



Conducting Polls During Virtual Meetings

One of the best ways to engage participants and learn more about them during virtual meetings is to conduct polls. Polls also have the advantage of providing a safe space for people to share their responses anonymously without risk or judgment from peers or bosses.

Almost every virtual meeting platform includes a polling feature, and several online subscription-based polling applications are available. These tools are typically simple for facilitators to set up and easy for participants to use.

Here are some polling best practices:

1. Establish your objective. Think about why you are asking people to participate, and what you are going to do with the responses.
2. Practice the polling feature with your platform in advance. You'll want to be comfortable with setting up and conducting the poll. Some platforms do not allow you to prepare your poll in advance and save it, requiring you to keep the meeting room open to avoid losing the poll. Often the facilitator view is different from the participant view, so be sure to check out how everyone will see the results.
3. Use an external polling application. Most are subscription-based and some are available at no cost. You set up the poll in advance and then share a link with participants. Provide clear instructions and consider sharing your screen or pushing results to a slide if individuals cannot see the results on their device. Remember to leave time for people to access the external application and then to respond. This may take longer than a poll integrated into your platform.
4. Go low tech. If you don't have access to polling through your platform or a cloud-based application, then go low tech. A simple way to quickly gather information is to post your question in a slide and ask participants to respond in the chat. Just remember, their responses will not be anonymous.
5. Ask clear and simple questions, and be sure you are only asking one question at a time. Beware of the word "and" in a question, for example: "Should we add more time for discussion and breaks?"
6. Determine how many questions you will ask over the duration of the meeting, and clearly indicate the timing in your process agenda. Polling can be an effective tool to engage your participants, so space your polls throughout the meeting to increase participant interaction.
7. Provide clear instructions about where and how to enter responses. Consider displaying an instruction slide.
8. Think about how and when you want to show poll results. Most platforms allow you to show results as percentage figures or absolute numbers, so select what is most appropriate for your purpose.
9. Respond to the results. If you are asking participants for feedback so you can fine-tune the meeting, be sure to modify your process or content to meet their needs.
10. Make your polls enjoyable and meaningful to your participants. That will help keep your response rate high (and will keep participants coming back for another great virtual meeting experience with you).

Uses for polls and sample questions:

- **Icebreakers:** Warm up the crowd by asking participants to solve a riddle or share something about themselves.

Examples:

- ▷ What do you see out your window?
- ▷ What, besides the usual things you would find on a desk, do you have near your workspace for comfort?
- ▷ What is your favorite music genre for long drives? (You could have participants select from a list of options.)

- **Pulse checks:** Ask about participants' level of knowledge, experience, or readiness.

Examples:

- ▷ When I think about [the meeting topic], I feel (excited about the possibilities, fine, underwhelmed, like I want to run).
- ▷ At this point I am (prepared to move on, hoping for more discussion, unsure about where we are).

- **Prioritizing:** Ask participants to pick their top (three or four) topics from a list of choices and address the one with the most votes first.

Example:

Choose your top three topics:

- ▷ Adaptation Strategies
- ▷ Coastal Storms
- ▷ Ecosystem Services
- ▷ Natural Infrastructure
- ▷ Risk Communication
- ▷ Vulnerability Assessments

- **Decision-making:** List options and have participants vote on their top choice.

Example:

Given our discussion, which outreach strategy would you like to implement?

- ▷ A booth at the festival
- ▷ Social media blast
- ▷ Podcast
- ▷ T-shirts

- **Learning “activators”:** Engage participants in activities during or after presentations and to check for understanding.

Examples:

- ▷ List one key take-away from the presentation.
- ▷ Select the first step in developing a risk-communication plan.
- ▷ Answer which of the following tasks is NOT the role of the communications team.
- ▷ Type in a response to a question and wait for facilitator to ask everyone to click “Enter” at the same time.