IBP Initiative
Scaling up what works in family planning/reproductive health

IBP How to Guide:
Organize and manage a video conference

Introduction

A video conference allows people at different locations to see and hear each other at the same time. This enhances our ability to communicate, share and retain information with colleagues in different countries. This in turn can expedite strategic discussions and decisions. It can be used for interviews, meetings, discussion groups and teaching.

Video conference is almost but not quite like meeting with people in real time. There can be a slight delay in hearing what people say and switching from one site to another, so if not well managed people can talk over each other. The images of visual presentations can appear small as they are on a screen. So people must be aware of this and prepare their visual presentations in larger fonts with fewer words.

> Prepare Power-points using a large font size (30 - 36) and only key words or graphics.

A video conference to be effective must be focused on a specific event or outcome, well planned, well organized and moderated. It should not exceed three hours, as people need to remain engaged and it is hard to ask people to sit in one place for longer than this. The video conference should address essential issues and be focused on the objectives and outcome. From experience 1.5 to 2 hours is sufficient time for a focused, effective meeting.

How much does it cost?

There are two different types of systems. ISDN which is a phone line and the more commonly used IP internet line. The ISDN phone line can prove very costly, so one does need to be aware of the technology that is being used at all sites.

WHO has the capacity to either act as a bridge that can link up 9 sites across the world or link with other institutions that are providing the bridge. WHO will support the preparation of a video conference and the video conference team have provided instructions on how to check the availability of the video conference facilities, book the room and prepare the technical side of the video conference. The video conference team will need to have a technical contact for each site they will connect to so that they can check the connections and make sure everything is working before the actual video conference.

Planning a video conference for a technical meeting

The same principles will apply to a greater or lesser degree regardless of the type of video conference that is being convened. All video conferences have to be planned properly. The same care should be taken in planning a video conference, as one would take to plan a real time meeting. There must be an agenda and people at each site must know their role and responsibilities and there must always be a moderator to manage the proceedings.

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Step 1: Determine the feasibility

1. Define the purpose of the video conference
2. Define the locations
3. Check the local time at each site to determine whether or not it is possible to link with each location
4. Identify possible site leaders at each location

Step 2: Check availability of facilities at each of the locations

➢ In collaboration with each site leader check the availability of the video conference facilities at each of the locations you want to link to. Who owns it and is it available on the date and time you wish to use it.
➢ If you are borrowing the facilities from the WHO Country representative or collaborating centre or local organization you may need to write a formal request.
➢ Identify a technical person who can work in collaboration with our video conference team to test the equipment and determine whether or not it is feasible to connect.
➢ Check if there are any costs involved in connecting with any of these locations.
➢ Prepare a table summarizing the location, who owns the equipment, the Geneva time and local time of connection, name and contact details of the site leader and name and contact details of the technician, date the equipment will be tested.
➢

Table 1: Checklist for facilities

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4
Location				
Who owns equipment				
Site leader and email address				
Technical contact details				
Geneva time for video conference				
Local time for video conference				
Date and time for testing				
Comments				

Step 3: Plan the video conference

➢ The same effort should go into planning a video conference as one would plan a meeting.
➢ In collaboration with your team and possibly the site leaders agree the purpose, objective and outcome of the meeting.
➢ Set the criteria for selecting participants and agree with your team and site leaders the method you will use to invite these participants.
➢ In principle there should be no costs, but occasionally funds are required for individuals to travel to the meeting.

➢ Identify your speakers.
➢ Prepare an agenda.

Step 4:   Structure of the agenda

➢ If the video conference is going to have a series of speakers it is important to allocate sufficient time for each speaker. At the same time it is important to structure the agenda so that there is time for people from different sites to become engaged in the proceedings.
➢ If one person speaks for a very long time, it is possible that the audience will not be able to maintain their concentration.
➢ In order to keep participants at all sites engaged the speaker should not talk for more than 6 - 7 minutes, using no more than 5 Power Point slides.
➢ Ensure that there are adequate breaks for discussion between the speakers.
➢ No more than three speakers should be scheduled to speak at any one time. After which there should be a short break for interaction/questions.
➢ Then the speaker can resume or another speaker can be introduced.
➢ Always have an introduction and a wrap up session included in the agenda.
➢ Prepare a short paper outlining the purpose/objectives, framework for the meeting, the agenda and list of participants.

NOTE: *For some meetings the site leader may like to bring participants before the video conference to discuss issues that will be raised during the video conference. This will help ensure that the participants are engaged in the meeting.*

Alternatively the site leader may like to organize a local meeting immediately after the video conference to discuss the outcome and next steps for that particular location. This can be discussed during the planning and preparation of the meeting. It can make better use of people's time and facilitate an effective outcome for that location.

This approach, if appropriate can be discussed during the planning and preparation of a video conference.

Step 5:   **Visual presentations**

➢ All Power Points and visual presentations are on a screen so will appear smaller. It is therefore important to keep the amount of information on a slide to the minimum and use a large font.
➢ The maximum of 8 slides should be shown before a break in the presentation to re-engage the audience in the proceedings.
➢ Always download the slides before the video conference and check and double that they are working.
➢ Always check and double check that the person handling the slides for the video conference knows the procedures to follow.
➢ Always know who is using a visual presentation and from what site this presentation will be provided.

Step 6   The moderator

It is important to have one person in charge of managing the video conference. The moderator will ensure that the video conference flows smoothly: The moderator will:
  ➢ Introduce all sites.
  ➢ Inform participants regarding the etiquette of communication during the video conference.
  ➢ Introduce each speaker
  ➢ Accept questions from each site and refer the question to the speaker
  ➢ Will keep the speakers to time and the video conference on time.

A script can be prepared before the conference for the moderator as this will help the moderator remember key issues and help to ensure the smooth flow of events between sites (To see an example of a script, refer annex 1).

Step 7:   Etiquette

  ➢ Request that all participants are ready on in their place at least 15 minutes before the meeting. If possible, arrange for refreshments and allow time for people to introduce themselves, at each site.
  ➢ Each site must be introduced. However in a large meeting involving many sites it is very time consuming to introduce every person at ever site. The moderator and the site leaders can decide how to address this issue before the video conference.
  ➢ Always inform people to put their microphones on mute if they are not speaking. Microphones are very sensitive and can pick up whispered conversations between people.
  ➢ Introduce the role of the moderator.
  ➢ Ask people not to speak unless the moderator mentions their site or the name of a specific person from the site. This avoids speaking over each other.
  ➢ Ask people when they speak to introduce themselves and their location.

Video conferencing is not a perfect science and things may not always run smoothly. The technical team will do their best to ensure an effective connection, but things do go wrong. If there is a problem, try to sort it out and just deal with the circumstances the best you can.