

How to navigate a virtual conference

The 54th Annual Orientation Program & Career Forum



With the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, virtual events are going to be part of our new normal, but they can be intimidating for somebody who's never engaged in anything aside from viewing a webinar.

With The Consortium's Orientation Program going fully virtual, Liberty Mutual and The Consortium partnered up to develop this resource to ensure you feel prepared and excited to network with employers, attend events and engage in a virtual way.

Benefits to Virtual vs. In-person Conferences

There are more benefits to virtual conferences than you may realize. Some may think virtual is "second-best" but that's simply not true. It is just a different way to deliver valuable connect and foster connections. For example:

- **You can "attend" more sessions!** Prioritize the ones you want to see live and then watch ones you want to see later. You can likely still contact the presenter with questions from recorded sessions should you want to engage further.
- **No geographic barriers!** Attend from your home and don't worry about flight or hotel costs.
- **Ask questions during presentations through chat boxes.** Asking a question in front of a large crowd intimidating for you? Chat boxes allow for easy interaction between you and the presenter.
- **Easy access to presentations and content** as well as employer and attendee contact information.



Pre-Conference Prep

Although it may be a slightly different experience engaging with peers and employers virtually, not much changes when it comes to prepping before a conference.

Review the conference agenda and select what's important for you to attend.

Like any large conference, you want to go in prepared.

- Write down one to two main goals you have for attending OP and then leverage the agenda to help you achieve those goals.
- Create a color system and highlight your top sessions and have a few back-ups should you have extra time, or something changes in the schedule. All content will be recorded for viewing later, so it's important to create a ranking system and prioritize those sessions you want to see live.
- Do some research before your selected sessions. Look up presenters on LinkedIn. Google them to see if they have content online already. Based on what you find, formulate some basic questions that you can bring into the session with you. If available ahead of time, review session materials to maximize your time

Test your technology to ensure a seamless virtual experience.

- Review what technology requirements the conference platform needs to optimize performance and reduce any technical snags. If necessary (and if it's readily available), run any updates or update any software needed to ensure a smooth experience. The Consortium OP event will be running on the Intrado platform. You can review system information [here](#).
- Log into the conference a little early to ensure your camera and microphone are working properly. If not, this will give you some extra time to troubleshoot.
- Have a back-up plan should your internet go out or if your computer isn't working. Most conferences will offer dial-in information where you can access the audio from your cell phone. Write that info down just to be safe.

Clear your schedule, set boundaries and prepare to immerse yourself.

- Set communication boundaries.
 - Block your calendar as *Out of Office* as you would if you were attending an in-person conference. Turn off notifications if you can.
 - Communicate with colleagues that you will be out of the office and ask somebody to be your back-up for any urgent matters.



- Assign designated times to check your email if you must. We suggest once early in the morning, once around lunch and once more towards the end of the day. It's tempting to check emails or answer pings/IMs, so it's important to set boundaries from the beginning.
- Set goals for yourself as it relates to participation, especially if it's your first virtual conference. It can be as simple as, "I'm going to ask one question via the chat box for each session I attend" or, "I'm going to visit three employers at the Corporate Open House and ask these two questions". Writing those goals down will hold you accountable.
- Check your LinkedIn profile (and whatever social profiles you use to engage professionally) and make sure they're updated. It's much easier to send an employer a quick LinkedIn URL vs. a PDF resume during that initial introduction.

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Day of Conference

It's the big day! Get yourself in the right mindset and be ready to virtually engage.

Dress the part!

- Even if you're virtual, it's important to dress for the occasion. You wouldn't show up in pajamas in person, so be sure to change out of them for the virtual conference. Not to mention, you'll likely be on video at one point or another.
- Not surprisingly, [research shows](#) that what you wear impacts how you feel and behave. Dressing up, even if it's a nice top, a button down or adding a blazer with a pair of jeans can make a huge difference in your behavior and engagement during the conference.

Have your materials handy.

- Have your highlighted agenda ready, your questions handy, and a notebook (digital or otherwise) to record quick notes and jot down questions. One great thing about a virtual conference is you can watch presentations back later, so no need to take furious notes, but rather notate salient points that you want to remember and revisit later.

Remember virtual etiquette.

- Mute your microphone when you're not speaking.
- Be aware of your surroundings. If you're on video, it's important to have a tidy background as not to distract the people you're connecting with. You want them paying attention to you, not the mess on your floor.



- Eat before your sessions or during breaks. You never know when you're going to want to speak up or will have to go on video. Have water or a drink handy throughout the event.
- Try and stay off your phone. It will distract you and you could miss valuable information. Plus, if you're on video it is just rude.
- If the presenter asks a question – answer! Even if it's in the chat.

Engage, engage, engage!

- The Intrado platform allows engagement from various angles. Leverage the chat box feature, participate in polling, speak up and use your video when it's appropriate! When you're chatting live or even putting something in a chat box, remember to share where you're sitting and what school you're attending. It's a great way to connect with others.
- Don't underestimate the value of virtual networking. There will be various networking opportunities at OP including the Corporate Open House in the Exhibit Hall, Mini Private Morning and Evening Chats, Corporate Lounges, and many additional opportunities to connect with corporate representatives in a variety of lounge areas. Use this opportunity to learn more about different companies and make deep connections.
 - Get ready for the Corporate Open House, the OP's version of a virtual career expo. Be prepared and develop a plan to visit booths during the Corporate Open House.
 - Companies will reside in multiple exhibit halls, so create a road map to most efficiently navigate the space.
 - Greet corporate representatives professionally and remember that first impressions are lasting ones. When entering a booth at the Corporate Open House, you may participate in a public chat or request a private chat with a corporate representative. When engaging in public chats, be aware that your comments are visible to all in the chat space (this includes corporate booth staff).
 - Company booths will contain content that may be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the company and its culture. Take the time to peruse materials and do not hesitate to add items of interest to your virtual briefcase. No matter how excited you are to engage a corporate representative, it is always important to be respectful of their time and considerate of your peers. It is never a good idea to monopolize anyone's time.



Post-Conference

It's not over! The great part of a virtual conference is you have easy access to materials for a period of time following the event. Make the most of your experience with the below tips.

- **Set up a call to review your favorite learnings from the conference with your colleagues.** Not only will this hold you accountable for attending and pay close attention, the preparation is an exercise in reflection which will help reinforce learnings.
- **Miss a session?** Schedule the time on your calendar to actually watch it. If you don't, it will never happen, and you'll miss valuable content! Need some motivation? Ask a friend or colleague to join you. Microsoft Teams or Zoom are both great collaboration tools that allow you to watch videos with others virtually. It's a great way to chat about the content while it's steaming live.
- **Follow up** with those you spoke with! Send a quick note thanking them for their time or if you have a follow up question for an employer you met, this is a great way to stay engaged.

References:

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