**VIDEOCONFERENCE INFORMATION**

**[Revised in 2017] This document contains basic background information—in the form of a general information flier and a sample letter to videoconference site hosts—for conducting videoconferences for rule advisory committee meetings and rule hearings. For information about videoconference sites, costs, and other information, please contact your agency’s videoconference coordinator. If you want information about how to make your videoconference plans work with OAH, contact Katie Lin at (651) 361-7911 or** **katie.lin@state.mn.us****. Please note this information is subject to change.**

**Videoconference Information Flyer**

**What is a videoconference?**

A videoconference is a two-way interactive communication between people at two or more sites, making use of video images, voice and audio.

**What activities may be conducted through videoconferences?**

A video conference may be used for meetings, training events, or a hearing or appeal. The Attorney General’s office and the Department of Economic Security use videoconferencing for various hearings.

**How does the video equipment work?**

The equipment includes cameras and microphones which capture the video and audio signals. A special computer, a **codec**, converts the pictures and sounds to digital signals. These signals are transmitted through telephone lines to another site with a **similar codec** which converts them back to sound and pictures.

**What sites are available?**

MNet, defined by state law, may be used by public organizations and private colleges and schools. This network has over 200 sites available statewide. The services of another partner network ONVOY® may also be used. This network was developed by a consortium of Minnesota telephone companies and includes sites throughout Minnesota.

**Videoconference Sample Letter**

[This letter can be used by the ALJ or the agency to provide information for those involved. The letter includes information as to how the room is to be set up and possible times and procedures that can be followed for the videoconference.]

Dear Videoconference Host,

Thank you for being willing to help with the Wednesday videoconference. Having you there will make a difference for those who attend. It will increase their comfort level, and enable them to make better presentations.

This is a new process for most of us (including myself!), so the overriding guideline is to use common sense. If something said below doesn’t seem to make sense for your particular site, you can just use your best judgment about the best way to proceed.

Here are the details of what you should do:

1. Arrive at the site about 45 minutes before start time. The hearing starts at 3:30 p.m., so it would be good if you arrived by 2:45 p.m. You should locate the Room Coordinator, who is the person in charge of the room. That person should know how to operate the cameras and other equipment. That person will show you what you need to know, about where to seat people, etc.

2. Consider the best room layout, and help the Site Coordinator rearrange the room if needed. The rooms are all different. The ideal layout would be a podium or a small table close to the camera, for the person who will be speaking. The rest of the room could be either rows of chairs or rows of chairs with tables for the audience. There will probably only be twenty people at the most in the audience, so don’t waste a lot of time rearranging the room. The Site Coordinators have had lots of experience with all kinds of groups, and they will know what has worked well in the past.

3. Set up a small table or chairs or some surface near the door where you can put the handouts. These were mailed to the Site Coordinator earlier this week. If they have been misplaced or are locked up and unavailable don’t panic. Just make up a sign-in sheet, with columns for name and address. See if someone can lend you some blank envelopes that people can self-address if they want a copy of my report. Call me (number below) and have me fax you the “Rulemaking Procedures Handout,” and then ask someone there to make a few copies.

4. As people arrive, greet them, introduce yourself, and tell them you are helping to organize the meeting. Point out the sign-in sheet, the handouts, and generally make them feel comfortable. Probably just as they are arriving, we will be doing various technical checks for lighting, sound quality, etc., so that should let them see how the equipment works before we even get started.

5. When we do get going, I will begin with a general welcome and explanation of how we will proceed. Then, when that’s done, we will have brief statements from the agency. Then we will be ready for public statements. In a traditional setting, when I am physically present, I just call on people at random. It does take time to ask for a show of hands of those who want to speak, pick one of them, and then wait for them to come forward. It will be quicker, and more productive, if you would get the next speaker at your site selected (at random) and get them ready to go while speakers at other sites are talking. We will go “around the horn” from site to site. We will begin with a speaker from Bemidji, then a speaker from Detroit Lakes, then Grand Rapids, International Falls, St. Paul, Thief River Falls and, finally Worthington. So, when the Bemidji speaker is talking, the facilitator in Detroit Lakes should select the next speaker (at random) from that site, so that they will be ready to go when we switch to Detroit Lakes.

6. When we do finish with each speaker, I’ll say something like “Thank you very much. Now let’s switch to Detroit Lakes.” At that point, the Detroit Lakes speaker should be at the speaker’s area. Before they begin speaking, I’ll ask them to state their name, and spell their last name. Some people are so nervous that they forget to do this. It might help if you could remind them as they are waiting to speak.

7. We will just keep going from one site to another until we run out of people who want to speak. Generally, we will run out even though some of the people present have not yet spoken. What I may do is to announce a ten minute break, so that people can go to the restroom, get a drink, and generally mill around. This always has the effect of stimulating some new speakers, so that when we resume after the break, there will be some people who decide they’ll give it a try. When we have run out of speakers a second time, we will see what time it is, and determine the likelihood of anyone else coming. I’ll want to wait around until about 5:00 before we adjourn for good, because there will be some people who may not come until they leave work.

8. Written comments can be submitted to me. But they must be received no later than a date which I will announce at the start, and again at the end, of the hearing. If people ask you about this, please tell them to send them in soon, and be sure to get them to me by the announced date. The address is on the back of the “Rulemaking Procedures” handout.

9. It would be desirable if you could remain at the site until the end of the session, but if you have to go home, to work, or wherever, it’s not the end of the world. The most important time for you to be there is before we begin, and also while we get the ball rolling with the first few speakers. Once people get the hang of how it works, you will have less and less to do and your attendance is less vital. But if you do leave early, please be sure someone will collect the sign-in sheet and the envelopes for you.

The last thing I want to mention is that it’s important that you be neutral in any statements you make about the proposed rules or people’s comments, and that you be absolutely fair in your selection of speakers.

If you have questions, the best way to reach me is at my office, at [contact’s telephone number]. If I am not in, please leave a message on my voice mail. I do check it frequently. After that, I’ll be at the videoconference site in St. Paul. The numbers there are [phone numbers]. It’s OK to call those numbers anytime, even in the midst of the videoconference. There will be someone there who will answer the telephone.

Well, that’s about all I can think of. Your willingness to help is really appreciated.