Working Remotely – Top Tips

It is now essential for many of us to work remotely and connect with each other using collaborative tools such as Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, Zoom or Skype. These tools can be used for meetings with team members, project team meetings, steering group meetings and also for meetings with our wider networks.

Based upon the TEC Team's experience of remote working and some of the best practice guidance that is now online for staff working remotely – here are our top tips for you:

Regular meetings – team meetings – project meetings

Scheduling

- Ensure that the link to join the virtual meeting is included in the calendar invite that is sent to everyone who is required to attend.
- As some people may only be able to join the meeting by telephone, make sure that you include audio only options (dial in numbers and meeting numbers) in the joining instructions.
- Test calls - this is important to do if it is the first time that some attendees are joining virtually. Schedule a time a few days in advance of the meeting to allow people to join for a short test call. This will help to reduce time spent on scheduled calls doing basic tech checks.

Basic tips for the meeting Chair:

- o Share meeting documents, including an agenda, in advance – just as you would do for a face to face meeting. If appropriate, use the file share options included in your software package.
- o The meeting Chair should launch the meeting 5 minutes ahead of scheduled time.
- o Ask attendees to be ready to start at the scheduled time – in practice this means they should launch the meeting a few minutes ahead of the start time.
- o Cameras on or off? It is always good to see your colleagues, especially when there are fewer opportunities to meet in person. One option is to have cameras on for the first 5 minutes while everyone arrives and says hello.

- o Recording the meeting – consider if this is necessary. If you plan to record the meeting, make sure that all attendees are aware of this and consent.
- o Ask attendees to introduce themselves and then mute their microphone until they need to speak / ask a question, etc.

- Remind attendees to keep their presentations to time – give them a timing and ask them to have the documents open on their own computer so that they can screen share when their agenda items are being discussed.
- Questions – advise attendees how to alert you, as Chair, to when they want to speak / ask a question e.g. they could type a question into the Chat box (in GoToMeeting, Skype and Zoom) or you could ask them to wait until a point in the meeting where you will invite comments / questions. At that point, you can go round meeting attendees and ask them for their views / questions, etc.

Tips for meeting attendees:
- Launch the meeting a few minutes ahead of its scheduled start time.
- Use a headset to reduce background noise.
- To make a comment or ask a question, please follow the Chair's instructions – e.g. wait until you are asked for your inputs or type your questions / comment into the meeting Chat function, etc.

Meeting Format

- **Introductions** - these meetings are typically with people who know one another, however, it is still important to take a couple of minutes at the start of the call to introduce all those who have joined the call and check in with everyone.
- **Facilitator** - If your meeting is larger e.g. more than 8 people joining, it is helpful assign a facilitator in addition to the meeting Chair. As all these software tools have a chat function, the Chair can encourage colleagues to jot down observations or questions in the Chat to be picked up by the facilitator during the meeting. The facilitator can keep in touch with multiple attendees using the chat function and pause the speaker if clarifications need to be made.
- **Agenda** - Virtual meetings work much better if you keep to a structure. Once everyone has said hello, quickly run through the agenda noting any pauses for discussion and when you wish to encourage contributions.
- **Cameras on or cameras off?** Having cameras on can be useful to help keep focus and avoid multitasking. However, video may stress home bandwidth so a happy medium is to switch cameras off for the bulk of the meeting - when screen sharing documents or presentations. Cameras may be switched back on for the final 10 minutes discussion and AOB.
- **Duration of meeting** - Think about the agenda and length of call. It can be more difficult to concentrate during virtual meetings so keep them as short and concise as you can. Plan a 5 minute comfort break if the meeting is going to be more than 2 hours duration.
- **Purpose of meeting** - Are you using this call to review a document? To review regular work plans / agree next steps? Or, to start a conversation e.g. about potential collaboration? Encourage attendees to try out the tools that the meeting software includes e.g. raising a hand or polling.
- **Multi-site / multi-stakeholder meetings** - go to each site / stakeholder (don't skip anyone) in turn at regular points during the meeting to check in for comments, questions and any other business.

- **Concluding the meeting** - in the last few minutes aim to quickly review any decisions or key actions. These can be written up and circulated, as for in-person meetings, and / the meeting recording can also be circulated.