Virtual Youth Action Boards (YABs):
Tips for leading more effective meetings

from the [MA Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission](#)

During this time of physical distancing, COVID-19 has thrown a wrench in the works for Youth Action Boards across the country, stopping them from meeting in person and making it difficult to continue their important work. However, **we know the work to end youth homelessness cannot stop.** We need to find ways for YABs to facilitate continued collaboration and social interaction as they navigate the transition to remote meetings   To support this work, the [MA Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission](#) put together this tip sheet on Virtual Meetings for YABs.

You are Offline - Get Connected

First, let's acknowledge the (hopefully) obvious. The biggest challenge to holding virtual YAB meetings is gaining access to technology and the internet. Many youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing housing instability and homelessness already face barriers to getting connected online; this is more pronounced with "Stay-home" orders in place. Below is advice for getting YYA connected online:

★ YAB leaders should try to include a phone / audio access to meetings in addition to the video conferencing.

★ Check in with YAB members before setting up the first virtual meeting to see who has access to phones or laptops, internet, etc. and how to best support them connecting.

★ EOHHS flex funds can be used to support YYA's ability to stay connected.

★ Service providers who are still open should consider ways they can help connect YYA to their wifi in the building. If wifi access is currently staff-only, consider finding ways to also offer separate public or "guest" access.

★ Housed YYA may qualify for some low-budget internet packages, there are some especially good deals right now to help people get connected, such as Xfinity's $10 plan called "Internet Essentials."

★ YYA enrolled in schools may be able to request to borrow Chromebooks or laptops.

★ HUD has approved wifi and some technology to be covered under a COC's planning dollars if other free resources do not exist.

Meeting Preparation

One of the most important elements for any meeting (virtual, or not) is to come prepared. The following should be included in each meeting:

1. Meeting agenda
   a. Start every meeting with an overview of the agenda, and goals for the meeting. It is helpful to have a shared Google doc or share slides on the screen so the meeting attendees can follow along.
   b. For those who can only attend by phone, email the materials in advance

2. Orientation to the platform
   a. Many YYA have never had virtual meetings before; to ensure folks know the basics include an orientation to the mute button, video button, annotations, and chat box at the beginning of the meeting.
   b. Most platforms have an option to change your visible screen-name. Walk meeting attendees through how to do it and encourage them to add their pronouns. This makes it easier for the host to call on and interact with people in the meeting.

3. Payment Information
   a. Make it clear at the beginning of the meeting what payment options are available to compensate YYA for their time. The last thing you want to happen is for someone to sit through a whole meeting, and not find out they aren't able to accept payment through the service you have available.
   b. Other YABs are using things like direct deposits, Cashapp, paypal, venmo, or mailing checks.

4. Group agreements and ground rules
   a. Go over the expectations you would usually include in in-person meetings.
   b. Consider adding or changing the usual group norms to better fit engagement on a virtual platform. "One Mic" in-person means only one person talks at a time, virtually it can mean one person unmutes at a time. It may be helpful (and get a few laughs) to reinforce that folks on video should keep their clothes on.
   c. Explain the virtual consequences of not upholding the agreements. Many platforms allow the host to mute or boot people out of the meeting.
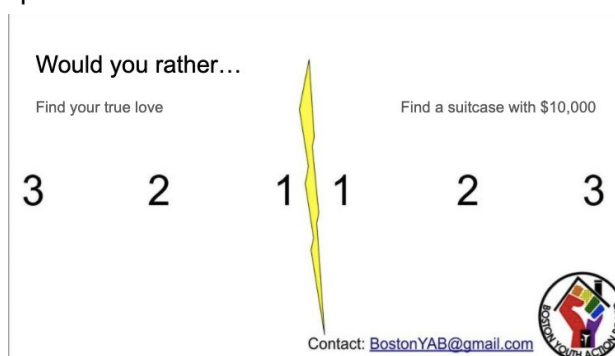
Getting Personal and Staying Connected

Creating dynamic meetings that keep everyone's attention is key and can be especially challenging in virtual settings. Here are some tips from folks who do this well:

★ Checking IN and checking OUT

- ○ Start and end with personal sharing, One suggestion is to include a "question of the day" in the chat-box while people sign-on and an "around the circle" meeting evaluation at the end (Example: one person starts sharing and then passes it to the person next to them and continue in the same direction to everyone). This helps to ensure that even the quieter people have a chance to share.

★ Make time for engagement and connection
  - ○ Older adults often prefer to "get down to business" and get straight to the content. To engage YYA, you should consider carving out space (5-15 min) on the agenda for personal sharing and connecting conversations.
  - ○ Use the "annotate" feature that lets folks draw on the screen to get more engaging responses. One way to do this is to create a series of "would you rather" questions on a slideshow presentation. YAB members can annotate their answer on the slide.

Would you rather…

Find your true love   Find a suitcase with $10,000

3   2   1   1   2   3

Contact: BostonYAB@gmail.com

  - ○ Another tool that can be fun is to set up polls, they can range from silly to serious. Some platforms have a built in polling feature. The Poll Everywhere website can also be fun. It allows participants to text a one-word response to a question and then creates a visual word cloud from their answers.

POLL (please respond!)

What do the youth you serve need most right now?

Join by Web

1. Go to PollEv.com
2. Enter ALICECOLEGRO802
3. Respond to activity

Join by Text

1. Text ALICECOLEGRO802 to 22333
2. Text in your message

What do the youth you serve need most right now?

vocational housing potential time social go health love hope sense cash places couches food online money stay support phone during non-congregate connection technology safety educational goal covid-tests safe education

  - ○ Try to read out loud some of the comments coming in from the chat box - so that people feel heard and so others who aren't reading the chat can respond or react.

★ Break up the content
  - ○ Most people (both older and younger adults) can only pay attention for about 15-20 minutes before starting to tune out. Science has shown that after twenty minutes, no matter how interesting the content unless something changes, a

person's focus will erode steadily until they can't listen any longer. Bring activities and movement to the meeting, even virtually. Play games, do dances, answer yes/no questions by sitting and standing, and just generally being silly can keep people tuned in.

★ Practice spotlighting
  ○ If you notice certain individuals not speaking up, create space for them by calling on them individually. You can say, "there are a couple of folks we haven't heard from yet - Robert, Jill, or Jayden, is there anything you would like to add?"

★ Break out groups
  ○ Break off for discussions during the meeting to give more people the chance to share. YYA may feel more comfortable sharing in smaller groups, and it can be hard to hear from everyone in larger meetings.
    ■ For more information on how to set up breakout rooms on a platform, see:
      ● Zoom
      ● Webex

★ Finally, let everyone know that they don't have to work or be alone between meetings
  ○ While getting solo work done, video call a friend to quietly work "together."
  ○ Set up calendar events to do things like "watch parties," meditation, and casual conversation.

Picking a Platform

There are many popular text chatting(💬) and video conferencing(📹) services. YYA are often looking for different elements from online meetings than older adults, so keep in mind that the platforms that work for virtual office meetings may not work for your YAB. Below is a quick comparison of some popular platforms. We recommend that the YAB organizer picks one based on how the YAB currently communicates and then discusses the other options to determine what works best for the whole crew.

📹💬 Google Hangouts: A great choice for convenience. It's free to use for groups up to 150 people; no downloads necessary; and it includes both video and messenger service all in one.

📹 Zoom: Popular and widely used. The paid version has really useful features, but the free version has a glaring downside - meetings can only be 40 minutes long. For larger groups, the ability to "mute" on default makes conversations a lot easier to hear. Zoom is a great platform for presentations that involve slideshows or screen sharing. Many YYA may be familiar with this service as it seems to be schools' preferred platform for virtual classes.

[💬] Discord: Designed with youth in mind, this platform is very visually appealing and YYA friendly. It feels like Slack if Slack was visually designed for gamers. Like Slack, it has channels and tags to easily organize team conversations.

[📹] [💬] Facebook Messenger: Like hangouts, this option is convenient and has both video and chat built into one. Many YYA already have Facebook, and sometimes are more likely to check Messenger than other places. A downside is that some people have privacy concerns with Facebook and won't use their messenger app. Others may want to keep their personal chatting on a separate platform from their work-related chats.

[📹] Webex: This is another familiar platform for many older adults who have attended online webinars and trainings. Webex is another great platform for presentations that involve slideshows, the features allow for great screen sharing.

Finally, for even more resources and tips on Virtual Learning see links below:
- https://cars-rp.org/_MHTTC/docs/Virtual-Learning-Guide.pdf
- https://training-wheels.com/

We would love to hear from you what has been successful with your virtual meetings! Please email Lauren Leonardis with any comments or suggestions:
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