Holding Accessible and Inclusive Hybrid Meetings

As many organizations are transitioning back to an in-office work environment, opportunities may still arise for meetings to be hybrid. A *hybrid meeting* involves a mixture of in-person and remote attendees. To ensure that all participants are equally included in the conversation, have access to the material needed, and the meeting is successful, the hybrid meeting should be fully inclusive. Hybrid meetings can help to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities, students who would have to travel too far to attend an in-person meeting, older persons,' and many other individuals. Hybrid meetings are a great way to guarantee that your meeting is available to everyone attending. Below are some considerations for hosting inclusive hybrid meetings.

Before the Meeting

Meeting spaces may need to be upgraded to best support hybrid meetings. Modern meeting rooms for hybrid meetings will rely on technology more than traditional meeting spaces. Connectivity, video, and sound are essential. A microphone that is not sensitive to background noise and can tell who is speaking, on a desk or ceiling, will ensure remote attendees don't miss a word. Remote attendees, however, will typically use a laptop or desktop as their window into the meeting room. To connect with their remote colleagues, in-person attendees will use a tabletop screen that combines video and audio or a central video conference screen. To ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in the discussion, contribute their ideas, and see meeting materials, consider the below.

- o **Plan times that are convenient for as many people as possible:** Add other time zones to your calendar, especially if you know that remote attendees are based in a different location.
- o **Send out an agenda:** Let people know at least 24 hours in advance what the meeting will be about - such as, "This meeting will be successful if we establish two locations for the upcoming gala" - so that all participants can prepare ahead of time.
- o **Make RSVPs location-specific:** Prompt attendees to respond whether they will attend in the meeting room or if they will be joining virtually. An easy way to do this when using Outlook is by adding a poll to the invitation. When you add a poll to the invitation, you can add the options of "virtual," or "in-person."
- o **Assign a person to monitor tech:** The tech person can ensure that closed captioning is available (when necessary), the brightness of the screen for the in-person attendees is high, translated captions are available online if required, and outside noises (such as beeping when a message comes through) do not interfere with the sound of the colleagues on video.

- o **Multiply your feedback options:** Many people do not feel comfortable speaking up in meetings, or physically cannot speak during meetings, so make sure they know they can use the chat feature or use the poll feature to get everyone involved. These features should be set up or reviewed ahead of time, to ensure they can be properly used during the meeting.

During the Meeting

A lot of work needs to be done prior to hosting a hybrid meeting to ensure that it can be accessed properly. Nonetheless, there are still things to be considered during the meeting to include remote and in-person attendees.

- **Rotate facilitator and note-taker roles:** Having team members alternate roles lessens the burden on one person and gives everyone a chance to participate more fully. Additionally, having a facilitator assigned can create an organized meeting, ensuring that side conversations in the room don't overpower the meeting or remote attendees.
- **Use virtual whiteboards (if any):** By using Jamboard, Zoom, and other options, remote attendees can also view and contribute to the joint whiteboard. Using a virtual whiteboard also allows for the option of accessibility features, such as a screen reader.
- **Set the camera up for optimal viewing:** Ensure that the computer desktop or laptop is set in an area for remote attendees to see all participants in the room, as best as possible. Using a screen large enough for online participants to be seen in the room is beneficial as well. This can be done through a projector, a screen that pulls down in the conference room, or a large desktop monitor. For the remote attendees, choose gallery mode, so all attendees will show on screen if their camera is on. For participants who depend on lipreading, ensuring they have full access to all participants is key to their equal participation.
- **Add extra efforts for remote attendees:** Constantly monitor the chat window for questions or shared insights. During the meeting, record it to be shared with participants that couldn't attend as well as to participants in case they missed something. Turn on live transcriptions to ensure that each virtual participant has the ability to hear or read the transcript as it occurs. Having someone in the room tasked with raising their hand when the online participants speak will also ensure that their remarks do not get ignored. If someone isn't monitoring the chat box, then their voices will be lost with the in-person remarks.

After the Meeting

After the meeting is over, it is still important to make certain that remote attendees and in-person attendees have equal access to the materials. In order to facilitate collaboration and achieve the meeting goals, you should ensure that equal access continues even after your meeting.

- **Finish strong:** Allow five minutes toward the end of the meeting for questions, comments, or concerns. While attendees are asking questions, drop the next steps into the chat box and reiterate them out loud for the in-person attendees.
- **Stay organized:** After a meeting, if you're using Teams or Zoom, the transcription, chat, recording and files will be saved automatically. Storing these files in a folder where those who need access are able to see them will create an organized way of maintaining the records.

- **Avoid the "post-meeting meeting":** Prior to the meeting ending, identify action points for all attendees while all are present. Avoiding discussion regarding the meeting and next steps after the meeting ends ensures that all attendees have equal access to the information and that those who are off-site do not miss out on vital information and collaboration. Often, when in-person meetings end, attendees may discuss the next steps, have realizations for future tasks, or take additional steps related to the discussion. When this happens after a hybrid meeting, only those in-person have access to this information. When the hybrid meeting ends, close the meeting out and offer for attendees to send a message or email regarding any post-meeting realizations to all attendees.