

Virtual network support tool

This tool helps network leaders plan for and implement techniques for engaging collaboration in virtual settings. Before your next virtual gathering, consider the tips and discussion items here and record your reflections. You may wish to note the items you have already incorporated and how well

they worked, those you wish to try and what you need to do to implement them, and those you haven't yet considered and first steps for applying them. You may also wish to add your own strategies.

1. MAXIMIZE ENGAGEMENT IN LARGE-GROUP VIRTUAL SETTINGS

Key consideration	Strategies	Reflections and additional strategies
<p>Know your audience: Remember that people may surprise you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider time zones and don't assume traditional business hours work best for participants. • Encourage turning video on but don't make it mandatory as sometimes people may not be comfortable or able to at the time. • Understand that virtual meeting fatigue is a real experience and plan frequent breaks. • Plan varied forms of interactivity to engage all types of learners and sharers. 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>
<p>Leverage familiar routines: Build comfort to increase connection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage participants with platform features, such as the thumbs up or high five reactions. • Record collaboration in living documents to share strategies, crowdsource emerging ideas, or capture notes and next steps. • Use real-time polling features. • Use online breakout rooms to host deeper discussions in a smaller environment. 	
<p>Differentiate for tech savviness: Cultivate genuine engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up and lead with virtual meeting norms. • Teach people how to use a virtual background if they don't want others seeing into their home office. • Have a dedicated team member add "tech support" to their screen name so participants know to whom they can direct questions. • Send a document with a list of the tech tools that will be used before the meeting and contact info for tech help. 	
<p>Prioritize dry runs: Practice to avoid the avoidable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify roles and responsibilities for each team member and have a backup person for each role. Specific roles include presenter, breakout room coordinator, and chat monitor. • Rehearse the content and roles several times with each person. • Establish breakout groups in advance with the understanding that attendance may change and adjustments will be required. 	
<p>Focus your time with wraparound supports: Maximize your time and extend the learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider materials to read ahead of time so all attendees can join the discussion with baseline knowledge. • Provide communications that outline "know before you go" information along with the meeting agenda. • Maintain transparency in your communication regarding goals, strategies, and updates. 	

2. FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Strategy	Tips	Questions or discussion prompts
Remind people often why they are using continuous improvement to solve current problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a prime time for rapid-cycle experimentation as you test how students learn in a virtual setting. • Through continuous improvement practices, you can share with your colleagues which strategies are working and which are not. • De-emphasize the tools of improvement and simplify the approach to continuous improvement. 	
Return to root causes that drive your continuous improvement work and network aim.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use empathy interviews to draw out lived experiences. (See the tool for conducting empathy interviews in the October 2020 issue of <i>The Learning Professional</i>.) • With the world changing so frequently, continue to revisit your root causes to make sure your strategies are still meeting the needs of your network members. 	
Engage in cross-network or cross-grade learning sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that whole-network convenings do not look the same right now, be intentional on how you engage your network members. Consider smaller group settings to share learnings. 	
Leverage partnerships from district leaders or other support organizations to give teachers more time for deeper thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When possible, take on some of the continuous improvement work at the network level. An example of this is completing the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) document that a teacher may normally be responsible for. 	
Use virtual visual organizing tools for capturing strategies, results, and takeaways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tools that teachers have easy access to and can review if they have to leave the meeting early. • Encourage people to add updates, new questions, or discussion topics in the tool before the meeting so everyone can come prepared. 	

3. CONSIDER CONTEXT

Understanding the context in which your network members operate is important for any successful effort. Articulating your starting place will not only help you plan but will help you share your learning with others.

Who are the members of your network? (You don't need to list names. Roles or general descriptions are sufficient.)

How often will you be convening network members and what platform will you use?

What is the problem of practice you are addressing?

What do you anticipate as the major challenges to your virtual convening(s)?

4. TOOLS FOR SHARED LEARNING

The following list of platforms is meant to help you research the best tools for you. You may wish to add your own ideas to this list.

TOOL TYPE	TOOL NAMES	TOOL PURPOSES
Virtual meeting tools	Zoom, WebEx, MS Teams, Shindig, Remo, Swapcard, On24	To hold online meetings. Some allow for participant agency in breakouts and small groups.
Polling software	Zoom, PollEverywhere, Menti	Gather real-time information from participants.
Project management	SmartSheet, Monday, Asana	Online project management system, allows for collaborative managing of timelines, processes, and project details.
Material management	JotForm, Nearpod, Google	Allows presenters to upload materials they would like to add to session descriptions and automatically saves them in Dropbox folder for processing.
Online messaging platforms	Slack, Facebook, Khoros, Remind, FlipGrid, CrowdCompass	Allows communication channels across teams. Peer-to-peer (referenced below) offers specific guidelines for tools.
Scheduling tools	YouCanBook.me, Calendly, Doodle	Scheduling software.
Collaborative boards and sharing	Mural, Padlet, Trello, Scrumblr	Digital workspace that allows templates to scaffold meetings and shared virtual whiteboards.
Community building templates	Peer-to-Peer Toolbox	Toolbox with templates for virtual community building strategies and frameworks.