

Hearing requirements for in person, online or hybrid hearings

Planning Panels Victoria | Practice Note 2

This practice note advises planning authorities, project proponents and other organisations of the requirements for hosting Planning Panels Victoria (PPV) hearings that are convened in person, online or a combination of both (hybrid).

How to read this practice note

- In person only: section 1
- Online only: section 2
- Hybrid hearings: all requirements in sections 1 and 2

1. In-person and hybrid hearings

Venue location

1. The venue should be located close to the geographic area of the project. If a suitable venue is not available near the project area, a central venue such as in the Melbourne CBD may be required. Once a suitable venue is found, please inform PPV prior to booking it.
2. For multi-week hearings, the venue will need to be booked over the intervening weekends. Consider whether the venue is available to be booked by other users over weekends. Additional expenses can be incurred if the venue requires use of the hearing room over the weekend.
3. The venue should be large enough to accommodate the hearing participants and attendants. Generally, for larger matters, plan for three times the number of participants, to accommodate the teams and observers.
4. Where possible, the venue should be located near public transport and/or public car parking. If public car parking is not available, private car parking may need to be provided for the committee/panel members and PPV staff.

Break out room

5. A breakout room should be available for the committee/panel. The room should be lockable, away from other parties/proponents and near the hearing room.

Access and signage

6. The venue must comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.
7. Adequate public signage should be displayed to direct parties and the public to the hearing room and other facilities such as tea/coffee station and bathrooms.

Catering

8. In the hearing room;
 - water jugs and glasses should be provided on all tables
 - tea and coffee provisions are optional but would be appreciated.
9. PPV will confirm whether lunch should be provided for the committee/panel and PPV staff each day. Morning and afternoon tea (food) are not required.
10. In the committee/panel breakout room, tea and coffee provisions are optional but would be appreciated.

Emergency arrangements

11. Emergency evacuation plans should be provided at the venue. A summary of this information should be provided to PPV so the chair of the committee/panel can guide people through these plans at the start of the directions hearing and hearing.
12. There must be prominent signs of access points such as exits around the rooms.

Hearing room facilities and equipment

Audio

13. The directions hearing and main hearing may be recorded. The committee/panel will provide more guidance on audio recording, including whether it is required.
14. Microphones (either individual or within the room) for the committee/panel, key parties, and the expert witness/submitter table may be required. Speakers may be required for hearings with a large gallery.
15. Audio equipment may be required including:
 - i. microphones with on/off switches for the committee/panel table, including one for the chair with a 'master mute' function.
 - ii. at least one microphone with on/off switch located every two/three seats at other party tables.

Visual

16. Adequate screens should be provided for viewing by the committee/panel, parties, and the public gallery. For hybrid hearings, this will preferably include screens on the committee/panel table to view the video conference.
17. A laptop with a built-in camera and mouse should be provided for submitters and experts to use for presentations, located at the expert witness/submitter table.
18. For hybrid hearings, a camera(s) will be required that can capture a wide angle of the room. Please inform PPV if an in-room camera is not available.

Other technical matters

19. A strong Wi-Fi connection should be provided for the committee/panel, and all parties to use.
20. Multiple power points for the committee/panel and parties seated at the table should be provided.
21. Multiple power points should be provided for the committee/panel in the breakout room.

2. Online and hybrid hearings

Video conference platform and settings

22. Webinars are preferred over meetings where possible. When a webinar is not possible, security settings should be configured to prevent disruptions, in consultation with PPV.
23. The Chair and PPV staff must be provided with co-host/organiser status to ensure they can:
 - i. Mute participants
 - ii. Request parties turn their camera on
 - iii. Assign attendee or presenter status to participants if it is a webinar
 - iv. Remove participants if necessary
 - v. Lower raised hands.

24. Hearing participants should be able to screenshare (some community submitters may require technical support from the host to do this).
25. The raise hand function should be enabled for participants and attendees to ask questions.
26. The chat function should be disabled unless the panel/committee chair requests otherwise.
27. All parties and attendees should access the hearing through the same link. The link should be provided to PPV before the timetable is issued.
28. A telephone dial-in function for those without computer access should be included (to be managed by the proponent or a dedicated technical support person). If a dial-in function is not possible, please inform PPV as soon as possible.
29. The video conference should have a title (full name of matter) so participants can be sure they have joined the correct hearing.
30. Video conference settings should be configured as follows (or similar, depending on the platform and meeting format):
 - i. Lobby and waiting room are turned off.
 - ii. Chat function is disabled.
 - iii. Participants are muted by default when they join.
 - iv. Participant video is off by default when they join.
 - v. If using Zoom, “allow removed participants to re-join” is disabled.
 - vi. Ability to annotate shared screen is turned off.
 - vii. Break out rooms are turned off.

Technical support

31. The planning authority/proponent must provide technical support for parties prior to and during the hearing. PPV staff are not able to provide technical support.
32. For larger matters, a technical support phone number must be available for parties to contact prior to and during the hearing.
33. Attendance licence limits for the video conference platform must be sufficient to ensure the directions hearing and hearing can support the predicted level of attendance.

3. All hearings

Document sharing

34. A document-sharing platform may be required to support the hearing. If directed, PPV will provide direction on its setup.

Recording

35. If directed to record, only audio should be recorded. If the chosen video conference platform only records audio and video together, the file must be converted to audio only (e.g., using VLC Media Player). If it cannot be converted, it is suggested that a different platform is used. If the recording needs to be published online this should be provided to PPV as a suitable weblink.

