

Remote Participation in an NCSA Event Using Cisco WebEx Meeting Center

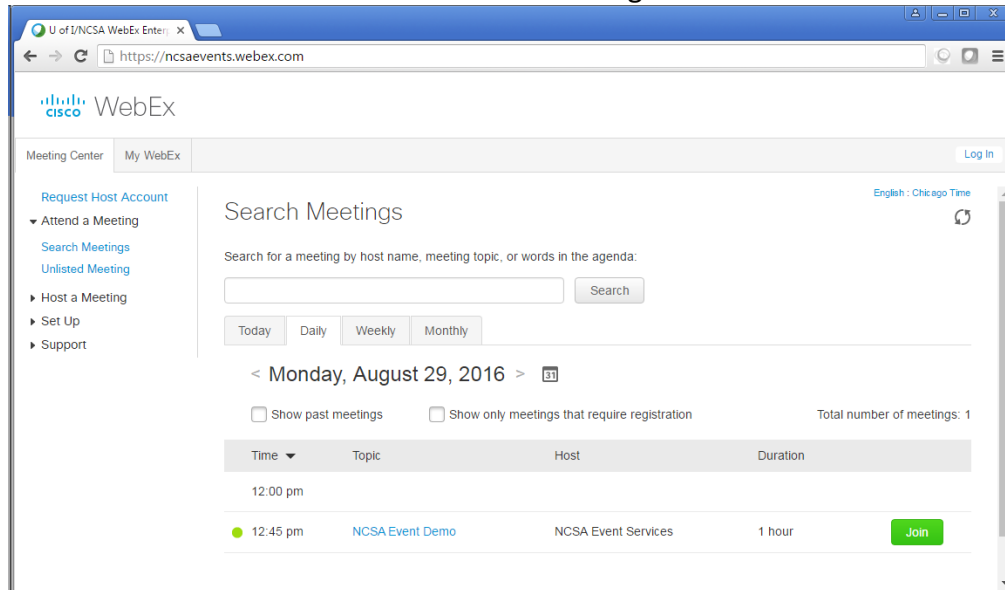
Randall Cotton - NCSA Event Services - September 2016
National Center for Supercomputing Applications

This document provides an overview of how to connect to an NCSA event remotely using Cisco WebEx Meeting Center and also provides some important tips on the pitfalls and etiquette of participation. While it's specific to the two most common methods of connecting (from a Mac or a Windows PC), it's still informative if you connect via some other method (Cisco WebEx Meeting Center does have some support for iOS, Android and Linux).

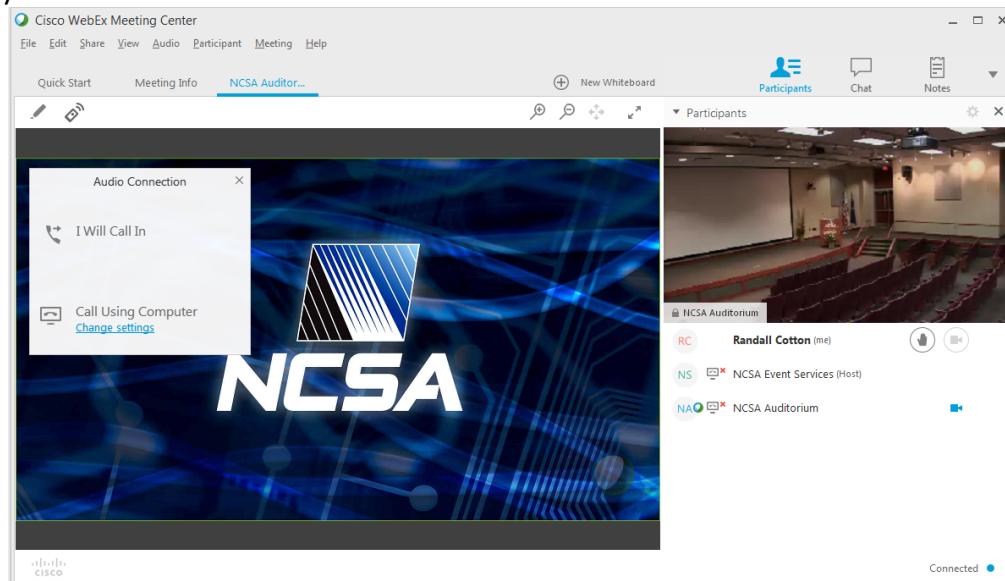
One-Page Quick-Start for Experienced Users with Good Computer Audio

(if you want more detail, you can read the tutorial which begins on the next page)

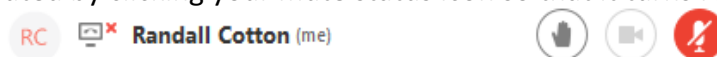
1. Go to ncsaevents.webex.com from a Mac or PC. Your meeting should be listed there. Click "Join".



2. Enter your name and e-mail address when prompted and join the meeting. Browser plug-ins may need to be installed. The Cisco WebEx Meeting Center application should download and start up automatically:



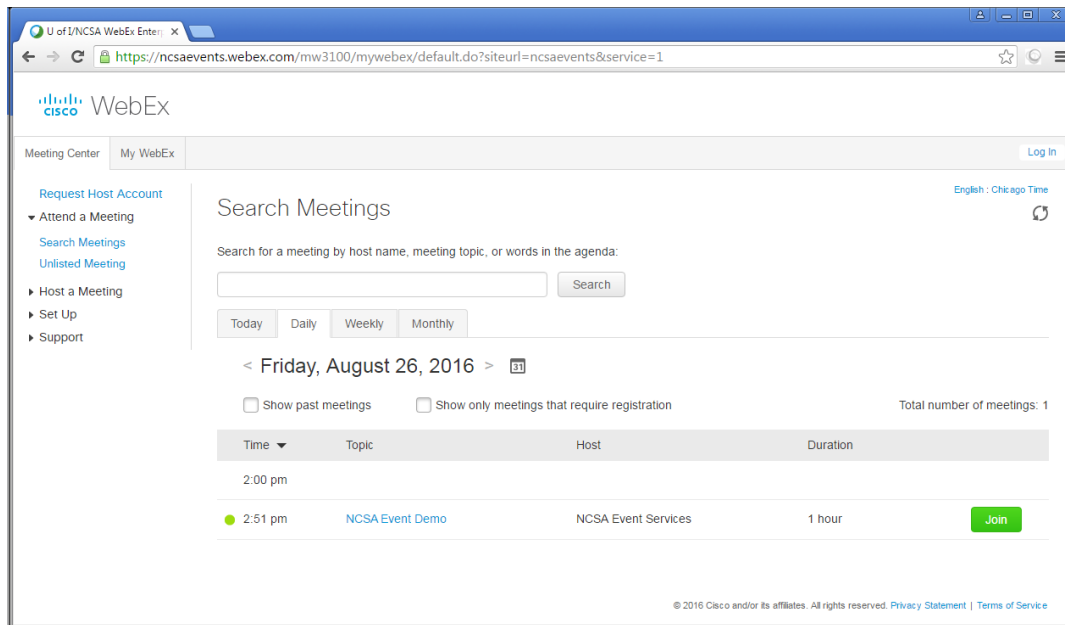
3. Click "Call Using Computer" to establish an audio connection.
4. Make sure you're muted by clicking your mute status icon so that it turns red:



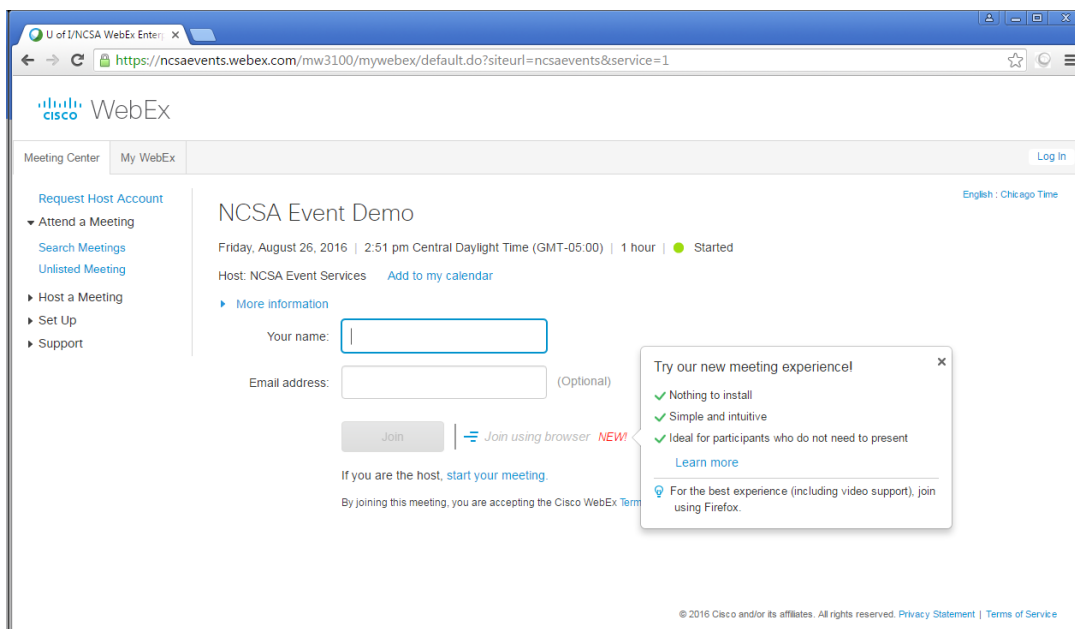
Detailed Tutorial

Cisco WebEx Meeting Center is a desktop application (in the same way Microsoft Word and the Chrome web browser are desktop applications). While it's possible to download and install Cisco WebEx Meeting Center separately, most folks just join a WebEx meeting by clicking on a web link and the installation happens more or less automatically.

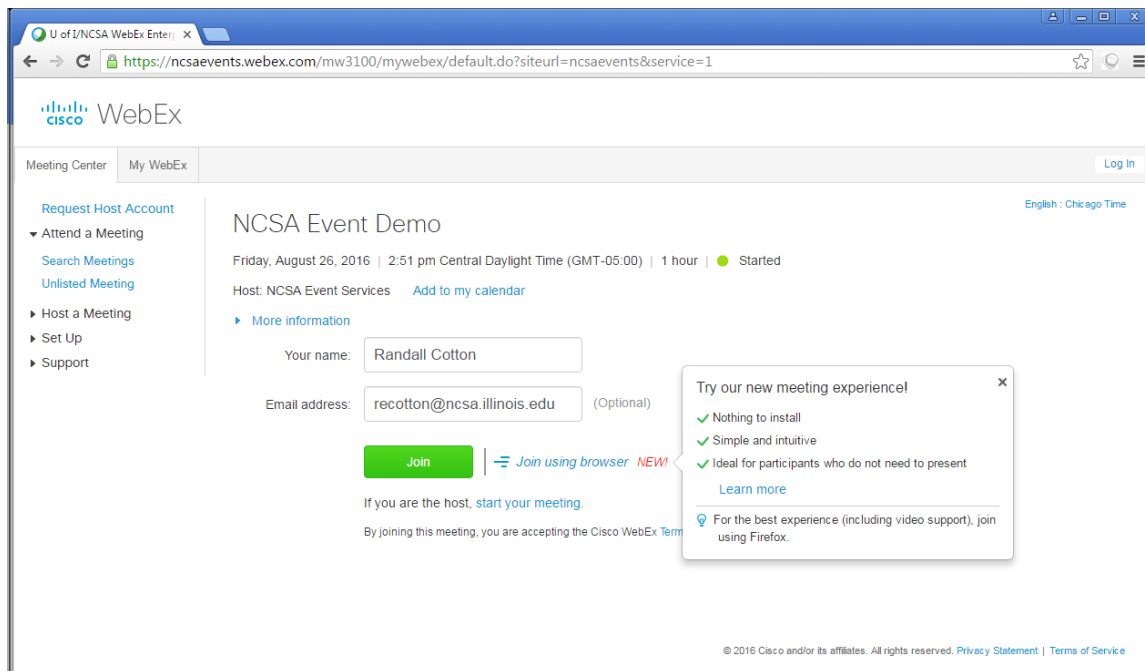
All of NCSA's Cisco WebEx Meeting Center events can be accessed by going to <http://ncsaevents.webex.com>, which should look something like this:



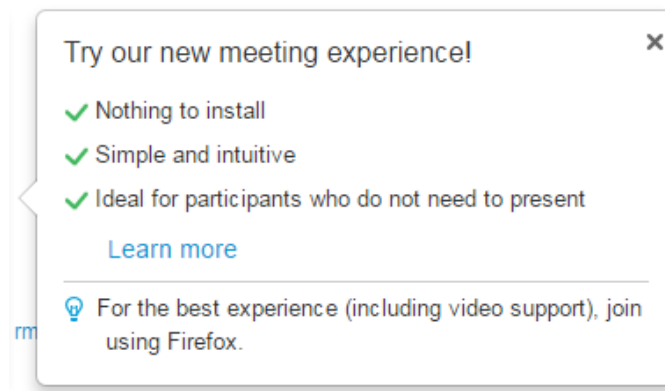
Clicking the green Join button should result in a screen similar to the following:



Here, you identify yourself with your name and e-mail address, then click another green Join button:



As you can see from the above screen capture, Cisco has a brand new option (as of September 2016) to connect to the meeting directly in your browser (instead of via the desktop application) ...



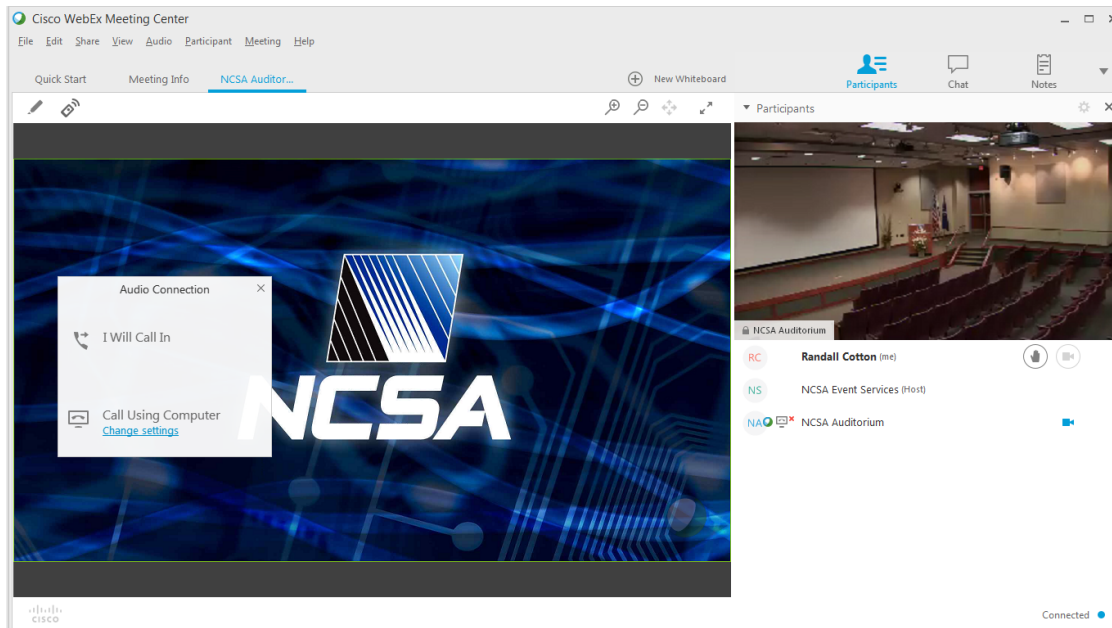
... but this web client option is a bit feature-starved and your mileage will vary considerably depending on what browser you use, so we don't recommend using it at this time (September 2016).

Once you click the green Join button as pictured above, that should trigger your web browser to prompt you for the installation of one or more browser plug-ins and ultimately, to download and run the Cisco WebEx Meeting Center application itself. If web plug-in installations don't work, you may be prompted as follows:

[Run a temporary application to join this meeting.](#)

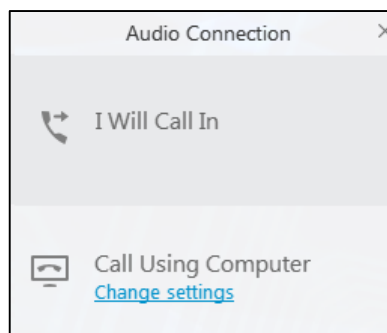
Clicking "Run a temporary application" is just as good a way of connecting as any other, so don't be shy about taking that option. An application will download and you may need to take an extra step to actually run it, but once you do, that should immediately connect you to the meeting.

Once the application ("temporary" or not) starts up, it should look like this (incidentally, the Mac and PC versions are designed to be as similar as possible):



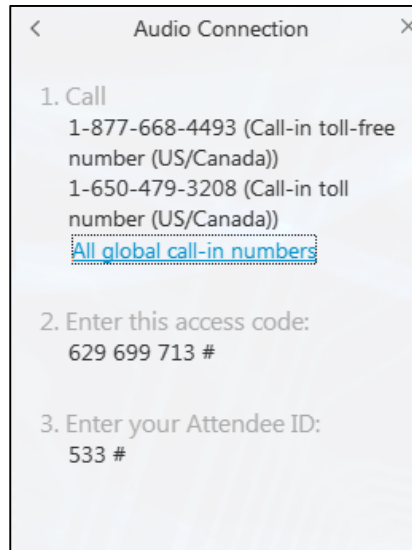
The image on the upper right is where participant live video is shown (the image is from NCSA's Auditorium). The image toward the left (showing the NCSA logo) is presentation content (such as a shared desktop, as in this case) – so presenter slides – PowerPoint, PDF, etc. – appear in that panel (there can be only one presenter at a time, incidentally). The participant list (only 3 participants in this example) is shown toward the lower right.

Note the "Audio Connection" dialog box:



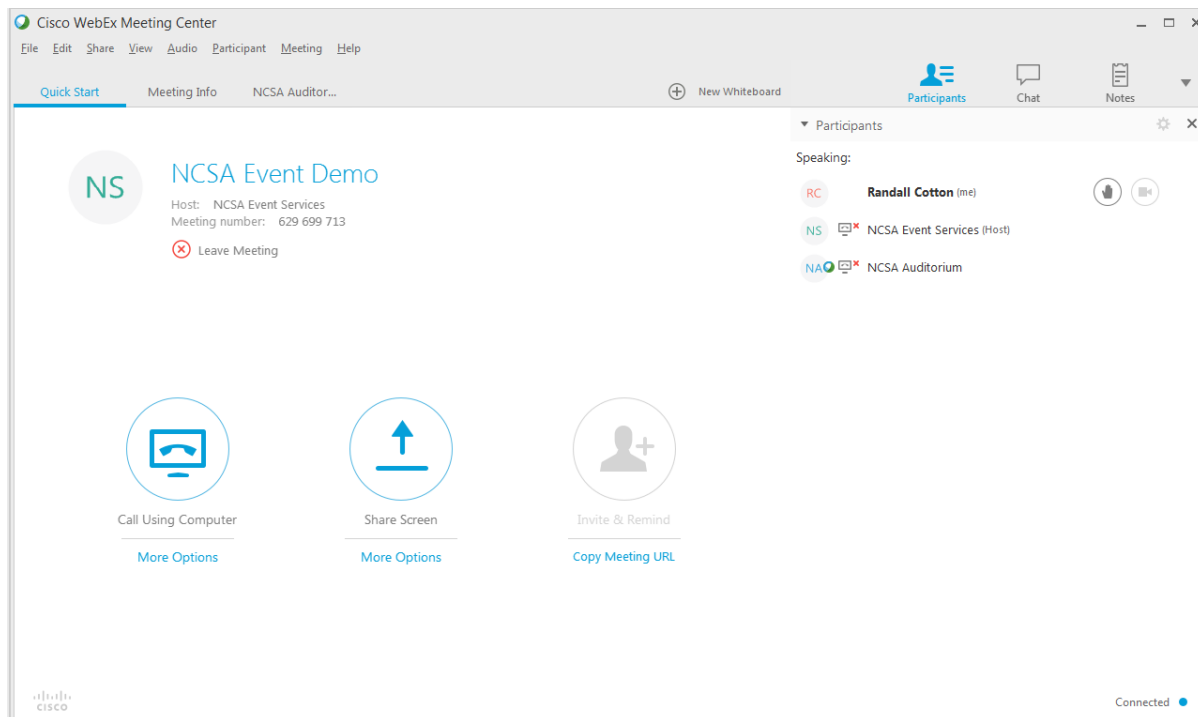
This box may pop up automatically, first thing, once the application starts. Right after you join, you can immediately see the live video that participants are sending and any presentation content from the meeting, but you can neither hear nor speak in the conference yet. That's a separate step, and since it's usually the very next thing a newly joined participant should do, the "Audio Connection" dialog box above may be shown immediately on connection.

- If you click on "Call Using Computer", an audio connection will be made using your computer's speakers and microphone.
- If, instead, you click on "I Will Call In", a window is shown with step-by-step instructions (see below) on how to listen/speak in the conference using an ordinary phone call (*instead of* using your computer's speakers and microphone) – see the next page to see what this instruction window looks like:

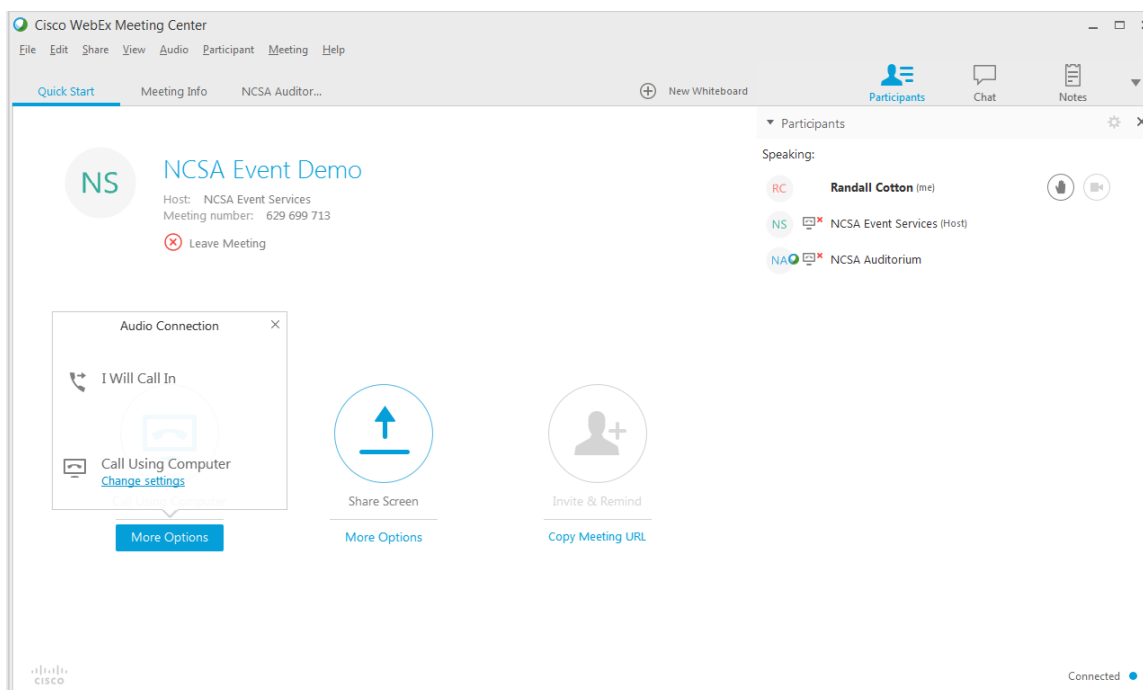


Following these instructions in order to use an ordinary phone call for your audio is helpful if you have trouble getting either your computer microphone or speakers working well, which is not uncommon. If you can get your computer audio working, that generally provides far superior sound quality both from the conference and from you to the conference (but echo issues can trip you up – more on that later).

Incidentally, if the "Audio Connection" dialog box doesn't pop up (or you dismiss it by mistake), you can still accomplish the same things from the "Quick Start" tab of the application (click on "Quick Start", toward the upper left in the window)






From here, you can either click directly on "Call Using Computer" if that's what you want, or you can click "More Options" just underneath that to get the same "Audio Connection" dialog discussed above:



Once you're connected via audio (using either your computer or an ordinary phone call), the entry for you in the participant's list should look something like this:



Note that this shows I am UNMUTED. This icon, in particular:  indicates my mute status. If I was muted, it would look like this instead: . Incidentally, a blue sound wave animation  (as shown above) tells me that not only am I unmuted, but I'm currently sending sound to the other participants that they can actually hear (say, colleagues in the next room, the dog barking next door, etc). To mute myself, I need to click the mute status icon, which should make it turn red like so:



One should never trust that you'll be muted to start with (although here at NCSA, we generally try to ensure that people are automatically muted when they enter an ongoing conference in the middle of the event). The moral of this story is: whenever you connect via WebEx (or, really, when connecting to any web-conference) always immediately make sure you're muted to begin with (preferably knowing how to do so before even attempting to connect). If you're not careful, you could wind up disrupting the meeting without even knowing it (everyone in the meeting will hear you and anything else audible in your room without you even being aware of it). If this happens, incidentally, NCSA staff will likely take action on our end to mute you. You'll hear a single plain tone if this happens (and your mute status icon will change to reflect that you're muted).

Note that even if you make your audio connection using an ordinary phone call, you can still click the mute status icon in the application to mute and unmute yourself, so long as you entered your "Attendee ID" in the instructions for making the call that were provided by the application (Cisco uses the "Attendee ID" to associate your phone call with the online connection from the application). From the screen captures above:

3. Enter your Attendee ID:
533 #

Regardless of whether you entered your "Attendee ID" or not when you called in, for NCSA events it's also possible to mute and unmute your ordinary phone call audio by pressing *6. In addition, of course, most any phone you use will have its own built-in mute function that you could use as well.

If you're interested in learning more, there is extensive documentation for the current version of Cisco WebEx Meeting Center (as of August 2016) at:

https://help.webex.com/servlet/JiveServlet/downloadBody/6318-102-3-19585/WebEx_Meeting_Center_User_Guide%20%28WBS31%29.pdf

Some Tips for Computer Audio

Using Computer Audio for web-conferencing can really sound fantastic – far superior than using an ordinary phone call, but there are some potential pitfalls and corresponding best practices meant to avoid those pitfalls.

Use headphones or, preferably, a headset (headphones with an attached microphone)



Using a good-quality headset is important. It prevents a lot of potential audio problems that can plague a meeting – for example:

1. Built-in computer microphones (and also microphones built-in to "ear-bud" headphones) tend to pick up every sound in the room, not just your voice, which can be distracting to other participants and also make it difficult for participants to understand what you're saying. A headset essentially eliminates this problem.
2. If you use speakers to hear the sound instead of a headset, the sound coming out the speakers might get picked up by whatever microphone you're using, causing a disorienting echo that all web-participants hear (except, ironically, you). Again, a headset precludes this from happening (and even just using headphones instead of a headset generally prevents this problem).

Get in the habit of unmuting yourself only when you need to speak

And right along with that, also get in the habit of re-muting yourself right after you finish speaking. It might be tempting to just leave yourself unmuted if you're in a long conversation, but unless you've got really tight control over your audio setup (good quality headset, quiet room, microphone not too close to your mouth, etc.), your fellow participants will greatly appreciate it if you keep yourself muted unless you're actually talking.

Connecting with an ordinary phone call is a safer bet than trying to use just your computer's built-in microphone and built-in (or even plug-in) speakers

The big issue here is echo. And, insidiously, it's an echo that you, yourself, won't hear (everyone else in the meeting will hear it, though). The problem (already mentioned once above) is that built-in computer microphones are very sensitive and tend to pick up any stray sound in the room. This includes the sound coming out of your computer's own speakers.

To more easily grasp the problem, consider the sound coming out of the mouth of some other participant in the meeting. That sound goes into a microphone on their end, travels across the network to your computer and comes out of your computer's speakers. But because you're using your computer's overly-sensitive built-in microphone, the sound then goes into that microphone and gets sent right back out across the network to all other participants. Most importantly, all other participants only hear the reflected sound from your computer after a significant delay (mostly from travelling over the network). The participants that hear the reflected sound even includes the person that was speaking in the first place! So they're trying to talk at the same time they're hearing something mimicking everything they say a fraction of a second after they say it. It's like trying to talk while your pesky little sister is repeating everything you say in your ear just to annoy you. All the while, you, the person who's actually causing the echo, are the only participant in the whole meeting who doesn't hear the echo (so yes, you have no way of knowing you're causing a problem). So unless you have headphones, or better yet, a headset, the safest bet is to stick to an ordinary phone connection.

Contacting Us for Help

If you're scheduled to remotely attend an NCSA event via WebEx and...

- you have questions that aren't addressed above
- you would like help with getting your system set up to successfully use WebEx
- you'd like to go through a full dry-run test of your computer's audio (and/or video) setup prior to the event

...please feel free to contact us at eventservices@ncsa.illinois.edu .