

# Tips for Effective Virtual Meetings: Crowd-sourced Advice from Around the CRA

Compiled by Cory Baillie, MD, FRCPC

COVID-19 has changed many aspects of our professional lives and the way that we meet with our colleagues and other professionals is no exception. Virtual meetings can be an effective tool but require extra effort from all participants and especially the meeting Chair to optimize the time spent together.

Here are a few dos and don'ts from CRA members based on their experiences with virtual meetings.

**Do** make sure if you are the chair that you log in earlier than everyone else so that everyone can access the meeting. To ensure you start on time, ask all participants to sign in a few minutes before the meeting starts to avoid any technical difficulties, especially if you're using an unfamiliar platform.

– Dr. David Robinson, Winnipeg, and Dr. Ahmad Zbib, Toronto

**Do** optimize your set up with a quiet space free of distractions; use earbuds with a built-in microphone; place your laptop on top of books etc. so that your camera is at eye level; maximize lighting behind your camera and not behind you, and when speaking try to look at your webcam and not other people's images.

– Dr. Cory Baillie, Winnipeg

**Do** consider doing an “around the room” at the start of the meeting. People are more likely to speak and be engaged if they have the opportunity to share at least once at the start.

– Dr. Joanne Homik, Edmonton

**Do** keep everyone engaged if you are the chair. If you notice someone is not very active, consider private messaging them in the chat to make sure they are ok and ask if they have any ideas they want to share. Some people are naturally more quiet, and online meetings can be an overwhelming space to express your opinion.

– Dr. Shahin Jamal, Vancouver

**Do** use the chat function freely to ask questions either as a speaker to assess agreement and comprehension, or as a listener to prompt discussion.

– Dr. Evelyn Sutton, Halifax, and Dr. Janet Pope, London

**Don't** try and make your virtual meetings too large. No one feels valued and most participants end up multitasking and don't focus on the meeting. Take advantage of tools for virtual breakout rooms to keep meeting sizes smaller.

– Dr. Shahin Jamal, Vancouver

**Don't** forget to schedule appropriate break times. It's hard to stay engaged virtually. For longer meetings, consider something special for entertainment during a longer intermission.

– Dr. Trudy Taylor, Halifax

**Don't** miss the opportunity for more casual interaction with meeting participants. At traditional face-to-face meetings it is the sidebar conversations with your neighbour, in the hallways and at the coffee break that are the most meaningful. They build relationships that last for a lifetime. This is the biggest loss with virtual meetings.

– Dr. Vandana Ahluwalia, Brampton