Why hybrid meetings?

Online meetings became popular during the pandemic. The effects of the meeting revolution are permanent. While people like the personal touch of physical meetings, there are times we cannot make it. Hybrid meetings allow in-person and virtual access. It improves participation and makes democracy more accessible. It's more inclusive for people:

1. Who have caring duties.
2. With mobility issues.
3. With weakened immune systems.
4. Who have busy schedules.
5. Who want to save the environment by reducing travelling.
6. Who with economic difficulties to save travelling costs.

How to do it with minimal requirements?

Hybrid meetings are no more technically demanding than online meetings. The prerequisites are the same: good wifi connections, up-to-date usable meeting app, e.g. Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Webex, etc. The only difference is that there is a group of people in the meeting room. This is a guide on how to do hybrid meetings with minimal requirements. The technical layout is designed to fulfil two goals:

1. Let the attendees in the meeting room see and hear the person speaking at the virtual meeting.
2. Let the attendees at the virtual meeting see and hear the speaker in the meeting room. In most meetings, the online attendees cannot see all the people in the physical meeting room, nor is it necessary.

We will need two devices, one to host and one to rove. The host device can be a laptop, tablet, ipad, mobile phone etc. Please use this device to sign in as the host using the account that scheduled the virtual meeting. The chair of the meeting should use this device to admit online attendees, respond to their requests to speak, and reply on chat. The host device should be silent to prevent echoing. Examples are in Zoom.
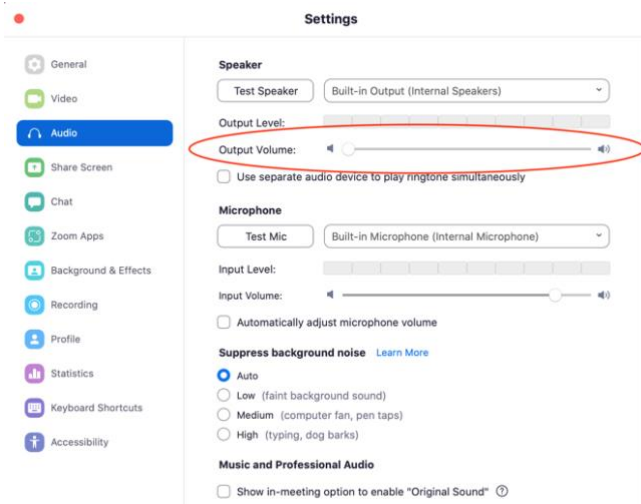
Host device: Laptop, Audio Output Volume set to zero
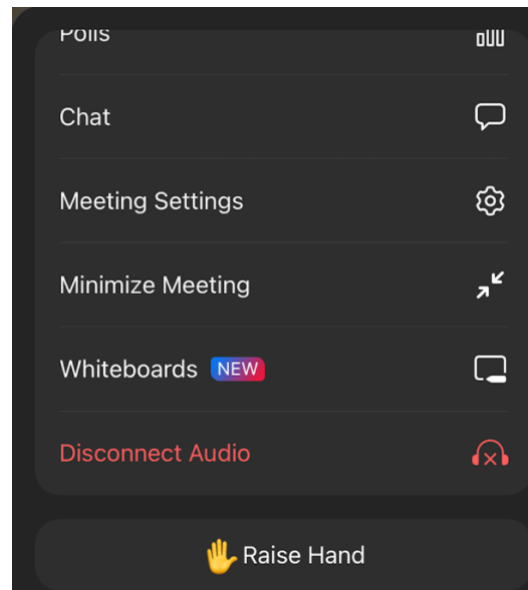
Host device: Mobile device, Disconnect Audio

We need another device (roving device) to work as a roving mic and camera for the speaker in the room. Please sign in on this device with a guest account. It should turn on the front camera, turn up its audio volume, and should be unmuted. When an attendee in the room speaks, they should hold it as if it's a mirror.

When the chair starts the meeting, they talk to the audience in the room as well as the roving device. When a person in the room speaks, they should hold the roving device and speak. When an attendee on the virtual meeting speaks, it works as the display and audio speaker. Somebody in the room should hold it facing the audience in the room.
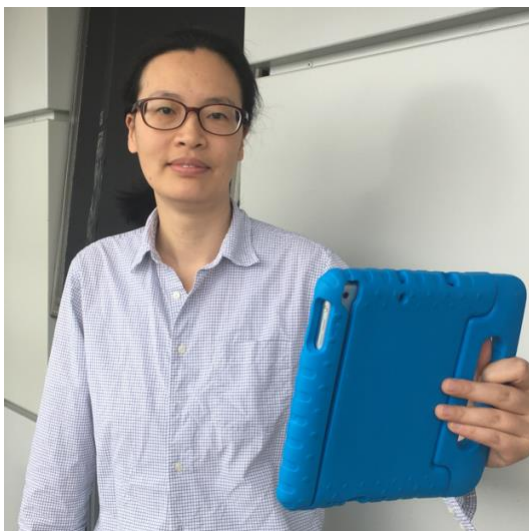
Attendee in the meeting room speaking to the audience in the room and to the zoom

Attendee on zoom speaking, someone in the room holds the device facing the audience.

Ideally, the roving device should be a tablet or an ipad because it's easy to pass around and big enough for display. But a mobile phone can work as well. A laptop without a cable can be passed around, or you can ask the speaker to come to stand in front of the laptop instead.

With one roving device, the meeting size should be less than 50 people. If there are more than one roving devices, only one device can have the audio on at one time, otherwise, there will be echoing.

Notes:
- Please test the wifi beforehand.
- Please charge the mobile devices fully before the meeting.
- Please bring an extension lead and backup battery, just in case.
- Please provide a good strong protective case for the mobile devices, ideally with a handle. The ones designed for children are good.

Labour Women's Network has the #KeepTheGoodStuff campaign for virtual meetings. Councillor Katherine Dunne had a great speech on it. https://twitter.com/LabourWomensNet/status/1442912219998547974

Mumsnet is campaigning for local councils to have the option of virtual meetings. Please support #KeepCouncilMeetingsVirtual https://www.mumsnet.com/news/open-letter-keep-council-meetings-accessible . If you are a councillor, please sign this open letter https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1orgAPy71fNh1YPri3FKh7Is0dNSF8vaFMfEUAeGZj-c/viewform?edit_requested=true