Online conferences in Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams can be used to run events like online conferences and symposiums. Within a Teams space people can interact with each other between or after sessions to continue discussions or watch recordings of sessions.

Although there is no set way of creating the conference, there are a number of recommendations below on how to set up a simple and effective online conference. To make it easier to manage, it's strongly recommended to keep the set up simple. You could use Teams for registration, messaging in the conference, evaluation and feedback (via Microsoft Forms in Teams) if you wished.

To see an example of a Teams space set up using the following guidance, join the Digital Skills Demo Conference Team.

You will need to set up the Teams space in advance of advertising the meeting.

1. Create a new Team for the conference space.

2. Within the team, set up additional channels – for the Discussions space, Sessions and Support.

   a. General channel:

      i. Use the general channel for announcements only e.g. countdown to conference, each day list activities with direct link to join activities.
      ii. Include instructions in an announcement for how people can view and add sessions to their calendar.
      iii. Restrict the General channel to Owners only. To do this, from the Channel options, click Manage channel, in Channel Settings, select Only owners can post to channel.

   b. Discussion space channel:

      i. The Discussion space is a normal, unrestricted channel, where channel members can start/continue conversations e.g. follow up or carry on chat from session. You might want to add an initial announcement in the channel explaining to people they can use the discussion space for this purpose.

   c. Sessions channel:

      i. Sessions run as individual Teams meetings linked to the Sessions channel. Therefore, all meeting chat and the recorded session are all kept together in one ‘post’ within the session channel. This is useful for people who missed the session to look back at the chat and/or watch the recording. Team members can also reply to the chat, even after the session has finished.
      ii. The Session organizer/Owners can also see the Attendance report in each session once completed.

      • For each session, create a new Teams meetings linked to the channel – inviting the presenters. It’s a good idea to have the session description and details such as audience, meeting link etc. clearly visible in the meeting details. Once created the sessions will display in the channel.
      • You will also be able to open the meeting details and copy the join link for you daily announcement during the conference.
      • Set meeting options to include: Only presenters can present. Mute attendees by default. Allow posting messages in chat before the start of the event. The meeting organizer can access the meeting options via their Teams calendar.
      • You will need to ensure channel moderation is set so Team Owners are moderator. To do this, from the channel options, click Manage channel and ensure Channel moderation is On, Team Owners are moderators.
d. Support channel:

   i. In anticipation that people might need some support during the channel, this provides a space for members to comment any issues. Owners /Support on the day needs to keep an eye on this space.
   
   ii. Make sure there is an announcement in the general channel about using the support channel.

3. On the Sessions channel, set up some tabs for easy access to the session calendar and any recorded sessions. You can add additional tabs if required. In the sessions calendar, people can see what is on all week/for the duration of the conference. They can click on a session, see details and add to their calendar. Organiser sees the list of who’s attending /numbers.

   a. From the Session channel, add a tab – select the Channel Calendar, and give it a suitable name e.g. Session schedule
   
   b. Link it to the Sessions channel to the tab. All the teams meetings that are linked to the channel are visible.

You will need to set up a channel in Microsoft Stream so you add your session recordings to that channel. Then they will display on the session recording tab you set up:

   a. Add a tab – select Stream channel and choose required channel.
   
   b. Each time there is a session recording, go into Stream and edit as required, then add to the conference channel you created.

You could have additional tabs if required, such as a tab for the Session Evaluation, which is linked to a Microsoft Form.
You can add people to a Team in various ways. If they are **externals (guests)** they will need to be added to the team manually with their email.

If you have a number of **internal** people joining a Team that is restricted e.g. staff only, it is recommended that you share a link to join the team (owners of the team will need to accept joining requests).

If the Team site is available to any staff and students at the University, you could make it publicly accessible.

See Adding Team members page in the Teams online course for further information.

In the run up to the event, you may wish to put some announcement posts within the General channel as a 'countdown' to the event.

It is also a good place to add an announcement on how users can book onto sessions and engage in chat discussions and how they can request support if they need it.
During the event, it’s recommended that you make a daily announcement with a list of that day’s sessions, brief descriptions and direct links to join the sessions. You might decide to copy the information you used when creating the sessions for this.

Frequently Asked Questions

Once you have joined a team, you will find the session information in the Session channel. The session calendar in the top tab will provide a good overview of all the session scheduled. From here, you can click on the session in the calendar, see details and add to your own calendar (by clicking on the expand button in the selected session and selecting add to calendar).
There is the option of breakout rooms within an online Teams meeting (not in Teams Live events). This adds a level of complexity, as currently only the meeting organizer can initiate the breakout rooms once the meeting has started. If the organizer is unable to be at the meeting, e.g. they are ill, then the breakouts cannot happen. Microsoft are working on this so that presenters can also initiate breakout rooms.

If you want a facilitator to be allocated for each breakout room you have, then you can either:

- Allocate everyone automatically into your breakout rooms, if have facilitators, go through the list, unassign the people you wanted as facilitators from their randomly assigned rooms and then reassign them to each room. Or
- Use manual assignment for the breakout rooms – first assign the facilitators for each room, then divide rest manually across the breakout rooms.

You can set up quizzes in advance of the session and link to them in chat in the session, or as a Forms tab in the top of channel space. See Chat, files and polling in meetings page in the Teams online course for further information.

Microsoft have increased the maximum number of participants in a Teams meeting, from 300 to 1000. If you have over 1000 participants in an individual session you will need to run the event as a Teams Live event, rather than a standard online meeting in Teams.

Go to the meeting in your calendar and invite the people presenting as attendees. Once invited, go into the meeting in your calendar and adjust meeting options for presenters to present (if not already set).

Externals cannot be made presenters in advance of the meeting. The meeting organizer or other presenter can make the external a presenter once they have joined the meeting.

You could use Microsoft Forms to gather information, or consider using LibCal calendar.

If you want to add a direct link to the session calendar in your instructions for joining a session: From the Session channel, open the Session calendar tab and click the three dot (...) button and select Copy link to tab.