

# ONLINE TOOLS FOR FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

/ Empowering participation using technology /

## WHAT ARE ONLINE TOOLS<sup>1</sup> FOR MEETINGS?

Online tools for use during face-to-face meetings have added a new dimension to the meeting experience. They are usually easy to use, offer quick results, and provide an element of fun. As most meeting participants already have mobile devices (and may use them during meetings/conferences), why not acknowledge their utility and apply them for the purposes of the meeting? Use these tools to find out how participants feel at various intervals during a meeting, gauge their interest levels, collect feedback and ideas, evaluate their understanding, and ensure your message is getting across.

Online tools enable meeting organizers both to empower participants and to give them some measure of accountability for the success of a conference or meeting. Using their mobile phones, laptop computers or tablets, participants can vote on questions, give inputs quickly at a moment's notice at any point during a meeting, or take part in learning games. These tools can significantly increase participant engagement, because everyone can respond at once, no one needs to be individually called upon, and in some cases participation can be anonymous if required. Results can be shown to the participants in real time. Large meetings (workshops and conferences) especially benefit from the power of these tools.

In addition to enabling participant feedback, most meeting tools incorporate analytics that offer useful insights to organizers.

**This article describes six of the main functions (purposes) for which online meeting tools are used:**

1. Instant voting/polling.
2. Gathering inputs or questions from participants during a meeting.
3. Using a social media wall to “turn up the volume” on your event and build engagement among participants or external observers.

*(continues...)*

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<sup>1</sup> Tools (software) listed in this article are suggestions only, and should always be used in line with the organization's policies and recommendations. Such tools are frequently updated, and new tools appear from time to time, hence the list included here is not comprehensive and may change with future releases of this Toolbox. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the tools and their main features.

4. Event planner and response tool for conference participants (e.g., adding agenda items of the meeting/conference to their schedules and facilitating instant messaging among participants).

5. Learning games.

6. Analytics for assessing meeting impact.

The outline of each function is accompanied by a list of suggested tools. See Appendix 1 for an overview of all the tools mentioned in this article.

### REQUIREMENTS:

- Meeting, workshop or conference event (more than 30 participants, each with mobile device/tablet/ laptop)
- Organizer or Speaker/ Presenter (with knowledge of virtual/online tool)
- Online tool, selected according to needs
- Reliable Wi-Fi connection with enough capacity for all participants (very important)

### Function 1: Instant voting/ polling

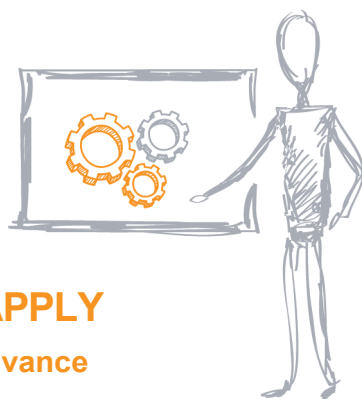


### WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Online tools for instant voting/polling (via multiple choice or rating scale/quantitative questions) are most useful for large meetings – those with more than 30 participants – where they can be great time-savers, avoiding the need to count hands or paper ballots, listen to individual responses, etc. Instant voting is a great way to encourage

interaction in meetings where people have not had time to get to know each other, and they are especially useful when you need quick answers. Participants can take an online poll and have their responses registered in real-time. The online feedback activity complements the offline presentation seamlessly.

Instant voting/polling uses purely quantitative question types. The value is that the quantitative response data can be quickly captured, tabulated and even shown to participants at the meeting, or conveniently embedded as a table/graph in a subsequent document. Various response types are available: yes/no, multiple choice, or numerical scale.



## HOW TO APPLY

### Prepare in advance

**1.** Choose an online tool for polling/ voting (see the list of suggested tools below), and sign up/register.

**2.** Follow the tool's instructions to create your poll questions online. This is almost always easy and intuitive. If you need help, every tool offers online instructions and/or FAQs. When formulating questions, consider the type of response you expect people to vote on:

- ▲ Yes/ No
- ▲ Multiple choice
- ▲ Numerical scale
- ▲ 'Like' button

It is best to stick to a few critical questions; don't overuse the tool.

**3.** At an appropriate place in your presentation, insert slide(s) with your poll questions. Also include brief instructions on how to vote; if participants are viewing your presentation on their device, they can click on the embedded links to begin voting. Depending on the tool chosen, participants may need a mobile phone (smart or not), a tablet or a

laptop computer. The voting process may require sending a text message to a designated number; visiting a specific web URL and typing a response; or sending a response via Twitter.

### When you are ready to start

**4.** When the moment for your poll arrives, display the questions, invite participants to vote and be prepared to assist any who have difficulties. Display the results as votes tabulated in real-time and shown on-screen as a graph.

### Suggested tools

There are a wide range of tools available that offer basic features for free on a trial basis. You can opt for a subscription, which will also enable more features such as provisions for larger audiences and for greater complexity in polling.

- ▲ [Poll Everywhere](#): instant voting via SMS, web browser or twitter.
- ▲ [Meeting Pulse](#): easy web/ SMS polling; other features include collecting questions from the audience.
- ▲ [IQ Polls](#): easy web/SMS polling, with response types ranging from multiple choice, numerical scale and 'Like' button.
- ▲ [Direct Poll](#): simple tool for live polling; completely free for use.
- ▲ [Wisembly](#): polling tool with multiple choice and 'Like' button; available by subscription only.
- ▲ [Kahoot](#): interactive learning game with polling/ voting feature included.
- ▲ [Slido](#): real-time polling and Q/A tool.

## Function 2: Gathering inputs or questions from participants during a meeting



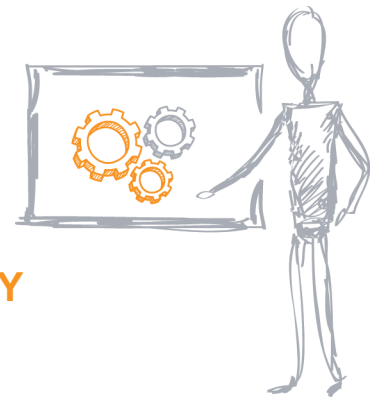
### WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Most of the virtual tools described above for (quantitative) instant voting / polling also allow you to obtain qualitative (i.e. text-based) input from participants, such as feedback, questions or comments. For large groups, this can mean the difference between a marginally responsive audience and a strongly responsive one. Tools for gathering inputs/questions are a boon for effective time management, and add variety to a speaker's repertoire. They are best used for:

- ▲ Broadening the scope for participants to interact and give feedback. In large meetings, normally only a few people can speak up due to time constraints.
- ▲ Getting instant feedback that helps presenters understand their audience better and tweak their presentations to maximize impact.
- ▲ Gathering opinions discreetly on sensitive questions; this is easier to obtain when participants don't have to speak their views in front of everyone.
- ▲ Obtaining one-word comments which are captured within an online 'cloud'. You can

embed the results in your presentation so that everyone can view them in real-time.

- ▲ Getting questions from the audience. Some tools allow you to invite participants to propose questions for presenters to answer, and also allow participants to see questions proposed by others and vote for their preferred ones. Questions with the most votes rise to the top of the list.
- ▲ Collecting any unanswered questions so they can be addressed after the meeting.
- ▲ Gathering instant feedback/evaluations at the end of the event meeting.



### HOW TO APPLY

1. Choose a virtual/ online tool that suits your needs, such as one of the suggested tools below.  
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2. Sign up and follow the instructions to create your questions online. Remember to consider the type of responses you expect:
  - ▲ Answers to multiple choice questions that you pose to the audience
  - ▲ Comments from the audience
  - ▲ Questions from the audience  
.....

**3.** Add your questions at an appropriate place during your presentation, or at the end if you are gathering concluding feedback. Include brief instructions on how to vote, and embed relevant links.

If you want to invite participants' questions for you or another presenter: Include instructions on how participants can propose questions, early on in your presentation, so that they will be able to enter questions anonymously at any time during the presentation. Then set aside a little time at a later point to review them, conclude the upvoting (of participants' preferred questions), and finally to answer the most upvoted questions.

### Suggested tools

- ▲ [Poll Everywhere](#) : Gather comments via SMS or web browser
- ▲ [Meeting Pulse](#) : Collect questions from the audience; allow participants to up-vote desired questions
- ▲ [IQ Polls](#) : Gather comments via SMS or web browser
- ▲ [Wisembly](#) : Gather comments via SMS or web browser; also provides features to support information sharing and collaboration, before and during meetings; available by subscription only.
- ▲ [Kahoot](#) : interactive learning game to gather feedback via quizzes and surveys.
- ▲ [Slido](#): real-time polling and Q/A tool.

### Function 3: Using a social media wall to 'turn up the volume' on your event and build engagement among participants or external persons.



### WHEN AND WHY TO USE

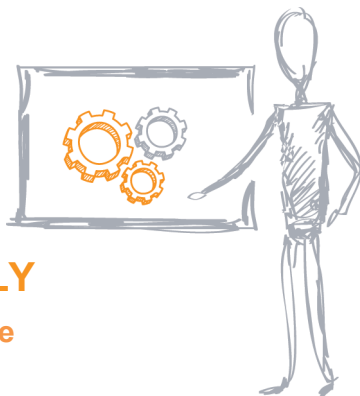
Social media updates (on Twitter, Yammer, Facebook, etc.) can be filtered by topics, using convenient hashtags. There are several virtual tools that allow you to capture relevant social chatter or social reporting (i.e. social media postings about an event by its participants, while the event is in progress, using an event-specific hashtag) on an issue or topic, compile it into an entertaining dashboard with ongoing updates – called a ‘wall’ – that can be shared with larger audiences including those participating remotely. This is most effective in conferences, symposia, virtual town hall meetings and other large events, in part because it is easier to generate sufficient social reporting if the number of participants is large.

A social media wall is best used to:

- ▲ **Raise awareness at your event of issues or topics** by displaying a stream of relevant social media posts (including comments and insights, highlights, photos, videos, etc.). The stream can be projected as a social media wall in a strategic location at your event, shown on a large screen or shared online by setting up a dedicated page in your website. This is also a great way to showcase the power of social media for participants.

▲ **Engage external audiences** by highlighting social media posts that talk about your specific event. External audiences include any interested people who could not attend the event. The most effective way to engage externals is by displaying the stream on a web page. The same stream can also be projected or displayed on a screen at the event. (Naturally, you will need some of your participants to be active on social media for this to be effective.)

▲ **Foster networking.** People get to know other social media users from the posts they see on a wall. This helps them follow people online and create networks, both virtual and in-person if they are attending the same event.



## HOW TO APPLY

### Prepare in advance

1. Select a tool to create a virtual social media wall – for example, one of the suggested tools below.

2. Decide what social media content you would like to display on the wall. Then choose appropriate filters and hashtags. These will depend on the topic(s) of your event. You may need to research what filters/hashtags are currently being used for your topic(s) in relevant social media (Twitter, Yammer, Facebook, etc.), or else introduce one or more hashtags for use at your event. It is common to create an event hashtag with the name and year of the event, e.g. #DREAM2017. Include the hashtag(s) in the event materials.

3. Assign specific persons in advance to post specific content with the right hashtags so it will appear on your wall, including especially photos and videos of event activities.

4. Decide how you want participants to see the wall (e.g. projected in a location with heavy foot traffic, or on the event website, or on a screen in the main room during breaks, etc.) and make appropriate arrangements.

### When you are ready to start

5. Announce the specific hashtags at the opening of your event and ask people to use them whenever they post relevant content on any social media platform.

6. Ensure the wall is visible wherever you planned it to be (projected, on a screen, or online on the event website). Draw participants' attention to it just before taking any breaks. Keep an eye on the wall, and if anything particularly noteworthy is posted, mention it briefly during a plenary session. It is often worth nominating a specific individual to monitor the wall for noteworthy comments or feedback or to ensure that questions posed reach the relevant speaker.

### Suggested tools

Depending on the purpose, you may be able to opt for a free offer or sign up for a subscription with more features.

▲ [Yammer “Streaming it out loud”](#): Social media wall with social chatter on display at

events (requires use of Yammer)

▲ **Livewall:** Social media wall with inputs from various social media sites on display at events

#### Function 4: Event planner and response tool for conference participants (for large and complex events)



#### WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Event planning tools (which usually consist of a web portal coupled with a mobile app) are best used for large scale events with extensive logistical demands, such as conferences, exhibitions and symposia. The event planning tool acts as a go-to guide and resource center for the event. It is useful for organizers, for presenters, and especially for enhancing the experience of event participants. Normally these tools are available for all devices including mobile phones, tablets and computers.

Specific features of an event planner can include:

▲ Event information available from phones or laptop computers, making it easy for participants to view the agenda and decide on

the meetings/sessions to attend. This reduces paper waste as well.

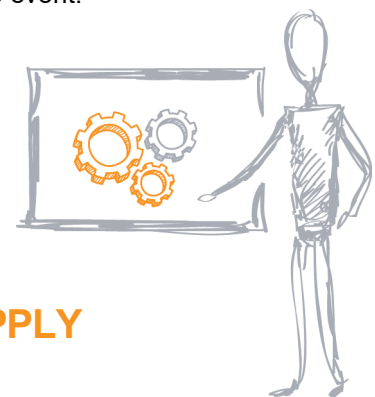
▲ Personalized participant profiles, offering also the option to save notes, mark favourite sessions and place reminders in planning event days.

▲ Networking options such as instant messaging and private chats, and sending meeting requests.

▲ As an all-in-one system, the event app also supports in-meeting functions such as voting/polling, asking/collecting questions and social reporting with a social media wall. Participants don't have to download different apps or tools to interact during meetings. All functions are embedded in the event planning app.

▲ A notification system: Organizers can update meeting details and coordinate changes efficiently via the event app.

▲ Business intelligence on participant preferences. By finding out who's attending what kind of sessions, what they're interested in and who they connect with, the organizers can analyse participant interaction and engagement, make useful recommendations and report more effectively after the event.



#### HOW TO APPLY

1. Choose a tool and provider. The cost of building a mobile app for your event is highly dependent on the services needed. Some providers will build an event portal and a mobile app for you from scratch. Others let you build your own app, no technical skills required.

2. Once the web portal and mobile app is ready, include the relevant information in your event announcements and materials. Participants and other stakeholders can register to gain access and build their profiles even before they attend the event. Participants can access the web portal on their computers and continue on their mobile phones by downloading the mobile app for portable access.

### Suggested tools

- ▲ [CrowdCompass](#): event app for organizers, speakers, exhibitors and participants to plan their activities during an event effectively and efficiently. (Formerly Genie Connect.)
- ▲ [Eventmobi](#): event app for organizers, speakers, exhibitors and participants to plan their activities during an event effectively and efficiently.

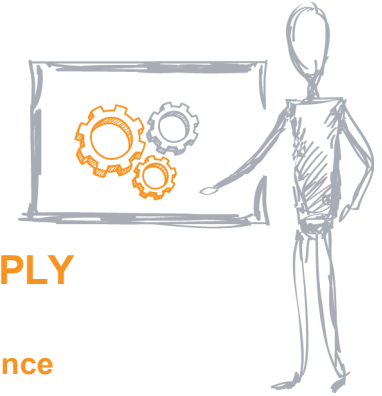
### Function 5: Learning games

## WHEN AND WHY TO USE

If the focus of your meeting/event is educational, consider using a learning game to



enhance group learning and creative collaboration among people of all ages, and to help make the learning experience fun. Learning games foster engagement, enhance instructional impact, and help start conversations among event participants, and also with external audiences if needed.



## HOW TO APPLY

### Prepare in advance

1. Explore the available options in your chosen software tool, then create a survey or quiz game based on the learning objectives. Plan your questions carefully: choose questions that target likely learning gaps among your participants. Make sure you have plausible wrong answers for multiple choice questions, to increase the challenge. Arrange your questions in a logical order, so that the correct answer to any question prepares the participants for the next one. Add illustrations, images or even videos to enhance the experience. The idea is to have fun while learning. Learning game apps may have their own instructional materials suggesting ways to take full advantage of the tool; be sure to make use of these.

### When you are ready to start

2. At an appropriate moment during your event, share the game with participants using a web link and ask them to join online using their mobile devices or laptops. This link can also be shared with external participants simultaneously. All participants ideally answer the questions at the same time.



**3.** Share the results screen (from your laptop) by projecting it on a wall for everyone to see. The summary of responses is updated in real time as the answers come in. Participants can then see if their responses are similar to those of others at the event. This often leads to interesting discussions and insights. Online participants from other locations also get to view the results on their computer screen.

### Suggested tools

Depending on the purpose, you may be able to opt for a free offer or sign up for a subscription with more features.

▲ [Kahoot](#): A popular tool for creating games to promote social learning among participants.

### Function 6: Analytics for assessing meeting impact



### WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Most of the virtual tools discussed in this article have some capacity to capture event data, which can be analyzed to inform organizers and moderators/ speakers on participant

interaction and engagement. The tools for polling, gathering inputs, social media walls and learning games offer analytics based on the functions they support, while the event apps offer more complete analytical reports based on participant activity during an entire event.

Using the analytics features of online meeting tools is a great way to report on, and derive insights about, the impact of a meeting, workshop or large-scale event. Tool analytics can effectively complement the traditional process of asking participants to fill out survey forms at the end of a meeting or event. Participant feedback is obtained objectively (i.e. from their actual activities, which are tracked by the analytics functions of the tools) as well as from any subjective assessments which you gather via online forms or questions.

Using tools enables you to gather feedback and assessment data gradually during the various sessions of an event. This can be more accurate than traditional evaluations alone – provided all your participants use the tools – and can help an organizer make better decisions for future meetings.

The analytics collected can also demonstrate the value of incorporating social media or online tools for improving participant engagement in meetings.

Analytics are available quickly, and hence can also assist organizers in making decisions during the event, for example, by adding additional sessions/activities that are particularly popular or by changing the tone or focus of a subsequent session/activity if feedback suggests change is needed.



## HOW TO APPLY

**When choosing a tool for any of the above functions** – polling, gathering inputs, creating a social media wall, learning games or creating an event portal/app – **make a point of investigating the tool's analytics and reporting features.**

The details will vary from tool to tool; the point is to become aware of what data is available and to make plans to use that data, either during the event or afterwards as a part of your meeting evaluation and follow-up. The quantitative data available from online tools can form a good basis for decision-making about future event content and organization.

### Suggested tools

▲ All the tools discussed in this article offer some form of analytics.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS



▲ Online meeting tools will generally demonstrate their value quickly to both participants and organizers – provided participants are comfortable with using them. This may require some support, clear and simple instructions, and encouragement.

▲ As with any new technology, there is a learning curve involved in using online tools for meeting feedback. Know your tool and be prepared to help. Consider having a help desk at the event (for large gatherings) beside the registration area, to help participants sign in into the online tool and build their profiles. This will facilitate their access and use during the event.

▲ In your written and verbal communications with participants, reframe the role of mobile devices and laptops: Instead of distracting participants from the event, devices will now support and enhance their participation in key activities. Underline the benefits to be had for all.

▲ Emphasize the fun and enjoyable aspects of the use of online tools, not only if you use learning games, but also with regard to the transparency and greater voice and empowerment of participants, particularly from those not able to be present in the room, as well as the power of real-time evaluation and feedback.

▲ For audiences unfamiliar with online meeting tools, maintain some aspects of the traditional feedback process (such as written evaluation forms at the end of sessions, occasional voting by show of hands, etc.) so that the transition is gradual and there is complementarity between online and traditional tools.



## REFERENCES

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*Refer to links in Appendix 1 for provider information.*

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## Appendix 1: Overview of online tools for face-to-face meetings

Tools (software) listed in this article are suggestions only, and should always be used in line with the organization's policies and recommendations. Such tools are frequently updated, and new tools appear from time to time, hence the list included here is not comprehensive and may change with future releases of this Toolbox.

Virtual Tool	Description	Polling	Ask questions, gather inputs (internal)	Ask questions, gather input, share externally/social reporting	Event planner, response tool for participants	Meeting impact (analytics)	Costs
<a href="#">Poll Everywhere</a>	Instant participant feedback	Yes (web/ SMS/ Twitter)	Yes	no	no	Analytics (with subscription)	Free or subscription
<a href="#">Direct Poll</a>	Instant participant feedback	yes	Ask quick questions only	no	no	no	Currently free
<a href="#">IQ Polls</a>	Instant participant feedback	yes (web/ SMS)	Gather opinions via multiple choice/ numerical scale/ 'like' button	no	no	Export and analysis of data (with subscription)	Free for basic functions; Subscription enables SMS voting, PPT integration
<a href="#">Wisembly</a>	Collaborative support for meetings/ events	yes	Comment during meeting; gather opinions via multiple choice/ 'like' button	no	Collaborative space	Export and analysis of data	Subscription only (free trial possible)
<a href="#">"Streaming it out loud"</a> (Yammer)	Create a social media stream/ wall	no	no	Share with large audience; Social reporting	Part of event to display social media chatter	no	Subscription to Yammer account (Community edition users-free)
<a href="#">Livewall</a>	Create social media wall	no	no	Share with large audience; Social reporting	Part of event to display social media chatter	Analysis of social media engagement	Free and subscription
<a href="#">Meeting Pulse</a>	Instant participant feedback; collect questions and up-vote	yes	Source questions from participants and up-vote them	no	no	Take quick pulse of audience (their moods)	Free for basic functions, or subscription (various levels)
<a href="#">CrowdCompass</a>	Cross platform event mobile app for organizers, participants, exhibitors, and speakers.	yes	Source questions from participants and up-vote them	yes	Event planner for all, access information, find people, send meeting requests using web/ mobile app	Analytics to track behaviour of attendees (who's attending, their interests and who they connect with)	Cost by event
<a href="#">Eventmobi</a>	Cross platform event mobile app for organizers, participants, exhibitors, and speakers.	yes	Source questions from participants and up-vote them	yes	Event planner for all; participants manage a simple profile and interact with others	Real-time analytics to see how attendees interact (measure engagement)	Cost by event
<a href="#">Kahoot</a>	Interactive learning games; scores calculated in real time	yes	Fun type quizzes/ surveys	Social learning: create, collaborate among participants in-meeting or elsewhere	no	no	Free for basic features; subscription for advanced features
<a href="#">Slido</a>	Real-time polling and Q/A tool	yes	Source questions from participants and upvote them. Run simple polls.	Yes	no	Simple analytics on participation	Cost by event or corporate subscription