# VLCT Hybrid Public Meeting Software & Technical Guidance for Vermont Municipalities

This guidance document is intended to help those municipalities seeking to conduct meetings by electronic means, while also complying with the Open Meeting Law. It reviews remote meeting software options as well as technical best practices in the context of Open Meeting Law requirements. Please use this guidance in conjunction with our other [Open Meeting Law](https://www.vlct.org/node/1051) resources and be sure to check the website for our most current information.

### Hybrid Public Meeting Software Options and Considerations

The law does not specify use of a particular type of software service or conference call system to use for a hybrid meeting, other than to say that it may be conducted through electronic or other means.

There are several free and low-cost digital meeting software options available. Vendors may provide both free and tiered software options. Be aware, some of the free options may include limits on participation, access to features, duration of meeting, and/or number of internal users. Please review selection considerations below to help you assess which option may work best with your municipality’s infrastructure.

To ensure you are using your hybrid meeting software or a teleconferencing system within the confines of the Open Meeting Law requirements, please review VLCT’s regularly updated Open Meeting Law FAQs at https://www.vlct.org/open-meeting-law-faqs for more information.

### Selection Considerations

Here are some important considerations to keep in mind when selecting hybrid meeting software. Consult with your IT (Information Technology) staff or IT service provider prior to installing new software.

* Check your internet bandwidth to understand which software options are most compatible. In other words, make sure your internet speed is fast enough. If you are not sure whether your internet can support hybrid meetings or you need additional network assistance, contact your internet service provider to review your current plan and options.
* Review software application security settings, vulnerabilities, and options. Consult your IT staff if available. Follow the hybrid meeting software’s instructions.
* If your hybrid public body meeting is going to give remote access to the public, strive to ensure that it allows remote participation, such as connecting through computer or device video and audio. If at all feasible, the software should allow the public to call-in by telephone.
* You need to be able to manage public comments, so if you’re using software with a chat system, make sure the software allows you to mute/unmute attendees and moderate any chat function.
* Make sure your software provides enough digital “room” for attendees, particularly when high attendance is anticipated (e.g. some services allow for up to 100 attendees in the free version – though there may be other limitations). Most have affordable pricing tiers, depending on your meeting needs.
* Ensure there are options for others to join the meeting without having to register or you can set an instant registration option.
* Many software services have hybrid platforms which allow for internal business collaboration as well, making them valuable tools not only for your public meetings but for use by all municipal departments.
* If desired, choose hybrid meeting software that gives you the option to record the meeting. Keep in mind, however, that any recording will constitute a public record under Vermont’s Public Records Act and will have to be managed accordingly. Please contact the State of Vermont Archives and Records Administration (VSARA) at 802-828-3897 for records management related assistance.

### Software Providers Options

Below is a non-exhaustive list of software meeting service providers along with links to industry vetted resources where you can read reviews and recommendations about them.***VLCT does not endorse any of these services.*** Please use due diligence regarding security and system compatibility when selecting a provider or providers. Be sure to comprehensively assess your municipality’s internal and external needs (including the needs of both the public body and the public participating remotely). As noted, your IT staff or provider should be consulted before downloading and launching new software.

**Common Providers:**

Freeconferencecall.com

Zoom

GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar

WebEx

ClickMeeting

RingCentral

Tele Town Hall,

UberConference

Skype for Business

Skype (standard)

Google Hangouts

Vast Conference

**Audio Only Conference Services**

Audio conference services may also be available through your phone or other telecommunications provider.

**External References**

<https://www.techradar.com/best/best-video-conferencing-software>

<https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-video-conferencing-software>

### Cybersecurity

You should be cautious when setting up hybrid public meetings with some software providers. **Some of these services may have known software security vulnerabilities. Vet services carefully and contact your IT provider!**

To mitigate some vulnerabilities, some software services provide unique links or passwords for users to login, which requires a registration feature or the ability to direct email contacts. Your administrator or IT provider may need to adjust service settings and compatibility features to enhance security features.

### **Software Testing and Troubleshooting**

Software services should be tested with your equipment prior to use. Please review provider tutorials and information sheets prior to set up. Many of these software systems allow you to designate organizers, presenters and attendees. A few of them may offer quick registration or options to embed live links via website, social media, and email.

### Setting Up a Hybrid Public Meeting

Please review our Hybrid Public Meeting Toolkit page for resources on conducting a hybrid public meeting. The toolkit includes a hybrid public meeting checklist, model notice and agenda, and hybrid meeting script.