# Online meetings in an association

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## 1. Video conferences

Measures related to the novel coronavirus have resulted, among many other things, in changes to the way in which executive committee meetings are carried out in associations. Many of us have now adapted to alternative solutions, such as digital media; video conferences are replacing real-life meetings. And we can safely assume that this type of exchange will also continue to accompany "live meetings" in the future, as a quick and uncomplicated alternative.

Online meetings should mainly be viewed as an opportunity to exchange information and hold discussions. Pure information can be passed on in other ways, such as by email, in a chat (e.g. WhatsApp) or on paper.

Video conferences of up to 5 participants are very efficient. They give everyone a chance to speak and the meeting won't last too long. But association committees often have more members than that – and, of course, video conferences are equipped to deal with bigger meetings, but they place greater demands on participants and the facilitators.

It is recommended to have facilitators to moderate video conferences. In digital communications, many non-verbal signals – signals we would notice in real life either consciously or unconsciously – often no longer apply. On a screen, we can't see what participants are doing during the meeting (checking their phones, reading a newspaper, etc.), and it is more difficult to "read" their faces, namely to gauge whether they are interested and alert or whether they are bored and have long since switched off.

Video conferences require a high degree of attention and as such can be tiring. For this reason, they should not last for longer than 1-1.5 hours. If a meeting lasts for longer than 1 hour, a short break should be factored in, giving participants the chance to stand up, stretch their legs and grab a coffee. Short but more frequent meetings are therefore popular. Since participants no longer have to travel to the meeting place, this is also easier to achieve.

Of course, the people facilitating the meeting can be rotated; to start with, it's best that those executive committee members with the most experience of moderating a meeting take on this role.

## 2. Moderation

### Preparations

Firstly, it's important to consider which tool will be used for the video conference. Colleagues may have some suggestions for this. It's key to pick a tool that can be accessed via a link (no downloads) and is easy to use. The vitamin B website contains a list of possible video conference tools, with descriptions; see https://www.vitaminb-e.ch/digital-meet-ups/.

A "fallback" channel should be set up in advance where people can find out what to do if they cannot access the video conference or are having technical problems. A WhatsApp chat, SMS or a telephone number are suitable fallback options.

The video conference should take place during a time that is quiet for all participants, during which they are unlikely to be disturbed by children, partners, postal workers, etc. It is recommended that a good time be clarified in advance. The ideal time for an online meeting may be completely different than for a normal meeting.

A few days before the meeting, participants will receive an invitation, for example by email. This will contain:

- The time and duration of the meeting
- The link to the tool or meeting (including brief instructions if necessary)
- Information about the fallback channel
- A list of items to be discussed, with priority items highlighted (which items absolutely must be discussed? What could be postponed if necessary?)
- Any written information to be prepared

It is also recommended to suggest a few rules when sending the video conference invitation and to ask for feedback thereon (see below).

Other preparatory measures include preparing any digital information that may be shown in the meeting.

### Tasks of the facilitators during the video conference

The facilitators should be logged into the meeting room a few minutes before the meeting starts, ready to welcome participants or help anyone having difficulties joining.

The facilitators could have different responsibilities: for example, one facilitator for content-related matters and the other for technical issues. In this case, there will be a facilitator dedicated exclusively to helping any participants having technical difficulties, for example (by running the fallback channel), or including any presentations/written materials during the meeting as needed, thus relieving the burden on the other facilitator(s).

Tasks of the facilitators during the meeting:
− Taking care of the content of the meeting: achieving objectives in the time prescribed

− Structuring: items to be discussed / time schedule ("time keeper")

− Encouraging exchanges in the group, permitting discussions. Giving specific participants the floor in the case of many or very active participants.

− Encouraging quieter participants to talk.

− Asking for clarification with regard to any uncertainties or misunderstandings.

− Regularly summarising the findings, more frequently than in "live meetings".

− Providing brief overviews every now and again (what has been achieved? What is next?)

− Creating a feeling of social cohesion, i.e. reassuring colleagues that they are not alone with any problems.

Of course, minutes should also be taken of online meetings. This task is best assigned in advance.


## "Rules"

The following rules are recommended for ensuring a structured, understandable and efficient video conference:

− It is important in this type of discussion that we pay attention to others and let each other finish speaking.

− Those listening and not currently talking should "mute" themselves during the meeting, namely by turning their microphone off. This will also eliminate any background noise.

− Those who wish to speak should put their hand up (wave or use the appropriate tool function). As a facilitator, I will give them this opportunity as soon as possible and ask them to speak.

− Please speak briefly and succinctly.

− As a facilitator, I will ensure that everyone has the chance to speak.

− As always, as a moderator I need to keep an eye on time and keep track of what is going on.