The Remote Participation Study Committee (RPSC) recognizes that hybrid meetings are more difficult to run than either fully remote or fully in-person meetings. The purpose of this hybrid participation pilot is to test both the technology and the protocol for different sizes and different types of meetings in order to learn how the Town can best support its many boards, committees, and commissions going forward.

Best Practices

1. **Communication.** We recommend that each board, committee, and commission clearly communicate its policies–both in its meeting agenda and at the start of each meeting–around its rules for public participation and what happens in the case of a technical failure and/or loss of connectivity. Send out any tips or links to technical support to remote attendees in advance in case they are not familiar with Zoom.

2. **Recording the Meeting.** We advise you to record your meetings for internal purposes; for example, to ensure accurate meeting minutes. Recordings will be stored in the Town's Zoom accounts for a limited time as recording storage is limited. Note that these recordings may be subject to Public Records requests under Massachusetts Law. Finally, the Open Meeting Law requires you to note when any meeting is recorded. It should also be noted that members of the public may record meetings themselves.

3. **Meeting Chair.** The chair of any hybrid meeting must be in-person rather than remote. In cases where the usual chair is unable to participate in person for a particular meeting, we recommend that they designate an in-person member as a temporary chair.

4. **Technical Lead**. We recommend that meetings with significant membership or public participation split between in-person and remote should consider designating a co-host/technical lead who will monitor remote attendees as they join the meeting, identify raised hands during the public participation sections of the meeting, and monitor any comments submitted in the chat (if enabled). This person should have experience with Zoom, and know how to handle the physical hardware in the room (e.g., cameras, laptops, etc.). Ensure that the co-host and the chair are aligned on all expectations and individual responsibilities for how the meeting will run.

5. **Displays.** Hybrid meetings work better if both remote and in-person participants are able to see each other and any relevant visuals for the meeting. If possible, have a big screen in the front of the room with as many of the remote attendees showing on video as possible.

On the other side, make sure the remote participants are able to see the presenters along with the meeting visuals.

Decision Points

Each board, committee, and commission will need to set expectations around what hybrid participation looks like at their meetings. To that end there are a series of "decision points" that will need to be made before beginning the hybrid-participation pilot. We welcome any comments or recommendations you may have.

1. **Should you designate a co-host?** Monitoring in-person attendees and remote attendees in a hybrid meeting, as well as other remote meeting features such as chat (if enabled), can be challenging. The chair of the meeting is strongly encouraged to delegate a sufficiently trained person, whether another meeting member or staff support personnel, to manage the remote communications. The duties of this person may include allowing remote participants to enter the meeting, noting when people have their hand up to speak, monitoring remote feeds to prevent potential malicious disturbances ("Zoom bombing"), and communicating any questions that may come up in the chat function (if enabled).

2. **What happens in case of a technical failure?** Each committee is asked to create a contingency plan for what will happen in the case of a technical failure and/or loss of connectivity. Some possibilities include:

    i) **adjourning** the meeting to a pre-determined date/time;

    ii) **pausing** the meeting for a pre-determined period of time to allow travel time for any committee members and members of the public wishing to participate in order to attend the meeting in person;

    iii) **continuing** with the meeting, so long as a quorum of board, commission, or committee members are present in person.

    Your policy should be clearly communicated, both in the agenda and at the beginning of each meeting. You may wish to have different policies for different types of meetings and your policy may differ depending on whether all committee/board members are in person or some are remote. In any case, the goal is to clearly communicate the policy that is in effect for that meeting prior to its start.

3. **How do you recognize members of the public who would like to speak?** Do you require remote and in-person participants to sign up beforehand so that a speaking order can be established? Or, do you ask people to raise their hands during the meeting (both remotely and in-person) to indicate that they would like to speak? If you allow a looser model of public participation do you take turns between remote and in person participants, or do you establish some other ordering?

4. **What are the expectations for committee members?** Do you require that a quorum of committee members attend meetings in-person? And, if you do require a quorum of members in-person, do you have rules around how many in-person meetings committee members are required to attend?

5. **Zoom-Specific Decision Points**:

   a. **Do you need webinar functions?** The town has a limited number of webinar licenses. If webinar features are required, please reach out to a Town staff member for assistance.

   b. **Do you enable chat for your participants?** If chat is enabled, the chair or a designee should monitor the chat screen for contributions throughout the meeting. If you would prefer to disable chat, you should do so prior to setting up the meeting.

   c. **Will you use the waiting room feature?** If the waiting room feature is enabled, the monitor of the remote participants will need to either disable the waiting room at the start of the meeting or regularly monitor and admit new attendees throughout the course of the meeting. If you do keep the waiting room feature on during the meeting, consider enabling the *chime announce feature* that creates a noise to alert the host that someone has entered the waiting room.

   d. **Do you record the meeting for the purpose of creating meeting minutes?** If so, the chair should announce that the meeting is being recorded prior to starting the record feature.

   e. **Will attendees be muted upon entry?** Consider automatically muting participants upon entry and requiring that they unmute themselves in order to speak.

Meeting Preparation

With the help of town staff, reserve a room with the right technology to hold your meeting. Prior to the start of your first meeting you should practice with the room technology to ensure that you know how to operate it.

Ask about audio:

- Can all participants clearly hear the main speaker(s)?
- Can all participants clearly hear in-person and online participants when they make comments or ask questions?
- Does the audio set-up avoid any unpleasant audio feedback or echo for either in-person or online participants?
- Will the main speaker(s) have practice time to get comfortable with the audio system?
- Can online participants experience music and videos that in-person participants do?

Ask about video:

- Can all participants see the main speaker(s)?
- Is the speaking area marked so the main speaker(s) are consistently in the camera view for online participants?
- Can all participants see in-person and online participants when they make comments or ask questions?
- Can all participants see slides, props, and other visuals?
- Is the camera positioned so the main speaker(s) can easily make eye contact with it?
- Will the main speaker(s) be trained to look directly into the camera to give online participants the experience of eye contact and direct communication?

Accessibility:

1. If your meeting is of significant interest to the general public, request CART (Computer Aided RealTime Translation) from the MCDHH (Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing) and ASL/English Interpreters at least 2 weeks prior to your meeting.

2. Any print or electronic announcements of meetings must include a note stating that a request for ASL Interpretation must be made to the committee, commission, or board at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting. If ASL interpretation is requested by the public, contact the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (mass.gov/mcdhh).

3. Regardless of whether there are any specific requests, automatic closed captions should be enabled for each meeting. If a video is being shown make sure closed captions are enabled.

4. If you are using slides or other visual material at your meeting please read them aloud and/or describe the visual information so that blind and/or visually impaired individuals can access the information.

5. Although hybrid meetings can be more accessible than fully in-person meetings, your physical meeting site must remain handicapped accessible with ramps, working elevators, any requested accommodations, etc.

Possible Introductory Meeting Paragraph

Tonight's Meeting of the _____ is being conducted using a hybrid model on the Zoom platform. On 7/16/22, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, as acting governor, signed legislation to extend key pandemic-era accommodations, including remote local government meeting authorization, through March 31, 2023 following the same guidelines that have been in place since the COVID public health emergency was first declared in March 2020.

Before we begin, permit me to offer a few notes:

1. Persons observing or participating in the meeting may follow an agenda posted on the Town/School Department's website. Instructions on how to join the meeting, including joining the meeting without registration can also be found with the meeting notice. You are not required to register to observe or participate, but you may have limited access to functions of the Zoom platform.

2. Persons wishing to address the body either remotely or in person are reminded that you will be asked to provide your full name and address in the interests of developing a record of the meeting;

3. All participants are advised that people may be listening remotely or in person who do not provide comment, and that those persons are not required to identify themselves;

4. In case of technical failure and/or loss of connection to the remote meeting function, the meeting will_____(see Decision Points for possible choices)

5. Finally, in cases where some members of the board/committee/commission are participating remotely, all the votes for the duration of the meeting will be taken by roll call.

Additional Resources and Tips

Many organizations are working on improving the effectiveness of hybrid meetings. Here are some guides from a range of places:

Logistics and Set Up:

[MAPC: Shared Practices, Tools, and Policies for Hybrid Meeting](#)

[Considerations and Best Practices for Running a Hybrid Meeting](#)

[What it Takes to Run a Great Hybrid Meeting](#)

Facilitation Tips:

[LinkedIn's Facilitation Toolkit for Hybrid Meetings](#)

[Facilitation Tools for Hybrid Group Meetings](#)