



Community Service and Engagement: Best Practices for Leading Activities Remotely

Continuing our work in the time of physical distancing

Created by Nancy Marks Tisch College/TUSDM
Community Service Program

This document was created to support student leaders and groups endeavoring to move their community service and engagement online during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not an easy task, as so much of community service is based on interactions between people in face to face settings. In fact, some activities require being together such as oral health screenings for veterans who are homeless or volunteering in our school based clinics. In these cases, all we can do is wait until it is safe for these activities and programs to start anew.

At TUSDM there are specific goals in doing community service. They include but are not limited to:

- Addressing issues of health disparities
- Understanding social determinants of health
- Meeting the needs of community partners and their members
- Breaking the isolation of people due to the pandemic
- Working with people of diverse backgrounds/needs in terms of race, culture, class, language and literacy
- Teaching new skills and expanding oral health knowledge of participants
- Integrating the lessons learned through community service in future work as a dentist

Virtual Zoom Workshops: Fuel Conversations, Learning and Connections in Various Ways

Leading virtual activities and workshops can be challenging. It is a new skillset for many. Concerns around engagement, participation, difficulty in delivering the right messages, and retention of information are all relevant. At the same time, now more than ever, your workshop participants need to be able to connect with each other and with you in whatever way works best. Based on your participants' age, access, and the platform, find creative ways to keep participants feeling connected to you and one another by having them engage with each other online. Be gentle with yourself and with your participants. Show up. Be Patient. Share the luv.

Consider Your Participants' Equity of Access

Some participants will have inconsistent access to WIFI and a computer. And, some may sign-on through phones or tablets; others will be sharing their device with siblings or parents. Try your best to ensure the learning platforms you use are mobile enabled.

Additionally, it's useful to keep in mind participants' computer literacy and typing skills. Allow for flexibility in this virtual environment.

Social/Emotional Considerations for *both* student leaders (you!) and participants

These are hard times. People are coming into learning and community spaces with a lot on their mind, and often with heaviness in their hearts. This is for a range of reasons, including the pandemic (isolation...or no space at all; no paid work...or being an essential worker; feelings and loss due to racism and fears around a shifting democracy.) Some kids are spending all their time in virtual learning, while older adults may not have access to email communication with their loved ones.

You are needed in the community! You bring valuable skills that can help—turning toward, and not away, from community service is vital. The key is to set goals that are achievable and take into account this moment in history. This is not easy work. Be gentle with yourself as you learn how to respond to a community organization’s request or an individual’s needs.



I. General Best Practices

- **Set reasonable expectations:** This is so important because you need to set flexible goals based on the participants, taking into account different learning styles and giving yourself permission to respond to the group's needs in real time. (More on this later.)
- **Let go of perfectionism** and appreciate whatever you do! Zoom is challenging...and we are all learning as we go. Don't be afraid to dive in and learn alongside your participants. It is a gift that you and participants show up during these tough times.
- **Don't Lead Alone:** It's important to have someone helping to monitor the group's needs and reactions outside of the material being shared. Find another leader to join the Zoom call with you to monitor participant's reactions, the chat, or just to provide moral support. These are times when we need to lean on each other for support.
- **Create a safe space:** So much of teaching is helping people to feel safe, visible and respected. If they don't feel this they won't learn...and/or they will "vote with their feet" and leave their screens.

II. Set up and Tech Prep

- Set up your Zoom meeting using your Tufts username and password ID. When scheduling the Zoom meeting decide if you want to allow:
 - Participants to be able to join the Zoom call before the host (you!) joins
 - Assign an alternative host who will have co-host privileges to start the meeting without you. [Note: You can only assign alternative hosts in advance if they have a tufts.edu email. You may assign non-Tufts affiliated individuals as co-hosts once the meeting starts.]
- Enter your Zoom meeting room about 15 minutes early. This will give you time to check your camera angle, audio, background visuals, etc.
 - Sometimes, people sign in early because it makes them feel more comfortable if they arrive early.
 - To avoid people entering before you are ready, you can create a waiting room. This allows you to let all your participants gain access at the same time and ensures you are ready

- Introduce yourself as each person enters (more on this below). Your first, and most important job is to make sure people feel comfortable! Greet them as you would as if you were shaking hands in a face to face meeting. This will make conversation between you and your audience more comfortable.
- Make sure that your materials are prepared in advance and easy to access and read. This means using two screens, if you need to have notes available, or having them printed out. I suggest using large font for easier reading while moving along in your presentation.
- If you will be screen-sharing, clear-out all other things so you can find what you will need during the workshop. Practice screen-sharing if you haven't done this before!
- If you are screen sharing and planning to share something with audio, make sure that you have share computer audio selected in the screen sharing menu.

III. Visuals

• **Lighting/Camera:** Here's where most people trip up, because lighting is more complicated than it seems. The most important thing is, avoid sitting with your back to the window, or to other sources of light. Otherwise the camera will expose to make you silhouette against the light, and your face will not be seen. Instead, flip it, and face the window, which will give you soft, people-pleasing light. If windows are not a problem, but your face is still too dark, try putting a lamp right next to and slightly behind your computer screen, directed at your face for even lighting. No sidelight or backlight.

• **Dress:** Be sure to dress in a way that you want to come across to your audience. You want to maintain a presence that is true to you as an individual but also one that your participants will respond to, as if you would for a face-to-face workshop. This may be scrubs or a nice shirt.

• **Background:** Make sure your background is professional and appropriate. Try your best to make your background one with few distractions. You do not want your viewers to be distracted by background material. Also, if possible, try to have at least 5 ft. separating you from your background. Otherwise, the camera will not know whether to focus on your face or the background. Finally, virtual backgrounds are a good option if you do not feel that your background is simple enough for a presentation. However, when using virtual background, you should test them first, because when you move, the background may “leak” into your face in ways that are distracting.

• **Eye Contact:** When speaking, look into the camera. Even when not speaking, maintain focus and remain engaged with whoever may be speaking. This helps to create a more personal connection while teaching over video. If you are using a second monitor for material, make sure that you are still looking at the camera. Never turn off your camera when you are presenting...except in the rare case that you have to use the restroom...in which case, also turn off your microphone.

• **Do not eat** during your session—a cup of coffee or water is OK. And, avoid asking people what they are eating, if they are eating while on the call.

IV. Create Safe and Welcoming Space: It starts when people “enter” the virtual space

- Your first job is to make sure people feel comfortable!
- As mentioned earlier, introduce yourself informally as each person enters— *“Hi, I’m XX -- Welcome. We will do a longer introduction in a minute once everyone gets here. We are just going to wait xx more minutes.”* People really appreciate it when presenters acknowledge that they came into the zoom chat.
- Plan on starting about 5 minutes after the expected start time (use your intuition on this...)
- Music: Make waiting time more comfortable by playing some soft, light, age appropriate music.

V. Establishing Ground Rules and sharing how the session is going to run

- Before formal introductions, it’s a good time to explain some ground rules—ie. Participants and muting themselves, etc.
- Share your agenda so people know how the session will unfold
- Remember—having access to a computer and knowing how to use it may be connected to access issues and age of participants. Do your best to anticipate and plan for this – ie. You may need to show people how to mute themselves, etc.

VI. Introductions/Icebreakers

- Sets the energy level for the session! Bring your best self from the beginning! Always make time for participants to introduce themselves. Show participants you are excited to be there, and they will replicate that attitude. Show participants that you are there FOR them: to get to know them and to work with them.
- Best Practice: Have an opening ice breaker question that is unrelated to the content as a way to let participants get to know you and each other. It should be an interesting age-appropriate question that everyone can answer. Be careful here with class, cultural references.
- An icebreaker people really like is “scavenger hunt”. Let people get up from their computer and find a favorite book, softest sweater, etc.) Give them a 2 minute time limit! Then people can show and tell a story about the object!

- Ice breaker for older participants who are using their own computers: Ask them to share their name, but also ask them to change their [Virtual Backgrounds](#) to a picture that shows something fun. These backgrounds can be another way for people to connect and share stories. (NOTE: older computers may not allow virtual backgrounds so be mindful of this!)
- With icebreakers: Start by answering it yourself to model how you want it done.
- Then call on people to answer, too... OR you can select by picking the first person by saying “Tag your IT—Bob.” Then, after Bob goes, he calls on someone else by saying, “Tag, You are IT, Taylor,” etc. Another option would be to “popcorn” it to the screen/individual on the right.

VII. Workshop/Activity Design and Presentation

- **Less is more:** Your workshop should be no more than 40 minutes total of which 10-15 minutes is just community building and bonding with your participants (this changes with age and skills of your group!) Remember to set realistic/descending goals mentioned earlier.
- **Create flexible, achievable goals: understanding the population you are teaching.** Set descending goals: Try for A but if you can’t achieve A, try for B and if you can’t do B, try for C.
 - a. Example: You are teaching tooth brushing to a 6-year old:
 - i. Goal A is for them to understand how much toothpaste to use and for how long to brush.... *But if this doesn’t happen...*
 - ii. Goal B is for them to just verbally participate even if they don’t try it with you over zoom.
 - iii. Goal C is that they don’t verbally participate, but they stay in the session the whole time and have fun.
- **Prep** in advance and practice zoom in advance
- **Don’t lead alone.** Have at least one other person on with you who has co-hosting rights. Practice and go through a run through so you are both on the same page before you present!
- **Make your presentation interactive**—lots of different ways! ([see end of document for additional ideas](#))
- Decide if you are using the **chat box**: If not, disable it so participants don’t get distracted by chatting with each other. Best practice is for you to have one person monitoring the chat box for questions while one person is presenting and engaging participants
- Decide if you are using **Reactions** box or raising of the hand feature

- **Review your workshop design** for: 1. Literacy level, 2. Content and 3. Participation level
- **When screen sharing**, make sure you have your desired presentation queued up/ready to go:
 - Avoid having personal internet tabs open.
 - Remove personal or inappropriate photos or icons from desktop or bookmarks.
 - When delivering a presentation, sharing images, files or video, give your students a moment to open or take in what you've shared
- **Embrace the pause.** Take a moment after the end of your comments and allow for students to engage before continuing on. It's okay if there is silence!

VIII. POST Session: Reflect on your session so you can learn and grow!

Evaluate/review the session and how it went immediately following the session. Find time for yourself and reflect while it's all still fresh. You are learning how to use online learning platforms as a trainer just as your participants are learning how to use them as learners. Leave time for yourself to reflect on how the experience went. And remember: you're not expected to be perfect!

Best Practice: Ask yourself questions like these (and write your answers down so you can keep track!)

- Which activities worked best and why?
- What trends do I see in participation and what are the possible causes?
- What could I do to make learning more accessible, inclusive, and meaningful?
- What will I change/add next time?
- Did we have fun?

Special considerations and challenges when working with older adults include:

- Familiarity with Zoom
- Memory capacity issues
- Access to updated computer
- Hearing and eye sight issues: (Use large fonts and speak clearly)
- Fear of technological challenges
- Thinking/processing speed: (Without condescension, check in for understanding before moving on to a new topic)
- They may be sharing one computer making it hard for individual participation

- Best Practice: asking them about 'real life' (like family, their favorite memories when they were younger, the advice they have for the younger generation, etc...) can help to build a relationship (especially when being online already takes away some of the closeness)
- Be loving and real
- Be patient!

Special considerations/challenges when working with children and youth:

- This is not school! Do not worry if they don't get things right.
- Be patient! If a participant makes a mistake or does not know the answer, do not rush to fix their error or provide the answer. Be patient and praise them for their efforts.
- If your participants get side-tracked, allow them to share for a bit before getting back to the topic.
- Kids might not show up even if they are RSVP'd. Could be their parents got busy or another reason.
- Using props can help to catch and hold a child's attention.
- Thinking/processing speed differences between and amongst participants. (Without condescension, check in for understanding before changing topics) If students are not understanding questions or the material, find a way to re-explain it. Don't try to force the kids to learn it in the exact way shown in the lesson plan, try to think of a new strategy.
- Some children may be sharing a computer
- Some may lack the motivation to actively participate –it doesn't mean they aren't listening
- Zoom fatigue can cause children to lose interest! Get them up and moving when you can!
- Keep your presentation time to 30 minutes or less and leave time for laughing and bonding
- Try to structure your learning opportunities to minimize frequent adult support. This helps boost students' independence while giving parents, guardians, and older siblings a chance to breathe and focus on other things.
- Try not to let minor misbehavior distract you from the group or activity. Students respond to what you notice, so if you call them out on inappropriate behavior, they will often continue to distract you and keep you from focusing on the task at hand. Instead, recognize good behavior and continue working with those who are paying attention.
- Be loving and real

Interesting Virtual Activity Platforms

- To make a quiz using Kahoot: Great for icebreaker or as part of a workshop design:
Site: [Kahoot!](#) Overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAfnia7-rMk>
- To make a quiz using Jeopardy: [Blank-Jeopardy-Game-Template](#)
- To make free BINGO cards: myfreebingocards.com
- <https://www.polleverywhere.com/>: real time polls/word cloud feature

Interesting Zoom HOW TOs

Although not everything will apply to your session, these are interesting zoom 'how tos'. I suggest you practice using the tools mentioned below if you are incorporating them into your workshop!

- If you are going to use the 'annotate or 'whiteboard function':
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/enus/articles/115005706806>
- General: <https://blog.zoom.us/how-to-transform-in-person-training-into-engaging-virtualtraining-with-zoom/>
- Lighting: <https://blog.zoom.us/filters-reactions-lighting-features-zoom-meetings-2/>
- Educator questions: <https://blog.zoom.us/zoom-for-education-top-10-frequently-askedquestions/>
- General: <https://blog.zoom.us/six-tips-surviving-zoom-mega-meetings/>

This document created by

Nancy Marks

Tisch College/TUSDM Community Service Program
Dept. Public Health and Community Service (DPHCS)
Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, Boston MA
nancy.marks@tufts.edu

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