

RHODE ISLAND  
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS REGULATION

# Holding Successful Virtual Public Meetings

Panelist Discussion



# Welcoming Remarks

Elizabeth M. Tanner, Esq.

Director

Department of Business Regulation



# Panelists

**Katherine Sadeck, Esq.** Special Assistant Attorney General

**Stacy DiCola**, Associate Director of Public Information, RI Department of State

**W. Keith Burlingame, Esq.**, RI Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal & Review, DBR

**Brian J. McGuirk**, Information Technology Project Manager, RI Division of Information Technology

**Shawn Selleck**, Clerk, City of Providence

**Ashley V. Sweet**, Town Planner, Scituate

**Jennifer West**, Clerk, Town of Portsmouth

**Moderator:** Amy C. Stewart, Esq., Deputy Chief of Legal Services, DBR

# 1<sup>st</sup> P o l l

Getting to know our audience.

What is your role in public meetings?

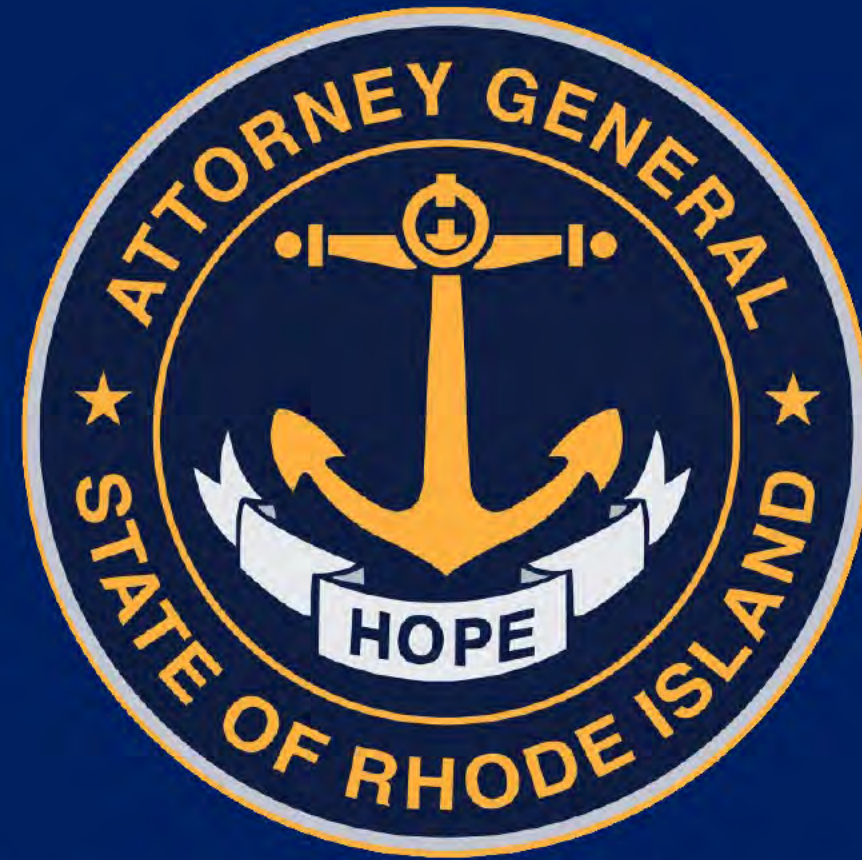


Polling is closed

143 voted

**1. In what role do you primarily participate in public meetings?**

**Office of Attorney General**  
*Peter F. Neronha, Attorney General*



COVID-19 RELATED MODIFICATIONS TO THE  
OPEN MEETINGS ACT

# Executive Order 20-46 OMA Provisions

- Extended by Executive Order 20-75, currently in place through October 10, 2020.
- Key Provisions:
  - Suspended provisions of the OMA that prohibit using telephonic or electronic means to conduct a meeting;
  - All meetings must provide free, adequate alternative means for public to access meeting in real-time;
  - Any meetings may be conducted by adequate alternative means, not just those for an essential purpose;
  - Means of public participation must be provided when required by law;
  - Except as specified in the Executive Order, usual OMA requirements remain in place.

# Adequate Alternative Means

- Measures that ensure transparency and provide real-time public access, such as video-conferencing
- Must be provided for free
- May require subscription or registration, as long as there is no cost and it is available to the public at large
- Examples: Zoom, GoTo Meeting, Microsoft Teams
- Members of public body do not need to be in the same physical place
- Even if a public body is able to meet in person, it must also offer adequate alternative means of public access to meeting



# Posting Notice

- OMA notice requirements remain in place
  - Notice must be posted 48 hours in advance (excluding weekends and holidays), in 3 locations:
    - Secretary of State website
    - Principal office or building in which meetings usually held
    - At least one other prominent place within the governmental unit
- R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-6(b), (c)
- If building where notice is normally posted is closed, you may post notice on outside door of the building
  - For "Place" on Agenda, provide how the public can access the meeting (URL address, etc.) or where that information is available
    - Also provide physical location if public body is meeting in person

# Executive Session

- Public body may use virtual means to meet in executive session if the usual requirements of the OMA for meeting in executive session are satisfied. See R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 42-46-4, 5.
- The OMA requires an "open call" in open session prior to entering executive session. R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-4(a).
- At the conclusion of executive session, the public body must return to open session to report out any votes from closed session. R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-4(b).
- These "open call" and reporting out requirements remain in place for virtual meetings.

# Other Considerations

- OMA does not require public comment, but public participation may be required by other applicable laws.
- If a law requires allowance for participation by the public at large, or by certain impacted individuals, then the public (or the specific individuals entitled to participate) must be able to appear and participate the same way a member of the public body would.
- Public body must comply with all applicable nondiscrimination laws and ensure virtual meetings are open and accessible to persons with disabilities. See R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-13.

# OMA Compliance Questions?

- Office of Attorney General Guidance and FAQ Document
- Rhode Island Office of Attorney General Open Government Unit
  - Kate Sadeck, Chief Open Government Unit
  - [opengovernment@riag.ri.gov](mailto:opengovernment@riag.ri.gov)
  - 401-274-4400
  - <http://www.riag.ri.gov/CivilDivision/OpenGovernmentUnit.php>



# FILING A VIRTUAL MEETING NOTICE

Rhode Island Department of State  
Nellie M. Gorbea  
Secretary of State

Manage Requests | Manage People | Manage Public Bodies | Open Meetings | RI

Working as Filing Coordinator for

- State, Department of
- State, Department of
- 1696 Historical Commission, The
- DOS Test Entity
- Gubernatorial Portrait Commission
- Notary Public Modernization Stakeholder Group
- November Patch Testing Group1
- Patch Test Public Body 02252019
- Patch Test Public Body 06062019 - 2
- Publications Clearinghouse Advisory Committee, State
- Register, Administrative Committee of the State
- Sally's Test Public body
- Test body - 05052020
- Visitor Center and Gift Shop Committee, State House
- Voters First Advisory Commission

Support



Rhode Island Department of State  
**Nellie M. Gorbea**  
 Secretary of State

Working as Filing Coordinator for  
 1696 Historical Commission, The

Manage Requests - Manage People - Manage Public Bodies - **Open Meetings** - RI Gov Directory -

Stacy DiCola (Filing Coordinator)

Enter Meeting Details

Public Body Name:\* 1696 Historical Commission, The

Meeting Date/Time:\* 09/22/2020 12:30 PM

Meeting Location Address

Address 1:\* Virtual Meeting

Address 2: Address 2

City:\* Cranston

State:\* Rhode Island

Zip Code:\* 02920

Is this meeting an emergency?  Yes  No

Is this an Annual Calendar?  Yes  No

Is this a Public Announcement?  Yes  No

Upload or Copy Meeting Agenda Below:

Accepted file types: .pdf, .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt

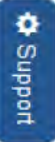
Upload Files

OR Copy/Paste TEXT ONLY. Images are not supported in the below text field.

Rich text editor toolbar with options for Bold, Italic, Underline, Text Color, Background Color, Bulleted List, Numbered List, Indent, Outdent, Text Color, Link, Unlink, and Help.

Note: With the exclusion of emergency meetings, meetings scheduled within 48 hours of occurrence may be deemed non-compliant

Confirm & Submit Reset



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Poll

How much experience do you  
have have with holding  
meetings via video  
conference?



Polling is closed

148 voted

**1. How comfortable are you with holding a public meeting via video conference?****2. Approximately how many public meetings has your entity held via video conference?**



# DBR Zoom Enterprise Accounts

## Notable Default Settings for Meetings

Waiting Room and  
Passcodes Enabled

Start meeting with Host and  
Participants Video Off

File Transfer is Off

Only Host can Share Screen

Nonverbal feedback and  
meeting reactions are enabled

Removed Participants cannot  
rejoin the meeting

Livestreaming is allowed



# DBR Zoom Enterprise Accounts

## Notable Default Settings for Webinars

Passcodes Enabled

Registration not required

Only Host can Share Screen

Q&A and Polls are  
enabled

Livestreaming is allowed



# Scheduling Video Conferences

## Zoom Webinar or Zoom Meeting Open Session Meetings

### General Settings

Limiting the public's access to certain functionality can help prevent "Zoom bombing" and assists the Host with maintaining control of the meeting.

- Disable Chat/Q&A or limit it only to technical questions regarding connecting to the meeting
- Disable private chat and polls because of problems with transparency
  - Caution - Chats may be a public record – both chats among the whole group and private chats.
- Mask Phone Numbers for privacy of participants
- Only allow screen sharing by the Host (this includes co-hosts)



# Scheduling Video Conferences

## Zoom Webinar for Open Session

- The Host has more control over the participants in a webinar than they do in a meeting.
- Clear roles for entity members as “Panelists” and the audience as “Attendees.”
- Avoids “Zoombombing” because participation by “Attendees” is limited viewing only, unless promoted by the Host to a “Panelist” or “Allow to Talk.”
- Webinars can be a useful format for meetings that include public hearings/appeals.

- Be specific when you name each webinar
- Include the date, short name of entity and note whether Open or Executive (if applicable).

My Webinars > Schedule a Webinar

Schedule a Webinar

Topic

Description (Optional)

Use a Template

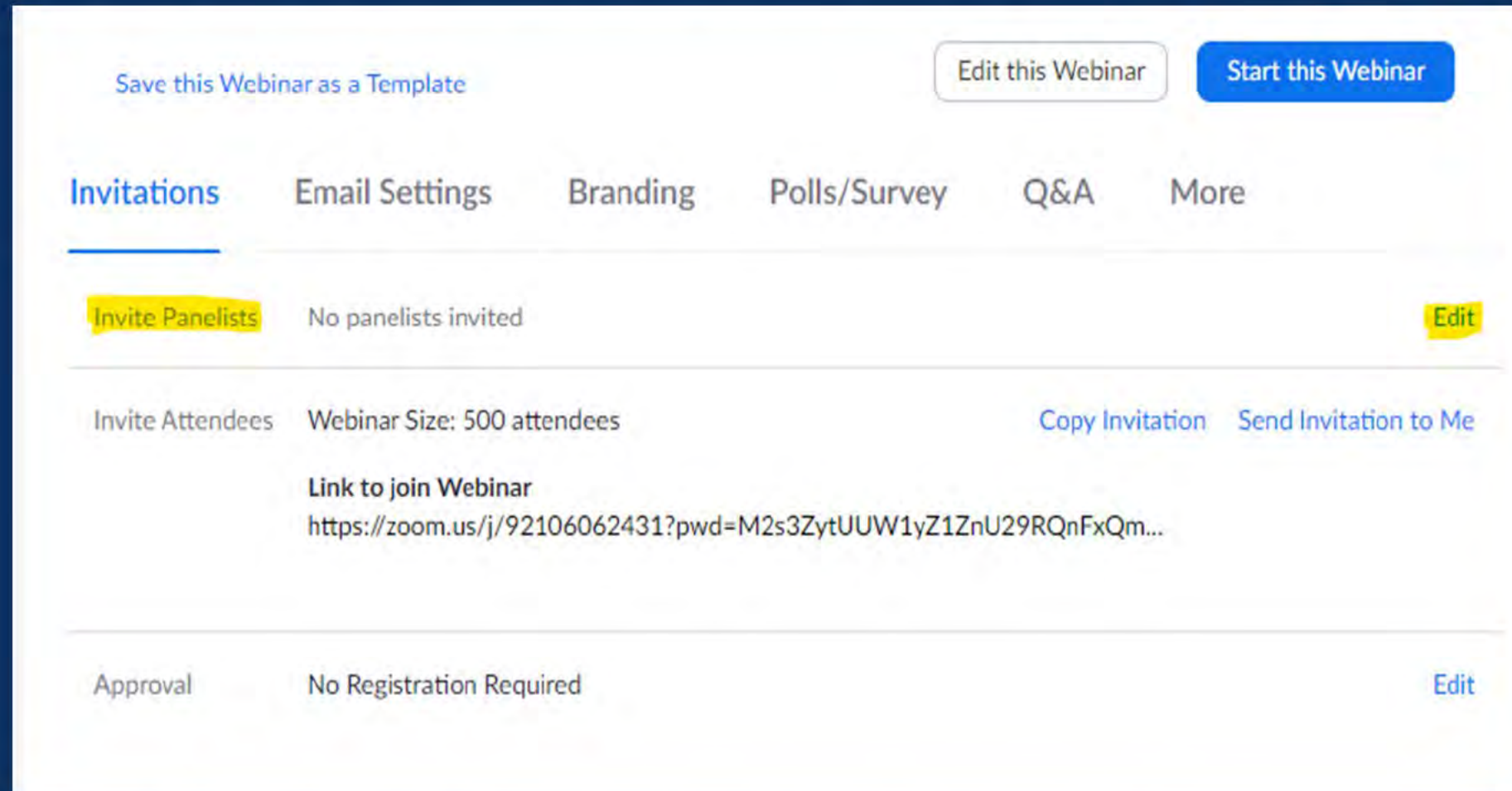
When

Duration  hr  min

Time Zone

# Scheduling Video Conferences

## Zoom Webinar Panelist Invitations



The screenshot shows the Zoom Webinar management interface. At the top, there are buttons for "Save this Webinar as a Template", "Edit this Webinar", and "Start this Webinar". Below these are tabs for "Invitations", "Email Settings", "Branding", "Polls/Survey", "Q&A", and "More". The "Invitations" tab is active, showing a section for "Invite Panelists" with the text "No panelists invited" and an "Edit" button. Below this is a section for "Invite Attendees" with "Webinar Size: 500 attendees", a "Copy Invitation" button, and a "Send Invitation to Me" button. A "Link to join Webinar" is provided: <https://zoom.us/j/92106062431?pwd=M2s3ZytUUW1yZ1ZnU29RQnFxQm...>. At the bottom, there is an "Approval" section with "No Registration Required" and an "Edit" button.

Once you schedule the webinar, scroll down to the bottom of the page and you will see this. Click on “Edit” to enter the names and emails of each panelist.



- Host enters each entity member’s name (as it should appear during the meeting) and email into the invitation.
- Zoom emails a personalized invitation to each panelist from the Zoom Host.
- Panelists must click on the link in their “panelist invitation” to join the meeting automatically as a panelist. (No need to identify and promote from attendee.)
- Panelists can call into a meeting with their personalized “Participant ID”
- Explain to your entity members how the panelists invites work.



# Webinar Panelist Invitations

After clicking “Edit,” this form pops up. Enter each panelist’s name and email address. Once you hit “Save,” the panelists will automatically be sent the Webinar invitation unless you uncheck the box.



Panelists

Invite a person or a Zoom room as a webinar panelist

Name	Email/Zoom Rooms	
Amy Stewart - DBR Legal Counsel	amy.stewart@dbr.ri.gov	Delete
John Doe - Council Chair	Email Address <small>Please enter a valid email address.</small>	Delete
Jane Doe - Vice Chair	Email Address <small>Please enter a valid email address.</small>	Delete
John Smith - Board Member	Email Address	Delete

[Add Another Panelist](#)

Send invitation to all newly added panelists immediately

Save Cancel

Invitations	Email Settings	Branding	Polls/Survey	Q&A	More
Invite Panelists	Stacy DiCola (sdicola@sos.ri.gov)				Edit
	Shawn Selleck (Sselleck@providenceri.gov)				
	Jennifer West (jwest@portsmouthri.com)				
	Katherine Sadeck (KSadeck@riag.ri.gov)				
	Brian McGuirk (brian.mcguirk@doit.ri.gov)				
	LIZ TANNER (liz.tanner@dbr.ri.gov)				
	W Keith Burlingame, Esq. (keith.burlingame@dbr.ri.gov)				



Once you click on save, you will return to the Webinar scheduling page and the invited panelists will appear in a list.

# Webinar Panelist Invitations

It's the day of the meeting and a member lost their panelist invitation.

- Go to the list of panelists and click "Edit." This list will pop up.
- You can copy the invitation or resend the invitation email.

Name	Email/Zoom Rooms	Resend	Copy	Delete
Stacy DiCola	sdicola@sos.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
Shawn Selleck	Sselleck@providenceri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
Jennifer West	jwest@portsmouthri.com	Resend	Copy	Delete
Katherine Sadeck	KSadeck@riag.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
Brian McGuirk	brian.mcguirk@doit.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
LIZ TANNER	liz.tanner@dbr.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
W Keith Burlingame, Esq.	keith.burlingame@dbr.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete
Ashley Sweet	[REDACTED]	Resend	Copy	Delete
Dawne Broadfield	Dawne.broadfield@dbr.ri.gov	Resend	Copy	Delete

Name  Email Address  Delete

Add Another Panelist

Send invitation to all newly added panelists immediately

### Copy Panelist Invitation

Hi Stacy [DiCola](#).

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

Date Time: Sep 17, 2020 09:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)  
Topic: Holding Successful Virtual Public Meetings – Panelist Discussion

Join from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device:


Please click this URL to join. [https://zoom.us/j/91872649338?tk=OJFhQDSHXIUR\\_hWt3iYqCSRIOlpE-51-Ea74iKlgrok.DOIAAAVZAlgehY0Y21CZVJhdIRBNmVJbVB5TC1LcFVRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA&pwd=cjFQeT](https://zoom.us/j/91872649338?tk=OJFhQDSHXIUR_hWt3iYqCSRIOlpE-51-Ea74iKlgrok.DOIAAAVZAlgehY0Y21CZVJhdIRBNmVJbVB5TC1LcFVRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA&pwd=cjFQeT)

Note: This link should not be shared with others; it is unique to you.  
Passcode: 817904

Description: The Department of Business Regulation ([DBR](#)) is hosting a panel to discuss what state and municipal entities

Select, copy and paste confirmation.

Here is Stacy DiCola's personal panelist invitation to this Webinar. You can find this quickly for any panelist and resend their invitation or just their personalized hyperlink to join the webinar.

Save this Webinar as a Template  [Edit this Webinar](#) [Start this Webinar](#)

Invitations **Email Settings** Branding Polls/Survey Q&A More


---

Select Email Language: English [Edit](#)

Email Contact: Amy Stewart, amy.stewart@dbr.ri.gov [Edit](#)

Invitation Email to Panelists [Edit](#)

Confirmation Email to Registrants Send upon registration [Send me a preview email](#) | [Edit](#)

No reminder email to Attendees and Panelists  [Edit](#)

No follow-up email to Attendees [Edit](#)

No follow-up email to Absentees [Edit](#)

# Webinars

## Panelist Reminder Emails


At the bottom of the Webinar scheduling page, click on “Email Settings” to set reminder emails for your webinar.

For public meetings, it is helpful to use the 1 day and 1 hour before reminder settings.

Reminder Email

Send Reminder Email to Approved Registrants and Panelists

- 1 hour before the webinar start date and time
- 1 day before the webinar start date and time
- 1 week before the webinar start date and time

 [Save](#) [Cancel](#)

Select Email Language: English



- Be specific when you name each meeting.
- Include the date, short name of entity and note whether Open or Executive (if applicable).

My Meetings > Schedule a Meeting

Schedule a Meeting

Topic **Town Council, Open Session, 9/24/2020**

Description (Optional)

When

Duration  hr  min

Time Zone

Recurring meeting

Registration  Required

Schedule For

Meeting ID  Generate Automatically  Personal Meeting ID 585 200 3035

Security  Passcode   Waiting Room

# Scheduling a Zoom Meeting for Open Session

Zoom Meetings allow all attendees the ability to participate.

Zoom settings that give the Host more control over the participants, include:

- Mute Participants Upon Entry
- Prohibit Participants from Turning Video On Themselves
- Make all entity members/staff Co-Hosts so they will be exempt from these restrictions.
- Permit members of the public to participate by unmuting them one at a time.



# Executive Session

## Scheduling Examples

**Providence City Council** – Schedules on Open Session Webinar and an Executive Session Meeting on two different Zoom Accounts, with two different hosts

**Portsmouth Town Council** – Schedules a Webinar and uses the “Practice Session” Feature for the Executive Session portion of the meeting. Send “Panelist” invitations to Council members and staff.

**DBR Licensing Boards** – Schedules a Webinar for Open Session and a Meeting for Executive Session on the same Zoom Account. Only 1 host. Persons invited to Executive Session for a complaint matter stay in the “waiting room” until the Board comes to that agenda item when they are admitted by the Host.

**Another Option – Schedule One Zoom Meeting** – After the vote to enter Executive Session, send all members of the public out to the waiting room and only allow the persons into Executive who have been invited for a matter on the agenda. Make sure you turn the recording off for Executive Session. You may resume the recording upon return to Open Session.

# Recording Meetings with Zoom Enterprise Accounts



- The DBR Zoom licenses include unlimited cloud storage for recording and it will automatically generate a transcript.
- When scheduling the Meeting or Webinar, use a descriptive name of the entity and the date, because that is how the recording will be labeled.
- Make sure you record Open and Executive Session meetings separately.
- Recording to Zoom is not required. You can still use a digital audio recorder or other recording devices to record meetings.

My Recordings > Appraiser Open Session 9/2/2020

Appraiser Open Session 9/2/2020

Sep 2, 2020 12:45 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada) ID: 983 9711 5466

1 total views • 0 total downloads [Recording Analytics](#)

**Recording 1**  
3 files 10 MB

[Download \(3 files\)](#) [Copy shareable link](#)

Shared screen with speaker view	9 MB
Audio only	690 KB
Audio transcript	2 KB

# HYBRID MEETINGS

Some Participants Are in the Meeting Room, While Others Participate Remotely

What type of equipment needs to be purchased in order to host Hybrid Meetings?

## Microphones

- In general, each in-person participant needs their own microphone.
- Have one microphone available for public comment.
- Headsets or Headphones are strongly recommend.

All Participants and Attendees (in person or remote) need to be able to Hear and See the Entire Meeting

## Meeting Room with AV Equipment

- Work with IT Staff to integrate this into the Zoom Meeting/ Webinar.
- Make sure there are screens in the room for everyone to see the remote participants

## No AV Equipment

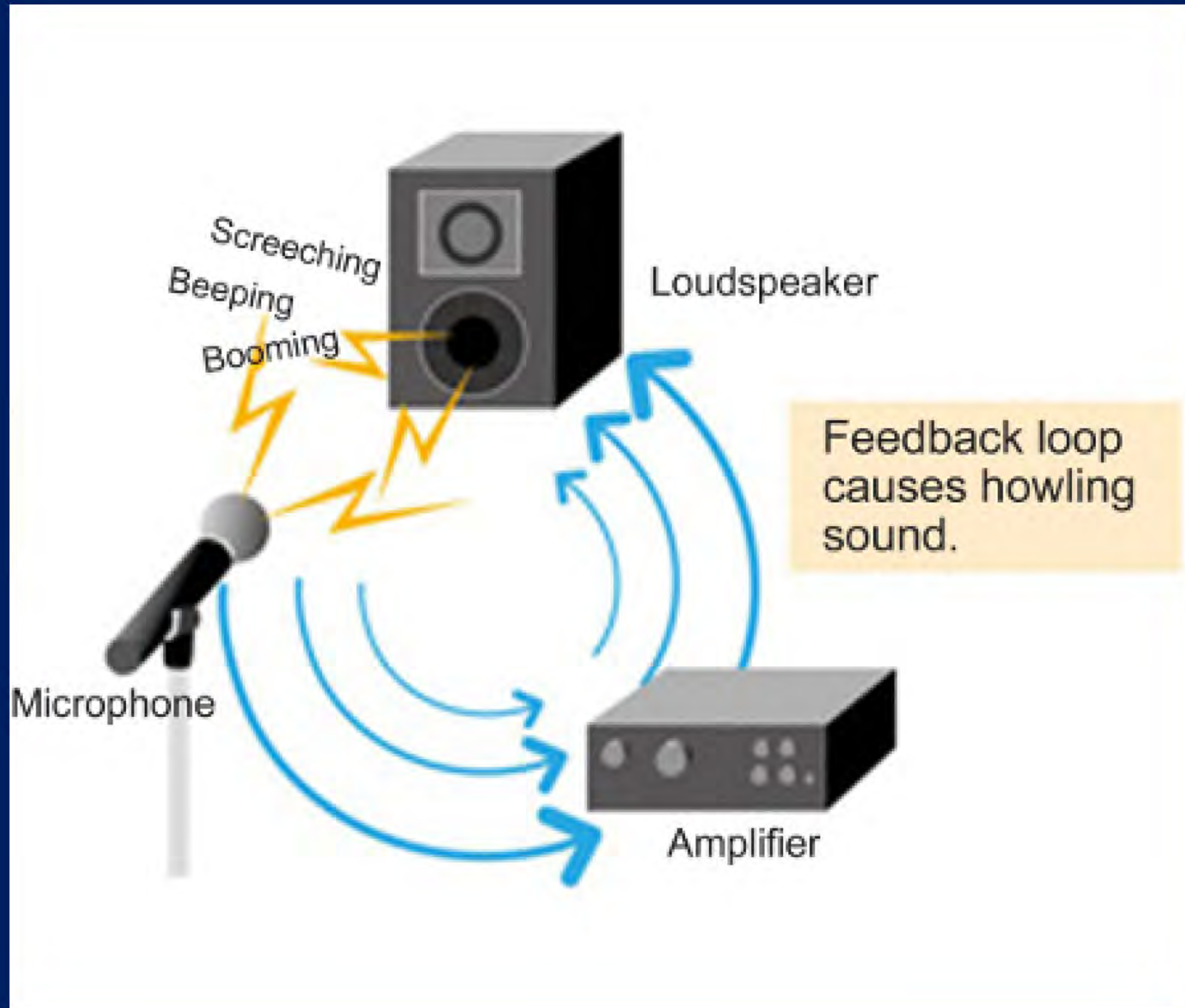
- Each in participant must access Zoom from their own computer/tablet/phone.
- All in-person participants should use a headset to avoid feedback.

NOTE: During the Covid -19 Pandemic, entity staff should disinfect shared microphones after each person provides public comment.

Hybrid  
Meeting  
Examples

**Portsmouth Town Council  
Jennifer West, Town Clerk**

**Scituate Plan Commission  
Ashley Sweet, Town Planner**



What is audio feedback and why does it happen?

# Adapting to Virtual Public Meetings

✓ Contact Participants on the agenda ahead of time. Have they used Zoom before?

✓ Prepare a list of participants so the Zoom Hosts and Meeting Chairs know who to expect for each agenda item.

✓ Post Open Session materials online ahead of the meeting.

✓ Set a deadline for the submission of exhibits or materials requiring board review, or for sign-ups for public comment.



# Role of the Zoom Host

- It is hard to be both the Zoom Host and a meeting participant.
- Ideally, the Host should be a technical moderator, perhaps an IT staff member, who is not an entity participant.
- Designate other entity staff as co-hosts.
- Co-hosts can assist with identifying and renaming participants, keeping track of the quorum, and assisting with public participation.
- Monitor Attendee List and match people with their matters on the agenda.
- Ask callers to identify themselves, then rename them.





# 3rd Poll

Which video conferencing platforms have you used for public meetings?



Polling is closed

116 voted

**1. Have you used Zoom before, prior to today's webinar?****2. Which video conferencing platforms have you used to participate in and/or host a virtual public meeting? Select all that apply (Multiple choice)**

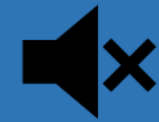


# Hosting Successful Virtual Public Meetings

## Good Audio Connections are Essential

- Use a headset.
- Call in if you have a bad internet connection.
- In general, avoid sharing microphones with others.

# Meeting Etiquette



Set the ground rules at the beginning of the meeting

- Please mute yourself when not speaking
- No side conversations
- Speak into your microphone 
- Warning: you may be muted for background noise
- Entity members should stay focused on the meeting.

Start with a roll call of all members in Attendance

- If a hybrid meeting –state who is participating in-person and who is participating remotely.
- Announce yourself each time you speak or make a motion for the benefit of people listening on the phone.

Make sure the record is clear

- Take Roll Call Votes
- Make clear motions, state who made the motion and who seconded it, before taking the vote.

# Guidance for Public Participation

## Additional Instructions Required for Virtual Meetings

### Explain:

- How your public entity will receive public comment during the virtual public meeting
- How to sign -up for public comment, if advanced registration is required.
- How to make a request for Disability Accommodations
- How will Executive Session occur.

State these instructions both on the agenda and during the meeting. Could also post this information on the entity's website.

Repeat the public participation instructions a few times during the meeting in case people arrived late, or prior to each public hearing/appeal.



# Strategies for Public Participation

## Identifying Meeting Attendees

- When they call in on the phone/number is masked?
- Use the raise hand feature - Where do they find it?
- Enable Webinar attendees to talk and ask them to identify themselves
- Is it a public hearing? Do we need their name and address?
- Pros and cons of using the Chat feature

# Simple Troubleshooting

- Operator Error v. System Failure
- Download Zoom Client to desktop/laptop AND smartphone.
- Keep apps updated.
- Learn how to connect on all devices. Phones can be used during an internet outage.
- Make sure the camera and microphone on your computer are enabled for use.
- Log out of VPN.
- Check Zoom Service Status here <https://status.zoom.us/>



# “Zoom bombing”

Reacting to and handling  
meeting interruptions

Providence City Council  
Shawn Selleck, City Clerk

RI Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal  
and Review

Keith Burlingame, Executive Director

What did they learn and  
how did they change their  
settings?





# Long-Term Impacts

- Many entities have seen increased public participation due to the accessibility of virtual meetings.
- Hybrid Meetings may become the standard in the future.
- Consider investing in audio/visual equipment for your meeting rooms for Hybrid Meetings.
- Economic access to technology and WIFI. How will you accommodate participants who do not have the ability to join a Zoom meeting at home?
- Monitor any Executive Orders and Legislation related to the Open Meetings Act.



# 4<sup>th</sup> Poll

What topics related to virtual meetings  
would you like additional training on?



# Polling 4: Topics for Future Trainings

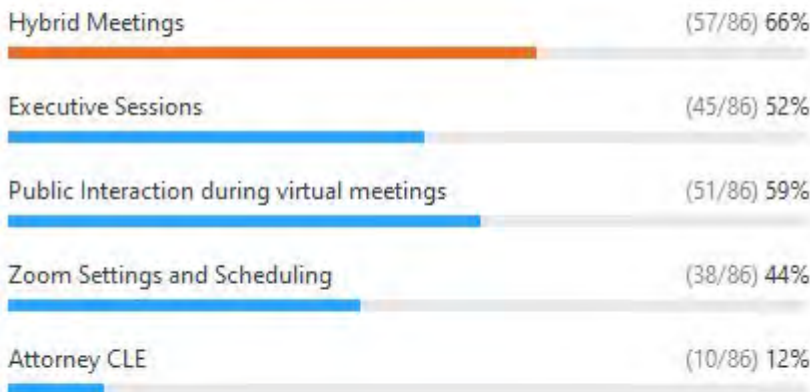


Edit

Polling is closed

86 voted

## 1. What topic would you like additional training on? (Multiple choice)



# Questions and Answers



# Special Thanks

- **Director Tanner for championing this project.**
- **Dawne Broadfield for helping manage today's webinar.**
- **The Department of State for notifying all open meetings filers about today's webinar.**
- **Our Zoom Working Group that made both the guide and this webinar possible, which includes all of the panelists for this webinar, and:**
  - **Jennifer Slattery and Brian Daniels, RI League of Cities and Towns**
  - **John Marion, Common Cause of Rhode Island**
  - **David R. Petrarca, Jr., Esq., Ruggiero, Brochu & Petrarca**
  - **Amy Goins, Esq. Ursillo, Teitz & Ritch, Ltd.**



# Next Steps

- Please complete our survey which you will receive after the meeting.
- Check out DBR's webpage for more information and updates to the Best Practices Guide. <https://dbr.ri.gov/>
- DBR's Guide on Holding Public Meetings via Video Conference: <http://bit.ly/PublicMeetingsGuide>