

Planning Panels Victoria | Practice Note 2

This Practice Note advises EES Project Proponents of the requirements for hearings convened at a venue and in a hybrid format (part 1), and hearings held by video conference (part 2).

This Practice Note may also be adapted for other major PPV matters.

Planning Panels Victoria (PPV) is currently convening all hearings by video conference. Advice of the Victorian Government and Chief Health Officer are being monitored and in 2022 hearings may be held face to face, by video conference, or as a hybrid (both video conference and with limited in-person attendance) depending on COVID restrictions. The format of the Hearing will be determined by the Inquiry/Committee when they are appointed.

Part 1

Hearing venue and hybrid requirements

1. The Project Proponent bears the responsibility and costs for making in person and/or video conferencing arrangements, in conjunction with, and following the endorsement of, PPV.

Hearing venue location

2. Generally, the hearing venue should be located close to the geographic area where a project is proposed. Sometimes hearings may need to be located in multiple venues, or in one central venue such as in the Melbourne CBD.
3. Consider whether the venue is available to book over weekends. Additional expenses can be incurred if the venue requires the use of the Hearing room/areas over the weekend and pack up is required each week.
4. The Hearing venue should be of sufficient size to accommodate a high number of parties and submitters.
5. The Hearing venue should be located with access to public transport links to make it easy for the parties and submitters to access the venue.
6. Car parking for the Inquiry/Committee Members may be required – this will be confirmed by PPV.

Hearing room layout

Please see examples of room layout at page 4 of this document.

7. Within the Hearing room, a U shape is preferred. The Inquiry/Committee will be seated at the front of the room. The Inquiry/Committee table should be large enough to seat the members comfortably with extra room for computer devices and paper documentation. No one is to access the area behind the Inquiry/Committee.
8. The PPV Project Team member/s will be seated close to the Inquiry/Committee to provide administrative support.
9. The Proponent, councils, statutory authorities (i.e., EPA, responsible Ministers) and some submitters will sit at other tables laid out in the Hearing room.
10. The Hearing room will need to have an appropriate amount of public seating available where parties and submitters can freely come and go, with their access away from the main tables..
11. Prior to the commencement of proceedings, the Inquiry/Committee will provide direction on party seating arrangements to ensure equity.
12. Front tables should be covered with cloths to shield the underside of tables from public view.
13. Suitable chairs (i.e., ergonomic) should be provided for the Inquiry/Committee members and PPV staff during the Hearing.

14. Other chairs will be venue chairs unless other parties make their own arrangements.

Main Hearing

15. A dedicated table with at least two seats should be arranged for parties and expert witnesses to present to the Inquiry/Committee. This seat should be in direct view of the Inquiry/Committee members, key parties and any screens.
16. Small bookshelves should be provided behind the Inquiry/Committee. These bookshelves need to be sturdy to take the weight of required documents.
17. A public table for display of the EES and associated documents should be provided at the rear of the Hearing Room.
18. Display boards and screens for maps and plans will be required; this will be discussed at the Directions Hearing.

Breakout room

19. A breakout room should be available for the Inquiry/Committee that is lockable. If possible, the breakout room should be located away from other parties/Proponent and not too far away from the hearing room. The Inquiry/Committee must be able to access its seated area from the side, so it does not have to walk through the room if possible.

Access

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

20. The venue must be Disability Discrimination Act compliant. If the venue is not compliant, PPV must be advised as early as possible.
21. 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

22. Lunch should be provided for the Inquiry/Committee and PPV support staff each day. Subject to Chief Health Officer advice in relation to COVID-19, lunches may need to be individually packaged. Morning and afternoon tea (food) are not required for the Inquiry/Committee but tea and coffee facilities in the Inquiry/Committee breakout boardroom is appreciated.

Emergency arrangements

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

23. The venue should provide information on their emergency evacuation plans. The Chair of the Inquiry/Committee can provide this information to the people in attendance at the start of the Directions Hearing and Hearing, and prominent signs must be placed around the rooms.

Hearing room facilities and equipment

Audio

Note there may be a requirement to record the Directions Hearing and Hearing in the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry/Committee. More guidance on audio recording, including whether it is required, will be provided by the Inquiry/Committee once appointed.

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

24. Sound amplification and microphones are required for the Inquiry/Committee, key parties, and the expert witness/submitter table.
25. High quality audio recording equipment may be required including:
- Three microphones with on/off switches for the Inquiry/Committee table, including one for the Chair with a 'master mute' function.

- b. For other party tables, at least one microphone with on/off switch per two/three seats at tables.
26. If recording is required:
- a. Space within the Hearing room for a desk and area to be staffed by a full-time audio-visual technician to manage audio-visual systems and recording.
 - b. Recording will be started and stopped at the direction of the Chair.
 - c. Recordings may need to be published to an accessible website such as YouTube. At the direction of the Inquiry/Committee, the Proponent and/or audio-visual technician should provide a YouTube weblink to PPV no later than 12 noon the following business day.

Visual

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

- 27. Adequate screens for viewing by the Inquiry/Committee, parties, and the public gallery.
- 28. Data point input via audio-visual technician – either Clickshare (preferred) or similar technology, or hardware input (cable/USB) to share information from parties' computers to the screens in the room.
- 29. A laptop and mouse for use by submitters for presentations, located at the expert witness/submitter table.

Other technical matters

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

- 30. High speed Wi-Fi for the Inquiry/Committee, Proponent and parties to use (if possible, separate networks are preferred).
- 31. Multiple points for power access for the Inquiry/Committee (at the head table) and access for all parties. Generally, one power board per table is adequate with the exception of the Inquiry/Committee's table.
- 32. Multiple power point boards should be provided for the Inquiry/Committee in the breakout room.
- 33. A webcam and associated software such as (MS Teams, Zoom) so that any submitter/expert witness can observe/participate in the Hearing by video conference. Note that the Hearings should be accessible for submitters and the public to observe online at all times through a weblink.

Security

Directions Hearing and Main Hearing

- 34. Direction on whether security will be required will be provided by the Inquiry/Committee Chair.
- 35. If required, Proponents should liaise with venues to determine what their existing security arrangements are, and if additional security is needed.
- 36. Proponents should liaise with the venue to discuss how protest action may be managed. Protestors will not be allowed in the Hearing room.

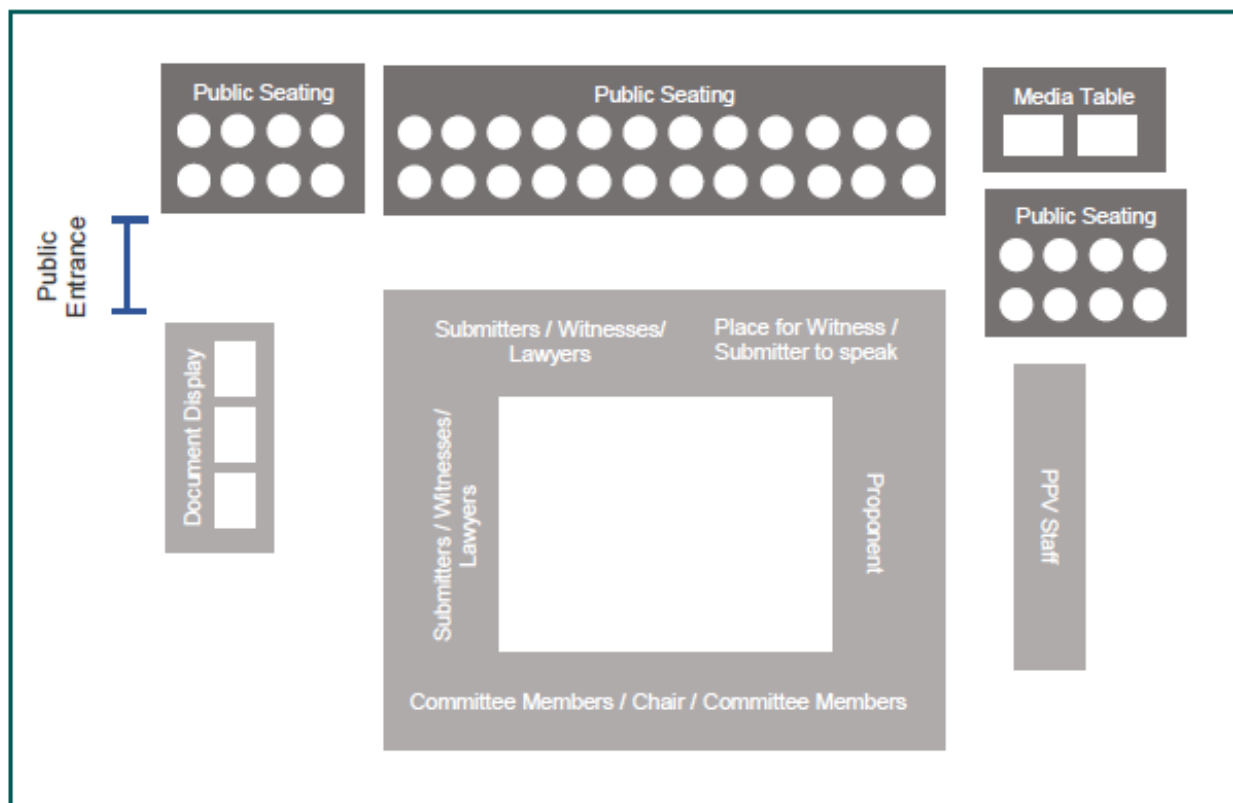
Advice from Health Authorities

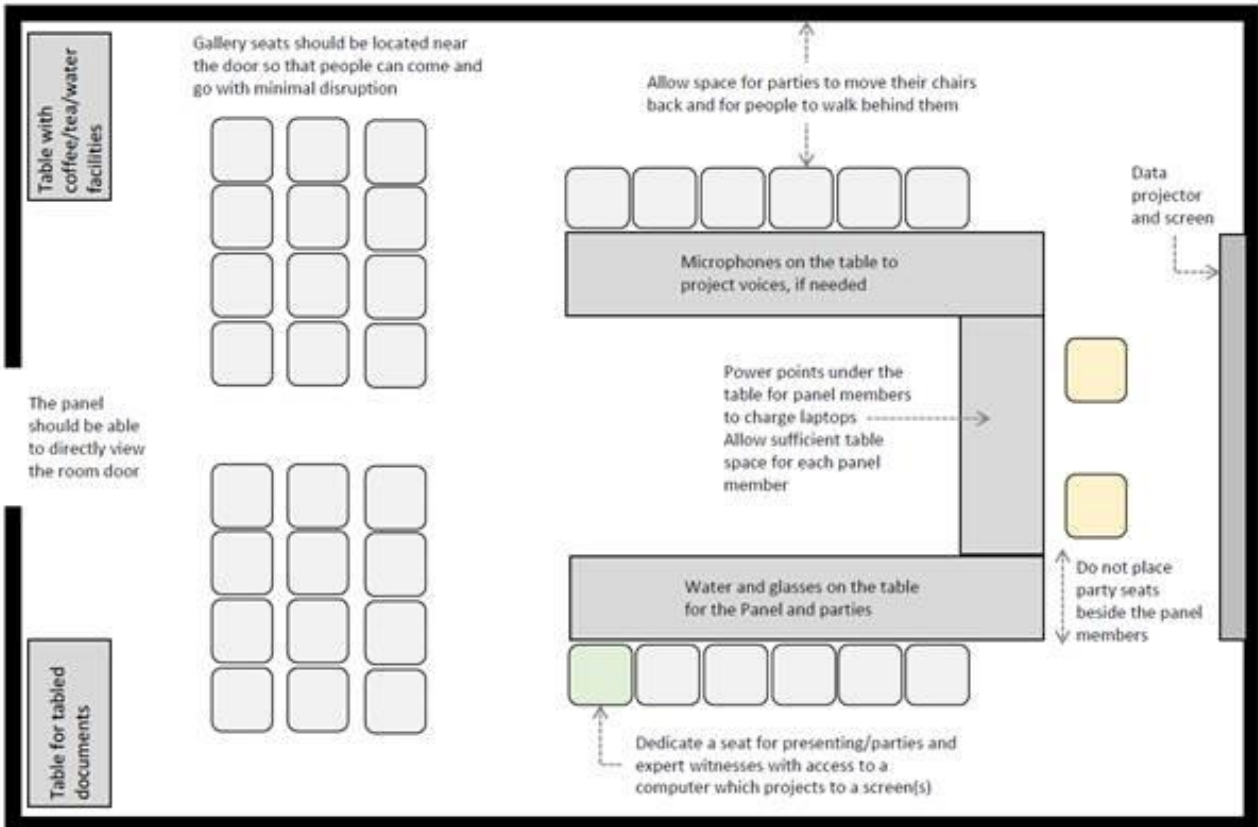
- 37. The Hearing venue must ensure it is compliant with the most up to date restrictions and advice from health authorities on COVID-19 as outlined on the DHHS website: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>
- 38. The venue selected by the Proponent is required to meet PPV's Requirements for COVID Safe Hearings (June 2021) (https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/529572/H5-Requirements-for-COVIDSafe-Hearings-June-2021.pdf). One of the main requirements is ensuring the proposed venue has a COVID Safe plan that complies with Victorian Chief Health Officer requirements and a registered Service Victoria QR Code. The COVID Safe Plan checklist should be returned to PPV at least three weeks before the hearing commences.

Additional venue requirements

39. Public gallery seating arrangements must be spaced out to provide at least 1.5 metres of physical distancing.
40. Density requirements set by the Chief Health Officer must be complied with at all times.
41. Hand sanitizers should be provided and promoted for use on entering the building and the hearing room. Disinfectant wipes should be provided and available for use in the hearing room.
42. The venue operator must provide adequate staff to ensure tables etc are wiped down, microphones cleaned and when submitters are using the presentation table, that must be wiped down after each user.
43. All attendees who attend the hearing in person must check in using the Service Victoria QR code every day and fill in the attendance sheet with full contact details. This is to protect hearing participants and the Inquiry/Committee in the event that someone in the hearing room becomes ill during or after the Hearing and they need to be contacted. This should be arranged with the external venue.
44. All hearing participants should provide their own water, tissues, and any required stationary such as paper and pens at the hearing. PPV will notify parties of these requirements.

Hearing room layout concepts





Part 2

Video conferencing requirements

Where a Directions Hearing and Hearing cannot be held in person, Proponents are responsible for arranging and hosting video conferences.

In general, Inquiries/Committees are familiar with MS Teams and Zoom (and have limited exposure to WebEx). PPV notes Zoom is its preferred platform. Proponents of larger matters should outsource the management of video conference component of Hearings to professional audio-visual providers.

The requirements are necessary for the video conference Hearing arrangements:

Platform

45. The Chair and PPV staff must be provided with co-host status to ensure they have the capability to:
 - a. Mute and unmute parties and participants
 - b. Turn cameras on and off
 - c. Assign attendee or presenter status to participants if it is a webinar
 - d. Remove participants if necessary
 - e. Lower raised hands.
46. A weblink should be generated for publishing to Engage Victoria for the public to observe the Directions Hearing and Hearing as attendee's, but not participate.
 - *Note on Zoom this is achieved by setting up a webinar that has a presenter and attendee status. Where a person joins the video conference, they join as an attendee where they can see the Inquiry/Committee members but cannot use their camera or microphone. As directed by the Inquiry/Committee some parties will have their status changed to a presenter so they can fully participate in the Hearings.*
47. Hearing participants require the ability to share documents on screen (some community submitters might require technical support to do this).
48. The raise hand function should be enabled for participants and attendees to ask questions.
49. It is preferred that all parties access the Hearing through the same link, unless it is a very large Hearing where it is preferable to have a presenters/participants room and then a separate gallery..
50. A telephone dial in function for those without computer access should be included (to be managed by a dedicated technical support person).
51. The chat function must be disabled at all times.

Technical support

52. The Proponent should arrange for a dedicated technical support person/s to host the hearing and provide technical support for parties prior to and during the hearing. Note the Inquiry/Committee will moderate the proceedings including who can speak and when, but they are not able to provide technical support. PPV staff are not able to provide technical support.
53. A technical support phone number should be available for parties to contact prior to and during the Directions Hearing and Hearing. If required, this should be available for parties to contact prior to any public test sessions and at least five business days prior to the Directions Hearing and Hearing.
54. Separate video conference test sessions for the Inquiry/Committee and the Parties to the process may be required.
 - The test session to be held between the technical support person/s and the Inquiry/Committee (if required) should be held before the Directions Hearing. The setup of the test session should be the same as what is proposed to be used for the Directions Hearing. This is so members can become familiar with and confirm the setup of the Directions Hearing.

- The test session for Parties is hosted by the Proponent. This is so the Parties can be familiar with how to connect to the video conference, share documents and test their devices before they speak at the Hearing etc. The setup of the test session should be the same as proposed to be used for the Directions Hearing. How the test session is run is up to the Proponent.
 - Note it may be appropriate to combine these sessions.
55. Guidance material should be provided to parties for the use of the selected video conferencing platform. PPV have guidance material available consider that a similar resource is critical in supporting parties to the process.
56. Examples are:
- [Your Guide to using MS Teams at Planning Panels Victoria](#)
 - [Your Guide to Zoom Webinar at Planning Panels Victoria – Golf Course Redevelopment Standing Advisory Committee](#)
57. A document sharing platform may be required to support the video conference hearing. If this is required, PPV will provide direction on its set up.
58. If directed to record by the Inquiry/Committee, only audio recording of the Directions Hearing and Hearing should be undertaken. No visual recording is necessary as that may create further privacy issues.
59. Virtual breakout rooms do not need to be created by the Proponent.
60. Attendance licence limits for the video conference platform must be sufficient enough to ensure the Directions Hearing and Hearing can support the predicted level of attendance.
61. Links to the Directions Hearing and Hearing should be provided as soon as dates are confirmed alongside the guidance material and technical support helpline number so they can be circulated to Parties and placed on the Engage Victoria website with ample notice.