

Conference Call Guidelines

Conference call meetings, in lieu of face-to-face meetings, can be an effective time and cost saving measure if conducted properly. Just like a traditional face-to-face meeting, proper planning and meeting management can mean the difference between a productive and well-run meeting versus an ineffective meeting with limited results.

In order to make conference calls productive for everyone, the following suggestions are provided for both conference call facilitators and participants.

Facilitators

1. Reserve the conference call system by contacting the Telecommunications Division of the Information Services Department at extension 42007. Two conference call lines may be reserved. The larger conference call line is extension 42777 (813-794-2777, 727-774-2777, or 352-524-2777) and will accept 40 lines/callers. The smaller conference call line is extension 42778 (813-794-2778, 727-774-2778, or 352-524-2778) and will accept 8 lines/callers.
2. Communicate your expectations – Prior to the conference call, send out the following:
 - Time of the conference call
 - Extension number the participants should call
 - Standards of behavior
 - The “standards of behavior” followed at a traditional meeting are just as important, if not more important, during a conference call. Sidebar conversations, typing on a computer keyboard, shuffling papers, etc., can be very distracting and should be discouraged. Remind participants that professional language is expected.
 - Inform participants how you want them to ask questions. (Should they ask during the conference call or wait until the end?) Ask participants to state their names when they ask questions or make comments during the call. Participants should not assume that others would recognize their voice.
 - How participants will introduce themselves – Directions will typically be:
 - At the END of the conference call, the facilitator will read off the names or representative groups of the expected participants. If calling off the names of representative groups (rather than the actual name of the participants), the facilitator will ask each participant to state their name, acknowledging their participation.
 - Instruct participants who will have to leave the conference call before its conclusion to email confirmation of their participation and any additional questions they might have.
 - Agenda you will be following
 - The first agenda item of any conference call should be a review of your standards of behavior.
 - Materials the participants need – You should explain to participants what they should have read before the conference call and what they should have as a reference during the call

All of these expectations should be sent ahead of time, but the facilitator, at the beginning of the call, should review them.

Participants

1. Learn the features of your phone before the call – The three most important features to learn whether you are using a district phone or some other phone are:
 - How to activate the speakerphone,
 - How to turn the microphone off and on when using the speakerphone, and
 - How to mute the handset.

There are several different styles of NEC phones throughout the district, and each model is slightly different.

- Almost all phones have a button that activates the speakerphone feature by pressing the Speaker or SPKR button. When using a speakerphone, it is a good idea to turn the microphone off so background noise is eliminated.
 - If your phone does not have a Microphone or MIC button, it should have a button labeled either 'FNC' or 'Feature.' You can turn the microphone off and on by pressing the Function (FNC) button and the number 1 or the Feature button followed by the number 1.
 - If you are using the handset instead of the speakerphone, you can also eliminate background noise by using the Mute button once you are on the conference call. This will set the phone so you can listen, but others will not hear anything from the phone.
 - Series III NEC phones do not have a Mute button – you can still mute the handset by pressing #6# after you have introduced yourself. To reactivate the microphone in the handset, press #6# again. (If you have this phone, you can put in a work order to the Telecommunications Division of IS to have a mute button activated and labeled.)
 - The important point is to learn these features before the call begins.
2. Avoid using cell phones – Cell phone users can join a conference call if necessary, but the potential for reception issues, static, and interference make it a poor practice.
 3. Don't use the hold feature – If, during a conference call, you put your phone on hold, the DSBPC "on-hold message" will begin to play -- for ALL to hear! Turning off the microphone or placing the handset on mute is the correct option if you are just listening to the conference call.
 4. Find a quiet location, call in on time, and set time aside for the call. All participants within one location should gather to participate in the call in order not to tie up any more lines than necessary. Avoid the urge to multi-task during the call.
 5. Follow the facilitator's expectations, which were sent prior to the conference call.
 6. Keep your phone muted until the facilitator is opening the line for questions or comments.
 7. Identify yourself each time you speak.
 8. Avoid talking over or interrupting other speakers. It is advisable to keep a notepad and pen handy for recording thoughts so they don't escape you as you listen to others.
 9. In order to maintain a professional demeanor, some comments should not be made in this public forum. Remember that your facilitator is available to discuss issues that are private or unique to you in an individual conversation.