



City of Bowie

15901 Excalibur Road, Bowie, MD 20716

Video Conferencing Guidelines for City Staff

Introduction

With video conferencing now being used by the City to conduct meetings, deliver training, and conduct community townhalls, it is important that staff understands the risks and best practices involved. This document will give guidelines on how to keep yourself and your participants safe, as well as tips for making video conferencing less daunting.

Currently Supported Platforms

At this time, the City authorizes the use of two video conferencing platforms for City business.

- Zoom
- Microsoft Teams

Though these offer similar features, MS Teams is a lot easier to access and is therefore suggested for most meetings. Zoom offers more webinar-based features but is more complicated to set up.

General Rules

When setting up for a video conference there are a few things you should consider.

- **Internet Connection**
 - Is it fast enough for video or should you only use audio? Typically, you need a minimum of 3 Mbps upload and download for a video conference. Wi-Fi will introduce extra lag, so make sure you have the best connection possible.
 - Is it shared? Could someone else suddenly start using a large amount of bandwidth?
 - Is it reliable? Could it stop working part way through your call? This mostly applies to Wi-Fi connections.

- **Location**

- With the camera on, what can be seen behind me?
- Is the light too bright / in my face / over my shoulder? All of these can make it hard for others to see you clearly.
- What is the sound like? Is there background noise? Does the area echo?

- **Others**

- Confirm the nature of the video conference. If it is confidential, ask all attendees to confirm that they have taken steps to ensure confidentiality.
- Are other people in the house? You should make them aware you are on video conference and if possible have the room to yourself.

Best Practices-General

Thanks to the similar features in both Zoom and MS Teams, the below suggestions are possible on each platform. Helpdesk Support can offer guidance on how to enable these if users are unsure.

- **Background filters** – It is recommended if you are video conferencing in a busy area or from home that you use a static background image from the inbuilt libraries of each app. This will reduce distractions for others in the video, block out any unwanted cameos, and protect the privacy of your home.
- **Headsets** – Though not always necessary, these are recommended as they limit the exposure of the conversation taking place. Others at your location cannot hear what is being said to you. Having a mic closer to your mouth means it is less likely to pick up background noise.
- **Screen sharing** – If you need to share something on your screen with others in the video conference, it is recommended you only share the application window you need to show. This means that members of the conference can only see that application and nothing else on your computer. If you need to share multiple applications, it may be necessary to share your entire screen., In this case, make sure your desktop is appropriate. You may not want others to see what applications you have installed or the picture of your family on your desktop wallpaper.
- **Framing** – Try and sit center frame when in a chat and be aware of your movements. It is easy to forget that the camera, unlike a person, cannot follow you if you move out of its field of view.

Best Practices - Zoom

Due to the known issues around the Zoom platform, the following practices are always followed.

- All Zoom events will be scheduled through the Web Conference Request Form (<https://bowie.fyi/WCRF>).
- To prevent *Zoombombing, The I.T. Department will setup and manage all Zoom events.
- For security purposes, chat, file transfers, and anonymous questions have all been disabled.
- All events will require registration and/or password for entry.
- Practice session(s) before event date is **highly recommended**.

*Zoombombing, Zoom-bombing or Zoom raiding is the unwanted intrusion into a video conference call by an individual or individuals, which causes disruption often maliciously and offensively.

Recording Video Conferences

Both supported platforms can record. Additional considerations when recording:

- Recorded sessions take up costly storage space and should be deleted as soon as they are no longer needed.
- You must have permission from everyone attending the session for them to be recorded, preferably in writing (email counts). Anyone objecting to being recorded should be asked to leave the session. This includes audio only participation.
- Before recording, you should plan what you are going to do with the recording afterwards. Where will it be stored and for how long? Recordings must be deleted as soon as they are no longer needed.
- Make the attendees aware of your / the City's plans for the recording. Make sure this is done prior to commencing recording and is acknowledged in the written consent.