

Some Frequently Asked Questions on Zoom

The following points have been adapted from a presentation given at a webinar on using Zoom effectively, held for local inter faith organisations in December 2020. The webinar will shortly be available to view on this website.

What's the difference between a webinar and a meeting?

In a meeting all participants can see/ hear one another (depending on what devices they've used to join) and in a webinar attendees can only see/ hear the 'panelists'.

In a webinar, attendees can only interact with the panel using the Q&A or Chat feature, or by raising their hand and waiting for the Host to allow them to unmute.

Webinars can be good for 'from the front' events with speakers and presentations, but less good for interactive events like dialogues or Committee meetings.

Webinars are also easier to chair if you are expecting large numbers, as you only really need to keep the panelists on track and read out questions. Whereas chairing a meeting with say 100+ attendees can be much more challenging, particularly as you won't be able to see them all on one screen.

How many people can take part?

If you only wish to use the free version of Zoom, then up to 100 people can attend a meeting. It will be a meeting, because webinars are not possible on the free plan. A key limitation to the free version is that meetings will have a time limit of 40 minutes.

However, the longer answer is that it depends on a) whether you want to host a webinar or a meeting, and b) whether you have a free or a paid subscription.

This means that most groups who are using Zoom to hold meetings are likely to need to upgrade to a paid subscription in order to have enough time, even if 100 attendees is more than adequate.

The cheapest paid license is currently £11.99 a month and still only allows 100 participants, but removes the time limit and enables you to live-stream to social media if you wish to.

If you need to host a meeting with more than 100 participants, then there are 'large meeting add-ons' available which enable you to go up to 500 people for £40 per month or up to 1,000 people for £72 per month.

In most cases, these add-ons will work out better value for local groups, as the Business and Enterprise versions of Zoom require you to have quite a large minimum number of user licenses, which quickly becomes expensive.

If you need to hold a webinar rather than a meeting, the cheapest webinar license costs £30 a month and enables up to 100 attendees. The next level up gives you 500 attendees at £112 per month.

All the prices given are monthly – If you know you will be using Zoom for a long while, some of the licenses (but not the add-ons) work out at a bit less money if you pay for a year up front. However, many local groups don't have the money to do this.

Do I need a webcam?

The short answer here is: 'No'. You can join without a webcam via your computer, tablet or smart phone, and should still be able to see/ hear other people and all of the controls. Others just won't be able to see you in meetings.

If you are using a tablet or smartphone, you will probably have a small camera built in. This is also true of most laptops these days, although not so on older models.

It's worth saying here that you will need some kind of microphone and some kind of audio playback device (speakers, headphones etc) to join by computer. Most laptops, tablets and all smartphones will have all of this built into them, but most desktop computers will not. Headsets which include both headphones and microphone are available for anything as little as £2 on ebay and amazon, and most will be adequate as long as they are compatible.

It is also possible to join meetings and webinars using a normal telephone by dialing a number and entering the meeting ID and passcode on your keypad. This enables you to speak and to hear people, but doesn't include access to anything visual or most of the meeting functions. It works, but it's a slightly limited experience.

How do you record meetings?

If you are the host of a meeting, the 'record' option should be visible by default. You simply need to click it, and tell Zoom where to save the files. If you have a paid version, you'll have the option to record straight to the cloud, meaning your files will be linked to your Zoom account online. Or you can record to your computer.

If you're not a host or co-host, you will only have the record option if the host of the meeting has enabled this feature. Most of the time they probably won't, for privacy reasons.

How can we ensure our meetings aren't gate-crashed/ remain secure?

There are a lot of horror stories around from the early part of the first lockdown this year about Zoom meetings being crashed and people then either saying hateful things over the Chair or sharing inappropriate images via the screenshare function.

Some of this has been resolved by Zoom's own security settings, which now force you to have either a pass code for meetings or enable the 'waiting room' function. At IFN, we usually enable both features.

The pass code is what it sounds like – it's a 6 digit password you'll need to join a meeting.

The 'waiting room' effectively puts people on hold until the host of the meeting lets them into the meeting. This works best if you know who you are expecting – either because you know them or you have asked people to register in advance.

Which leads me on to other things you can do to boost security:

1. Ask people to register, and don't send the joining details to anyone who has not registered. You can let Zoom handle this for you automatically, or do it yourself, depending on what you find easier.
2. Linked to this, certainly don't publish the joining link and passcode for your meeting anywhere public. You might want to share it with a closed Facebook group, for example, but not put it on your website. Publishing it enables anyone to join, including those with dodgy intent!
3. If you are host, familiarise yourself with the host controls, including those which enable you to mute someone or eject them from a meeting.
4. You might also like to turn off features like 'screen sharing' unless they are needed, so that people can't use that route to share something inappropriate.
5. If the worst does happen, and you can't deal with it quickly by removing a person, then simply end the meeting and contact people afterwards to explain what happened.

The Community Security Trust, which monitors and responds to antisemitism and other security concerns of the Jewish community has produced a more detailed guide on security of Zoom meetings, and we can send a link to anyone who would like this.

To pay or not to pay?

Hopefully, by now, my presentation has indicated that you probably need access to a paid account unless you plan to hold meetings of under 40 mins in length for 100 or fewer people.

However, it may be that people in your group already have access to a paid account and are willing to Co-host with you to save you needing to buy a license for the group. Certainly some groups have, for example, a local councilor or local authority officer as a member have been able to use an account paid for by the local authority rather than purchasing their own license.

How does chairing on Zoom differ from chairing in person?

Chairing a Zoom meeting requires all of the same skills as chairing a normal meeting – ability to keep speakers to time, enabling a range of people to be heard, dealing tactfully with difficult behavior, keeping an eye on:

- those in the room,
- those speaking,
- the time,
- the brief if you have one,
- the meeting agenda and papers.

On Zoom, additionally, you may also need to keep an eye on the chat box, the Q&A box if you are hosting a webinar, as well as keeping an eye out for virtual and physical raised hands.

Of course, doing all of this from one screen can be tricky, particularly if there are a lot of people attending.

If possible, it is helpful to use 2 screens when chairing, the first with the Zoom gallery view open, so you see up to 25 people tessellated on screen. In the other, you can display the participant list, the chat window and the Q&A window so that you can keep an eye on all of these. You might also need to have meeting papers open on the second screen.

If you have a brief as well as papers, it is often a good idea to print some of them if you can to free up screen space, or to open the papers on a separate device such as a tablet or second laptop.

Another very helpful thing to do when chairing on Zoom is to have a helper – someone who has the Co-Host controls and can keep an eye on things like chat, raised hands etc. and assist with bringing people in.

This person might also help with technical aspects, such as running slideshows for presenters, letting participants into the meeting and recording the meeting.