Article Citation

Background
Virtual meetings are now used more than ever especially given the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, there is scant evidence of best practices and guidance on the topic. Virtual meetings save money, time, resources, and; given the technological advances; allow broad participation by global audience and collaboration.

Methods
As a result of a scoping review of peer-reviewed literature, grey literature, and lay literature, this article is a compilation of best practices for maximizing virtual meetings and conferences. The criteria for selection of the articles were based on being supported by the literature, being integral to driving change, and reflect the full continuum of virtual meetings.
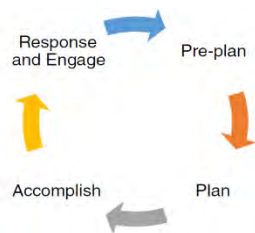
Results
The authors came up with the following 4 phases of the meeting cycle (PrePARE):
1- **Pre**-planning
2- **P**lanning
3- **A**ccomplishing conference goals through execution and gauging
4- **R**esponse and **E**ngaging the target audience for future cycles

Pre-PARE

Pre-Planning considerations:
These considerations include gathering an **organizing committee** with multiple stakeholders keeping in mind the target audience. The authors recommend assigning an "**accessibility chair**" who oversees the best practices of auditory, visual, economic, and technical accessibility given the target audience. In the pre-planning stage, a decision should be made about the **type / format of the meeting** to achieve learning & engagement of the audience (Conventional, full virtual, hybrid, or asynchronous).

Planning considerations:
This phase is the most cumbersome phase of the cycle and includes both small and large decisions. In this phase, it is important to establish an individualized, robust, and secure **registration process**. The scheduling should pay close attention to time zones, scheduling breaks, and the **duration and density** of the content released. The virtual nature of the meeting allows attracting **high quality speakers**. Consideration should be given to providing speakers with **standardized slideshow template**, **technology specifications**, and **speaker preparation document** *(provided in the supplemental material)*. Software and hardware recommendations should also be provided to attendees to maximize connectivity. *(Sample attendee recommendation document checklist is provided)*. The planners should also have a **robust technical support** for both attendees and speakers/moderators who would test a **dry-run** with them prior to the meeting. Depending on the event type, the platform is used to maximize engagement based on the plan and the capability of the platform (e.g. small group sessions, …). The **monetization and marketing recommendations** would take advantage of the virtual nature of the meeting to make it accessible and easy for the speakers and moderators to

advertise their participation. In addition, the same rules related to industry sponsorships apply same as a live meeting.

Accomplish considerations:

It is important in virtual meetings to designate a **host and a moderator** for every session. The host typically has technical responsibilities during the session. Use the features of the platform to foster desired engagement such as polling, surveys, whiteboards, breakout rooms, etc. Be prepared for **technical issues and disruptions** and provide moderators, hosts, and attendees with technical support numbers. Also provide hosts and moderators with **guidelines in the event of disruptions**. Pre-recording sessions is one way to avoid live-virtual disruptions. Obtain consent from the speakers to share post-event takeaway material and/or post content.

Response and Engage considerations:

This is the phase where the planners assess the virtual conference and use the data to invest in continuous growth and improvement of the conference in the next cycle. This phase includes gathering evaluation data, analyzing the data, being transparent and sharing the data and analysis with all stakeholders, and using the data for research and /or future planning.

Discussion

1. **Why are the concepts represented in the article important?**

   The best practices recommendations presented in the article are important for the following reasons:

   1- Help planners think of the special considerations needed for virtual CME offerings in all phases from pre-planning all the way to post-event evaluations
   2- Highlights special considerations, practices, and tools that are specific to virtual meetings
   3- Offers useful checklists, documents, and comparison tools specific for the virtual platforms and the planning and implementation of virtual meetings

2. **How can the topic(s) be applied to CME/CPD and activity development and delivery, in various learning formats (live, online, journal, etc.)? Please identify any possible examples as related to AAP CME activities.**

   Most of the AAP CME activities went virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the tools provided by this best practices article could be applied to many of the AAP virtual events.

The authors shared in this article a set of supplemental materials including checklists for speakers, attendees, as well as comparison charts of the various virtual platforms, their cost, capabilities, and features. The supplemental material can be downloaded at: Supplemental Material & Checklists.

Reviewed by Rani S. Gereige, MD, MPH, FAAP
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