

# Virtual AGMs: Yes, you can!

Virtual AGM Facilitation Guide



ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

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## Virtual AGMs: Yes, you can!

Switching your Annual General Meeting (AGM) online? As a provincial network, ONN has been doing virtual AGMs for four years! Our team has compiled our best tips and tricks to help nonprofits move their AGMs online and facilitate them effectively and efficiently.

### Can your nonprofit host an AGM online?

Yes!

The Government of Ontario announced on March 31, 2020 an Emergency Order that permits nonprofits to hold meetings of directors, shareholders and members electronically or over the phone even if legislation (like Ontario's Corporations Act) or your bylaws say you can't. The electronic or phone system has to allow people to communicate with each other simultaneously and instantaneously. So, for example, an email chain over a few days likely would not qualify as a meeting.

This information is current at the time of publication, April 2020. For current legal resources and information, please go to [Community Legal Education Ontario's Nonprofit Law page](#).

### Choosing a platform

It's important to have a reliable platform that your team has tested. ONN uses GoToWebinar and Zoom platforms and will be referring to these platforms for this mini-guide. Other common platforms include [Adobe Connect](#), [BigMarker](#), and [Microsoft Teams events](#). Each platform has free access to training to get your team adjusted in no time!

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## Meeting format versus webinar

A common question is whether you should host your AGM in a meeting format versus a traditional webinar format. The two main differences between the two formats are polling and attendee participation. In a webinar format, you have the option to poll and survey attendees. This is especially helpful for completing your voting. Additionally, in a webinar the host has the option to mute all participants. In a meeting format, polling functionality is not available on most platforms and participants must control the mute/unmute function for themselves to ask questions and join a discussion.

The electronic or phone system has to allow people to communicate with each other simultaneously and instantaneously.

Although having active participation is a benefit, please remember that not all attendees will remember to mute themselves or know how to use the function. If you have a large AGM, this can cause delays, background noise, and distractions during your AGM. For this reason, ONN chooses to use a webinar format, while also leveraging the chat, question, and poll functions to foster engagement from attendees.

You can view the full breakdown of meeting and webinar benefits for [Gotomeeting](#) and [Zoom](#). In addition to traditional meeting and webinar platforms which include all of the functions we will discuss, there are also voting software options for nonprofits including [Election Buddy](#) and [Simple Survey](#).

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## What functions are needed

While many nonprofits will have unique needs for the AGM, we have compiled some of the most common online meetings functions for virtual AGMs.

### Meeting quorum and tracking attendance

A good practice is to ask attendees to type their name in the chat box once your webinar is live. Asking for their full name allows you to track attendance in your AGM minutes and ensure you have met quorum. Using the chat function as opposed to the registration for tracking attendance is important because not all attendees will use their full names when they register.

At ONN, we have a staff member record all names entered into the chat function into our meeting minutes. If you do not have the staff capacity to record names during the webinar, you can ask a volunteer to assist (in advance) and also leverage the “save chat history” function with Gotomeeting and Zoom. Tip: saving the chat history should be done prior to the webinar through your account settings and tested on a “mock webinar” ahead of time.

### Voting

The polling function in webinar platforms allows users to create a question with multiple answers for attendees to choose from. Once a poll is launched, attendees can vote on one answer. The organizer is able to see the percentage of votes per answer and the percentage of attendees who have completed the poll. This helps to see participation and once the poll closes, webinar organizers have the option to share the results of the poll. Total responses can be shared. Individual responses remain confidential.

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## What functions are needed

### Voting (continued)

By inserting the motion you want to pass in the question area of a poll and setting the answers to "favour, opposed or abstain", nonprofits can use the polling function to complete voting for passing motions. There are a couple of things to remember:

- To start collecting responses for a poll, you need to click the button to share the poll. Once you have shared the poll, you cannot launch it again. This includes during practice mode.
- The total character count on poll questions and answers is low for many platforms. Prepare exact questions prior to your AGM and add them ahead of time to avoid last minute troubles. You don't want to be editing "on the fly" as speakers and participants are waiting.

### Passing motions

The chat function allows nonprofits to record motions. The speaker can ask for a motion verbally and/or onscreen. Members can type "first" or "second" in the chat box to indicate their support. Using the chat function as opposed to having members speak minimizes the chances of audio challenges, members speaking over each other, and ensures a record of voting.

### Answering questions

The question "channel" is a great way to respond to questions and track them throughout the meeting. You can respond to attendees directly by message, or if you believe the question is helpful for everyone in the meeting, you can have the speaker respond to the question during their presentation.

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## What roles are needed

We've compiled a list of roles to help smooth the transition from in-person to online. We recognize that not all nonprofits have the capacity or number of staff or volunteers to match these roles. If you are a nonprofit with limited capacity, we recommend combining the roles and completing a mock AGM to ensure all team members are comfortable multi-tasking.

### Presenter

Limiting the amount of speakers can help alleviate some of the logistical challenges of online AGMs. We recommend having one speaker to complete the introduction, land acknowledgement, and to present the motions. The speaker is usually the Chair of the Board. Make sure to delegate another team member to be responsible for advancing slides.

### Slide Advancer

It is important to designate one person to be responsible for advancing all slides during a presentation. This could be a team member whose sole responsibility is advancing the slide deck or this could be combined with a Presenter role. It is important to keep the Slide Advancer apart from other roles.

### Poll Manager

The Poll Manager is responsible for setting up the polls, launching the polls, and sharing the results with the attendees during the AGM.

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## What roles are needed

### Chat and Motion Manager

The Chat and Motion Manager in an online AGM has two responsibilities. First, they tell the speaker when the AGM has met quorum and when a motion is passed. Second, if there is a question regarding a specific motion prior to passing, the moderator will present the question to the speaker.

To help limit the interruptions for questions, we recommend all questions not related to motions be discussed following the AGM.

### Tech Support

Having a separate staff or volunteer(s) available for tech support ensures that the speaker and moderator can focus on the meeting. At ONN, we have one person completing tech support questions through the question box and another person available to answer questions by phone. The Tech Support team member can also be responsible for starting the AGM online and ending the AGM for all participants.

### Phone/Email Reception Support

If your team has additional capacity, whether it's an additional staff member or volunteer, we recommend designating someone to answer email and phone questions during the set-up period.

### Registration and reminders

Some of the platforms listed have their own registration functions to capture registrants' names prior to the AGM so you can track anticipated attendance. Or you can use other scheduling platforms, like online calendars, to do this. Some platforms also enable you to set automatic reminder emails to participants. You want to make it as easy as possible for participants to join (and find the meeting link in their full inboxes!).

# 08

## Tips & tricks we've learned along the way

### **Have a few back-up members ready to join to ensure you have more than enough members registered for quorum**

To ensure you meet quorum, make sure you have more registrants than needed (at least 20% more).

### **Always complete a mock AGM with your speaker and moderator**

It's important to ensure that each team member is comfortable with their role and the specific order of the AGM using the online platform you have chosen. What may seem straightforward on paper can be more difficult when carrying out in real time.

### **Complete technical testing at least one hour prior to starting the AGM**

Tech testing, meaning audio and video checks for speaker (s) and moderator, only takes five to ten minutes if everything works. However, if it does not work, you will need the extra time to determine what the problem is. Trust us.

### **Have a back-up plan if audio cannot be fixed**

Most online meeting platforms have an alternative call-in number for both speakers and attendees. Make sure that your speaker and moderator know the phone number prior to the event. Should their audio not be able to work, they can call in by telephone.



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## Tips & tricks...continued

### Assume things will run late

Setting a timed agenda for your meeting is a helpful way to ensure you respect your attendees' time. Reviewing this at the beginning of the presentation will set expectations, while also helping attendees follow along. Since you cannot start the meeting without quorum, assume your meeting will start a few minutes late. It's easy to let attendees know that you have finished early. However, if you run late, you risk attendees leaving early and missing out on important information or votes.

## Keeping attendees engaged

Keeping attendees engaged may be a challenge when completing online events such as AGMs. Here are some ways to improve attendee attentiveness during your AGM:

- Keep your AGM as concise as possible. If you plan on having an AGM for longer than 90 minutes, have a set break time in your agenda. You can also use polls and ask the audience questions to break-up content for longer AGMs.
- Have both your speaker(s) and moderator use their cameras so attendees can see their body language and expressions as they speak.
- Use clean, easy to read slides - especially for longer presentations. This means less words per slide, more images, and contrasting colours when possible. Here is a [helpful list of slide deck recommendations](#) by TED.

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## Templates and resources

Feel free to use our online [AGM script template](#) and [AGM critical path template](#) to start your planning.

Additionally, here are a few legal resources that may help:

- [Nonprofit Law Ontario](#), free legal information to help you run a nonprofit
- [AGMs during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), options and considerations for nonprofits
- [Carters special COVID-19 update](#), legal information and implications for nonprofits

## Questions and feedback

We welcome your feedback about this virtual AGM facilitation guide. Have additional resources to support nonprofits with AGMs?

Contact us by email ([info@theonn.ca](mailto:info@theonn.ca)) or social media. Share them with us on social media by tagging us at @o\_n\_n (Twitter) and Ontario Nonprofit Network (Facebook and LinkedIn).