

Online Collaboration Tools & Tips

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click on the Hyperlink/Bookmark to navigate through the document

ONLINE COLLABORATION TOOLS

- [Video-Teleconferencing Platforms](#)
- [Online Canvas \(Sticky Wall\) Platforms](#)
- [Document Sharing and Co-Creating](#)
- [Audience Engagement Applications for Meetings & Workshops](#)

QUESTIONS & TIPS FOR FACILITATING ONLINE

- [Best Practice for a Good Online Experience](#)
- [How can you plan for or minimize challenges with bandwidth?](#)
- [How does preparatory time for online offerings compare to in person sessions?](#)
- [How to facilitate communication in the group to reduce participants speaking over one another?](#)
- [If you want to take visible notes for the group as the discussion continues, what's the best option?](#)
- [How do you get to the point of being an accomplished online facilitator?](#)
- [Other potential ideas \(depending on the audience\)](#)

Attribution: This is a curated and edited list of the tools, questions & tips co-created during five, one-hour online sessions with a total of 76 participants in late March 2020 through [ICA Associates](#). The original list was documented from these sessions by JO'Leary; this current version was edited for relevancy to the Medical Laboratory Professionals learning community. The list is in no way comprehensive as there are many other online tools, tips and resources for online facilitators/teachers. I hope this is a helpful starting point.

ONLINE FACILITATION TOOLS:

Video-Teleconferencing Platforms

- Zoom <https://zoom.us/>
- GoTo Meeting <https://www.gotomeeting.com>
- WebEx <https://www.webex.com/>
- Microsoft Teams – Office 365 Teamwork Hub which allows group Chat & Collaboration

Check your Learning Management System as several have built in video/teleconferencing collaboration platforms e.g BlackBoard Collaborate

Online Canvas (Sticky Wall) Platforms

- Linoit – <http://linoit.com/>
 - Only the host pays. Inexpensive (e.g. ~\$4.50 CDN/mo)
 - Participants are invited to the canvas by the host and must only sign in/create a user ID
 - Using Linoit, for example, several working groups (e.g.breakout groups on Zoom) have their own canvas to work on. Items from each breakout canvas can be copied to a main canvas for all participants to review, cluster, work with etc.
 - Stickies can be different colours, different fonts, sized texts, include symbols (e.g. for naming cards in consensus workshop method). Can be moved, sorted, resized etc. to serve whatever purpose.
- Miro – formerly Real Time Board <https://miro.com/>
 - Beautiful boards, a bit smoother operation than Linoit
 - Each participant needs their own account
 - Increased cost over Linoit
- Trello: Useful for action planning and project planning. www.trello.com
 - Anyone can sign up for a free account
 - Once others have the account you can invite them to join a project
 - All see the same Trello board and contribute to it together
- Mural – online brainstorming, synthesis & collaboration <https://mural.co/>
- Stormz – “Meeting Software for Demanding Facilitators”: supports collaborative meetings <https://stormz.me/en>
- Stormboard – “Make your Meetings Better” – supports online idea gathering, prioritization, organization and refinement <https://stormboard.com/>
- Google Jam Board – easy, post it/sticky board part of the Google Suite of options

Document Sharing and Co-Creating

- Google Suite – Use Google Docs (Word) to allow anyone with the link to work together on a single document; Sheets (Excel) and Slides (Powerpoint)
- Microsoft Teams - Office365 and OneNote allows a similar option to GoogleDocs. Useful within an organization where all are on the same system; however, can invite external participants.

Audience Engagement Applications for Meetings & Workshops:

- Mentimeter – audience engagement, polling; presentation (Powerpoint) slide formats ready to go <https://www.mentimeter.com/>
- Polleverywhere – audience engagement, polling; presentation (Powerpoint) slide formats ready to go <https://www.polleverywhere.com/>
- Slido – audience engagement, polling & question prioritization software – use to watch real time participant interest in audience questions <https://www.sli.do/>
- Kahoot - audience engagement, polling. Fun, colourful, casual <https://kahoot.com/>
- Lean Coffee Table - supports discussions by allowing people to generate topics, vote for which ones are of interest to discuss, put topic on the table for a defined period of time, re-polls individuals to see if the group wants additional time to continue talking about the topic or not and offers an option to note action items during the discussion and generate an exportable record of the discussions. <https://www.leancoffeetable.com/tour>

QUESTIONS & TIPS FOR FACILITATING ONLINE

- **Best Practice for a Good Online Experience**
 - A headset with microphone provides the best sound, reducing ambient noise
 - Have video on at start of meeting at minimum to allow participants to see and meet one another during the introductions/check in
 - Have participants mute their microphones until they are speaking to minimize background noise in the background.
 - Discuss Ground Rules to start to minimize distractions in team members e.g. please silence notifications, please keep video on, etc.
- **How can you plan for or minimize challenges with bandwidth?**
 - Video chat relies on the stability of participants' internet
 - Offer an opportunity/practice session for participants to check out their connection
 - Ethernet connections (direct hardwire of internet into computer) are typically more stable than wifi
 - Should there be interruptions during the meeting, choose to ask participants to turn off video function and use audio only
 - Get people with low bandwidth to call in on telephone. In advance of the meeting email any materials such as the presentation including templates, guiding questions, prompts etc. This will allow them to follow along as they are on the call; they can then see, hear, and participate in the discussion. NOTE: Check to ensure there is a local or toll free number so participants don't receive unexpected phone charges
- **How does preparatory time for online offerings compare to in person sessions?**
 - A lot of preparation ahead of time (especially if you need to coach participants on the technology and such)
 - It is not unexpected to double the prep time when delivering material for the first time
 - Requires additional time up front to think through engagement strategies, test them out, determine producing role etc.

- **How to facilitate communication in the group to reduce participants speaking over one another?**
 - Set the expectations at the start as to how this is going to happen. Suggestions include:
 - Call on individuals in order (group list, arrival in room, alphabetical order)
 - Give timeframes for contribution – i.e. 1-2 sentences to reply, or 60 seconds each etc.
 - Have participants raise their hand either virtually (In Zoom – Participants – Raise Hand function) or literally on video when they wish to contribute
 - Create norm to state when you are finished e.g. by saying “done”, “over and out”, “pineapple” or any other agreed upon word
 - Use Zoom tools – thumbs up, raise hand etc. to show agreement, ask a question
 - Use Chat feature to take questions or invite comments

- **If you want to take visible notes as the facilitator for the group as the discussion continues, what's the best option?**
 - Google docs to note take in live time - share screen and participants will see notes being made
 - Scribe participant comments in the Chat
 - For the adventurous: Graphic facilitation e.g. using Procreate on iPad

- **How do you get to the point of being an accomplished online facilitator?**
 - Practice with tools ahead of time – especially breakout groups, polling, sharing documents etc.
 - Practice with colleagues before facilitating with participants so you can see what the experience is like for them
 - Get more exposure and experience by volunteering to support others (act as their producer)
 - Talk to other facilitators, learn with and from others.

- **Other potential ideas depending on the audience:**
 - Draw participants name from a hat to keep them on their toes as to when they are going to need to contribute ((to manage distraction))
 - Have participants sign in on a Google doc when they arrive – call on them in that order ((to manage contributions))
 - Calling on individuals is a way to manage participants who have a tendency to "hide" - that is another reason to go around the virtual table to call on people ((to hear from all participants))
 - Invite participants to draw a table and put the names of all participants as they do the check in around the table drawing ((helps to visualize the number of participants ~ share the air time))
 - ELMO: “Enough Let’s Move On” ((for participants to type in chat when they want to move on to the next topic – helpful during time constraints)). Lisette Sutherland, CollaborationSuperPowers.com
 - WAIT: “Why am I talking?” can be offered as a reminder to self to think before sharing