



MONTANA 4-H CENTER FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT *COVID-19 BEST PRACTICES*

Guidance for Virtual 4-H Meetings

Virtual 4-H meetings can help keep 4-H members connected and on track with their 4-H projects. Like in-person programming, there are best practices for keeping youth safe. Virtual meetings have their own unique considerations and this guidance will help you reduce risks. Consider all platforms on the Internet as public and engagement of youth, families, and volunteers should be treated as if you were interacting in public.



The following are expectations for holding a virtual 4-H club or project meeting:

- Parental consent for engaging with their children online will be gathered during 4-H enrollment. MSU Extension will clearly communicate to parents how Extension agents or volunteers will provide content online, what website and services will be used, and what sort of alternatives will be provided for students who are unable to access those services.
- Volunteers must work with 4-H faculty or staff on options for conference call or virtual or 4-H meetings.
- In times of shelter-in-place orders, do not encourage 4-H members to congregate with others for the virtual meeting to gain access to the technology.
- Virtual or conference call 4-H meetings should have a purpose and must have an educational component, this includes members giving presentations about their projects, virtual judging skill-a-thon, project instruction, etc.
- Only recognized Montana 4-H adult volunteers registered with their county Extension office and having passed the background check may host official virtual or conference call 4-H meetings.
- Ensure a minimum of two adults are in place for virtual or conference calls, and that they are present on the virtual platform prior to the start of the meeting and youth should be supervised at home by their parent or guardian.
- Guest Speakers who are not registered 4-H volunteers will not be provided Internet or direct access to the youth after the meeting.
- If a youth directly contacts an adult, a second adult should be included in all responses.
- Members should identify themselves with their first name only.
- Meeting admin should change the label of any attendees who dial in to reflect the attendee's name rather than their phone number, which can be compromised.
- Use only "group chat" and turn off "private chat" in any virtual meeting.
- Turn off "screen sharing" for participants.





Virtual Platforms

There are many virtual platforms that you can use for sharing information. However, virtual meetings should use the Montana State University Extension recommended platform that is ADA compliant for transcription. County Extension Offices should train volunteers in setting up meetings and help with ADA accessibility.



Using Webex or Similar Platforms

Webex meetings should have the waiting room feature enabled. The waiting room empowers the meeting host to allow only official individuals into the meeting.

Password protection is also an appropriate strategy to ensure attendance is limited to 4-H members, families, and guests.

Ensure that invitations for meetings intended for a limited audience are shared in such a way as to limit attendance (email, text, internal group messaging program). Remember that when you share links to virtual meetings through social media, anyone who has access to the link will have access to the meeting.

The meeting host should always add another adult as a co-host when using Webex. The role of the cohost can be used to help manage the chat boxes, monitor the “Waiting Room,” and manage the “Mute” functions. Additionally, adding a co-host is essential to allow for connectivity in case of internet issues with the main host.



Tips for Success

During your virtual 4-H meeting, you will want to consider the following to ensure a positive and safe experience for all in attendance.

- Set ground rules for the virtual meeting and share them with all participants at the start of every meeting.
- Mute everyone upon entering to ensure audio quality.
- Please keep track of virtual or conference call 4-H meetings and participation for your county records.
- Do not record the meeting. The secretary or assigned person should take minutes.



Types of Meetings

Virtual meetings can occur at the club, county, or state level. If you are conducting a meeting that is not dealing with club-specific content, please talk to your county 4-H agent about the possibility of making it a county-wide or even statewide opportunity. By leveraging the tools at our disposal, we can offer more high-quality positive youth development programming to a broader audience.



Social Media: An Engagement Strategy

Social media is a great strategy for youth engagement, and it poses a unique challenge for transparency. Social media messaging between 4-H members and authorized adults should be treated like communication in-person. If you wouldn't say it in person, face-to-face, and with witnesses, you should not communicate these thoughts via social media where there can be a feeling of anonymity.

The adult and youth code of conduct apply to all social media content and messages that transpire between 4-H members and adults affiliated with the 4-H program. Communications on social media must comply to the two adults rule by group messaging or messaging parents along with youth.



Accessibility

Keep in mind that not all 4-H members have access to technology to participate in virtual 4-H meetings or conference calls. Since this is the case, virtual or conference call 4-H meetings cannot be mandatory and will not count against attendance policies.

If you need something that is compliant for transcription per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), your county-based 4-H youth development professional can set up the meeting and help you with your ADA needs.

Work with your county-based 4-H youth development professional on options for virtual or conference call 4-H meetings or when you have any questions.

