![Monash Partners — Academic Health Science Centre logo]

Remote Consumer and Community Involvement during COVID-19

Online communication technology such as Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams is an excellent way to continue to connect with consumers while physical distancing measures are in place.

More generally, online technology allows for a reduction in travel time and costs for consumers, while providing an opportunity to connect with those who may find it challenging to attend meetings in-person due to time, carer, work or other commitments.

Below are some useful tips to assist health professionals and researchers in continuing to connect with consumers.

1. Consider the type of internet consumers have access to (e.g. NBN, Wi-Fi, phone hot spot) and their familiarity with online technology. Choose an online technology that is most suitable for your audience.

2. Check the needs of your group and discuss ways that enable participation. Determine how familiar consumers are with the program you are using beforehand and their confidence in using technology more generally. When working with consumers less familiar with technology, schedule a pre-meeting test run and/or provide them with information and videos to help get started. Always consider those with hearing/vision impairments or other factors affecting their ability to be involved.

3. Consider the time required for the online meeting/activity, what will work best to maintain engagement levels, and if any breaks are needed. Zoom meetings with the free version have a limit of 40 minutes. Meetings/activities between 30-60 minutes is a general guide.

4. Some people may be nervous using online technology. Try to create ways for consumers to feel comfortable in online groups, such as facilitating a casual conversation or informal warm-up activity at the start of the meeting. Allow for different ways for consumers to participate, such as using chat and annotation functions available in some programs.

5. Provide consumers with an agenda or overview ahead of the meeting, outlining the discussion and activities to take place. This can help consumers feel more prepared and at ease.

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6. As the host, it can be helpful to arrive in the online meeting early to greet people and make them feel welcome as they log in. Allow five minutes at the start of the scheduled meeting to assist everyone to log in and familiarise them with the technology.

7. Create opportunities for everyone to speak or participate in the meeting; plan ahead for ways you can enable each consumer to share their thoughts and ideas. This may be through actively facilitating turns for each consumer to have input or having consumers provide ideas and feedback using chat or polling functions.

8. Consider recording your meetings. Recording meetings can ease the burden of taking notes, but remember all recordings need meeting participants' consent. If recording is not possible, have a person attend to take notes, as it can be challenging to host a meeting and keep notes at the same time.

9. As the host, it can be more difficult to gauge the informal ways we often get feedback through face-to-face communication, e.g. facial expressions, body language, acknowledging gestures and comments. Remember online is a different form of communication, with many benefits such as chat functions, annotations, voting and polling. Plan fun and creative ways to allow people to contribute both formally and informally throughout the meeting.

10. Follow-up with consumers after the meeting to share outcomes and next steps. This is a great opportunity to ask for people's thoughts and experiences of the online meeting and receive feedback.

"Create opportunities for everyone to speak or participate in the meeting."

Further support and advice

Register your project via **the Research Advice Form.**

For further questions on Consumer and Community Involvement and how it can improve your research outcomes contact **Darshini Ayton** or **Sandra Braaf.**