

Tip sheet

Using technology well during COVID-19

Using technology well during COVID-19 requires you and your team to understand the range of software options available, and how you can use them to promote productivity, collaboration and connection. It also means thinking carefully and talking to your team regularly about setting boundaries (such as security measures and switching off), and having plans in place for when technology lets us down.

During this time we have the opportunity to build new skills using collaboration technology that many of us had not tried before. These new skills can be carried forward as we return to our workplaces to inform new, and often more productive ways of catching up with stakeholders, collaborating with peers in other agencies or connecting with each other.

No matter where, when or how we work, technology is a crucial enabler of our success: If technology is hampering a team member's ability to perform in their role or be included in team collaborations, you need to work with your ICT team and/or colleague to find an alternative platform or software that is accessible for them.

Ensure your team is clear on which technology you'll all use

There are many software options to help your team communicate and collaborate, but the trick is being able to match the right software for your team's function. Below are just a few of the apps that you could consider using. First check with your ICT team to see which platforms are supported, as there may be some security considerations. Secondly, pick a platform that is fully accessible, and stick to it consistently where possible so that things don't get missed. Feeling 'out of the loop', especially when team members are working at home alone, could add to a sense of isolation. Ensure you communicate the platform you are using to other teams when collaborating, in case they're using something else or are unfamiliar with what your team is using.

Software that supports productivity

There are now multiple online platforms that can create clear tasks with timelines and responsibilities. This can provide a snapshot of what everyone is doing and can also be shared across the team. They're especially useful for job sharing employees to ensure there's handover, and to ensure part-time employees are kept in the loop and in turn have information for other colleagues answering queries on their non-work days.

Tasks	Applications	Description
Project management	Trello	Visual boards with project cards given to team members trello.com
	Asana	Create lists of tasks and subtasks that can be used for project management, goal-setting, brainstorming and meeting agendas. asana.com
	Project	Project management tool https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/microsoft-365/project/project-management
Note taking	One Note	Organising thoughts, to-do lists, and projects. onenote.com
	Evernote	Taking notes, clipping web pages and recording audio. evernote.com
	Google keep	Ideal for collecting images, drafting documents, and creating checklists. keep.google.com

Software for communication

Dispersed teams will need to use a communication tool to share documents and have short discussions. Tools like Teams can help organise and find communication for future reference, as you can search the conversation threads. Ensure the platform you are using is as accessible as possible.

Tasks	Applications	Description
Communication	Microsoft Teams	Instant messaging and collaboration system with ability to share documents, images and emails. It is an all in one application.
	Slack	Slack can be used if you don't have Microsoft Teams. It offers similar features. slack.com
	WhatsApp	Informal communication application for quick text and images exchange. whatsapp.com
	Yammer	Ability to create private channels and share documents.

When you do have team meetings online, discuss and decide how the meeting will run:

- Make sure users are aware of the accessibility features of the software you are using. For example, Microsoft Teams allows users to activate live captioning.
- How will attendees signal they want to speak or respond to a question, and what is the etiquette for listening to others? If someone online is using live captioning, make sure each person identifies themselves each time they say something.
- Ensure your team know to speak slowly and clearly. This will aid in everyone's understanding and ensure that live captioning is as accurate as possible.
- Do you expect all microphones/cameras to be muted or off? Approach this one sensitively, as employees may have had past poor experiences, or not feel 'safe' showing their home.
- Will you use chat for questions?
- Is it useful for everyone to have a role, e.g. a time keeper, a note taker who 'tags' action items and owners, and a chat monitor?
- How interactive will the meetings be, to encourage engagement?
- Where possible, select software that does not require any downloads to function. Software that requires employees download a plug-in to access creates unnecessary roadblocks. Some people with disability may not be able to download and install plug-ins, and most work computers do not allow users to install software.

Software for collaboration

There are a number of easy to use collaboration technologies available that help people work together from different locations. When deciding, think about the key functionality you need the tool to provide; for example, the ability to work on a document together while at the same time holding a conversation about the topic of the document.

Use collaboration technology **during** meetings to:

- Report on project progress and prioritise actions.
- Mind map or brainstorm 'how could we better...' ideas.
- Use a virtual whiteboard or visual management board.
- Field questions and collect responses during meetings or events.
- Gather feedback (edits and comments) on documents.
- Make and allocate decisions collectively.
- Co-create documents.
- Manage projects, to allocate and report progress of tasks.
- Take notes and record action items.
- Share and build resources.

Use technology **between** meetings to:

- Schedule meetings—provide participants with options for dates and times to meet.
- Manage projects, allocate and report the progress of tasks.
- Work in groups to complete tasks:
 - Communicate live using chat, audio or video calls.
 - Co-create documents—agendas, guidance, reports.



The list below does not include Teams, but it can also do much of this functionality, as well as the communication aspects.

Tasks	Applications	Description
Document sharing	Dropbox	Independent cloud storage application. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer). dropbox.com
	OneDrive	Cloud storage application own by Microsoft. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer). onedrive.com
	Google Drive	Cloud storage application own by Google. Available across devices (mobile, tablet, computer). google.com

Build technology resourcing into your business plan so that hardware and software can be provided to your employees through an IT modernisation project or staged transformation over time. Discuss up front where the lines are drawn in terms of the employee responsibility to pay for internet use at home. In principle, if you have provided a workspace with internet access in the office, they should not expect the organisation to pay for the same at home.

Note that even when the technology is available, its inherent limitations and a lack of confidence can discourage people from using it. Encourage your team to pick up the phone and have direct conversations instead of email when it will be quicker to do so, or when the issue being discussed needs it. Ask the more tech savvy in your team to become 'champions' who help teammates wanting the support, especially if your IT team are not available to assist with training.

Set expectations and boundaries around technology use up front

Remote teams can risk overwork, particularly if they're working from home (and the temptation to check emails and not switch off gets harder to fight). The best way to mitigate this risk is to proactively track your team's workload with them, to ensure that they are not being overwhelmed. This will help them feel valued and visible. If you sense overwork, raise the issue next time you meet for a progress check in and find out what is going on for the person. It may be that they are feeling pressure that is not actually necessary, or their displacing a worry about something else by immersing themselves in work.

Don't create an expectation of 24/7 availability and reinforce this in the way you model your own approach to work. Communicate your expectations clearly to your team: you trust them to use their wisdom to balance meeting deadlines with taking breaks and to switch off devices when they are not working. At the same time, keep a careful watch on potential overwork or underwork and step in as soon as you sense unbalance.

Ensure that your team is mindful about security (and cybersecurity) measures when working elsewhere — lock away papers, laptop security, etc. Check with your ICT team about cybersecurity as well, especially if using alternative Wi-Fi or devices.

Establish technology workarounds: have a Plan A, and Plan B (and a Plan C)

Have some established workarounds that everyone understands for when technology fails, to minimise disruption to productivity (and the level of team frustration!):

- Always set aside an extra few minutes before a video or telephone meeting to get the tech working at your end and encourage colleagues to do the same so the meeting does not lose the first 10 minutes to troubleshooting.
- If your videoconference fails, switch to pre-arranged telephone conferencing facilities and email the meeting notes or slides to your team.
- If you think your access to a shared document management system could fail, save files locally on your computer, email them to yourself in your work account only, and remember to copy them back into the correct file location when you regain access.
- If a videoconference is working but some people cannot access the meeting, use the platform to record it and send them the link afterwards. Some platforms such as MS Teams include an automatic transcript, to help with accessibility.

And before your team returns to the office, make sure you set aside some time as a team to reflect on what worked using technology over this time, and what you want to keep doing this way, or ditch.

This tip sheet will be enough to get you started, but if you feel you need more help or to go deeper, post your query on our LinkedIn group, talk to your manager, IT team member or a trusted peer, or consult with your HR representative to explore any courses your agency may have access to.

Works for me.

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FLEXIBLE WORKING