
EUROSCITIZEN COST ACTION - VIRTUAL NETWORKING SUPPORT GRANT 2021

Best Practises and Guidelines for **Hybrid COST Meetings**

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Authors:

Joelyn de Lima, Lilian Smith

Please note – meetings and the budget for the moderation support (Local Organiser Support) need to be approved by the MC and COST before being planned.

COST regulations relating to Hybrid meetings can be found in Vademecum (including but not limited to section 7.1.5)

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What is a hybrid event?

A hybrid event is one where ***some of the participants are gathered physically together in one location and some of the participants join in remotely.*** These events are designed to use both formats and do not use any one format as an afterthought.

One of the biggest concerns to running a successful hybrid event is to ensure equity of participation, **the experiences of the participants joining in-person and remotely should be as similar as possible.** This is difficult to get right but very easy to get wrong.

To hybrid or not to hybrid

In both virtual-only and in-person-only formats you will have to design the experiences just for one format and so can ensure that your participants are having the same experience.

Some added benefits to virtual-only formats:

- They can increase the accessibility to participants (geography, economy etc).
- Some virtual tools (such as using chat functions) can increase participation:
 - by allowing for several simultaneous contributions to the conversation
 - increasing contribution from introverted participants.

Some added benefits to in-person-only formats:

- opportunities for informal conversations and relationship building
- avoiding major technological glitches.

Hybrid events however, come with added concerns:

- designing experiences for two different formats
- ensuring equity in participation
- dealing with technical glitches among others.

Therefore...

...before organising your next hybrid event - ask yourself the very important question:

Does this event need to be a hybrid event?

What is the added benefit by having it in the hybrid format that cannot be achieved in the virtual format?

If the potential benefits of having a hybrid event outweigh the risks, we have put together a list of best practises and guidelines to help you organise a successful event.

Note: These guidelines are not written for the following instances

- in-person events which are live streamed (virtual audience is passive)
- instances when people are physically in the same place but are only interacting virtually (no real in-person interaction)

Moderators

- Have either two moderators (one joining virtually, one joining in-person) or one in-person moderator who will also facilitate interaction with the virtual participants.
- If you have two moderators, have a joint briefing meeting before the event and make sure they are on the same page about individual and joint responsibilities.

Technology

Technology can make or break a hybrid event. So ensure that you have access to all the technology you will need and test it. Then test it again. And one more time!

Audio

- This is the most important technological aspect of running a successful hybrid event. While it is possible to have a successful event without being able to see everyone, it is impossible to do so without being able to hear participants.
- Everyone hears everyone: Everyone in the room should be able to hear what people participating remotely say and vice versa.
 - If possible, conduct the in-person activities in a room that has a built-in speaker and microphone system.
 - Alternatively, arrange for handheld microphones that are passed around. Make sure that people only speak when they have a microphone.
 - Ensure that the speakers in the room allow for in-person participants to hear the remote participants.
- If everybody in person is also joining the virtual space - make sure they are muted and that their speaker volumes are turned off - this will prevent feedback sounds.
 - In this case, in person participants should also keep their personal microphones muted for the whole duration and only rely on the microphones in the room to speak. This will:
 - prevent issues with unmute/mute
 - ensure that there is uniform sound output throughout the event.

- Some additional tools:
 - Noise cancelling software. Investing in such software will enhance the auditory experience for both in-person and virtual audiences by eliminating background noises. E.g. Krisp*

Video

- Everybody sees everybody. Or at least everyone sees the face of the person speaking.
- It would be advisable to be able to see the faces of the in-person speakers rather than one view of the whole room. This can be achieved by two means:
 - Have the in-person activities in a space where it is possible to manipulate the room cameras to zoom-in and focus on the speaker.
 - Have a mobile webcam (just like the mobile handheld) microphone which is taken near the speaker.
- An additional camera displaying a view of the room could be a nice way for virtual participants to see what is happening in the physical space.

Collaboration tools:

- Using digital collaboration tools will allow both in-person and virtual participants to interact with each other.
- One of the key tools that you can use is the chat function in the online space. This will allow participants to talk, respond to each other, and share resources in real time. A few points to consider:
 - If this function is going to be used - the in-person participants should also have access to participate in the chat.
 - It is up to the organisers to decide and set the ground rules: Should only questions be posed, who responds to questions, what about comments, is there a period during which the chat function should be disabled to prevent distractions?
 - It would be wise to have somebody monitor the chat to detect inappropriate content and take action.
- It is also advisable to have a virtual space for participants to share information about themselves, contact information, resources etc.

- Here are some examples of tools* that could be used:
 - Google docs/sheets/slides*. These can be used in the following ways:
 - Docs: Creating smart agendas (agendas that have embedded links to external documents/resources), collaborative note taking (meeting minutes/group discussions)
 - Sheets: Contact information of participants, lists of resources
 - Slides: Participant introduction (create a deck of blank slides with each participant's name and they can individualise it to introduce themselves)
 - Jamboard* - collaborative drawing/brainstorming
 - Trello* - collaboration, task management (could be useful in the planning stage)
 - Padlet* - brainstorming, sharing and organising resources, poster sessions
 - Piazza* - group work, posing questions, (note - piazza does not allow for real-time collaborative editing)
 - Slido*/ Mentimeter*/Poll Everywhere*/Responseware* - Interactive polling, text responses
 - Slack* - topic based chat rooms, direct messaging

Before the Event

- Share the agenda with all the participants. Keep it simple.
- Assign prep-work if necessary. This will help ensure that all the participants are on the same page.
- Make a smart agenda.
 - This is one virtual document that will contain not only the agenda for the day, but also links to other e-resources or collaborative spaces that will be used during the event.
 - An important feature of the smart agenda is that it can be constantly updated with information and links, and you will not have to keep sending emails with the new/changed information.
 - This is more efficient than providing multiple links at multiple timepoints. Additionally, you could make the document secure by limiting the view/edit access.

- After the event, the smart agenda can be updated to provide links to the resources generated and also to video recordings.
- Test the technology!

During the event

- Always keep equity of participation in mind. This is a hybrid event, so participants in both formats should have equivalent experiences.
- Set some ground rules:
 - Everyone raises their hand - and speaks only after being called on by the moderator.
 - People say their name before speaking
- Alternate comments/questions between remote, in-person, and those posed in chat.
- Breakout rooms. It might be advisable to have them be format specific and not have hybrid breakout rooms. However, if there is a product that is expected during/at the end of the breakout session (reporting back, working on a topic) this should be done in the virtual space.
- Allow virtual participants to join early and hang out late - to give them the benefit of having some time for informal conversations. If the meeting is being recorded - please ensure that you start the recording only when the official business starts and end it as soon as it ends, so that people can feel free to interact without worry of being recorded.
- If there is an in-person main speaker who will get the chance to informally interact with the in-person audience, schedule a time when they can interact informally with the virtual participants as well.

After the event

- Ask participants (in both formats) what worked and what did not work - and share this feedback with EuroScitizen.

***IMPORTANT:** Neither COST nor EuroScitizen recommends or endorses this product. It has merely been used as an example/illustration.
