D86 Guide to Hybrid Meetings

Deridor Collier, DTM, Program Quality Director 2021-2022 posted in the D86 blog, https://toastmasters86.org/hybrid-meetings-are-they-on-your-club-horizon/ with regards to clubs deciding to move to hybrid or not.   Who knew almost 2 years ago that everything would still be in flux? Even recommendations for clubs deciding between in person, hybrid and online keep changing. Though there are provincial guidelines for consideration, municipal and venue owner restrictions take precedence. As an example, the province may relax meeting conditions but a venue owner, for example a city run facility or a privately run seniors centre, may have their own guidelines in place which could include the requirement of vaccination passports. The point is every club HAS TO do their due diligence to review their meeting location requirements and resources available to help determine if they can meet in person, go hybrid or stay online.

If a club decides to go hybrid, there are things to think about. This paper is NOT all encompassing as the field continues to change. It is meant as a thorough paper to consider going forward with hybrid meetings.

With regards to hybrid meetings, there are 2 options.

(A) Rotate your club meetings from in person to online every other meeting.

(B) Go full hybrid. Have the in-person venue set up to accommodate members and guests who are not available to attend in person.

The information provided within is a collection of various articles, videos and guides to provide you best practices. The Appendix has links to videos for Hybrid meetings a VERY rough costing guide ($) on equipment options. The costing guide is not exact and is not to be. It is to give you a rough approximation of expenses your club will have to consider. MANY items can vary in price, or you may have free or less expensive sources available to use. Please do so but do abide copyright other terms of usage for any product or service.

To start with if your club is considering hybrid meetings you NEED:

1) Connectivity (1$) Stable internet capable of displaying Zoom (or other) platform and be able to stream video to your online participants. For metrics, for decent video coming into your meeting and for decent video streaming from your meeting to online participants is 2 Mbps (2 megabits per second), download and upload speeds. The good news is most internet packages easily cover this. The bad news is some venues don't have any internet at all which means either you must pay for an internet package which is something you have to factor into your club budget going forward or the equipment / bandwidth at your current venue is too slow and you need to buy a better package. ($).

   If you have Wi-Fi at your venue, you can check your speed with free apps like fast.com or speedtest.net. Wi-Fi DOES fluctuate. It is not a steady stream so do test your Wi-Fi from time to time especially around the time you would normally have your meeting scheduled.

   Higher download / upload speeds with low ping mean better quality video and less stuttering.

   Some members may have unused data plans and may wish to 'donate' their cellular data to the club if there is no internet available. This is a noble gesture however not prudent. What happens if that donor is not available to attend the meeting? As well, to stream a full meeting does require some significant amount of

data, estimated from 1 Gb to 4 Gb (pending quality requirements) for a 2-hour meeting. Now consider how much is used monthly or yearly. It is doable in a pinch but not recommended.

Potential costs for internet connectivity are included in this document, however, as D86 has clubs in such a vast area with different providers that there will be a big variation in pricing. A rough minimal cost from the 3 or 4 networks will be provided as an example. Each club will have to do their own due diligence to find pricing.

2) Microphone(s). (2$) Ideally more than 1. One microphone could be in a laptop /camera that is set up at the podium to record the chair / speaker. Modern laptop/tablet/camera microphones are adequate for up to 2 meters, (or 2-6 feet). Older devices require the speaker to be 1-3 feet max away from the microphone. Good practice tip – whomever is at the podium, speak louder AND have someone monitor the online participants (Zoom master) to ensure speaker is heard.

With the purchase of more than 1 microphone (see recommendation section for type), your online audience will have the ability to hear not just the speaker, but the rest of room (pending microphone placement). Good practice tip – TEST TEST TEST. Before your meeting have all the equipment placed, plugged in and test to see what works best and be prepared to change. Some clubs meeting configuration is a U-shape room. We have seen some meetings where there are more people on one side of the room vs the other. Place your microphone(s) where they will pick up most voices.

3) Camera(s). (3$) Just like microphone your laptop/tablet/phone camera in more modern equipment is quite suitable for recording the speaker. DO ensure there is sufficient lighting. Best practices again – TEST TEST TEST. Modern phones tend to have better cameras than laptops several years old. Just like the microphone, if you can place another camera in your meeting facing the audience then your online audience can see all or most of the members during the meeting and have better experience. There is a new webcam out that offers some unique options with regards to face / motion tracking. There will be a link below to the website. There are no toastmaster reviews of the product. The product is only mentioned for the fact that conference cameras offering the same functionality tend to be $1000-$2000+. This camera OBSBOT Tiny is approximately $200 USD. Having a camera focus on a speaker and be able to effectively track a speaker as he/she moves around the front of the room could be of useful benefit to hybrid clubs in that it offers in person members to still move naturally and for online members to not lose focus or be regulated to a wider camera shot. The OBSBOT Tiny video quality is decent, but it was designed for tracking vs better, natural colour rendition. [Video review of product](). D86 is NOT endorsing this product, however we want to bring to light newer technologies that may be available to members.

4) Screen and projector (4$). This is for your in-person audience to see your online members. Your venue may have these materials in stock to borrow. You may have members who have this available to borrow. Projectors can vary in price from $60 to $2000. YOU DO NOT NEED TO SPEND $2000 FOR A PROJECTOR. With that in mind the basic, no-frills projectors under $200 tend to be of decent quality however in a meeting room with standard lighting may not be bright enough for members in venue to see the screen adequately. Projector brightness is measured in lumens. For a standard office type room, you need 2000-3000 lumens of brightness. Some rooms might get by with 2000, some bright environments would need 5000 lumens to see the projector properly. It is recommended for most meeting room settings to look for projectors with 3000-4000 ANSI lumens. Some cheap projectors will say 2000-5000 lumens, which is the brightness of the white light, but you need to find the ANSI lumens ranting to find the overall brightness. The problem is the more lumens your room needs, the more expensive the projector will be.
Inexpensive projectors are generally up to 500 lumens and therefore not ideal in a lit meeting room. Your club would need to review options for projectors and matching screens if this pairing is not available.

HOWEVER, you may have other options.   Your club may have access to a large TV, though not ideal, could be connected to show your online audience. It may save you on equipment costs to utilize what equipment maybe available to your club and members.

5) Speakers (5$). You have devices for your online audient to hear and see you and we've discussed how to see your online audience. Now you need to hear them. There is a cost factor here, however, this tends to be one of the cheaper components. If you are interacting solely from the lectern then the speakers in your laptop/tablet/phone are low but sufficiently loud enough for the chair / speaker to hear. With regards to the rest of the club, simple Bluetooth or simple computer speakers can be connected to your device relatively inexpensively. Many members have computer or Bluetooth speakers which can be borrowed/donated. Dollar stores and similar low budget stores have simple speakers.   For your consideration – the larger the venue for your club meeting, the more important it is to acquire more expensive speakers to produce the volume required for all your members to hear your online members and guests, (i.e., instead of $5 speakers, you may need $50+ speakers).   Again, first principle – TEST TEST TEST. What works well in your venue? It may take several trial runs with different options to be able to see, hear and interact with online members. **Your club will need to spend some time prior to your first hybrid meeting to work out all the bugs.**

6) Meeting Software (6$). What are you using to connect to your online audience? Zoom is the default standard. Some clubs use Microsoft Teams, GotoMeeting, Google Meet, Facebook Groups, Cisco and others. Some software offers free video conferencing options however you may have finite meeting time limits or reduced features. Zoom is approximately $20 per month or $200 CAD per year(if no discounts are available). Your club should look at online meeting options and facture in the costs of connectivity not just for internet but meeting software for your budgets going forward if you wish to go hybrid. DO consider changing. There is more than one meeting platform out there. Maybe you want hybrid but can't afford $200. There are less expensive platform / options out there, like Skype. Perhaps try different meeting platforms for a week or two. Is it EASY to use for all your members? Is the video/audio quality good? Acceptable? Passible? Don't be afraid of change. Look to get the best experience for the smallest bang for your buck. The pricing page gives rough pricing guidelines but there may be features that you need like the ability to record and share meetings / videos, that aren't in some packages. Can someone meet using only a browser or do they have to download the full program on the computer / tablet / phone?   What works and what doesn't and what can you live without?

Please remember that every club is different, and some items may not be required. You could get by with just a laptop set up at the lectern and a big tv. Your club must determine what works and what doesn't. You may be hindered by budget, you may not. There are other things that you should consider. For example:

Extension cords and power bars: The more equipment you have the power plugs you need, and you'll need somewhere to plug it all in. You may have to change your room configuration or even need a different room just to power your devices. If you are using cellphones as a camera or microphone, even portable speaker, you will need to make sure they are sufficiently charged or have batteries handy.

Time: You need time to set up your devices and take it down. If you are renting a room and you have a finite period of time, you need to factor in when to set up your equipment and may have to shorten your meeting to compensate.

Space: Other than possible meeting room restrictions due to social distancing, you will need space for a laptop, projector, screen, maybe an additional microphone, speaker and camera. And if you have someone presenting a speech with slides – do you need to set up another laptop / device or do they log into the laptop being used to host the meeting?

TSAA / Zoom master: TSAA – Technology Sargeant at Arms. Not everyone is comfortable setting up devices. You're SAA may be appropriately qualified but what if you need him/her to set the room up with tables/chairs/ballots, etc. You may need a member or members to assist in getting everything plugged in and working as quickly as possible.

Best Practices suggest you should have someone in person who is the zoom master to not only interact with the online members and make sure they can see / hear but help welcome online guests, handle online polling, handle break out rooms and other tasks.   Zoom master tasks can be managed by online participants as well but you will still need a representative to be there in person to make sure their voices are heard in your club meetings.

Laptop / Tablet / Computer / Smart phone: You need a device to host the meeting that must be there every week. Keep in mind some devices are limited with what they can do. You may not be able to download the latest version of Zoom if you have an older tablet. You may not have a great picture/sound on an older laptop. You may have a dedicated member bring their laptop every meeting but what happens if they can't make it?

Storage: You may be fortunate to being able to keep all devices and equipment on property. You will need to invest in some storage options to make sure it remains on site and in good condition. You will also need to ensure multiple members have access to it if the SAA/TSAA are not available that meeting.

Just like table topics, you will need to think on your feet. Internet connectivity can wane. You may lose video feed but retain audio. How do you cope? Be prepared to deal with any situation as it arises. Things happen. Prepare to have a flawless meeting but have plans in place when things go awry.

This guide is simply that – a guide. There are many things not covered that you may have consider. District 86 is here to support the clubs and members as best as possible. We will continue to update members on best practices from Pathways, to online meetings, to EasySpeak and any other platform if need arises. Please do reach out to the District 86 Executive team if you have any questions.

Appendix Link – Room Set up & How to Videos

Hybrid set up options (these are ONLY suggestions) you need to determine what fits best for your club:
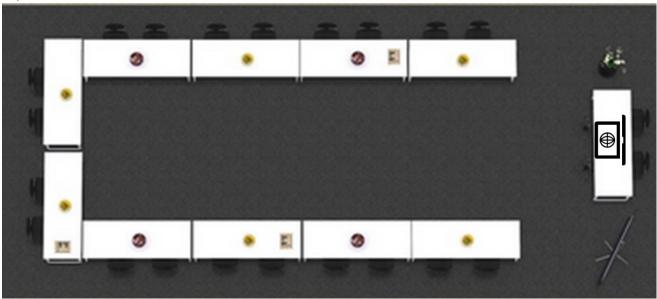
1) Simplest: a) 1 Laptop, 1 Large TV / monitor
                b) 2 laptops
2) Basic: c) 1 laptop, 1 monitor, 1 speakerphone
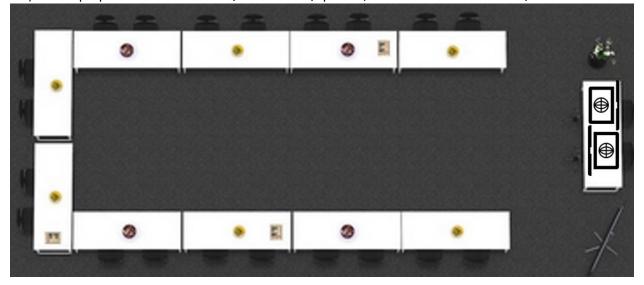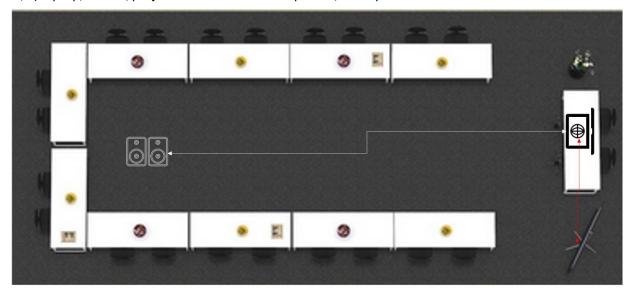   d) 1 laptop, 1 projector, 1 screen

1a)

Laptop is at podium/lectern facing towards the chair/toastmaster/speaker. TV/Monitor is off to the side for members to see.

1 b) Two laptops – 1 to face the chair/toastmaster/speaker, 1 for the members to see / face the audience

2 c/d) laptop, screen/projector or monitor with speaker/microphone for members

There is a plethora of how videos out there, but the best sources (so far) are Markus Seppälä and Tech for Toastmasters. Various clubs and Districts have their own Hybrid Guides however much of the material covered can be found in the channels below.

Markus's YouTube channel can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/c/MarkusSepp%C3%A4l%C3%A4Presents

Markus not only is a Toastmaster who regularly posts on Toastmasters International but along with his channel does occasionally provide live video discussions on hybrid meetings, tech and other items for discussion.

Tech for Toastmasters channel can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCo6zesdnVhIWq_53GHBP-ng

Tech for Toastmasters covers similar topics but also delves into videos on setting up FreeToastHost, using CANVA, evening the annual TI Business Meeting.

Both sites have numerous videos on hybrid meeting protocols, best practices and even recommended equipment.

The Appendix Link Costing Guide is a brief summation pulled from various sources and again. It is up to each club to look at device options and costs. This is only a guide, not a shopping itinerary.

Appendix Link – Costing Guide

1$ - Internet basic costs. Subject to change dependent on where you are and providers available. Resellers such as Tech Savy, Virgin, Primus and others tend to have better pricing than Rogers, Shaw, Cogeco and Bell so please do look around.

Rogers: Internet 10: $ $49.99 for 10 Mbps good for downloading, 1 Mbps, ok for uploading. Has 100 GB limit. Zoom uses 500mB to 1.5Gb per hour. With 4 meetings a month you should have sufficient room for the limit – assuming members on location aren't using internet during the meetings to stream videos, etc. https://www.rogers.com/web/consumer/internet/offers You will need to provide an address to determine coverage.

Bell: Fibre Internet: $49.95 similar specs. Upload speed is UPTO 0.93 Mbps. Video from meeting could become choppy. https://www.bell.ca/Bell_Internet/Internet_access

Shaw: Fibre +10: $50.00, Similar specs. NO mention of upload speed. 150 Gb data usage limit. https://www.shaw.ca/internet/plans

Cogeco: Ultrafibre 6, Ultrafibre 12, Ultrafibre 15: NO pricing available on website. ==NOTE: Companies are required to provide base internet packages for high-speed internet however most companies try to hide the lowest packages and try to upsell you on faster speeds and higher prices.== Download speed is indicated by the package number 6, 12, 15. 12 or 15 is adequate. 6 can work but you may have some lower video quality at your club. Each plan has 2Gb upload which is sufficient for zoom calls. They mention 45 GB limit. Should be sufficient room, again, if members are not surfing during the meeting. Total package comparison is here (without pricing): https://www.cogeco.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/HSI_compare_on_en.pdf

Please note there may be additional charges for installation which can vary from $20 to $75. There may be charges for equipment rental or outright purchase. Please do check total pricing for internet costs.

2$ Microphone(s): Your club may determine that the microphone on a laptop is sufficient. You may wish to purchase a microphone or speakerphone(s) to allow your online guests to hear better, or to hear from a more people in a room.

Microphones can vary from hand to speakerphone to lapel.

Simple wired lapel microphone: $15 to $55 (2 mic set). Make sure you choose suitable length.
Wireless lapel microphone: $45 to $289. (Do not forget batteries). Great for those who can walk around and do not have to worry about tripping over wires.
Speakerphone: $32 to $250+   Handy to cover the need to buy speak and microphone. Well placed – can help the entire room be heard and to hear.

3$ Camera(s). If your club has access to a laptop/tablet/computer, chances are you have a working camera already that is… ok. You can use an older cell phone (tripod $) and use the camera on that with its microphone as your main or use it as secondary camera. Most modern cell phones have decent camera quality and there are members who have a spare older cell phone or two laying around. Try to use a phone within the last 2-3 years max as it will increase your chances of having a better camera. You need HD quality or better. Look for something that has 720p or 1080p specs or higher. For most cell phones the rear camera is of better quality than

the front camera. Your club could decide to get a dedicated video camera like a webcam, or even an old video camera (assuming it has the right output to connect it to a laptop). Webcams vary in price from $25 to ~$400 for speciality webcams with built in lighting for video conference/bloggers. As mentioned earlier on, you may find other devices, newer technologies, such as the OBSBOT Tiny which not only provides webcam capability but also features face/motion tracking to follow the speaker and a microphone array to pick up the speaker(s). Price is $200~ USD.

4$ Screen and projector. Again, you may not need any cost overlay if your venue provides/loans the equipment. Some venues rent it out as needed. That could range for $5 to $50 per night depending on the venue. You could have a large tv available that can display your online members. You could use a stark white surface/wall instead of a screen. It is doable but the brightness/sharpness will be slightly diminished.

Screen Projector (pricing varies on sizes). $30-$150

Projector: ballpark 1000 ANSI Lumens ~$100 to $2000+. The cheaper the projector, the poorer the video quality/brightness but you do not need to spend $2000+. Look to spend $300 or a used one from a thrift / office reuse store.

5$ Speaker(s) Laptop speakers may be sufficient but can be upgraded with inexpensive laptop speakers. These could be found in thrift /dollar stores. Keep in mind, quality may be an issue. Having more than one speaker allows larger rooms to hear the online members better. You NEED to make sure your speaker is plugged into your device(s) to connect to Zoom (or your preferred meeting platform). Cable length is an important consideration. Speakers cost $5-$150. You do NOT need to spend more than $50 on suitable computer / laptop speakers. Bluetooth speakers which are plentiful may work but either the microphone component is of poorer quality or there is an increased risk of interference. We are not stating it is likely, but with many devices in rooms from phones to devices there may interference with the sound.

Speakerphone(s) are a viable option in that they can be of decent quality and also take care of having to acquire a microphone. Speakerphones range: $40 - $200+

6$ Software: Every online meeting platform offers a free version, but it is limited. Zoom, the default, allows meetings up to 40 minutes free of charge. Information provided does not include taxes.

Zoom annual cost in Canada is currently $200, 1-100 guests
Cisco Webex $17.95 per month –(1-50 guests)
GoToWebinar: $104 PER Month (1-100 guests)
ZOHO Meetings: $9USD per month (1-50 guests), $12 USD (100 guests)
Google Meet: $8USD per month (1-100 guests)
Skype (Meet now): Free (1-100 guests)
Toasty (yes it's the name but NOT related to Toastmasters): Free (1-20 guests for 1 hour); $15 USD (1-100 guests up to 3 hours)
Microsoft Teams: Free personal version, (1-100 guests) * free for 1 hour however, like Zoom, they have waived for now the maximum time. NO indication of when they may reinstate. $6.40 per user per month (1 year commitment), (1-300 guests), no time restriction. Meeting recordings.

D86 will continue to monitor the hybrid landscape and look for tips, tricks & recommendations going forward. If you have any questions, please reach out to the Education Outreach chair, John Constant, DTM. educationoutreach@toasmtmasters86.org