

## Great Decisions COVID-19 Newsletter

As many groups now look to meet remotely due to the ongoing threat of COVID-19, we at the Foreign Policy Association would like to provide a guide to three of the most popular online meeting platforms. Zoom, Webex and Google Hangouts all have free plans that users can access and host their discussion groups remotely. Below is a quick explanation of each platform.

Google Hangouts is a web browser extension for Google Chrome web that participants that use or download Chrome can use for free. The extension allows for the creation of a “hangout” that group leaders can manage and invite the group participants to. The hangout allows for real-time video and audio chatting and conferences, along with a discussion thread for participants to use for comments and questions. You can download Hangouts from [hangouts.google.com/](https://hangouts.google.com/).

Zoom provides a free version of its service that participants can access either online or through their smartphones (via the Zoom app.) Zoom free limits group meetings to only 40 minutes, which can help facilitate a structured discussion after the participants already read and watched the materials. Zoom can host meetings that are both audio or video and can host up to 100 participants at a time. You can visit [zoom.us/](https://zoom.us/) for more information or to sign up for Zoom.

Webex from Cisco has a free version of their service that participants can download onto their computers or smartphones. Webex allows you to meet with up to 100 participants at a time and for as long as you want. You can share files such as PowerPoint presentations, graphs and images to your meeting participants using their message and file-sharing system. Group leaders or speakers can also set up Webinars, where you host a presentation that is recorded and made available online. For more information on Webex, you can visit <https://www.webex.com/>.

These are just three of a growing number of apps and services that allow for people working from home, under quarantine, or following proper protocols and remaining inside to gather and meet online. Other services like Skype, Slack and Amazon Web Services (AWS) also provide free and paid versions of software that can help facilitate remote groups.

Here are some tips to help your remote group run more effectively:

1. Plan out your meetings (Consider sending an agenda out to participants)
2. Collect questions in advance
3. Leave time at the start to allow for latecomers
4. Focus more on discussion time then using the meeting to present only
5. Allow time during your presentation for a comments section

We also have some suggestions for group participants on what they can do to help keep the discussion going:

1. Make sure to mute yourself on whatever service you are meeting on when the presentation is happening. (It is also a good idea to mute any computer updates during the meeting.)
2. Maintain etiquette: understand that trying to talk over someone during a conference call or online meeting makes it even more difficult for participants to understand each other.
3. Continue the discussion: just because the meeting is over doesn't mean that the discussion must end. You can use chat functions or forums on certain services to keep in contact with other group members and continue the discussion after any meetings.

We have provided access to the Great Decisions 2020 Television (as well as 2018 and 2019) on [YouTube](#) for participants to view from home for free. You can now access hours of content from experts on topics ranging from climate change to global health, all from your computer or mobile device.

We at the Foreign Policy Association would also like to extend our best wishes for good health to all our members and participants in the Great Decisions program. We know that these times can be challenging but it has never been more important for Americans to remain together and strong. Even as we practice social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19, let us not lose our sense of community and continue to look out for each other.

For any questions on remote software or the Great Decisions program please email [mbarbari@fpa.org](mailto:mbarbari@fpa.org) or call 212-481-8100 Ext. 391.

#### Additional Resources

Kristen Klein, "Best Practices for Hosting a Digital Event"

(<https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/03/04/best-practices-for-hosting-a-digital-event/>)

David Spinks, "A Comprehensive List of Tips, Tools, and Examples for Event Organizers During the Coronavirus Outbreak" (<https://cmxhub.com/a-comprehensive-list-of-tips-tools-and-examples-for-event-organizers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>)

Joshua Kim, "7 Best Practices for COVID-19 Necessitated Online Meetings"

(<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/7-best-practices-covid-19-necessitated-online-meetings>)