



Directory of Virtual Meeting Tools

Introduction

Networks of professionals of any kind face many challenges to working together—funds, distance, time management. But today’s technology offers a wide variety of virtual meeting tools to help you meet these challenges, keep you connected, and make your work together more efficient and effective. You can tailor the way you use these tools to meet the needs and capabilities of the members of your network.

This guide briefly describes several types of tools and their uses; it offers a “Quick View” of these and a few examples of each as well, because many of these tools are designed for different purposes, you’ll want to select the tool or tools that best suit your needs.

Technology is continually changing, so these examples represent a snapshot of only some of the available tools. Programmers will have developed new ones even before this document is released, and they will have added to or changed features of existing tools. Be sure to



review carefully the websites that feature each tool before choosing any option, to ensure that it is the best one for your network members.

Whichever tools your network uses, be sure to put guidelines in place to ensure professionalism and confidentiality in all virtual interactions. For example, guidelines would ask members to refrain from posting or sending personal information, selling or sharing a list of network members with nonmembers, or posting any information that might compromise the confidentiality of children or adults in their program. These guidelines should be shared with all members when they join the network. You and other network members will also want to be aware of any policies that your individual programs have in place regarding social media or other Internet activities.

Virtual Meeting Tools

Conference Calling

A conference call involves connecting three or more people on a phone call. This can be done two ways: directly through a personal telephone call or through a conference call service.

Personal telephone call: Your telephone service provider may offer more features than you know about, including a way to link two or more people on a call. Check your phone menu or user’s guide, or contact your service provider for more information. If this service is available to you, you may need no additional service to set up a conference call with members of your network.

School readiness begins with health!

Conference call service: There are some free and many fee-based conference-calling services available. These services provide the ability to connect various numbers of callers, so be sure that the service you are considering can accommodate the number of people in your network who will be joining your calls. Typically this service involves sending a single conference-line phone number (and sometimes a passcode) to all participants, who then dial in to join the call. Not all services offer a toll-free number, however. With some services, individual callers will incur costs for the call, in addition to the cost of the conferencing service itself.



Video Calling/Conferencing

The video capacity of computers, smartphones, and tablets allows you and your network members to see as well as speak to each other as you meet virtually. There are numerous video-calling technologies that you can use for one-to-one connections, and some of these also enable group video calls.

Anyone wanting to use video-calling technology will need a webcam in order to be seen on the call; many computers, smartphones, and tablets come with these built in. Those users without webcams already in their devices can

purchase an external camera that plugs into their computers and provides the video for these calls.

There are three options for securing audio capacity during a videoconference. You may choose the microphone and speakers that are usually built into most computers. You can also install external speakers, which many people do because the sound quality tends to be better. Or you may choose to use a telephone connection while accessing video over the Internet.

Additionally, many instant message-type software options (see “Group Chat”, below) have video-calling features that your networks could use.

Group Chat

An instant messenger (IM) service allows people to have an online “conversation,” known as a chat, by typing to each other and sending messages that are viewed instantly. (IMs are not to be confused with text messaging, which is the term used for phone-to-phone mobile, not Internet-based, communications.) IM is typically considered a one-to-one communication option, but most IM tools also allow you to set up instant, non-permanent groups. This group communication option is called a “Chat” or “Group Chat” rather than an “IM.”

Many programs and applications allow for instant messaging and chat. Windows Live Messenger (now Skype messenger), AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), and Google Hangouts are among the most popular. Advances in IM software allow many of these programs to do much more than just text message: they can send files and pictures, and they allow you to have audio connection over the Internet and even video chats.

These IM options are free with registration and sometimes include the option of upgrading for a fee to add more features. IM software typically allows you to communicate only with others who are using the same software (e.g., Skype to Skype). However, there are some chat programs or applications that allow you to talk to many different IM sources at once.

Email/Electronic Mailing Lists

Electronic mailing lists (sometimes referred to as “listservs” or “distribution lists”) do not require special software; users only need to have an email account or access to simple group email features, such as Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups. Email lists are a convenient and simple way to communicate with members of your network, posing questions, soliciting answers/discussions, scheduling meetings, and sending information.

You can easily set up an email list by collecting email addresses from all network members and creating a group contact. You can then include all members of the group in one email. By using “Reply to All,” members can respond to the whole group and maintain communication and conversations throughout their sequence of emails.

If you are initiating an interactive electronic mailing list, you may want to suggest to the other network members that they also set up the list in their own email contacts. This group contact will make it easy for them to initiate an email to all members, as well.

If your group email distribution list gets large, your emails may be flagged as Spam. You can avoid being perceived as Spam by using a group feature, such as Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups, to create your listserv. Because this kind of group sends mail to individuals

who agree to receive emails by subscribing to the group, mass emails from this kind of distribution list are not flagged as Spam. To take advantage of this feature, one person will need to serve as the “administrator” to set up the group. This administrator creates the account with a name that is representative of your network and invites members to subscribe. Members can then post comments, questions, or ideas that will automatically go to the email inbox of all subscribed members. Such groups can also be set up as a one-way communication for simply sending information, not enabling the group members to communicate among each other. In this case, only the administrator is able to send emails to the group. A network might use this approach simply to send announcements about events or resources, and choose to use other tools for discussions. If you choose this method, it gives greater monitoring responsibility to the administrator, potentially limits the number of email messages sent, and possibly adds more time between responses.

Sharing Documents

Your network may want to look at or work on a document together. You can do this in a number of ways:

- **Document Sharing.** If you just want others to see a document (e.g., you want to share a checklist or a parent flyer), you can either email it, or you can post it on a website (see “Website Design” below) where your group can go to view it and, if they choose, download it to their own computers. Some group chat options also allow you to send files. The purpose is simply to allow others to view documents, not to edit or otherwise contribute to them.

- **Screen Sharing.** You can view a document with several people through screen sharing, which allows everyone involved to work on a document together. Screen-sharing software allows one individual to share his or her computer screen with others while all are online at the same time. Participants are invited to log on to a particular site; when they are all present, the individual whose document is being shared clicks on an icon that enables the others to see his or her screen “live” as they all work. This software is helpful for collaborative work (e.g., viewing a document together as you all discuss it and one person enters any changes) and/or for conducting presentations. Free software exists but is often limited to one-to-one sharing. For larger group sharing, most software must be purchased.
- **File Sharing.** Another way to work on documents together is through file sharing, which allows a user to upload documents to an online site that others who have been given access can reach from any location. One person at a time can then work on the files or documents directly online; users do not download the files to their own computers, and they do not share a screen to view each other’s work simultaneously. While they do not work together simultaneously (as with screen sharing), this file-sharing option allows users to edit, comment on, and develop documents while working from the same file, rather than working separately on different versions or copies of the same document (and often creating nightmares around “version control”). You may need to download free software before using some file-sharing sites.

Website Design

Your network may wish to create and launch its own website. There are low- and no-cost options that give you a template that you can customize to meet the needs of your group. For example, you might want to have a link on your website where you share files by posting resources for others to view; you might want to keep a calendar of events and meetings; or you might want to have a discussion board. Password protection enables a network to keep some or all of the areas of a website accessible to members only.

Social Media

Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and various other social media websites allow you to post text, images, videos, and other media to a public Internet space, which is then available for others to view whenever they please. Other people are also able to “follow” your social media account, which means they receive alerts whenever you post something to your space. Privacy controls for these media allow you to define the degree of public accessibility most appropriate to your particular space. Most of these sites also have ways for people to create specialized “sub-spaces,” often called groups, hashtags (#), or pages that are created for a special interest, business, or marketing campaigns. These groups can restrict access to invited members only and are useful to networks as private spaces for invited members to communicate.

For examples of each of these tools, see the Quick View table on pages 6–10.

Quick View of Virtual Meeting Tools

The following table provides a quick overview of each of the networking options described above to help you determine which you might need for the purposes and capacity of your network. We list a few examples of each option; you may find others that you'll want to explore.

Unless otherwise indicated, the tools are compatible with both PCs and Macs. Some can also be used with smartphones and/or tablets; the product's website will indicate this feature.

Please note that in cases where network members meet together in "real time," all participants must connect via the same tool to communicate as a group (e.g., you cannot hold a video conference with some participants using Skype and others using Google Video.)

Be sure to check technology requirements, terms of service, price, and privacy policies before using any online tools.

Key

✓ = Free

\$ = Some cost (Many offer free trials for a limited time. Consider trying before buying.)

N/A = Not available or not applicable

Talk = A group of people can talk with each other via telephone or over the Internet.

Type = A group of people can communicate in real time by typing text to each other.

See and Talk = A group of people can see each other on their screens while talking with each other.

Send/receive documents = A group of people can send documents to each other electronically.

Create/share documents = A group of people can create, review, and edit a document stored at a central location.

	Talk	Type	See and Talk	Send/receive Documents	Create/share Documents	Notes
CONFERENCE CALLING						
Freeconferencecall: http://www.freeconferencecall.com	✓/\$	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$	Conference calling space is free, but phone charges apply to participants. (Toll-free conferencing is available @3.9¢/pp/per min.)
FreeConferenceCalling: http://www.freeconferencecalling.com/	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Domestic long-distance rates may apply as determined by each caller's carrier. If the caller has a nationwide long-distance plan, the conference call will likely cost nothing.
Instant Conference: http://www.instantconference.com	✓/\$	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Meeting One: www.Meetingone.com	\$	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	A 30-day free trial is available.
NoCostConference: http://www.nocostconference.com	✓/\$	✓	✓	N/A	✓	Fees may apply if you want to use this service without ads.
PGI: www.pgi.com	\$	N/A	\$	N/A	\$	

	Talk	Type	See and Talk	Send/receive Documents	Create/share Documents	Notes
VIDEO CALLING/CONFERENCING						
Adobe Connect: http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	A free trial is available.
FaceTime: www.apple.com	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	Available only for Macs (iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Mac with built-in FaceTime camera) and requires access to a 4G network or WiFi.
Google Hangouts: https://www.google.com/hangouts	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	Up to 10 participants in live video calls for free.
Go To Meeting: http://www.gotomeeting.com/	N/A	\$	\$	\$	\$	A 30-day free trial is available.
Join.me: www.join.me	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Allows users to share their screen to work on a document together, talk, or chat with as many as 9 other people. (The Pro version allows more, and costs @19/mo.)
ooVoo: http://www.oovoo.com	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	Free video chat, call recording, and screen sharing for up to 12 people. Premium service available for a cost.
PGI: www.pgi.com	\$	N/A	\$	N/A	\$	Available for Mac, PC, iPad, iPhone, Blackberry.
Skype: www.skype.com	✓	✓	✓/\$	✓	✓	Skype offers free videoconferencing for 2 people and charges a fee for 3 to 10 participants. It also links to Facebook accounts and takes voicemail messages.
Vidyo: http://www.vidyo.com	N/A	✓	✓	\$	\$	12-way videocalling
Webex: http://www.webex.com/	N/A	✓/\$	✓/\$	✓/\$	✓/\$	As many as 3 people per meeting can meet for free.
Wiggio: http://wiggio.com/	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	Allows as many as 10 people on video chat and can also be used to send texts and poll members.

	Talk	Type	See and Talk	Send/receive Documents	Create/share Documents	Notes
GROUP CHAT						
AIM: http://www.aim.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	Cannot be used with Microsoft Explorer (for now); it requires Firefox, Safari, Chrome, or its desktop app.
Google Hangouts: http://www.google.com/hangouts/	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	Up to 10 participants in live video calls for free.
Skype: https://www.skype.com	✓	✓	✓/\$	✓	✓	Skype offers free videoconferencing for 2 people and charges a fee for 3 to 10 participants. It also links to Facebook accounts and takes voicemail messages.
Wiggio: http://wiggio.com/	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	Allows as many as 10 people on video chat and can also be used to send texts and to poll members.
Yahoo! Groups: http://groups.yahoo.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	N/A	Makes free chat rooms and Instant Messenger available for group members.
EMAIL/E-LISTS						
Any email account	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	N/A	Allows you to create a group email with all of your network members. Caution: Make sure members use "Reply to all" to maintain communications among everyone in your network.
Google Group: http://groups.google.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	N/A	Possible to set up a private group for invited members.
Wiggio: http://wiggio.com/	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	Allows as many as 10 people on video chat and can also be used to send texts and poll members.
Yahoo! Groups: http://groups.yahoo.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	N/A	The "Moderator" sets up the group for invited members.

	Talk	Type	See and Talk	Send/receive Documents	Create/share Documents	Notes
SHARING DOCUMENTS						
Dropbox: www.dropbox.com	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	Allows you to work on and store online up to 18 GB of files.
Google Drive: https://google.com/drive	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	Makes available 5 GB of free file storage and 25 GB at a low cost.
Join me: www.join.me	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Allows users to share their screen to work on a document together, talk, or chat with as many as 9 other people. (The Pro version allows more, and costs @\$19/mo.)
OneDrive: https://onedrive.live.com	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	Offers 15 GB of free storage if you have a Microsoft account.
PGI: www.pgi.com	\$	N/A	\$	N/A	\$	Monthly fee starts @\$19; discounts are available for annual accounts.
Quick Screen Share: www.quickscreenshare.com	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	Limits screen sharing to 2 participants at a time.
Screen Leap: www.screenleap.com/	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	The free plan allows 1 hr/day of screen sharing. More is available for monthly fees.
Wiggio: http://wiggio.com/	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	Allows as many as 10 people on video chat and can also be used to send texts and poll Members.
WEBSITE DESIGN AND HOSTING						
GoDaddy: www.godaddy.com	N/A	\$	N/A	N/A	\$	Fees are very low and support options are available.
Homestead: www.homestead.com	N/A	\$	N/A	\$	\$	30-day free trial available.
Webs: www.webs.com	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	
Wix: http://www.wix.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	✓	✓	Premium plans available for a fee. Lower-cost options include ads.
Yahoo Webhosting: http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/webhosting	N/A	\$	N/A	\$	\$	A Yahoo account is necessary before logging in.
Yola: www.yola.com	N/A	\$	N/A	N/A	\$	

	Talk	Type	See and Talk	Send/receive Documents	Create/share Documents	Notes
SOCIAL MEDIA						
Facebook: www.facebook.com	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	Private groups can be created that can only be viewed by invited members who have Facebook accounts.
Google+: https://plus.google.com/	N/A	✓	✓	N/A	N/A	This feature allows you to create private Circles or Communities of selected people and to conduct a video chat with as many as 10 people.
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	Discussion boards are available for group members with LinkedIn memberships.
Twitter: www.twitter.com	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A	This media has a 140-character limit to messages sent to/among "followers"; it also has video-sending capacity.

URLs provided were current at the time of publication. Since URLs change frequently, nonfunctioning links may be encountered.



This document was prepared under Grant #90HC0005 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Health. February 2015