

Addressing Conferencing Efficiency at NWU

<p>IT IS COMPULSORY to consult NWU-IT Electronic Services [+27 (0)18 299 4119 alex.venter@nwu.ac.za] before purchasing any audio, video or e-Conferencing equipment. Best practices must be followed from planning to support and maintenance for offices, meeting rooms, laboratories, classrooms and all other NWU spaces. NWU policy states that only the Chief Director IT can approve exceptions.</p>					
Video Conferencing	Venue Examples	Design Requirements & Equipment	Support Model	Best Practices ①	Training
Extra Large Venue 70+ Participants [Senate, Research Seminar Broadcasting]	P-C1:135 P-F1 Senate M-New Large V-New Admin	Properly designed acoustics (SANS 10103)	<p>Each venue is assigned responsible technologically aware meeting room coordinators and assistants, experienced through regularly supporting video conferencing and information technology used during strategic, management and research meetings. Their competence is established through theoretical and practical training and assessment.</p> <p>Support for single participants or office meetings is provided by skilled videoconferencing coordinators in each department, responsible for video conferencing and office technology assistance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled venue coordinator and assistants • Observe proper video conferencing etiquette ② • Skilled chairperson • Test remote connections 24 hours before meeting • Monitor and control meeting from an additional participant computer 	<p>Cultivate Technological Awareness through Video Conferencing Training presented as Blended Learning: Hands-on training and e-Fundi, initiated by NWU IT.</p> <p>Compulsory for Video Conferencing Coordinators and Assistants. A skilled videoconferencing coordinator or assistant has been successfully trained through extended hands-on training and assessment.</p>
Large Venue <>25 Participants [UMC, Faculty Board]	P-Health Sciences	Shure DIS Microphone System or similar			
Medium Venue <>12 Participants	P-C1:134	Polycom, etc.			
Office <>6 Participants	P-F1:159	Logitech Group with extension microphones			
Single Participant	Acoustically acceptable office	Laptop containing web camera, microphone and speakers or a microphone and headset combination			
Alternative Mobile or Phone Participant (Only in emergency)	When abroad or in absence of Internet connectivity	Smart Phone, Tablet or Telephone			

① ② See next page

① Best Practices for videoconferencing technology use

Arranging or joining a video conference. Be certain about:

- a) The conference date and time (and time zone)
- b) On which videoconferencing platform you connect
- c) In which virtual room the meeting takes place
- d) The electronic link you send out or have received
- e) Who will be the skilled meeting chairperson or host
- f) The agenda and required documentation sent prior to, or shared during the meeting

Ensuring a prompt and reliable meeting:

- g) Verify availability of a skilled meeting coordinator (and assistants for a large meeting venue)
In the case of single participants or office meetings, skilled videoconferencing coordinators in each department, responsible for video conferencing assistance
- h) Test connections and local and remote operation of sound and camera 24 hours before an important meeting, especially to first-time remote participants
- i) Test local equipment at least one hour before the meeting (to address unexpected software updates and equipment or battery failure)
- j) Use cable-connected internet when available. Wi-Fi use implies risk associated with lower reliability when participating in videoconferencing, compared to cable-connectivity.

Ensuring pleasant and clear communication:

Choose your meeting venue wisely. The venue should be audibly and visually pleasing from the perspective of the microphone and camera. Acoustics should be quiet with minimum reverberation. It is essential that participants should be in close proximity to microphones, speak distinctly into the microphone, appear attentive and considerate. Participants should not be in the dark.

When large meeting venues participate in videoconferencing, skilled meeting coordinators monitor the meeting from separate computers connected as participants to the meeting.

In this way:

- k) Quality assurance, to verify that audio and video is successfully shared to remote participants, may be performed
- l) When manually controlling the video camera, the controller may be able to see the camera image while it is not possible inside the venue when a document is shared
- m) Disturbances to the meeting could be curtailed, so that participants on ordinary telephones and remote participants who do not adhere to proper meeting etiquette could be muted
- n) Text messages sent by remote participants using the Chat feature of the conferencing platform or a backchannel, could be relayed to the chairperson, or acted upon by the coordinator
- o) Participants experiencing technical difficulties could be assisted
- p) The number of participants could be verified, before and during the meeting
- q) Recording of the meeting could be controlled

② Conferencing Etiquette for participants

- (i) Pleasant, orderly, and productive videoconferencing meetings need prudent planning, a first class agenda, and considerate participants observing meeting etiquette.
- (ii) Consider others by allowing the chairperson to control the meeting. Only one person should be speaking at a time. At most, the microphone of the chairperson and the microphone of only one other participant allowed to speak by the chairperson should be unmuted at any given time.
- (iii) Show consideration when entering the meeting by only opening your microphone when no disturbing sounds are audible in your own meeting venue. Do not enter the meeting with an open microphone subjected to offending noises, drowning out other participants in the meeting. First listen, then speak when appropriate. Introduce yourself properly and greet other participants. Then provide opportunity for others to do the same.
- (iv) Keep your microphone muted and only briefly open when requesting to speak, or when given an opportunity to continue speaking.
- (v) Have required documents ready to share with the meeting when appropriate. Stop sharing when finished.
- (vi) When entering a large meeting with many participants, especially if the meeting is being recorded and/or streamed live, enter with your camera disabled and microphone muted.
- (vii) When your microphone is unmuted, do not engage in conversation with someone beside you, use your phone or type on your computer. Do not allow open microphones to be subjected to disturbing sounds from jewelry, keyrings, tableware, blinds, curtains or furniture.
- (viii) Speak clearly, directly into the microphone, maintaining emphasis on every word. If the screen you are looking at to see other participants is not positioned directly on the other side of the microphone, position yourself so that you speak directly at the microphone while looking at the screen.
- (ix) Disconnect from the meeting when finished.