



Designing virtual workshops



Q is led by the Health Foundation
and supported by partners across
the UK and Ireland

How to design high quality virtual meetings

We firmly believe that good virtual meeting design isn't all about technology, although it will help to have a grasp of the basics. The steps you go through to design virtual meetings are no different than face to face, but you need to be paying attention to how the experience will be different for people, in order to translate your expertise to a session that will work well virtually. We have identified five principles that it's useful to consider.

1. Have a clear purpose and determine the mode you want people to be in, for each individual activity
2. Make sure everyone can contribute and engage in activities
3. Accommodate for reduced attention spans, and different learning styles
4. Take advantage of technology - when it feels right
5. Prepare

1. Have a clear purpose and determine the mode you want people to be in, for each individual activity

This is an obvious one to start with, but it's also something you can't think enough about.

Every session should have a clear objective of what you want to get from it. Consider the questions below. Your answer to these questions will give you important information about the scope of your session.

Why is this conversation important right now?

What would good look like by the end?

Will anything be done afterwards?
If so, what?

How do you want people to feel?

Deciding your answers early on will give an anchor to come back to, when you begin to develop a plan. It will also be useful in the pre-information and introduction that you provide to participants. They will get more from the meeting if they understand why they are there, and what success will look like.

2. Make sure everyone is able to contribute and engage in activities

Designing engaging sessions is even more important when you're working virtually.

If your meeting is designed to be collaborative, then your goal has to be that you will hear from everyone – either out loud, or in writing. It can be easy for a few voices to dominate and for others not be heard.

Only use open conversation for groups of 8 people or less.

Consider activities that allow everyone to be involved. In Q we draw heavily on Liberating Structures and the Q caps cards. These activities are purposefully designed to enable high quality collaboration. While most of them aren't designed to be run virtually, we've been having increasing success in adapting these – and would encourage you to have a go. We'll continue to share our experiences of doing this in the write ups to these workshops.



Creative Approaches
to Problem Solving

Methods toolkit

2. Make sure everyone is able to contribute and engage in activities

Other ideas include:

Take a more directive approach to chairing

- Call on each person to speak

Use technology to help you

- Chat box
- Breakout rooms
- Sli.do

Be explicit about how people can engage. Consider developing instructions, like this example:

- Having your video on makes it easier to feel connected. Please keep your video turned on (if your Wi-Fi allows).
- Please mute yourself when you are not speaking.
- Concentration is harder than it is in person. Pay attention to your concentration levels and give yourself a break if you need to. We are all learning how to do this well.
- Wherever possible, make your contributions succinct and clear. Pausing to think about what you want to say is OK.
- The chat box can be used to share issues and ask questions.

3. Accommodate for reduced attention spans, and different learning styles

We are all experiencing video call fatigue. It can be a lot harder to hold your attention virtually. Some simple things you can do: Limit your meetings to 90 minutes maximum. If you need to do more than this, build in some proper breaks.

Pay attention to energy

- Limit your meetings to 90 minutes as an absolute maximum. If you need longer, consider splitting the meeting into two parts.
- Vary the content and mode of working throughout the session to keep energy up, and engage different people. Include small group discussions and individual reflection time.
- Keep your presentations even shorter and snappier than usual. Don't have any sessions longer than 10 minutes unless there is interactivity.

Experiment with the form of the meeting

- Trial different ways to hold people's attention. Can parts of your meeting involve people being outside or moving around? Recommend people try sketchnoting as a way to hold their attention.
- Challenge some of your pre-conceptions about how you deliver face to face sessions. For example, can you strip the meeting back so that only the essential things happen when everyone is together, and put more onus on people to do work in advance or after the meeting has taken place?
- Try silent meetings where there is dedicated time for reading as part of the meeting. This can be communal and allows people to take in information at their own speed.

4. Take advantage of technology - when it feels right

In any virtual meeting, there will be a low tech and high tech way of running it.

When you're planning to add extra technology and platforms into a meeting, make sure you're really clear about what it's adding, and that it's worth the additional complications.

The platform that we use most in Q – beyond zoom – is Miro. Miro is an online collaboration platform. It allows us adapt workshop activities to work well virtually. We used Miro in the last Rapid Learning and Improvement workshop, and we shared some info about in the meeting write up. There are other similar tools you can look at, such as Mural and Stormboard.



4. Take advantage of technology - when it feels right

Other things to consider

- Stick to platforms that you know are most likely to work on NHS and local authority computer systems
- Do some test runs of the technology to increase your confidence and plan for what will go wrong
- Send around information about the systems you'll be using in advance to participants, and link to information about how to use the information
- In the meeting, be honest about the fact things will go wrong: it's ok to be nervous
- Have a back up plan. For example designate who will take over if someone's internet fails

5. Prepare

People often comment on the professional nature of Q and Q Lab events. We have this reputation, because we prepare. A lot.

This may not always be relevant to everyone's context, but is something you should consider if you are demanding a lot in terms of the time commitment from others.



Decide time for planning

- Develop detailed facilitation notes with precise timings and instructions
- Have clear roles across the team. You may need more people involved than you would do face to face. Consider back up roles in case someone has internet issues
- Consider how you will communicate as a team during the meeting. We often use WhatsApp so it's separate from the inbuilt chat which is hard to follow when you're chairing.
- Prepare what you will be saying in presentations. Practice this and get feedback from colleagues