

The Union Activist's Guide to Online Meetings



Conducting union business online

COVID-19 has allowed many local unions to explore online spaces as a way to conduct union business and connect with members. While physical distancing restrictions make it difficult or impossible to meet in person, online spaces can ensure a regular point of contact with members. This document's intended use is a guide to assist local unions in finding good options and getting started.

Finding the best option for your needs

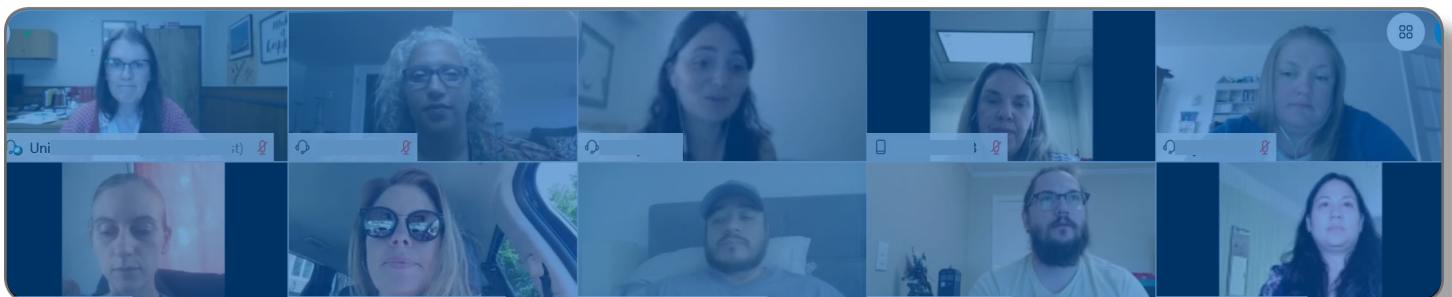
There are many options for video conferencing that range from free to pricey, and everything in between. Not all meetings need to be conducted by video conferencing, and you may decide that a good, old-fashioned conference call is the best way to get your business done.

Just like when you plan a meeting in real life, you want to ask yourself key questions to help define your goals and objectives.

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- How many people will be in attendance?
- Will this meeting have some interaction between participants?
- Do you need to hold a vote?
- How many people are speaking?
- Do you need to share content, such as a slide deck or video?
- How long will the meeting last?
- Is it a closed or open meeting?
- Do you want people to register in advance?

Once you know the kind of meeting you're holding, and the functionality you will need, you can identify options that may work for you.

- **WebEx or Skype:** allow for group video conferencing and both have free and paid options, multiple options and functionality. Paid subscriptions are available for larger or more complex groups.
- **Zoom:** is a widely used option that requires downloading software onto your computer or application on your phone. Many people have used zoom throughout the pandemic, making it an option that many people are familiar and comfortable with. It includes a basic free account, and various paid options for increased functionality and meeting size.
- **Signal messenger** offers secure two-way video conferencing that is stable and user-friendly.
- **Jami** offers secure group video chats through your phone. It is free and ad-free.
- Many platforms have their own video chat service, such as **Facebook, Google** and others. People will need a login with that platform to access your meeting if you chose these tools.



To increase your chances of success for your meeting, think of all the things you would normally put in place for a physical meeting, and think about whether you need to adapt any of them for online purposes. Start with these tips.

- Give as much advance notice as you can, and be sure to actively promote your meeting. People won't find out if you don't tell them when it is, and where to sign up.
- Send a reminder a few hours before the meeting
- Familiarize yourself with the tools and settings of your platform before your meeting. Consider doing a test run with a small group to make sure everything works.
- Have a plan that includes an agenda, a moderator, a note-taker, etc.
- Give people an orientation to the platform, by telling them where the mute button, chat box and other options can be found.
- Set some house rules to help you conduct the business of the meeting.
- Encourage active participation.
- Shut down other things that take up bandwidth (for example, ask everyone to turn their camera off during a formal presentation, and to turn them back on when it is time for discussion).
- Online meetings require people's full attention and can be tiring. It's best to keep the total duration to under 90 minutes. If it will take longer, make sure to factor in 15 minute breaks regularly.
- Use an external head set or ear phones to increase sound quality
- Be respectful of time - set an end-time and stick to it.
- Share materials (prior to or after the meeting).

Basic online security tips for activists

As more of our business is conducted online, it is wise to take additional caution to protect the privacy of our members and the security of our communications with them. It doesn't matter if you have "nothing to hide" - you do not get to decide whether someone's contact information or their communications are at risk due to your online behaviour. Lead by example, set a few ground rules for your local union.

- Communicate with members on personal emails, not employer-provided emails
- Use Signal messenger for secure texting and communications
- Ask permission before recording, capturing or taking a screen shot of your online meetings
- Update passwords for local union email accounts, computers, or any online portals
- Strengthen your passwords
- Use a password manager
- Use two-factor authentication for your own accounts
- Look up other internet resources on increasing your personal internet security.

Constitutional and bylaw requirements

If you're attempting to conduct official business online, with procedural votes that impact the governance of your local union, please be sure to connect with Unifor's constitutional department prior to scheduling and holding online meetings.

Accessibility is a priority

Just like any other union event, planning to make your meeting or activity as accessible as possible is crucial for participation. The accessibility challenges of an online meeting may be different, but your process to address issues around accessibility can be very similar.

Refer to Unifor's Inclusive Practices Tool Kit here: <https://www.unifor.org/en/inclusive-practices-tool-kit>

This toolkit includes practical information about assessing the physical environment to accommodate disabilities, creating accessible event materials, booking support services and suggestions for registration forms to gather information that will assist with accommodation-related needs.

Be creative and have fun!

Just because it's called a "meeting", doesn't mean it cannot be exciting! Make sure to think through ways to keep your meeting engaging and interesting for your participants.

- Invite a guest speaker
- Have a poll to get some group engagement
- Invite participants to share a feeling, idea or action on a piece of paper and hold it up to share with the group
- Invite someone to sing or put up words to a song and have everyone join in
- Encourage participants to add a fun background (sit in front of art work, a poster, or a space in their home that they love)
- Invite everyone to wear their favourite union shirt or hat
- Make it a Lunch & Learn or a Coffee Break so it feels less formal
- Encourage participants to share activist resources (films, books, websites) in the chat
- Promote meetings as family friendly.

Additional Resources

Land acknowledgement

"We would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, Indigenous territory and territories on which we are learning, working and organizing today. Even if we are in different physical locations, we must still recognize the land we're on."

Anti-harassment policy

"Every individual has the right to dignity and respect within the union and within the workplace. Creating and preserving a safe harassment-free environment at all union activities, events and meetings is our collective responsibility. As such, Unifor's anti-harassment policy will be in effect for this meeting and this space." <https://www.unifor.org/en/about-unifor/constitution/unifor-harassment-policy-union-events>

Unifor's online education schedule

Since the start of the pandemic, Unifor has rolled out webinars to provide information and knowledge to Unifor members throughout the pandemic. While courses will pause in July, keep an eye on the schedule to see new sessions announced in late summer and throughout the fall here <https://onlineeducation.unifor.org/>