

Albania OGP

POC / Technical Secretariat

Guidance for LFPs: Conducting Online Consultations & Meetings

This guidance note provides recommendations from the Open Government Partnership (OGP)¹ on how to effectively convene virtual online meetings² during the OGP co-creation process. These recommendations should be considered whether the meeting is within the technical secretariat and the lead focal points, the thematic groups, steering committees or during public consultations.

Key Messages

- People tend to have shorter attention spans in online meetings
- Use breakout groups to increase interaction, improve attention span of participants and ensure all participants are able to contribute
- Ensure all materials are provided ahead of time
- Use crowdsourcing tools to collect ideas

I. Hosting or Leading a Meeting

Preparation

- Determine the online meeting platform³
- **Establish clear objectives for the meeting regarding:**
 - key messages, expected outputs, decision, follow ups
- **Send the following materials to the participants at least a few before the meeting:**
 - The call-in information, specific agenda items, background materials, log-in details and instructions on accessing the online meeting.

Planning Logistics

- **Have a co-host or co-moderator** (or several for large meetings) assigned for the meeting and responsible for overseeing any technical challenges
- **Agree upon roles and responsibilities ahead of time regarding:**
 - How the meeting will be facilitated;
 - What happens if someone drops off the call;
 - Plans for entering, managing and exiting smaller breakout sessions.

Agenda Setting

- **Invite any additions or changes to the agenda at the start of a meeting**
- Note if there is an “any other business” section at the end
- **Inform participants that they can contact you off-line** to suggest topics that need to be covered in a future consultation or through a round of emails.

Explaining the rules of participation at the start of the meeting

- **Clearly explain the rules of participation at the start**
- **Encourage constructive and active participation**

¹ Minimally adapted from: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/taking-the-ogp-co-creation-process-online-managing-virtual-meetings/>

² For additional recommendations see: <https://hewlett.org/friday-note-21-escapes-from-conference-call-hell/>

³ For a database of platform options see: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/taking-the-ogp-co-creation-process-online-online-tools-platforms/>

- **Emphasize importance of inclusivity and being respectful towards all participants and ideas**
- For larger meetings discussions may take place in chat boxes or virtual breakout rooms
- **Ask those not speaking to put their microphone on mute**
- Explain that the moderator will call on participants to unmute to speak or ask questions and explain how to do this
- Ask that each participant share their name and affiliation when they speak

Maximizing Interaction

- **Attention span for an online meeting is 45 minutes**, but longer if more interactive
- **Introduce breakout groups to improve interaction and attention spans**
- Icebreaker exercises increase interaction – inclusion of ‘fun’ live polls
- Ask speakers or meeting moderators to pose questions in the meeting chat box (and ask someone to collect the answers and report on some of the answers)

Note Taking

- Assign note taking to someone who is not moderating
- Note-taker can email agenda and background materials during the meeting to any participants who do not have them on hand
- Designated document to collect notes and ideas from all participants to all everyone to contribute

Summarize Action Items

- State any conclusions, action items and next steps and corresponding responsibilities and deadlines at the end of the meeting
- [Google doc](#) can be used to show live what action items are being noted
- Inform attendees of when materials from the meeting will be available

II. Managing Breakout Groups

If your group is large and you are finding a need to bring the whole group together while still having smaller group discussions, try the following methods:

- Decide before the meeting how to divide participants into groups or smaller teams
 - Consider organizing groups along thematic or sector lines
- **Platforms for break out groups:**
 - [Bluejeans](#), [Google Meet](#), [Jitsi](#), and [Skype Meet](#)
- Specialized collaboration platforms and tools:
 - [Zoom’s breakout rooms](#),
 - [LUMA Institute’s templates in MURAL](#) for visual collaboration
 - [Ideafly](#) for online interactive tools such as ‘post it’ style tools and online flip charts
- **Appoint a lead facilitator or moderator for each breakout group** and have them explain the participation mechanics and the objectives of the breakout session
 - Ensure that there is back up support for the facilitator in case technical challenges are faced by the latter at any point during the meeting.
 - Depending on time available and group size, all participants may be invited to introduce themselves briefly.
- **Have everyone brainstorm ideas in a pre-workshop session where possible**, then cluster ideas and discuss
- Remember that if you break the participants into subgroups for an activity, you may need to have them share their discussion with the broader group. Consider how that will affect the meeting time, decide who will do this and how
- **Ensure that you provide time reminders on when the breakout session will end and how participants can re-join the full group discussion**

III. Sharing Content with Your Group

It may sometimes be useful to share visuals or documents while you are facilitating a meeting. Some considerations are:

- **Inform participants where videos, PDFs, and other necessary files are stored:**
 - Examples: [google drive](#), [Dropbox](#) or [Box](#)
- **Send materials that will be used ahead of time**
- Keep it simple – don't have too many visual elements or tool features in the meeting to avoid having to troubleshoot during the meeting.
- **Practice the logistics beforehand:**
 - Ensure organizers/breakout room facilitators/note takers are comfortable moving seamlessly between tools (ex. from video conferencing to chats to documents and back)
- **Be mindful of accessibility needs:**
 - For people joining by phone this may also include making sure you send presentations or documents via email first so that participants have time to download/print off anything they may need in advance.
 - Facilitator should explain anything visual and promote participation of those phoning in

IV. Assessing Ideas with the Group

For prioritizing ideas with the participating group of stakeholders to help select draft commitments and ideas consider the following:

- Ensure participation from stakeholders who will join the consultation is appropriate for the decisions to be made:
 - **Complex topics** with ambitious agendas have a better chance of success with fewer participants or with breakout groups.
 - **Straightforward topics** involving fewer exercises still work with larger groups.
- Brief key participants in cases where decision making may be more challenging
- Collect ideas using crowdsourcing tools
- **Minimize presentation time**
- **Maximize time for discussion among participants** and include discussion time in the agenda
- **Decisions can be made by:**
 - Simple majority or;
 - Voting by a fixed percentage of participants or;
 - Consensus or;
 - No objections basis or;
 - Conditional agreements subject to any changes agreed.
- **Facilitate nonverbal communication**
 - For a consensus vote, use webcams to get a "thumbs-up" from everyone or ask to see heads nodding in agreement;
 - Emojis and GIFs in chats can enhance nonverbal communication too.
- **Use a poll, or a platform with built-in voting functionality:**
 - Examples: [Poll Everywhere](#), [Mentimeter](#) , or [MURAL](#)⁴
- Be realistic about what can be managed in one session
 - If the agenda is long with multiple decisions needed, consider breaking up the meeting into a series of shorter sessions spread over a period

⁴ MURAL's built-in voting functionality speeds up the process and allows for additional rounds of voting. Results from multiple voting sessions can be quickly reviewed so everyone can clearly see how preferences changed over time