



BEST PRACTICES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL (ONLINE) 4-H MEETINGS

Virtual meetings can be utilized to conduct the business of 4-H clubs or provide educational support to its members and volunteers. Virtual meetings are not meant to replace face-to-face club or project meetings, but those can fill a need in certain circumstances.

This document serves as a guide to provide a commonsense approach to hosting online meetings for 4-H clubs. It does not cover every possible aspect of a virtual meeting. Consult with your County Extension office for further guidance.

For meeting setup, please refer to your specific platform provider's website for detailed instructions.

GENERAL

- All virtual club/project meetings must be organized by active Texas 4-H adult volunteers in coordination with their County Extension Agent(s).
- All information shared or discussed during the virtual meeting needs to be shared with those not in attendance or unable to join due to technology limitations.

YOUTH PROTECTION STANDARDS

- All applicable policies, rules, and guidelines outlined in the Texas 4-H Rules and Guidelines, Youth Protection Standards (YPS), Code of Conduct, and online training modules apply.
- No one-on-one (private) meetings between a 4-H member and an adult are allowed.
- It is recommended to have two YPS screened adults in every online meeting.
- The purpose of the online meeting should consist of project-focused education or the routine business of a club. If other needs arise, please consult with your County Extension Agent (CEA).

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

PLATFORMS

- Survey families to determine their preference, connectivity, and experience with various platforms.
- Utilize well-established, business-oriented platforms whose primary function is providing online conference services (examples: Microsoft Teams, Skype, Webex, Zoom, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, etc.).
- Some free accounts have time limits. Zoom's free account, for example, has a 40-minute time limit.
- Clubs can use their funds to purchase a paid account, but such actions must be approved in advance by the club membership.
- Avoid platforms whose conferencing features are deemed secondary (such as gaming software like Twitch, Roblox, and Discord).
- Review the terms of service, safety, privacy features, and data collection policies.

COMMON PLATFORM FEATURES DEFINED

- Chat/Messaging - a text-based conversation that occurs at the same time as the audio/video presentations. Ideal for participants without microphone access.
- Host - The person who sets up the meeting using the platform's website. This person is typically responsible for sending invitations to all participants.
- Mute/Mute All - turns off the microphones for an individual or all participants. It is used to reduce background noise.
- Presenter - the person who is actively presenting (speaking and/or sharing content) during the meeting. This role is assigned by the host. The presenter can be, but it is not always the meeting host. There can also be multiple presenters in a meeting.
- Raise Hand - allows a participant to indicate to the presenter that he/she would like to speak. This allows presenters to continue speaking without interruption.
- Recording – allows the meeting to be electronically recorded and stored on a computer or server (cloud). Links or files are available to the host for sharing. This is useful for participants who could not attend the scheduled meeting.
- Screen Sharing - allows the presenter to share content that participants can see on their screen.
- Telephone Call-in/Dial-in - provides participants an alternate connection to the meeting's audio through a telephone connection. Participants call in to a designated number that the host has access to in the setup. This is ideal for those traveling or who may not have a microphone, speakers, or internet connection.
- Virtual Background – allows users to display an image or video behind themselves. It is a "green screen" type of effect that replaces the physical background with a digital one.

SETUP

- The host should secure a named account with the platform provider.
- Notify your CEA of all scheduled meetings.
- Have parents register their child(ren) in advance and provide their (parent's) email address.
- Send the meeting invitation link and dial-in number only to parent and CEA e-mail addresses.
- Password-protect the meeting.
- Do not share the password publicly/online (social media, website, bulletin board, publicly accessible newsletter, etc.).
- Only share the password through direct communication such as email or text.
- Enable the platform's "Lobby" or "Waiting Room" feature so that everyone is allowed entry into the meeting at the same time, and only those who should be in the meeting are granted access by the host.

RECORDINGS

- Consult with your CEA to determine if there is a legitimate need for recording the meeting.
- If it is determined that a recording is necessary, all participants should be notified of the recording in advance. This should be included in the announcement about the meeting, and a verbal statement at the beginning of the meeting.
- Determine where the recording will reside and who will have access to it. In some cases, there is an option to save the recording on the host's computer or in the cloud on the company's server. The recording should only be shared with those who have a legitimate reason to view.
- Delete the recording when it no longer is necessary to maintain it.
- Recordings should never replace the minutes recorded by the secretary.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

- Do not collect, discuss, nor share any personal information. This includes personal addresses, health records, bank account information, etc.
- Do not collect personal information directly from youth under 13 years of age. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ([COPPA](#)) requires notice and consent from the parent or legal guardian for any data collection of youth under 13.

EQUIPMENT

- Most online conference platforms provide audio and video capabilities. As such, it is important to let youth know equipment requirements in advance of the meeting.
- Most modern laptops have built-in microphones and video cameras.
- Most desktops do not and will require the addition of an external microphone and webcam.
- Youth may also be able to connect using a smartphone or tablet and utilize the camera and built-in microphone.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Some youth may not have access to high speed internet; therefore, choosing a platform that depends mostly on audio and video may not be the best. Youth may feel left out or embarrassed, and he/she may choose to not participate. In such cases, a chat-only or teleconference may be the best alternative to face-to-face.
- If a call-in option is available, that may provide an avenue for youth who do not have a computer or internet to participate.
- If the platform allows, turn on closed captioning. Some platforms have intelligent software that translates voice to text and displays it on screen.
- Ensure that documents shared are made in an accessible manner that provides everyone with an equal opportunity to access information. This will enable assistive technology software such as screen readers and magnifiers to be more effective.

AGENDA

- Clear communication is key to the success of any meeting. Send an agenda along with the meeting invitation.
- An agenda will give youth an opportunity to prepare reports or gather their thoughts on topics.
- An agenda for a virtual meeting should not be drastically different than one for in-person meetings.

ETIQUETTE

- Start and stop at the scheduled times.
- To make the meeting run as smooth as possible, ask members to mute their microphones when not speaking. This eliminates unnecessary feedback or distractions.
- To minimize the chance of background distractions, advise participants to inform their family members that a meeting is taking place.
- If audio/video quality is poor, advise all participants to turn off their videos completely. This will allow bandwidth to be dedicated to everyone's audio and only the video of the host.
- Remind youth that dress codes apply to virtual meetings the same as they would in-person.
- If inappropriate behavior occurs by a participant, the host should remove that person immediately from the meeting and report details to the CEA.
- Set clear positive youth development expectations for participants choosing to use virtual backgrounds.

VISUALS

- Visit with club members to determine what they would like to see during the meeting.
- Do they prefer to see the video of the person who is speaking?
- Would they rather see the agenda or perhaps the notes someone is taking?
- Would the agenda topics on individual slides be preferred?
- Determine if the program presenter needs to show slides or video during his/her presentation.

ENGAGEMENT

- Keeping participants engaged is one of the most challenging aspects of online meetings.
- Allow a little time before the meeting starts for everyone to test their audio and video.
- Resist the urge to start off immediately with club business.
- Start with an icebreaker, just as you would in-person.
- Create a cloud document (example Google doc) where participants can view/take notes throughout the meeting.
- Insert poll questions into the meeting. Some platforms have this feature built in, but if not, simply pose the question and have participants respond in the chat.
- Allow extra time for responses. It takes time to type responses or some may hesitate in responding because they do not want to talk over others. Awkward silence is not always a sign of people not paying attention.

LEADING / MODERATING

- Assign someone to be the lead in the meeting. That role can change or be re-assigned throughout the meeting as needed.
- Assign one or more people to facilitate chat discussions and report to the lead throughout the meeting.
- On most platforms, the leader has the ability to “mute all” participants. That can be helpful to maintain order, but should never be used as a disciplinary tool to silence healthy discussion.
- If the platform has a “raise hand” option to request speaking time, incorporate that into the meeting so that everyone has an opportunity to speak.
- If some have joined via the phone, you may need to call on them directly to speak.

THE CLUB MEETING EXPERIENCE

- Replicate as much of the face-to-face aspect as possible.
- Everyone must be able to be heard and speak to one another, but it must be done in an orderly manner (just as you would do in-person).
- In order to conduct any business, a quorum of youth members, outlined in club bylaws, is still in effect.
- Members must be able to make, receive, and discuss reports and motions.
- Members must be able to conduct and record votes.
- Follow the standard agenda. That includes having an educational program.
- The presiding officer(s) should practice using the platform ahead of time.
- Assign another officer to moderate the chat room.
- The secretary should record minutes for the meeting.
- Have one person lead each of the pledges. Audience members should remain muted, but still stand and recite the pledges. Share an image of each flag as the pledges are being recited.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

- Most parliamentary procedure rules still apply, but some may need to be adapted to accommodate the virtual environment.
- If club bylaws specifically state a physical location for club meetings, the membership may need to amend bylaws to allow for future virtual meetings. See *Suspending the Rules* section below for a temporary solution.
- Use the gavel just as you would at an in-person meeting, but be aware that some individuals may be listening on their headphones, so tap lightly.
- Members should use the “Raise Hand” or chat room features to provide orderly discussion or make motions.

- Moving “Previous Question” does not automatically stop discussion. It is a motion that comes to the floor and requires a 2/3 majority vote in order to suspend discussion. If it passes, debate ceases, and the vote is taken. If it fails, debate continues until no other discussion is taking place and the president calls for the vote.

VOTING

- Utilize unanimous consent for standard procedures like approving minutes. “Is there any objection to....?”
- Voice votes are difficult to discern in the virtual environment.
- Using the polling feature is not best when you have households with multiple members. For example, a family of three members would only have one vote if polling was used.
- The chat room is the best option, because there is a written record for the secretary to see and record in the minutes. Have each member type his/her name and vote “Aye or Nay” (Yes or No).
- Phone apps may also be utilized to record votes, but leaders should consider the accessibility issues that exist for each member to have access to the application.
- The presiding officer should take his/her time and ask for final counts from the secretary.

SUSPENDING THE RULES

- In emergency circumstances, a club may suspend certain rules in order to meet virtually, so long as the following occurs:
 - The club manager consults with the CEA about the need to suspend a rule, and the CEA approves the measures.
 - All members are notified at least 2 weeks in advance of the proposed rule change and voting procedure.
 - An electronic vote (email, text, e-form, phone call, etc.) is held and receives a 2/3 favorable vote, with a quorum voting.
- Example email wording from club manager to membership:
 - *Club meetings are an important part of 4-H youth development and families will benefit from continued meetings. Due to unprecedented circumstances, our County Extension Agent (insert name) and I are recommending we suspend our club bylaw rule that currently prevents us from meeting virtually. In order to do that, we must put this action to a vote by the membership. You will have an opportunity to vote on this action and share your thoughts or concerns.
(insert proposed rule change and details of voting process)*

ELECTIONS

- Consult with your CEA about the ideal election procedures for your club.
- Review your club bylaws for voting procedures and mimic those as best as possible.
- If a ballot is required, consider using an electronic ballot such as a Google Forms, VoxVote, SurveyMonkey, etc. Check the settings to make sure a family with more than one member in the household can enter multiple votes from the same computer/account. Some electronic forms or apps may restrict responses based upon the computer's IP address or require the single user to be logged in.
- If votes need to be submitted anonymously, disable personal identifiable fields in the electronic form.
- Determine a process that eliminates "ballot stuffing" (more than one vote per member).
- Designate a club officer and at least two adults from two different families to have access to results.
- Results should be tallied immediately, announced publicly, and recorded by the secretary.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES, AND TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CLUB LEADERS

- [Texas 4-H Publications](#)
- [Are Your Kids Home and Online? How to Keep Them Safer](#)
- [Protecting Kids Online](#)
- [Safe Kids](#)
- [Icebreakers for online meetings](#)
- [Ice-Breaker Ideas for Virtual 4-H Club Meetings](#)
- [4-H Volunteers Can Go Virtual Series :Setting Up a Zoom Mtg](#)
- ["Do I Still Need the Gavel if It's a Virtual Meeting? Tips for Successful Meetings in the Age of Zoom"](#)
- [How can we have a virtual Michigan 4-H club meeting when the bylaws say you cannot?](#)
- [Zoom's Guide to Rolling out Virtual Classroom](#)
- [Zoom's Best Practices for Securing Your Virtual Classroom](#)
- [TAMU Youth Program Zoom Recommended Settings](#)
- [Zoom and FERPA Compliance](#)
- [Creating Accessible Documents](#)
- [Captioning Videos](#)