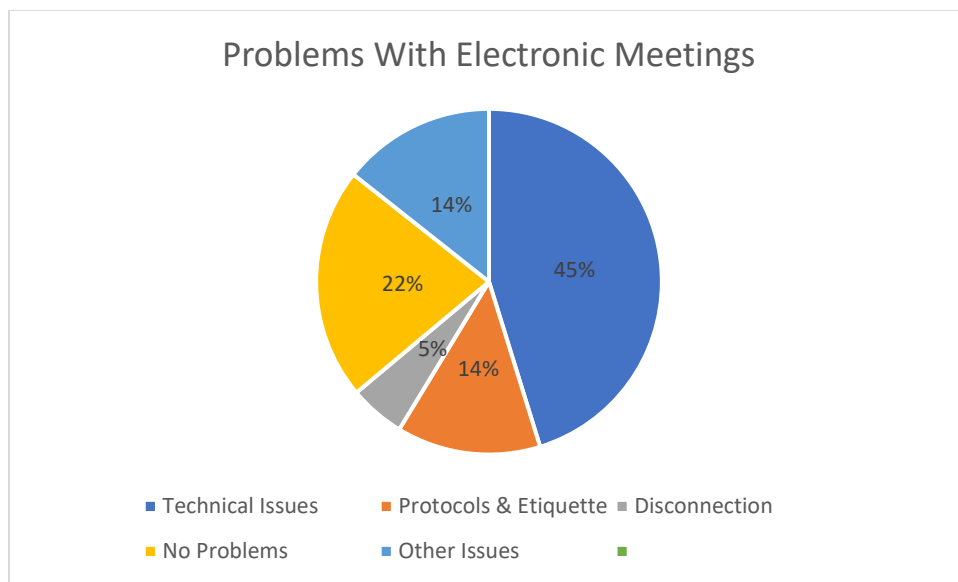


Threshold Question – Should We Keep Electronic Meetings in Some Form?

The overwhelming response to this question is Yes.

- Of the responses received that indicated any preference, 90.4% indicated that some form of remote access should continue to be the norm, versus 9.6% expressly voicing opposition to remote meetings in favor of going back to in-person meetings.
- Of those wanting to continue remote meeting options, 35.5% expressly stated a preference for continuing hybrid meetings, and only 3.6% stated a preference for “either/or” – that is, either all remote or all in-person.
- Though the question was not directly asked in the survey, there was overwhelming support for not mandating a specific design of electronic meetings, but rather allow municipalities to hold electronic meetings and determine which type of meeting to use under which circumstances.
- When asked what problems were faced with either all-remote or hybrid meetings, a relatively high percentage of respondents (21.5% and 14.2%, respectively) indicated that there were few if any problems with holding either form of electronic meeting.

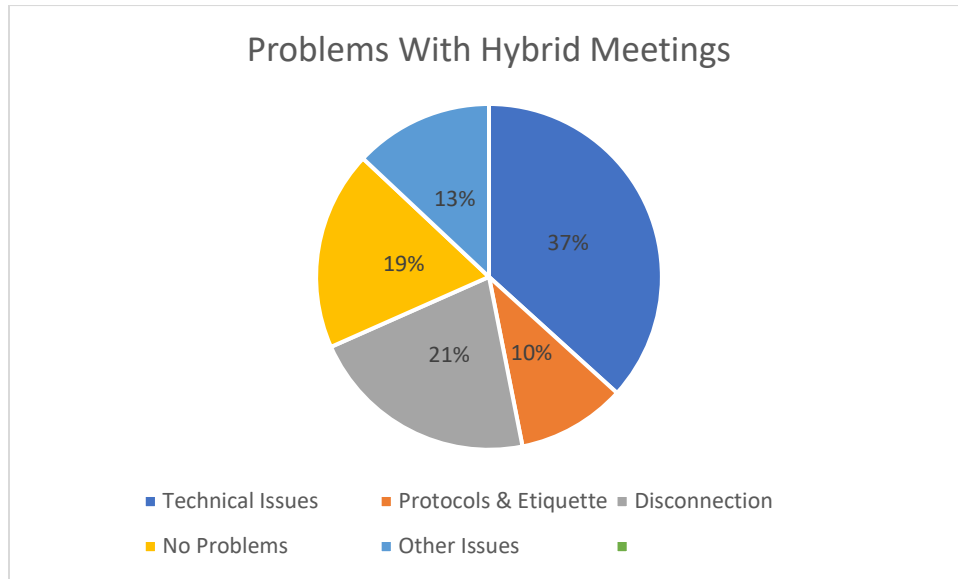
Problems Identified With Remote-Only Format



In response to the question regarding the remote-only format:

- Respondents overwhelmingly cited technical issues, such as poor connectivity, as the greatest obstacle that these meetings faced.
- However, a significant percentage felt that those technical problems have largely been resolved over time.
- Establishing standard protocols and online etiquette, including muting and maintaining “camera-on” policies for commission members was identified as a significant need
- The lack of an in-person connection – not being able to see reactions and read the room - was identified by many as a problem.

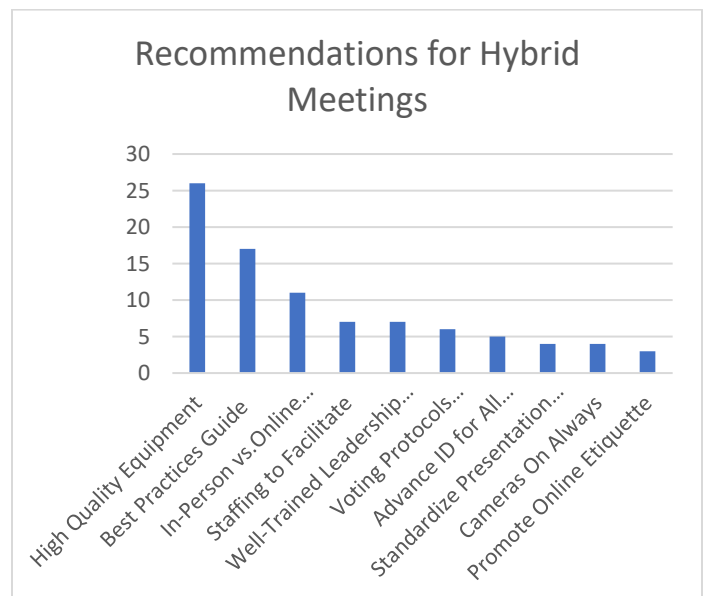
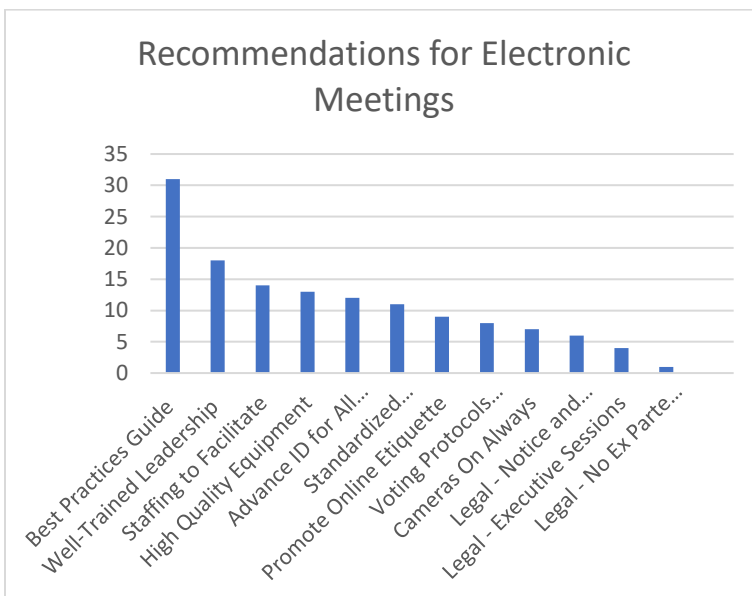
Problems Identified With Hybrid Format



Hybrid meetings drew responses similar to remote-only meetings:

- Like remote-only meetings, respondents named technical problems as the single biggest issue to overcome.
- Also like remote meetings, a significant number felt there were no problems that haven't already been overcome in the hybrid format
- The major difference in responses for hybrid versus remote-only meetings was the “disconnection” problem – particularly with the disparate treatment of in-person and remote attendees.

Recommendations for Remote-Only and Hybrid Meetings

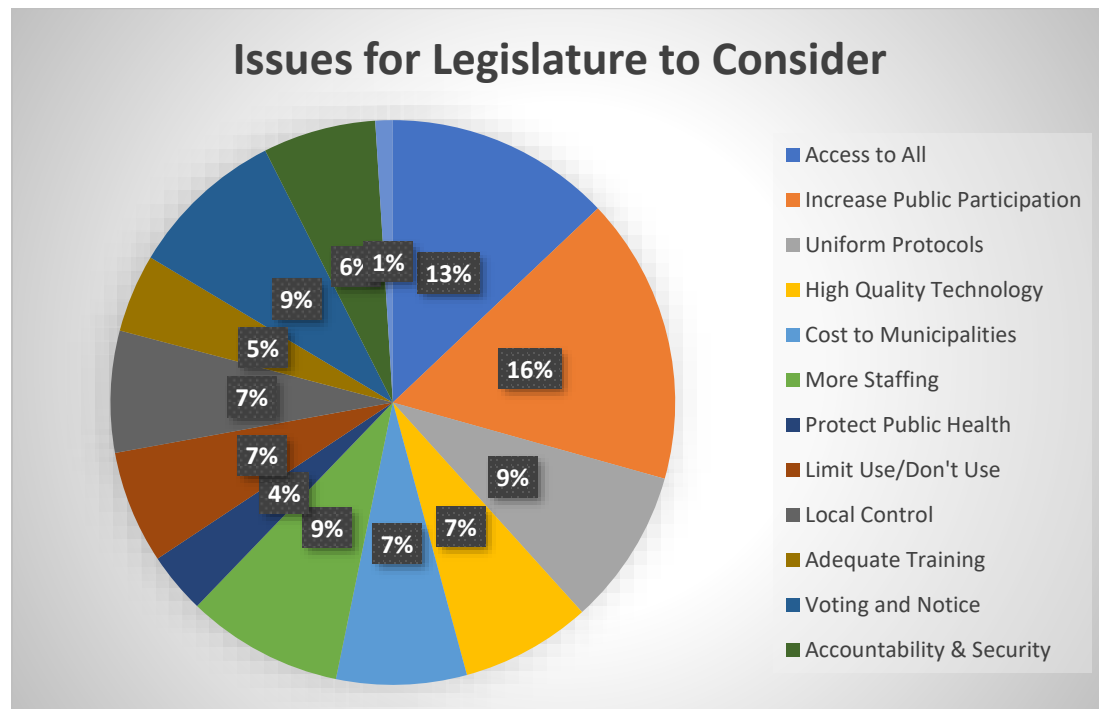


As to comments regarding what makes each meeting format beneficial, or could make them better, respondents identified:

- The need for a standard, best practices guide for holding meetings
- Training on using the technology for those who are running meetings
- Availability of high-quality equipment
- Availability of staffing to help set up and monitor the meetings
- Resolution and guidance on legal issues involving notice, voting and executive sessions.

The major distinguishing recommendation between the two formats is the problem of disparate treatment of in-person and online participants in the hybrid format.

Major Issues for Legislature to Address



Regarding the respondents' recommendations for the legislature to consider in addressing the future of remote and hybrid meetings, the largest percentage of comments focused on the need to continue to offer these options to the public as a means of increasing participation in local government, and to provide access to those for whom in-person attendance and participation is difficult or impossible.

Beyond their endorsement of the availability of either meeting format, respondents also cited the need to avoid uniform mandates that require remote or hybrid meetings in every town, as well as mandates on where and when to provide them. While the need for a uniform set of protocols for running meetings and legal guidance regarding notice requirements and voting, respondents clearly indicated that with those guidelines, they should be allowed to determine their own application of those options.

What is also clear is that the respondents believe the future of remote and/or hybrid meetings depends heavily on the availability of the resources necessary to conduct them. This includes high-quality hardware, software and connectivity (particularly for hybrid meetings), ample training for those expected to run these meetings, and adequate staffing resources to setup and monitor them. Without financial support from the state, all of these will cost municipalities significantly, so to be successfully implemented and sustained a financial support plan will need to be established.

Conclusions

Overall, the responses received cited issues and recommendations for improvement that generally fall into the following categories:

1. Technology – the need for high-quality hardware and software solutions, as well as better connectivity to ensure these meetings run smoothly.
2. Best Practices – guides and training for conducting meetings and promoting online etiquette among participants
3. Legal Issues – separate from the conduct of the meetings themselves, a set of legal guidelines that address issues such as notice requirements, ex parte conversations among members, executive sessions, and in particular, secure and accurate voting protocols
4. Funding – providing local bodies with financial support necessary to secure the best technology as well as the staffing to set up and facilitate meetings

As to general observations and statements, respondents seemed to agree on the following:

- 1.. No Going Back – The continuation of some form of online meeting structure is now an essential tool for promoting a) the public’s participation in their local government, b) access for those who otherwise would not be physically able to join in-person meetings, and c) protecting public health. Even those who expressed a preference for returning to in-person only meetings made exceptions for emergencies or other exigent circumstances.
2. Local Option Only – Respondents overwhelmingly supported the concept of allowing towns to decide for themselves how and when to offer remote options at their local meetings. Almost no one expressed support for mandating remote options in general, and for dictating when such formats should and should not be utilized.
3. Remote-Only versus Hybrid – Generally, there was no consensus that one form of remote meeting is better than the other. Some expressed the opinion that the only option should be between all-remote or in person, with no option for hybrid meetings, but those sentiments seemed to be based more on technology limitations or inexperience with the format. The major obstacle identified by respondents with hybrid meetings is the potential for treating in-person attendees differently than online participants, with the former having an advantage over the latter.