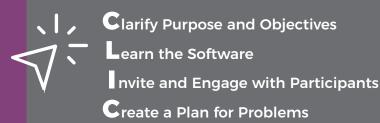**MAKING VIRTUAL MEETINGS "CLICK":**

5 Tips for hosting an effective virtual meeting from the IBP Network

Over the past several years there has been an increased emphasis to host virtual meetings. Whether due to efforts to reduce the carbon footprint, the desire to engage a more global audience, cost-savings, or more recently, finding yourself homebound due to a pandemic outbreak, virtual meetings are becoming more common. Since its creation 20 years ago, the IBP Network has hosted innumerable webinars, discussion forums, and virtual meetings around the world.

Below are some tips the IBP Network has garnered over the years to make virtual meetings most effective.

Clarify Purpose and Objectives
Learn the Software
Invite and Engage with Participants
Create a Plan for Problems
Keep the Format Simple

① **C**larify Purpose and Objectives

Make sure meeting organizers and participants are clear on the objectives of the meeting. This is especially important for virtual meetings given the variety of technologies and applications available to make the meeting interactive.

- Knowledge sharing, and dissemination meetings can benefit from webinar formats where information is shared through panel presentations or lectures
- Building consensus or decision making requires more active engagement and may benefit from more features like polling or providing ample time for questions and discussion
- Learning and training can incorporate other features like videos, or live streamed demonstrations
- Networking during virtual meetings can be done through chat functions to communicate in real time or by sharing contact information with participants post meeting

② **L**earn the Software

There are many applications available with varying degrees of capacity. Most have similar basic features so just choose an application that works for you.

- Make sure that both you and your presenters know how to manage the basic features of the software. This might include how to login, the chat features, how to pose, view and answer questions, and how to control audio options
- If you anticipate connection challenges for some participants to join online, try and provide an alternative method to joining the meeting in case (i.e. through phone)
- Close other existing applications like email, web-browsers, Skype, messenger, social media, etc... and try and use a solid internet connection rather than Wifi

③ Invite and Engage with Participants

Invite a diverse representation of presenters and participations to allow for multiple perspectives and allow enough time for questions and discussion.

- Involve presenters and even potential participants prior to the meeting to develop objectives jointly and ensure everyone is involved in the process from the start
- Share the recording and slides with participants so they can view again at their own pace. You can also share any unanswered questions with presenters, so they can respond directly to participants to keep the discussion going as needed
- Finally, consider starting a community of practice (CoP) to keep the discussion going after the virtual meeting. This can be done through online platforms, phone applications or even basic email.

④ Create a Plan for Problems

Practice in advance can make a big difference in how smoothly the virtual meeting with run. Even with lots of planning though, problems will arise so make sure to be as prepared as possible.

- Do a Dry Run! Check the sound set-ups of each presenter and make sure everyone can connect properly. You may need to provide a call-in option in which case this should be sorted out in advance.
- Provide a timeline or a "run of show" to all presenters so they know the flow of the meeting and keep to their time
- Ask your presenters to run through their presentation on their own so they don't go over time. Nothing deflates the energy of meeting more than presenter that drags on...
- Connections may fade, and a presenter may drop off or lose volume so identify someone who can step in or have a backup plan to reconnect or move on.

⑤ Keep the Format Simple

It is tempting to get caught up in the technology and try many features at once (live streaming, polling, sharing screens, showing videos etc...). Keeping the format simple however will avoid technical issues in the delivery and be easier to follow for participants. Remember, your participants are there for the content and the information, not the technology.

- Plan no more than 4-5 presenters per webinar, including the moderator/facilitator
- Identify a technical organizer who can manage the application from behind the scenes
- Make sure the topic is focused and clearly defined so the audience can easily follow
- Make a master slide deck for presentations so only one person, the technical organizer, can advance the slides rather than moving from screen to screen and wasting time switching controls from one speaker to another. This can potentially derail the flow of the webinar
- Stick to one language during the meeting but consider offering similar meetings in multiple languages

Finally, remember to stay positive and have fun! While virtual meetings may not fully replace in person face to face interactions, they can still be a great way to learn and exchange ideas in an interactive and informative way! A well-run virtual meeting is a great opportunity to connect, engage and share knowledge!

ABOUT THE IBP NETWORK The IBP Network is a consortium of over 80 INGO, local CSO, academic, faith based, and other organization dedicated to supporting the dissemination and use of evidence-based guidelines and practices in family planning and reproductive health. With over 15K subscribers worldwide, IBP activities range from in person workshops and training to virtual online meetings, webinars and conferences.

For more information, visit www.ibpnetwork.org, contact ibpnetwork@who.int, or follow us on Twitter Follow us on Twitter: @IBP_network