

# Planning Virtual Events



## PLAN FOR SUCCESS

No matter the size of the event, or whether it's hosted in-person or online, every event needs a plan.

Take stock of existing platforms, create a concept and key goals, and create an outline for the type of experience you want to deliver for your audience. Every audience is different and events are not a one-size fits all.



## TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Selecting the right date and time for your event can make all the difference. Consider the following:

- Plan ahead - make sure your event doesn't coincide with other events in your network or community.
- Consider analytics - know the peak times to engage your network - morning, afternoon or evening.



## BE INCLUSIVE

Any event should be as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Use plain language, clear fonts, and high colour contrast. Consider other aspects or tools for audio/visual inclusion (e.g. subtitles).

## PREPARE FOR PITFALLS

When you're working with various pieces of technology, there will be glitches. Consider the following to help avoid or navigate these common technological pitfalls:

- Test & test again - before the event kick offs, test the microphones, internet connection, and other various pieces of technology.
- Backup - have backups of any visuals, documents, or presentation in case something goes wrong.
- Practice - rehearse your event in advance
- Support - not everyone is tech savvy, have easy FAQs and resources, or even staff support, to help people troubleshoot and navigate tech troubles.

## PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Promotion is key to bringing in an audience - especially when there is good incentive. Know the unique propositional value of your event to hit a home run with marketing - a keynote speaker, skill building, or networking opportunities.

As part of your promotional strategy, consider the following:

- Ad medium - what platform is likely to have the most engagement? Invest money on targeted advertising for that platform.
- Registration - peak registration occurs 2 to 3 weeks before your event, so amp up efforts during that time frame to increase attendance.
- Social media tools - what tools are available that can increase awareness and engagement (e.g. Instagram Countdowns).
- Community influencers - have your network be an ambassador to draw in more people.



## ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT

Creating opportunities for engagement, creates a more involved audience. By adding polls, quizzes, or opportunities to chat and ask questions of moderators or presenters, you're encouraging the audience to stick around.

Think of the ways you want people to engage and what technology supports their interactions - break out rooms, interactive slides, self-reflection and chat.



# Things to consider



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Finding the right tools isn't necessarily the first step. Here are some things you can consider to help get better acquainted with technology:

- Take stock - what platforms do you already use? What are its capabilities and how can you use the applications for your event?
- Think about how you plan the event for in person and apply the same steps to your digital event. The experience really isn't that different.

## AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Virtual meeting fatigue is one of the issues we have to contend with right now. So, how can you keep your audience's energy levels up and encourage participation?

Here are some ideas to think about for your next event:

- Our brains absorb information in short sprints. Plan activities in 30-50 increments to allow people time to process.
- Leave space for breaks. Consider short breaks after every activity or after every hour. This will give people space to move around, rest their eyes or prepare to switch to a new activity.
- Allow space for self-reflection and silent thought. People like interactions, but they also need space for solo work.
- Create spaces for interaction. People want to learn from their peers, so remove yourself from the conversation to create that networking vibe.
- Read the room. Be prepared to cut things short if you're not getting the level of participation you anticipated.
- Strike a balance between high and low energy meetings if you're regularly convening the same groups of people.



## TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

Going it alone can be difficult! If you have volunteers or internal capacity, consider involving others in your event. Here are some roles you may need for support:

- The tech wizard - who can support with technology, admit attendees, manage the breakout rooms or support attendees with things like audio or visual problems.
- The facilitator - someone who can lead the learning & activities. Keeps the conversation going and facilitates the interaction.
- The audience support - someone engaging in the chat & responding to attendees. Keeps the conversation going and facilitates the interaction.
- The note-taker - someone who can take notes or record the conversation & help with data capture in real time.

## TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

Here's a list of our top-rated platforms at Volunteer Alberta.

- Zoom
- Basecamp - a project management, resource sharing and communication platform to keep your teams in the know.
- Canva - a design platform for ads, resources, presentations and more!
- Google Slides - an alternative to PowerPoint and in-person whiteboards.
- Game Storming - a book to help brainstorm activities to foster understanding and systems thinking.
- Miro - online collaboration and whiteboard templates.
- Mural - a digital collaboration space, similar to Miro.



# VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION IDEAS

## For community events

- Partner with local businesses to offer vouchers for coffee, food or attractions.
- Host an online volunteer fair and let people know what kinds of opportunities exist & showcase local organizations.
- Film a thank you video from your ED, board, local councilors or program participants.
- Recognize community volunteers and local nominees with an online gala and presentation of community spirit awards.
- Get a local author or poet to read a passage or poem about volunteerism, community or celebration.
- Create promotional materials for local residents to thank volunteers (e.g. posters or window decals).



## For organization events

- Host a virtual potluck and share a recipe book with volunteers as a keepsake.
- Host a tour of the facility and let people get to know your space and the people who work there.
- Offer training events or professional development opportunities for volunteers to build skills.
- Host a trivia, pub, or game nights - there are so many virtual platforms for bringing groups of people together (e.g. JackBox, Yaymaker, etc).
- Drop off or mail handwritten notes from staff or clients to volunteers.

## For year-round recognition

- Write personalized thank you cards and tell the volunteer about the impact they've had in helping you achieve your mission/vision.
- Provide volunteers with Letters of Recommendation so they can advance their career or education goals.
- Offer training events or professional development opportunities to build skills and confidence.
- Have regular check-ins and feedback loops so the organization and volunteer benefit from sharing their ideas and insights.
- Host different opportunities to connect volunteers with one another (e.g. volunteer picnics, coffee chats).
- Start a volunteer newsletter and regularly share program or organization updates to keep volunteers engaged and informed.

