conducting an online meeting.
  - Actively encourage everyone to participate. Along with collaborative problem solving, giving each person time fosters greater collaboration and helps get input from all the team members.
  - Close the online meeting with deliverables and next steps.
    - Who's responsible for following up on each item or task
    - When those deliverables are due
    - When the next meeting or check-in will be
  - Make sure that everyone has your contact information.
  - Thank everyone for their attendance.

- Follow-Up
  - Be sure to open up the "virtual floor" for questions and discussions.
  - Send a thank you email and ask for feedback.
    - Did the online meeting meet your expectations?
    - Is there anything you would like to see in a future meeting?
  - Share notes, and create a shared understanding of deliverables and next steps.