Tech support in online, on-site and hybrid spaces

Hybrid tech support can be hard to grapple with, as it is something rather new. It differs greatly from tech support for an "all online" meeting and tech support for a completely on-site meeting.

For example, support for online meetings requires tech staff to:

- Be constantly in touch with organisers and presenters to check the time and last-minute changes to the agenda.
- Admit participants to online spaces and filter/exclude the non-invited.
- Test and troubleshoot participants’ audio, video and potential connectivity issues.
- Enable cameras and audio when participants have issues, and mute and disable cameras when they are introducing noise.
- Manage the global camera view and screen views that the participants get.
- Assist with sharing screens or other media.
- Create and oversee breakout rooms.
- Pay attention to dynamics in the chat.
- Preserve recordings (audio, chat and notes).
- Provide links to external tools like surveys, games, drawing pads, etc.
- Alert presenters and organisers about participants' requests.
- Communicate important information to participants.
- Support interpreters and captioners (if present).
- Support event broadcast to other platforms (e.g. YouTube – if applicable).

Meanwhile, supporting an in-person meeting will require the tech support person to:

- Test the internet connection and have a backup solution in case of disconnection (e.g. mobile phone data plan).
- Check that the projector, TV and/or screen are working.
- Make sure that microphones and speakers are working.
- Check that the presentation(s) and screen shares are compatible with the display and that they show properly.
- Troubleshoot any issues on presenters’ computers and/or manage presentations and assist with sharing other kinds of media.
- Make sure that participants have access to microphones when they want to speak.
- Assist with changes in the room setup or lighting.

However, in a hybrid event we will have a mix of both worlds, and it is not just the sum of these two lists above – which are not at all exhaustive lists – but rather another layer on top of that, which is connecting these two worlds through technology.

This layer includes additional tasks such as:

- Set up and manage video cameras in the room so that remote participants have a feeling of being present and do not feel excluded. This ideally would imply two cameras:
  - One camera with the current speaker in focus, meaning that this camera needs to be managed and adjusted at all times – and it should also point to drawings, papers or any exercise space used on-site.
  - Another camera to give a broader view of the room, allowing remote participants to have a sense of room dynamics.
- Make sure people in the room always use microphones when they speak, so remote participants can hear what is said in the room. This also means that people should request the use of the microphone and not have parallel discussions that exclude remote participants.
- Make sure remote participants are audible in the physical room, which means connecting online audio to the room audio system.
- Make sure that remote participants are not excluded by relaying dynamics happening in the virtual and the physical room to one another through the chat.
- Make sure requests from remote participants to speak or intervene are noted by the facilitators.

The number of tasks and the fact that they all need to be done simultaneously require a team of two to four people present at the event, some on-site and some remotely. As we can see, some of these tasks do not require specific technical skills: all the tasks related to observing and communicating dynamics in and to the different rooms, as well as passing microphones and keeping the camera focused, can be managed by other people supporting the event.

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