Virtual events

HANDBOOK

For more information please contact the Events and Domestic Protocol team.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVENTS AND DOMESTIC PROTOCOL SERVICE OFFERINGS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPES OF VIRTUAL EVENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing factors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitability</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous protocol</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST PRACTISE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/Format</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting in a virtual space</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATFORMS: ZOOM MEETINGS VS ZOOM WEBINARS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATIONS AND REGISTRATIONS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FURTHER RESOURCES AND TRAINING</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Virtual events are events that are held in a virtual environment through use of the internet rather than a physical location. They can be used in place of or with an in-person event.

Macquarie University has a number of online platforms available for staff to use when running virtual events including Zoom, Echo 360 and Microsoft Teams. The Events and Domestic Protocol team recommends the use of Zoom Meetings and Zoom Webinar. While this guide contains some general strategic advice and recommendations for virtual events, our support offering has a focus on Zoom products.

All staff have individual access to Echo 360, Zoom Meetings and Microsoft Teams. Access to Zoom Webinars requires a specific licence, which the Events and Domestic Protocol team and a few other stakeholders within the University have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENTS AND DOMESTIC PROTOCOL (EDP)</th>
<th>SERVICE OFFERINGS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SERVICE LEVEL</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUDGET</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAT</td>
<td>Basic lecture presentation with possible Q&amp;A and polls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUDIENCE</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE/REPUTATIONAL RISK</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDED PLATFORM</td>
<td>Zoom Meetings (300 capacity) or Zoom Webinar (500 capacity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TYPES OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR OBJECTIVES, CONTENT AND AUDIENCE?

WEBINAR
Webinars typically last from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Holding webinars virtually allow local and international audiences to join in and listen as one or more speakers present the content. Webinars can either be ticketed using online payment services or free to access, they can be available privately to a select group or public for all. They typically use video conferencing tools to present live to your audience, utilising functionality such as Q&A. Sessions can be recorded to share afterwards.

ON-DEMAND EVENT/CONTENT
On-demand videos allow attendees to watch content at their own pace. The presenter has greater control over the video as it is prerecorded and can be edited. This form of virtual event delivery limits the connection with the audience; it and does not allow interaction or participation by the viewer.

Zoom also provides the option to schedule a webinar with registration and record the webinar automatically in the cloud. After the webinar, registration will stay open and anyone who registers will receive a link to the cloud recording. The host will receive registration information for live attendees and others who register to watch it later.

LIVE STREAM EVENT
Live streaming is the broadcast of a live recording of content. This could be a debate, lecture, performance, interview etc. As audiences are experiencing the content live they are able to interact with the speaker, provide comments and ask questions which may influence the conversation. You can broadcast to a private platform or to a public platform such as Facebook live, or YouTube. Audiences don’t expect live streams to be as polished as traditional edited videos; however, such events still need to be presented professionally as a representation of the University brand. Audiences like the fact that live stream feels more authentic and it creates a stronger feeling of connection with one another. Watching a stream live can be a communal experience, especially if you encourage audience participation and feedback through the chat function.

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
Virtual conferences are built around a live, complex agenda that includes keynotes, sessions, breakouts and more. They include multi-session content and can involve virtual networking and engagement tools. The conference can be made up of a series of webinars, on-demand video content and live streamed sessions. Virtual conferences are generally longer than webinars and can extend over multiple days. For this reason it is particularly important to create variety and include audience participation to maintain engagement for the duration of the conference.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS
Planning and running a virtual event involves many different factors from those of a face-to-face event. Following are some things for you to consider.

BENEFITS
• **Reduced cost** – no catering, venue hire or print costs. Save on speaker travel costs.
• **Attendee accessibility** – accommodates attendees who are usually unable to attend in person, either due to limited time or location. Through use of public broadcast platforms and social media there is the potential to reach a wider audience.
• **Convenience** – without the need to travel to and from the event, attendees can more easily fit the virtual event into their schedule.
• **Access to high-level international speakers** – there is the potential to live stream international speakers when they are not available to attend in person.
• **Data collection** – by using an online platform there is greater potential to collect information about your attendees, in comparison to physical events.
• **Can be prerecorded** – prerecorded video content allows greater control over the delivery. You can edit, edit and reshoot until you are happy that the result achieves the intended message and tone.
• **Recording of event/shareable content** – recording the event means that you have re-usable and sharable content to extend your audience reach and reference in the future.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS
• **Time zones** – consider when the best time to hold the event is, based on the location/s of your target audience. If the locations are too varied to accommodate all, consider the potential of a live stream event with the recording shared post event so registrants can consume at a time that suits.
• **Resources** – ensure you have resources with sound technical ability/understanding to support organising and running the virtual event. You will need to allow for potentially one or more co-hosts, separate to any presenters, that will play a role of monitoring questions from the audience and managing the participants. (They do not need to have experience in virtual events or webinars; however, a general knack for use of technology and software is helpful.) Please refer to page 11 for training and tutorial resources.
  
  Note: Only Macquarie University staff can be the host or alternate host. External speakers can a be co-host, panellist or participant.
• **Technical issues** – as virtual events rely heavily on technology it is possible that something might not go to plan. A speaker’s microphone might drop out or a presenter’s wi-fi connection might be weak, causing an interruption in the flow of the event.
  
  – Ensure you schedule a rehearsal ahead of time to practice the flow and format of the event as well as test the technical set-up of each presenter. Consider providing speakers with detailed instructions on how the virtual event will run and a basic set-up guide.
  
  – Consider having a short video to play while a potential speaker corrects any technical issues. It is not recommended to prerecord content using Zoom as the quality and buffering is unstable. To ensure the highest quality use of videos it is best practice to embed a downloaded video file rather than running the video directly from a link to the internet.
• **International blocks and access** – consider if international audiences will have any restrictions in accessing your choice of virtual platform.
• **Internet connection** – Before hosting a virtual event, you should check that your internet connection meets the recommended bandwidth requirements. You can do this using a site like [Speedtest](http://www.speedtest.net). The bandwidth used by Zoom will be optimised for the best experience based on your network. The system will automatically adjust for 3G, wi-fi or wired connections. The recommended bandwidth for hosting/presenting with camera for Zoom is 10 Mbps (up/down). If your internet connection reading is lower than this, then it might be better to consider streaming from a location on campus.
  
  Note: During COVID-19 restrictions please seek pre-approval from your department Dean to be on campus.
• **Time frame** – have you made allowance to open registrations and market the virtual event 4–6 weeks prior (depending on the commitment required)? You will also need to allow time for the creation of your registration page, potential website, restructure of content suitable for a virtual space and rehearsals.
  
  Note: If you wish to hold a Zoom Webinar you will need to check that your specific date and time is available to use the Events and Domestic Protocol team’s licence.
SUITABILITY
Not all physical events will be suitable to hold as a virtual event. Consider the below factors to decide if your event objectives can be successfully achieved in a virtual space.

- What is your event objective?
- Do you want to share knowledge and information, or are you trying to collaborate and connect?
- Do you want attendees to be able to communicate with one another?
- Is networking a priority?
- Can your agenda be effectively translated to a virtual setting?
- Who is the audience? Do they have access to the technology needed and the skills to use it?
- What do you want to gain?
- What do you want the audience to take away from the session?
- What does success look like to you?
- Would these objectives be more successfully achieved using another form of communication such as video, infographic, eDM, article, social media campaign or podcast?

INDIGENOUS PROTOCOL
If you are including an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of your virtual event, you will need to adapt your statement to the specific location. As virtual events are held online and can be across various spaces the below provides two suitable phrases that incorporate the entirety of Australia.

“Macquarie University would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their culture and Elders past, present and future.”

or

“On behalf of this gathering, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Elders past, present and emerging.”
ENGAGEMENT

Engaging attendees through virtual events is more difficult and requires creative thinking to make an impact and maintain interest. Consider incorporating some of the below ideas.

- **Polling** – Can be used as an ice breaker, to gather information and opinions or to tailor the content to the audience. Ask attendees what they want to hear about and receive instant feedback after each session or speaker. Polling engages the audience by asking them to actively consider a question and provide an instant decision.

  - **TIP:** build a ‘poll’ slide into your presentation deck so you don’t forget to launch the poll.

- **Breakout sessions** – only available in Zoom Meetings. Breakout sessions allow attendees to break into smaller groups for interactive exercises or discussions. The host can either select these groupings manually or have them automatically selected at random. Consider if each breakout group requires a moderator to keep conversations flowing, depending on the purpose of the session.

  - Consider breaking attendees into groups, giving them something to think about, have them discuss the topic within their session and then rejoin the main meeting to share with the whole group.
  - If you wish to include a networking segment to your event, breakout sessions could be scheduled during breaks for attendees to chat among themselves. To encourage and ease flow of conversation consider providing a topic or question to discuss.

  - **Note:** It is not possible to record breakout rooms in Zoom, only the main meeting session.

- **Screen sharing** – Screen sharing allows the audience to see an exact mirror of the presenter’s or host’s individual screen desktop. This is used to display presentations, infographics or documents during the virtual event. The speaker is in control of the progression of slides and can select a specific application window to share. It is best practice to share an application window rather than a section of your screen.

  - You will need to select ‘share computer sound’ from the pop-up settings if you are sharing a video with audio.
  - Ensure all material being presented is downloaded to the desktop rather than presented from cloud-based storage.
  - If you need to present content it is recommended that you do so from a desktop or laptop rather than iPad/tablet device.

- **Q&A** – only available in Zoom Webinar. The Question and Answer feature allows attendees to ask questions during the webinar and for the panellists, co-hosts and host to answer their questions. If you wish for attendees to submit questions in Zoom Meetings this would need to be facilitated through the chat function.

  - Use the co-host to monitor submitted questions, provide text responses for any admin questions and confirm which will be answered live.

- **Chat** – The chat function allows attendees to either chat with the host or other guests, publicly (everyone) or privately (individuals). You will need to allocate the chat settings depending on the structure and intention of your session. It can be useful to allow attendees to chat with hosts but you may wish to disable chat between attendees. It may be considered a negative as it can pose as a potential distraction for attendees; however, if the intention is for the audience to discuss some points among themselves during the presentation then it can be useful.

  - **Zoom Meetings tip:** Chat is the only option for attendees to submit questions so if this is required then ensure Chat is enabled.
  - **Zoom Webinar tip:** to make it easier to facilitate questions, direct attendees to only ask questions in the Q&A function rather than Chat.

  - Include elements of entertainment like a live stream or prerecorded band or performer.

- **Break the barriers** between physical and virtual events by sending attendees an e-voucher for lunch delivery or mail out a physical conference pack with tools for attendees to use during the event, ie branded stationery, workbooks and snacks.

- View a tutorial on Zoom best practices

CONTENT/FORMAT

As the energy and atmosphere of a live event is difficult to maintain in a virtual space, what you are saying and how it is presented is even more important to create a successful event. The content and format of virtual events needs to be tweaked to suit the virtual space and should not be a recycle of face-to-face event content.

- **Keep it simple,** keep it bite-sized for our ever-shortening attention spans. Make sure it’s rehearsed, make sure it’s engaging, presented by people who know how to interact with a virtual audience. But most of all, keep it varied.

- **Shorten the duration** of your sessions. Attention spans are shorter online.

- Don’t forget to **schedule breaks** for all-day conferences or ideally consider breaking it into two half-day sessions to avoid virtual overload.

- **Mix up the format,** try to include group discussions, interviews, Q&A, debates, panel discussion and lectures to maintain audience’s attention and interest.
• If the content is available in various formats ie infographic, slideshow, video, eBook, consider sharing downloadable content alongside your virtual event to extend the life of your content and achieve maximum uptake.

• Use of videos and prerecording – It is not recommended to prerecord content using Zoom as the quality and buffering is unstable. To ensure the highest quality use of videos it is best practice to embed a downloaded video file rather than running the video directly from a link to the internet.

  Note: There can be buffering issues for attendees when presenting videos virtually so if it is not necessary it may be best to leave out.

• Housekeeping – at the beginning of the session explain to attendees how the virtual event will run, including any key difference from the physical event, which functionality will be used and any directive for use. Let attendees know if the session is being recorded and if they do not wish to be recorded to turn off their camera and microphone.

• Ensure all speakers, hosts and co-hosts schedule a virtual meet-up and rehearsal in advance so that everyone is on the same page in terms of how the virtual event will flow and who will manage which tasks.

• Assign a co-host to manage the moderation of audience comments, questions and microphones. The co-host can mute any guests that have any possible distracting background audio and answer any basic audience questions and comments they know the answers to, to free up the presenter.

  Note: Co-host can be allocated to anyone and does not have to be Macquarie University staff.

• Any virtual audience participation requires a moderator or facilitator to ensure the smooth running of the session and adherence to schedule. Both facilitators and audience members need to have a clear understanding of how the interactive session will be run so make sure to share communications that explain the process.

• To avoid speakers talking over the top of each other during panel discussion ensure they are heavily moderated by the MC. Pre communicate to panellists that they are not to speak unless invited by the MC and if they want to speak otherwise to raise hand. The MC should cue to each panellist for responses and keep conversation moving.

PRESENTING IN A VIRTUAL SPACE
Audiences may switch off from virtual events that look poor in quality and aren’t engaging. Use the below tips and tricks to create a more polished and professional virtual experience for your audience.

• Ensure speakers are well rehearsed and comfortable presenting in a virtual space. It is very different to presenting content face to face. Consider having speakers record themselves presenting and watch it back.

  Refer to Fact sheet 4 - Zoom cheat sheet on how to record using Zoom.

• Virtual speakers need to be able to present engagingly to a camera while reacting in real time to questions appearing on their screen. Select speakers based on their experience as well as their subject expertise.

• Select an appropriate space. Consider the background, noise, potential interruptions and lighting.

  – Remove anything from the desk that you may fidget with.

  – Fabrics such as carpet, curtains and rugs help to absorb sound and remove any echo.

  – Test backgrounds ahead of time. Think about what will be shown in the camera frame and how it will appear to viewers.

  – Avoid busy or messy backgrounds; tidy shelves or pot plants work well.
• We have developed a range of Macquarie University branded Zoom virtual backgrounds to achieve a polished result. To get the best result using virtual backgrounds select a background and clothing that contrast one another.

• **Position yourself** within the camera frame. Avoid being too close or too far from the camera to create ideal engagement with the audience.

• **Raise the camera up** to eye level and talk to the camera. Avoid looking at yourself on the screen or staring down at your notes on the desk. If you have multiple screens ensure any content you need to view is on the screen with the camera.

• **Consider standing up** to allow more expressive body language and better energy. However, be careful not to sway, pace or shuffle.

• **Position light in front of the presenter.** This could either be natural light from a window or two dimmed lamps on either side of the camera.

• **Dressing the part** - Avoid wearing patterns or striped clothing as they can strobe on camera. Bright block colours work best. Avoid wearing the same colour as your background, especially if you wish to use a virtual background.

• **Equipment** – if your department is running multiple virtual events and the investment is justified you may wish to consider purchasing some basic equipment which is higher quality than those built into your laptop or desktop computer. Some recommended products include: Blue Yeti USB Microphone or Blue Yeti nano USB Microphone. Logitech stream cam. Alternatively, you can borrow equipment or utilise an on-campus studio space through MQ Tech.

• **Consider allowing the audience to provide non-verbal feedback** and reactions during the session to provide extra insight. Feedback and reaction options include ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘go faster’, ‘go slower’, thumbs up, thumbs down, clap and ‘need a break’. Utilise the co-host to monitor these and pass on required information to the speaker.

  Note: Full range of feedback options and reactions available in Zoom Meetings, only ‘Raise Hand’ available in Zoom Webinar.

• **Disable enter and exit chime** in Zoom Meetings to remove any extra distractions for the speaker if attendees are joining late or leaving early. **Managing participants in a meeting**

• **Use headphones** whenever possible. Although some laptops and software can automatically mute the microphone when other people are talking, they're not perfect. Headphones will prevent feedback loops that result from your mic picking up other people speaking.

• **Improve your virtual presentation skills**

**ACCESSIBILITY**

• As a publicly funded organisation, Macquarie University is required to make all its online content accessible. This means that we have to use transcripts for virtual events and videos. We not only have a moral obligation to make our content accessible, but also a legal one. Furthermore, the more accessible our content is, the more people can actually view it.

• **During either the registration or communications for virtual events it is important to ask attendees if they have any accessibility requirements and cater to these accordingly.**

• Depending on the individual's needs the solution may be to record the Zoom session and make this available with transcripts post-event. It is recommended that all virtual events are recorded as a minimum option to improve accessibility, regardless of whether requirements have been confirmed from attendees.

• **Where possible and in situations when accessibility is in high demand it is recommended to engage a specialist supplier to provide live captioning directly into Zoom during the session.**

• **For a detailed event accessibility checklist** visit the Australian Network on Disability website.

• For further specialist advice and direction on how to make your virtual event accessible please contact Jo Hatton in the Equity and Diversity Unit.
PLAT FORMS: ZOOM MEETINGS VS ZOOM WEBINARS

• Refer to Fact sheet 1 - Zoom Meetings vs Webinars for a detailed comparison of Zoom Meetings & Zoom Webinar.

ZOOM MEETINGS

All MQ staff have an individual Zoom Meeting licence. Login here.

• Zoom Meetings are ideal for hosting smaller, more interactive sessions where you wish to have lots of audience participation or break your session into smaller groups. Zoom Meetings allows all attendees to speak and be seen on camera, allowing them greater input than Webinars. Group interactions work best when everyone can see each other.

• It can also be beneficial to see the audience so the speaker/presenter can read their engagement and reactions to content. It keeps the audience accountable to be involved and paying attention.

• Zoom Meetings has the ability to create registration invitations, send registration confirmation emails and send reminder emails. You can also include an ‘add to calendar’ function.

• Reporting can be pulled on registrations and attendance only. Note: To pull reporting on attendance, login to your Zoom account in the web browser and navigate to reports. Select usage, specify the time frame in which the meeting took place and search. Locate the specific Zoom meeting and click on the blue number in the participants column. This will show you a listing of the participants and how long they joined the session. You can also export this report information.

• Refer to Fact sheet 4 - Zoom cheat sheet for how to schedule, run, record and share the recording of a Zoom Meeting.

• Important note: When scheduling your Zoom meeting ensure you select all of the required settings within the meeting set-up. Because the advanced settings apply to your entire account rather than specifically to each meeting you will need to set these just before the rehearsal and again before the live event to ensure they are not changed by another meeting scheduled prior. Alternatively, if you are using the same settings for most meetings these can be set as your default account settings and left unchanged for each individual meeting. Note: For further clarification please reach out to your Event Partner.

ZOOM WEBINARS

The Events and Domestic Protocol Team have a licence for Zoom Webinars which allows a maximum of 500 attendees per webinar.

• Webinars are like a virtual lecture hall or auditorium. Webinars are ideal for large audiences or events that are open to the public. Typically, webinar attendees only ask questions to the speakers and do not interact with one another. A webinar usually has one or a few people speaking to an audience and the audience joins in a listen-only mode (however, the host can selectively un-mute individuals as required). The host has more control over the session than in Meetings.

• Zoom Webinars have the ability to create registration invitations and send confirmation emails, reminder emails and follow-up emails to attendees and absentees, including an ‘add to calendar’ function.

• Zoom Webinars have the ability to automatically redirect attendees to another URL upon the session ending. This could be to a particular website link or a feedback survey etc.

• Reporting can be pulled on registrations, attendance, engagement, Q&A and polling.
COMMUNICATIONS AND REGISTRATION

Macquarie University has a number of solutions available for the distribution of communications and collection of registrations for virtual events. The best solution for your virtual event will depend on the particular requirements, size and audience.

Registration is recommended when you wish to track expected attendance and record audience details for your database. It is also needed if you expect high attendance numbers as Zoom licences have a set capacity.

Note: Group Marketing has developed a range of Macquarie University branded Zoom banners for Zoom meeting and webinar registration and communications.

💡 TIPS

When marketing your virtual event ensure you use the words ‘virtual’, ‘online’, ‘streamed’ or ‘webinar’ throughout, including in all email subject lines. Use of the word ‘event’ is most commonly associated with a physical, in-person event so it is important that all communications make this clear definition. Guests may delete event communications without even reading further to discover it is a webinar if they are not in a position to attend a standard face-to-face event.

Zoom attendee user guides: Download User guide 1 – Zoom Meetings for Attendees or User guide 4 – Zoom Webinars for Attendees to assist attendees in getting the most out of their virtual experience. We recommend sharing this with your attendees a few days prior to the virtual event. Ensure you tailor the instructions depending on how you intend to run the session, use of functions and the settings selected. When you save as a PDF ensure the links are still interactive.

Note: If you need any assistance in tailoring the instructions for your audience please consult the Events and Domestic Protocol team.
FURTHER RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Fact sheet 1 – Zoom Meetings vs Webinars

A detailed comparison of the functions available and limitations of each solution. Used to determine which solution is most suitable for your virtual event.

Fact sheet 2 – Zoom Meetings roles and controls

Explains the different roles available in Zoom Meetings to allocate (host, co-host, attendee) and what they can each access/have permission to action.

Fact sheet 3 – Zoom Webinar roles and controls

Explains the different roles available in Zoom Webinar to allocate (host, co-host, panellist, attendee) and what they can each access/have permission to action.

Fact sheet 4 – Zoom cheat sheet

Explains how to login to your MQ Zoom account and basic use of Zoom meetings.

Fact sheet 5 – Virtual event rehearsal and live checklist

Reference list of steps and settings to check and confirm during a virtual event rehearsal and directly prior to going live.

User guide 1 – Zoom Meetings for Attendees*

User guide 2 – Zoom Meetings for Speakers*

User guide 3 – Zoom Meetings for the Host*

User guide 4 – Zoom Webinars for Attendees*

User guide 5 – Zoom Webinars for Speakers*

User guide 6 – Zoom Webinars for the Host*

Note: *All User guide documents MUST be tailored to suit the specifics settings for the event.

ZOOM MEETINGS

MQ staff Zoom Meetings guide
Zoom Meetings video tutorial
Teche MQ Zoom guide
Teche MQ Zoom guide, part 2

ZOOM WEBINARS

Zoom Webinars Video tutorial

OTHER

Zoom best practices
Zoom Live Training Webinars
Virtual presentation skills
Zoom Video Tutorial
Tips for using Zoom

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