



Republican Party of Virginia
www.rpv.org

Guide to Online Meetings

The State Central Committee recently adopted a Party Plan amendment authorizing all Official Committees to hold electronic meetings during the public health emergency. Party Plan, Art. XII. This brief guide is intended to assist chairmen and committees in holding electronic meetings. While it provides a few tools that can be used for online meetings, it is not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive. There are other tools that may be useful and other practices that may make electronic meetings easier. Please feel free to provide any feedback to Chris Marston, cmarston@rpv.org, who will update this guide as necessary.

RPV's parliamentary authority, Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th ed.) (hereinafter, RONR), requires that an electronic meeting has, "at a minimum, conditions of opportunity for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area." RONR, p. 97, ll. 24-27. That is to say that participants must be able to hear one another throughout the meeting. So, for example, a meeting may not be conducted by an exchange of e-mail messages.

RONR also recommends that committees adopt additional rules relating to the conduct of electronic meetings. Such rules are not intended to change basic procedural rules, but to adapt them to an electronic meeting. RONR, p. 98, l. 30-p. 99, l. 30. This guide suggests several widely available electronic meeting tools, suggestions for using them, and appropriate rules.

General Suggestions

Several considerations apply to any type of electronic meeting.

- Advance preparation is critical
- Meeting notices should include logistical details for connecting, as well as any special rules of order applicable to the electronic meeting. Reminders should be sent early and often.
- Provide hosts and participants with links to appropriate information from the service provider (e.g., telephone controls, software/app downloads) in addition to any summary information you provide.
- Provide all documents related to meeting at least 24-hours in advance, along with a reminder about the participant logistics.
- Presiding officers and secretaries will need a team to assist them in making sure the meeting runs smoothly. For example, someone other than the chair or secretary should assist as moderator or host to keep track of the call details and

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- assist the chair in determining who seeks recognition and assist the secretary in noting who is on the call and speaking at any given time. Another person should be assigned as the meeting technical support person who can take calls on a second line to help anyone having trouble to connect.
- Clearly reference any documents relating to an order of business and state clearly and repeatedly any motions or amendments that were not distributed in advance to ensure participants understand what they are considering.
 - Don't assume that documents can be sent by e-mail during the meeting as some members won't have access and dealing with attachments and downloads while trying to participate is challenging. (It may be appropriate to ask participants who wish to make a motion to send it by e-mail to the chair and secretary)
 - Ensure that everyone is familiar with any important tasks, such as muting and unmuting, "raising hands," using meeting chat features and voting by announcing them at the beginning of the meeting and including reminders at appropriate times.
 - Running a mock practice meeting several days in advance of the actual meeting may be helpful.
 - A training session for participants prior to the meeting may also be helpful.

FreeConference.com—Best for Phone-Only Meetings

[FreeConference.com](https://www.freeconference.com) provides free telephone conference calls that can be easily used by participants with only a standard phone (the presiding officer or a call moderator assisting him should use the web or smartphone app moderator tools). Participants can mute and unmute themselves and raise or lower their hands (virtually). It also provides a videoconferencing and screensharing, but its principal strength is that it can be used effectively by participants with only push button phones.

Recommended Supplemental Electronic Meeting Rules

1. When the roll is called, participants shall indicate the phone number from which they are calling so their names can be associated with those numbers for the presiding officer.
2. Once a quorum has been determined by roll call, no point of order relating to the presence of a quorum shall be in order.
3. Members may seek recognition by using the "raise hand" feature (*2)
4. Members may interrupt a speaker only when such an interruption is in order by unmuting their line (*6) and addressing the chair, stating their name, and the reason for interruption (e.g., Mr. Chairman, this is John Doe, I have a point of order).
5. Members should send main motions and amendments to the chair and the secretary by e-mail prior to or at the time of offering.
6. All actions should be taken by unanimous consent unless a member promptly objects by using the "raise hand" feature (*2).
7. A voice vote is not in order; initial votes shall be taken as a rising vote using the "raise hand" feature (*2); if the Chair is in doubt, he shall take a counted rising vote using the "raise hand" feature (*2).

8. A call for Division of the Assembly is not in order; a roll call vote may be ordered in the usual manner.

Tips

1. Chairs and other meeting managers must use the Online Meeting Room function to see “raised hands” and can associate names with phone numbers and toggle a participants’ mute line status
2. Host should turn off entry and exit chimes (*8) at the beginning of the meeting
3. Chair should use Q&A Mode to mute all participants but allow them to unmute themselves
4. Participants should be asked to use the conference mute function (*6) rather than the mute function on their own phone so that the meeting managers can see their mute line status.
5. In the meeting announcement, ask members to RSVP with the phone number they will be using so that you can load the names and numbers into your freeconference.com address book in advance so that names will show up, rather than numbers in the Online Meeting Room.
6. Remind members that taking action by unanimous consent does not mean that all members agree, simply that they are willing to take the action in expedited fashion knowing that it commands majority support. *See* RONR p. 55, ll. 5-8.

Zoom—Best for Computer/Device Meetings

[Zoom](#) provides online meetings. Although participants can dial in with a phone only, it is most effective if participants connect with their computers, tablets, or smart phones (with or without video cameras). Zoom provides an optional required registration process, which is very helpful for ensuring the moderator knows the identity of participants. In addition to a raise hand feature, it also has yes/no buttons that can be used for voting.

Note that the service is free for a meeting of less than 40 minutes for 100 or fewer participants. The monthly subscription fee of approximately \$20 removes the time limit. Committees that don’t meet at the same time may wish to share a subscription; a District Committee might subscribe and make it available to its constituent unit committees.

Leadership Institute also uses the webinar feature of Zoom to manage online meetings. For a small fee, they are available to assist a committee in hosting a meeting. This may be the best approach for large committees (over 50 participants). Contact Dena Espenscheid, Director of Grassroots Coalitions, at LI’s main line 703-247-2000 or this contact form on their website (<https://www.leadershipinstitute.org/contactUS/staff/?staff=117956>).

Recommended Supplemental Electronic Meeting Rules

1. Members must connect to the meeting through the Zoom website or one of Zoom’s apps for smart phones and tablets.
2. Members must register by first and last name upon connecting to the meeting (the use of a common nickname for the first name is acceptable, e.g., Thomas could use Tom; Thurston Howell III, could use Trip; etc.).

3. Members should mute their line when not speaking; The Chair or his designee may mute any line not being used by a recognized speaker.
4. Members may seek recognition by using the “raise hand” feature.
5. Members may interrupt a speaker only when such an interruption is in order by unmuting their line and addressing the chair, stating their name, and the reason for interruption (e.g., Mr. Chairman, this is John Doe, I have a point of order)
6. Members may provide the text of main motions and amendments using the Chat feature and may be required to do so at the discretion of the Chair.
7. All actions should be taken by unanimous consent unless a member promptly objects by using the “raise hand” feature.
8. A voice vote is not in order; initial votes shall be taken as a rising vote using the “Yes” and “No” button feature.

Tips

1. The Chair, the Secretary and any meeting managers should be designated as host or cohost in Zoom in order to take advantage of key meeting management functions
2. When setting up the meeting, you should require registration.
3. To Prevent Zoom Bombing you should:
 - a. generate a separate Meeting ID for each meeting. This is also important if you are sharing a subscription.
 - b. make sure that the Share Screen is set to “Only Host” (under Advanced Sharing Options) to prevent unknown individuals from sharing videos, annotating the screen or other unexpectantly adding to the screen.
4. The authentication options are confusing, so only use them if you’re confident that you’re using them correctly and they will have the desired effect.