

## **Teleconferencing**

Teleconferencing allows people to come together without travelling and it can provide a speedy, cost-effective alternative to face-to-face meetings.

*Benefits of teleconferencing include:*

- Reduces the need to meet face to face
- More effective use of time
- Costs savings on travel, subsistence and time
- Improved communication because of ability to quickly arrange teleconferences
- Productivity gains
- Quality of work improves (less travel stress, time wasting etc)
- Geographically dispersed units/staff brought closer
- Team and project meetings occur more often
- Quick and easy method to update members of team or project

*Disadvantages of teleconferencing include:*

- Can be difficult to establish an effective group relying solely on teleconferencing
- Giving complex information and making important decisions can be difficult
- Face to face communications does not occur and normal team forming does not take place
- Communications become difficult if there are a large number of people contributing.

### **Phone teleconferencing etiquette**

The key etiquette rules that apply to phone teleconferences are as follows:

#### **Host/chair:**

- As the host/chair, you have to plan the meeting carefully. Develop an agenda that covers the main points and is as brief and targeted as possible. Participants will be more likely to be attentive and to stay on track if they know what to expect.
- Send out meeting-related materials in advance so that participants are familiar with them and you won't have to take time explaining basic information.
- Ask participants to send related material to each other in advance. Handling the arrangements carefully will also help make the teleconference run smoothly with no one missing or arriving late.

- Give adequate notice about the time and date of the meeting. Provide clear instructions on how to participate in the teleconference. For example, do participants need to call a specific phone number and enter a code to be admitted?
- Contact each participant a day or two before the teleconference with a reminder and make sure they'll be there.
- Send reminders of etiquette for the meeting, such as stating their name as they start speaking ("Dave here; I want to comment . . ."), allowing others to complete their thoughts before starting to speak and avoiding derogative or argumentative comments.
- Be familiar with the equipment you'll be using so that you can handle it without slip-ups during the conference. Arrange for someone to help you with the equipment while you're running the conference.
- Provide participants with any technology details they'll need, such as requesting that they mute their phones when they're not speaking to reduce background noise.
- Keep an eye on time, don't allow the conference call to get off topic and stick to the agenda. It is a good idea to set a time limit on the conference call when you organise the conference so that everyone can plan accordingly.
- If minutes are required ensure that you have identified a minute taker prior to the meeting and inform participants that minutes are being taken. Ask participants to clearly identify themselves when speaking to ensure accurate minutes.
- A round of introductions is necessary -- Everyone should have a clear understanding of who is present in the room listening in on the call. Ensure that **all participants are identified** when they join the teleconference.

**Participant:**

- If you are a teleconference participant, be pro-active about reducing noise and interruptions when preparing to take an active part in discussions.
- Use a landline phone (for better sound quality) in a closed room, if possible. And arrange for incoming calls to be forwarded during the conference.
- If you have to use a mobile phone, make sure it's fully charged and that you've found a spot where you have three or four signal strength bars and little background noise. Using a

headset can help minimise the sound of sirens, train or traffic noise or anything else in the background.

- If you're in the office, prepare to close the door and put a "Conference in Progress: Do not Enter" sign on your door. If you work in open plan offices try to find a conference room or other quiet area.
- Familiarise yourself with the agenda, meeting materials, etiquette rules and technical specifications.

No matter how you plan, teleconferencing etiquette doesn't stop when the meeting starts. Keep reading to find out what you should avoid, as a host or a participant, so that your teleconference runs smoothly and politely.

### **Things to Avoid During a Teleconference Call**

#### **If you're the host, once the teleconference starts, don't:**

- Let anyone enter the teleconference without noting their arrival. That way, participants won't feel like someone is listening without participating, this is essential when dealing with confidential or sensitive information.
- Wait around for latecomers and start late. If participants feel that the teleconference is taking valuable time, a late start will only confirm this and frustrate them.
- Allow participants to wander into off-topic discussions. Summarise the relevant points made and direct everyone back to the next item on the agenda.
- Forget to pause frequently. You'll want to give participants time to think about what's being said and to add their own comments. Participants can't see each other, so a pause gives them a chance to step in without feeling that they're interrupting.
- Let it run overtime, keep a close eye on the agenda, and if there's no time to discuss other important topics, indicate that they'll be handled through an e-mail exchange or on the agenda for the next teleconference.
- End the conference without indicating an opportunity for polite feedback. Send an e-mail asking participants to let you know how the teleconference went. Was it worth the time? Did the technology work? What could have been done differently?

**If you're a participant, you'll want to avoid:**

- Showing up late. You'll find yourself trying to catch up with the discussion, and the host will have to take time to introduce you to the group.
- Losing focus, keep your mind on the teleconference, instead of multitasking by also answering e-mail, prepping for an upcoming meeting or handling a departmental crisis.
- Speaking without saying who you are.
- Addressing a question to the group instead of to a specific individual. You'll get an answer quicker if everyone doesn't pause to figure out who will respond.

National Communications Unit

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