

How to Use Zoom Conferencing for Your Next Neighborhood Meeting

By Jim Hawk, N2N Executive Director

You've probably heard a lot about Zoom lately. Zoom offers free and paid conferencing call services that include *video* by laptop, desktop, and smartphone and *dial-in* by phone. There are multiple ways to use Zoom conferencing for your next neighborhood meeting or gathering. We will explore those options in this article, as well as some practical tips on what to say when hosting your meeting.

THREE WAYS TO USE ZOOM

There are at least three ways to utilize Zoom for neighborhood meetings and gatherings (depending on whether you use a free or paid plan):

Invite Speakers and Members to Participate on a Zoom Conference Call (All Accounts)

This can be challenging but allows for the greatest participation. Members can ask questions in real-time with follow up clarifying questions. This is also helpful to speakers who may not fully understand a question submitted in writing. Your members can join online or dial-in by phone. Frankly, with clear guidelines and instructions -- and a firm moderator -- this way does work surprisingly well and people feel included.

Invite Speakers to Participate on Zoom and Members to Participate Via Facebook Live (Paid Only)

You, or your organization, must have a publicly-accessible Facebook Page or Group. This is technically challenging and sometimes there are glitches (like the Zoom Conference Call never goes live). This can be frustrating for those trying to watch. On the other hand, it is generally easier for the moderator because the number of people on the Zoom Conference Call is much lower and manageable. Even if you do get questions in advance, I would suggest having someone monitoring the Facebook Live chat and feeding immediate questions and comments to the moderator (via Zoom's chat) so that the moderator can share those questions and comments with the moderator.

Invite Speakers to Participate on Zoom and Members to Participate Via YouTube Live (Paid Only)

You, or your organization, must have a publicly-accessible Youtube account. The same issues arise for this option as for Facebook Live. However, many people do not have Facebook accounts and are thus

not permitted to participate. This is not true for YouTube. If you set the stream to the public, anyone can watch.

RECOMMENDATION

Whether you have a **free or paid account**, I'm personally partial to the first option number one, because it allows for the most number of people to participate. I've found it to be easy to moderate by clear guidelines and instructions -- and a firm hand -- is important.

Let me just say that, however, you use Zoom, make sure you always record your meeting and post it to your website and/or social media channels. This way individuals who were not able to be present at the meeting, can at least watch it later on. This is something you can do if you have a free account and it is a great tool for expanding your reach.

USE OUR ZOOM ACCOUNT FOR YOUR NEXT MEETING

N2N now has a subscription to Zoom for video and phone conferencing. If your neighborhood organization would like to utilize our account, please email me at jim@n2n.solutions or call me at 615-495-2945.

MEETING GUIDELINES

Setting the right tone for your Zoom conference calls is critical. Here are a few suggestions for ensuring your success:

1. **Encourage your members to register in advance for the Zoom conference call.** This is a new optional security feature, but the advantage is that you can ask questions of those who want to participate. For example, you may want to get the street address or phone number of the participant (email address is a required question). You may want to find out how long they have lived in the neighborhood or why they belong to the organization or allow participants to ask questions in advance. Be strategic and don't make the registration too long.
2. **Encourage participants to arrive early and stay late.** Creating community is a critical part of any neighborhood organization. Providing participants with the opportunity to socialize online is a great way to do this. Also, if it is their first meeting, getting logged in and situated takes a little extra time.

3. **Mute audio as a default.** Muting audio as a default keeps down the noise as people set up and prepare for the meeting.
4. **Encourage those who can turn on their video.** Video is turned off, as a default, for every participant when they enter the room. However, visual cues are important for every moderator. Help your participants understand the importance of turning on their video (if available) during the meeting.
5. **Make sure those who dial-in know how to unmute (*6).** I usually announce the importance of using *6 for those dialing in several times before the start of the meeting and almost every time we begin a discussion on a topic.
6. **Point out features you feel are important.** Once you begin the meeting and encourage callers to turn on their video and teach everyone how to unmute, you may want to point out a few other features. Some of those include:
 - a. Chat - This can be a dangerous feature because some members will send messages to everyone supporting or denouncing what is being proposed. However, there may be some advantages to this for your neighborhood group. Remember that dial-in participants cannot use this feature.
 - b. Raise Hands - This is a great feature that helps the moderator recognize those who want to speak. Show participants how to use this feature early on, and then repeat before each discussion. Remember that dial-in participants cannot use this feature and you may need to make special accommodations.
 - c. Polls - You may want to use this feature to take a vote or find out an answer to a question you want to ask. Remember, again, that dial-in participants cannot use this feature.
7. **Make sure you record the meeting.** When you are ready to call the meeting to order, be sure to press record. An announcement will appear that informs everyone that you are recording. This feature can be helpful for your secretary as well as a tool for engaging your neighbors. You can upload the video to Facebook or share it on some other platform that your organization uses.

There are many other features, like breakout groups, that you may want to utilize. Please remember that Zoom video conferencing is just one tool that you have for engaging your neighbors.

While many things are changing, the basics of neighborhood organizing remain the same: 1) Building relationships with your neighbors and other stakeholders; 2) Create a common vision and identify common problems that need to be addressed, and 3) Work together to find solutions and take action.