

Tips for online meetings

Information Sheet for Parents and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs)

Many P&Cs have embraced online meetings as an efficient and effective way to conduct their business during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to consistently achieving a quorum, some P&Cs have found that online meetings have attracted new members and reinvigorated the P&C and its role in the school community.

Online meetings can operate with all attendees online or as a hybrid style – with some people meeting in-person and some online.

P&C agendas, business processes and etiquette should be followed for online meetings just as they would be for face-to-face meetings.

Considering online meetings:

The P&C should decide (and minute) its approach to online meetings. Things to consider include:

- Will the meetings be entirely online or a hybrid style, with some members attending at the school and some members online?
- Will every meeting be offered online or just some meetings? Will certain types of meetings (e.g. the Annual General Meeting or meetings at which a secret ballot is required) be held in-person only?
- What support can be made available for parents who want to be involved but don't yet have the skills or equipment to participate online?

Equipment required:

At a minimum, the P&C will need access to:

- a laptop with microphone and camera
- speakers (built-in or plug-in)
- the internet (e.g. Wi-Fi)
- an online meeting platform
- members' email addresses.

If conducting hybrid meetings, some P&Cs may decide to borrow or buy:

- a tabletop microphone
- a TV screen.

Choosing an online platform:

There are many free and paid meeting platforms available. In choosing the best platform for your P&C, you might wish to consider:

- cost
- allowable number of participants
- how easy the platform is to use
- the familiarity and/or expertise of the P&C Executive Committee or P&C members with particular platforms
- the security of links
- compatibility with a range of devices including mobile phones, tablets, laptops, desktops
- ability to screen-share
- options for voting
- other features such as the ability to 'raise your hand' and 'chat'.

Setting up online meetings

- Check that all members of the Executive Committee know how to use the chosen platform and that members are easily able to join. (Perhaps do a test run.) Create and share the meeting link with P&C members. In order to maintain a complete list of participants, it may be appropriate to invite prospective members to register to receive the online meeting link (e.g. by emailing the Secretary).
- Before the meeting begins, all participants should check their internet connectivity and that the online platform works on their computer/device (including speakers and microphone).
- Consider what will display on participants' screens during the meeting. Should a person be on camera as they speak? Will the agenda and key documents be shared on the screen during the meeting?

Hosting online meetings

The President and/or Secretary (or nominated person):

- Identifies members present (through a roll call if necessary), noting that in some instances, the name appearing on the screen may not be the person attending. (Some platforms can generate an attendance list.).
- Spend a few minutes at the start of the meeting explaining meeting etiquette and key features of the platform being used e.g. mute, camera on/off, who can vote, how voting will occur, what to do if connectivity is lost.
- Know who is eligible to vote on motions.
- Monitor attendance to ensure a quorum is maintained throughout the meeting.
- Ensure everyone is given the opportunity to voice their opinion (including to constructively object) on agenda topics.
- Ensure motions are clearly worded and understood by members before voting.
- Monitor chat functionality and draw attention to matters raised in the chat as appropriate.

Meeting etiquette for members

- Mute your microphone when not speaking to prevent background noise and feedback.
- If using the camera, be aware of your background. Consider a plain or virtual background to avoid distractions. Turn the camera off if you are eating.
- If available, use the 'raise hand' function to get the Chairperson's attention.
- Speak clearly into the microphone.
- Use the chat function to ask questions or advise meeting facilitators of any issues, noting this can be viewed by everyone.
- If you need to leave the meeting early, advise the Secretary at the commencement of the meeting or through the chat function.
- Do not record meetings using any type of device. The Secretary will minute meetings.
- Always act according to the P&C's Code of Conduct.

Connectivity issues

- The meeting agenda should indicate what to do if there are connectivity issues (e.g. leave the meeting and re-click on the meeting link to re-join).
- In some cases, turning cameras off can improve connectivity.

Voting

While voting options will depend on the platform chosen:

- If available, the 'raise hand' (or similar) function, or a note in the chat, could be used for voting.
- Depending on the number of members present, rather than asking people to vote in favour of a motion, it may be appropriate for the President (or Chairperson) to ask that only people who object to a motion or who wish to abstain from voting respond, e.g. "Does anyone wish to register their objection or abstain from voting for this motion?".
- For more sensitive matters, an electronic survey/poll could be conducted during the meeting, or members could be asked to text or email their vote to a nominated scrutineer.

Members who don't have the equipment or skills to participate online

While most P&C members or prospective members will have access to a mobile phone, device or computer, it is important to be mindful that some people may not have the technology or confidence to use online platforms.

P&Cs can consider:

- Including in the notice of meeting (and other communications) that arrangements can be made to support anyone who needs help accessing the online meeting (e.g. help installing an app, tips on using the chosen online platform, or the opportunity to attend in person at the school, if preferred)
- Offering a pre-meeting run-through to check technology and ensure microphones, speakers and/or cameras are working.