

# Virtual Programming and Engagement

## PLANNING

### **The most important question: what is the topic?**

- Consider staff and volunteer capacity
- People who are more engaged in this topic (at the bottom of the [engagement funnel](#)) will put in more time and effort for the event. Do they have room to do that?

### **Speakers: who are you reflecting?**

- Do the speakers reflect the potential audience for the event?

### **Will the event be a one-time event? Recurring? A series? Will your virtual event have any in-person options?**

- Holding in-person “watch parties” for virtual events can be a way to create connections between in-person attendees.
- In-person components also require careful extra planning and should have an on-site moderator to manage the event.

### **Will you have a closed program or an open program? What privacy considerations exist - is sensitive information being shared? Are minors involved?**

- If sensitive information will be shared, or you’re inviting the audience to share their own personal experiences on a sensitive topic, consider a closed program that requires registration and will not be recorded.
- If minors are involved in the program, obtain permission from a guardian for the minor to participate. Consider not sharing details about the minor(s)’ location, school, age, etc. Can the minor participate in voice only, not appearing on screen?
- If images depicting people who are currently minors will be shared during the program, consider blurring or covering their faces.

### **What date, day and time will you choose for your event?**

- If your audience will be joining outside of a typical workday, consider evening or weekend times.
- You could also present a program at multiple different times, or record for later sharing with those who can’t attend live.

### **What platform will you use to share your event?**

- Check what platforms, if any, your organization is already using.
- A few ideas include:

- [Miro](#)
- [OBS \(Open Broadcaster Studio\)](#)
- [Streamyard](#)
- Social media (Facebook Live, YouTube Live, Instagram Live)
- [Zoom](#)

### **If using Zoom: meeting vs webinar? Registration?**

- A Zoom meeting format allows for more audience participation but may be harder to moderate audience members. If you choose this option, be sure to have someone assigned to watch participants and the chat.
- A Zoom webinar controls the audience's options for participation more tightly but is easier to moderate. This format is best for mostly one-way communication.
- Requiring registration will give you an idea of participation and allows you to capture participant contact information, but could be off-putting to potential audience members who don't want to register.
- A registration process also allows for asking questions that may inform the event content (i.e., "What are you hoping to learn in this webinar?").

### **Design meeting norms and create a Code of Conduct for your event.**

- A Code of Conduct does not need to be overly complicated, but spelling out expectations ahead of time makes a more enjoyable experience for audience members and presenters alike.
- If you require registration for your event, you can ask participants to agree to the Code of Conduct in the registration form.

### **How will you reach out to potential participants and audiences beforehand?**

- Based on the details above, identify audiences for your event. Use this information to design a communications strategy to build awareness and excitement.
- Consider putting together a marketing kit for event partners to use for outreach to their own audiences: graphics, posters, postcards, social media blurbs, press releases, and talking points can all make it easier for partners to invite audience members.
- Share the marketing kit or materials with your event speakers so they can promote their own participation in the event.

### **Plan the logistics of the event itself.**

- Assign meeting roles: Who will lead/facilitate? Who will take notes? Who will monitor the chat and/or provide tech support?
- Who is sharing their screen? Who is the backup screen-sharer?

### **Host a dress rehearsal.**

- A drop-in or scheduled dress rehearsal for an event with several moving parts will help speakers and leaders work out any rough spots in the content or technology ahead of time.
- Before or during the dress rehearsal, provide contact information for tech support so that speakers can reach out directly on the day of the event if needed.

### **Prepare participants for the meeting.**

- If audience members have registered ahead of time, send out 1-2 reminders of the event ahead of time. (1 week and 1 day ahead of the event work well.)
- Share any relevant information about technology and the meeting platform. Invite participants to contact hosts with technology concerns.
- Invite participants to contact hosts with accessibility needs and accommodate accordingly.
- Share the meeting login, password, and any other participation details.
- Invite participants to join the meeting early to test out their own technology if they'd like.

## **DURING THE EVENT**

### **Greet participants upon entry to the meeting.**

- Share tech support contact information as people join.
- Have a waiting room slide with engagement - give them something to do or talk about while they're waiting for the meeting to begin.
- Ask participants to change their screen name as needed - create a virtual nametag.
- Invite participants to change their background if appropriate.

### **Establish expectations and schedule at the beginning of the event.**

- If appropriate, let participants know that the meeting will be recorded (and don't forget to hit record!).
- Review code of conduct, ask people to mute microphones, ask for cameras on or off as appropriate. Review any other meeting norms.
- Review the agenda for the event so participants know what's in store.

### **Create a virtual environment to foster connections.**

- Give participants time to meet and greet, just as they would if they were attending an in-person event.
- Start with an icebreaker question, something simple and not too personal. (i.e. "What are you looking forward to about summer?" Check [here](#) for some good ideas.) Let attendees know they can answer out loud or in the chat.
- Aim for a new engagement burst about every 10 minutes.

- Change the method of engagement - use chat, interactive documents (Google docs, Jamboard, etc), poll technology, or breakout rooms.
- Invite participants to take pause and reflect moments before discussion. Silence is okay!
- Encourage participants to stand up, walk around, move, etc. every so often. Schedule in a break about every 50 minutes, and let participants know when these breaks will be.
- Encourage participants to use chat to share ideas and ask questions.

#### **Use slides and screenshares to convey content.**

- Slides should have more visuals, less text. Just as with an in-person presentation, attendees will listen to you or read your slides, but not both.
- Consider turning off the shared screen/slides occasionally when the group moves into discussion. If appropriate, model turning on your camera during interactive discussions.
- Speak slower than you think you need to.

#### **End on time.**

### **AFTER THE MEETING**

- Share out the meeting recording with notes. Remember, your event platform may be able to export a text file of the chat if you need to revisit the information that was shared in the chat.
- If appropriate, post the meeting recording to your website or social media. What is the “afterlife” of your event recording?
- Poll participants on their experience in the event. Get their feedback on engagement, content, etc.
- Reflect on the experience: What worked well? What didn’t work? If you had event partners, consider scheduling a debrief session to discuss the event.