Deciding whether your meeting should be online or in-person

It can be hard to figure out how to make our meetings more environmentally conscious. One way might be deciding to have your meeting online instead of in-person. But this isn't always possible or helpful.

We've created this simple tool to help you in deciding whether your meeting should be face-to-face or screen-to-screen. The first section contains some general information around the sorts of things to consider. The second part of this document has a basic flowchart to help you make that choice.

Please remember that there is no right or wrong answer. Making environmental choices can sometimes be daunting and surrounded by guilt. But, ultimately, need to do what you think is best for the people attending the meeting in question.

Travel

One of the major factors when deciding to have a meeting online or not will be the travel needed to attend. Here are some questions to consider:

- How far will people have to travel to attend in person?
- Can you choose a venue for that is easy to get to by public transport?
- Can you choose a venue that people can access by sustainable transport (walking, cycling etc)?
- Can you subsidise travel on public transport to encourage people to attend via those methods?
- Could you send out instructions on public transport access to the venue to attendees?

Accessibility

You'll need to think about who is attending the meeting and what they need to attend. Here are some questions to ask yourselves and those attending if appropriate:

- Do people have the necessary digital skills to take part in an online meeting? If not, what can you do to support them to attend?
- Do people have the necessary digital skills to host an online meeting? If not, can you provide them with some training in using online platforms and in how to run accessible online meetings?
- What accessibility requirements do people have? Might people need a wheelchair accessible venue or a British sign language interpreter? Do they need the meeting to be held on a specific online platform?
- Does your online meeting platform have the option to provide closed captions or live transcripts as people talk?
- Do the people you are inviting to your meeting or workshop have adequate access to the internet? If someone has an unstable connection or can't afford adequate data packages they may struggle to attend an online meeting.

Digital footprint

Did you know that every email, zoom call, Miro board and Google Drive folder has a carbon footprint? All these things require energy and electricity to do.

Whilst long zoom meetings typically use less energy than a traditional conference, online meeting platforms do have a digital carbon footprint. Six hours of large conference Zoom meetings can generate 1,324 kg of CO_2. That's like driving over 3,200 miles. Here are some things you could consider to decide whether to hold your meeting online or in-person:

- Can you turn off the HD video setting in your meeting platform? A higher quality video uses more energy to produce and transmit.
- How long is your meeting? Can you keep it concise? This might reduce the desire to travel even further!
- Do your staff know how to reduce their digital carbon footprint in other ways to make the meetings more emission efficient? Read Going Green Together's 'How to Reduce Your Digital Carbon Footprint' guide to find out more.

Topic sensitivity

As well as environmental aspects to consider, it is also useful to consider what you will be talking about. Remembering that some people may be triggered by certain conversations might make you want to give them the option to turn their cameras off rather than having to get up and physically leave a room which can be tricky if you're feeling anxious. Equally, some topics may require there to be a strong physical connection where it is easier to read people's body language and facial expressions.