

Virtual Institutional Review Board (IRB) Meetings

INTRODUCTION: With the current COVID-19 pandemic, researchers and IRBs are confronted with ethical and operational challenges well-beyond those that most have ever faced. HRP Consulting provides information such as this “Think About” to help organizations, researchers, and IRBs develop appropriate solutions to these challenges. There is no one best practice in circumstances such as this. It is our hope that this information helps you identify and develop the solution that will work best for your organization and research community. A few tips:

- Remember to document your decisions and the thought process behind them, these records will be important as we all move forward
- Remember to check federal, state, and local orders (e.g. shelter-in-place), and any organizational or facility restrictions or requirements, to ensure that your solutions are workable and comply with these rules
- Remember to reassess often – information is evolving so quickly and what made good sense today may change tomorrow (e.g., because of a new or modified federal or state order, because of new guidance, because of emerging evidence, etc.)
- Remember to flag protocol records that may require follow-up action down the road

SUMMARY:

Holding an IRB meeting via electronic means (for example: Go-to-meeting, Zoom, Google Hangouts, telephone) has its challenges, but proper preparation can make the transition seamless.

Below are some important concepts to think about:

- All IRB members **must receive access to all protocols and documents to be reviewed in advance** of the meeting providing as much time as possible for member review. Typically, if possible, at least one week in advance.
- Once you have **determined what system** (i.e. Zoom, Go-To-Meeting, Skype, conference call, etc.) you will be using to conduct the meeting, conduct a trial run prior to the meeting to work out all glitches.
- **Have set roles** for all members and staff who are presently on the IRB (i.e. IRB Chair, members, staff):
 - Who is responsible for documenting meeting attendance?
 - Who will confirm quorum at the start of, and throughout the course of the meeting?
 - Who will take the vote counts during study reviews?
 - Who will take the meeting minutes?
- It is imperative that the IRB always knows who is and isn't in the meeting during the entire meeting. IRB members must be told to **clearly announce when they are arriving or leaving the**

meeting for any reason, so that quorum can be maintained, and accurate attendance and vote counts can be assured. Note that the reason for leaving does not need to be announced (or recorded in the minutes), unless the reason is due to a conflict of interest.

- Continuously remind members to **check their “mute” button**. Develop a process in which all members are acknowledged when speaking. If no acknowledgement is heard, ensure the mute button is not activated.
- The IRB Chair must ensure that all members present have an opportunity to speak. This isn't always easy, particularly by telephone, but it's a good idea for the chair to have a **list of attendees and address each member by name** for further comment or questions before summation of discussion, motions, calling of the vote, etc.
- If possible, it is a good idea to **have the ability to “project” or “display” information** from the submission (i.e. consent forms, etc.) for all to see during the vote. Many products have a share screen feature.
- When voting, the Chair should **call each member individually by name for their decision**, to ensure all members' votes are accounted for and no mistake is made on what their vote actually is. Some systems have a “raise you hand” function as well.
- Have a **process for allowing a member to recuse themselves** from a review due to conflict. The member can “sign-off” or hang up during the review (confirmed by staff), and texted (or other form of communication outside the meeting) when the study review and vote has concluded so they can sign back on. Alternatively, if there is only one member who has a conflict with one study, the agenda can be rearranged so that the study on which the member is conflicted can be the last item on the agenda, so the member can leave the meeting with no need to return. When this is done, the minutes should reflect that the member left the meeting (as opposed to recusing due to conflict).

DOCUMENTATION:

Be sure that the IRB meeting minutes clearly document that the meeting was held remotely, that all members were individually called for attendance and voting, announced their departures and returns throughout the meeting, and that all members received their agenda and supporting documents with enough time to properly review the material prior to the IRB meeting. The minutes should document the member by name and the times in and out so that quorum is counted accurately for each submission reviewed.

Some Virtual Meeting Resources

1. Doodle

Doodle is an online **scheduling tool**. It is the simplest way to schedule a meeting regardless of the target audience. With Doodle, a poll is created with different dates and time options for participants to choose. The meeting organizer can then track, in one place, everyone's responses, thus facilitating meeting scheduling.

Link: <https://doodle.com/en/>

Pricing and Features: <https://doodle.com/premium>

2. Zoom

Zoom is a remote **conferencing services** company. It provides a remote conferencing service that combines video conferencing, online meetings, chat, and mobile collaboration. Zoom provides various options and packages. The free option works very well, and connectivity does not appear to slow down while a greater number of people are using this tool. Screen share is possible via laptops, tablet devices and phones. Zoom also has good interactive tools. Meeting participants can write messages, raise hands to participate and ask questions. Moderator can mute and unmute as necessary.

Link: <https://zoom.us/>

Pricing and Features: <https://zoom.us/pricing>

3. Cisco Webex Meetings:

Webex is an **online meeting tool** that allows you to meet virtually. It provides video conferencing, online meetings, screen share, and webinars. Users can join meetings from anywhere and any device. During this time of increase remote work, Webex has provided a no cost option (<https://www.webex.com/covid19.html>).

Link: <https://www.webex.com/>

Pricing and Features: <https://www.webex.com/pricing/index.html>

4. Google Hangout: Google Hangout is part of G Suite and it can only be used within G Suite which includes email, cloud storage and videoconferencing options. Many of the google tools are free as long as the user has a Gmail account. Other services like G Suite have a monthly subscription. G Suite is developed for business to own the content of documents.

Link: <https://gsuite.google.com/>

Pricing and Features: <https://gsuite.google.com/pricing.html>

5. GoToMeeting: GoToMeeting is an **online meeting**, desktop sharing, and video conferencing software package that enables the user to meet with other computer users, customers, clients or colleagues via the Internet in real time.

Link: <https://www.gotomeeting.com>

Pricing and Features: <https://www.gotomeeting.com/meeting/pricing>