**Virtual Communicable Disease Emergency Planning Tabletop Exercise Guidelines for Indigenous Communities**

***Guidelines and Best Practices on How to Organise and Hold a Virtual Tabletop Exercise***

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This document can be used as a guide for the Exercise Organiser and Facilitator

**Why should we organise a virtual exercise?**

The community might consider organising a virtual tabletop exercise if the provincial public health authorities have put in place public health measures around community gathering spaces, large group events, and travel. Bad weather and scheduling conflicts that prevent travel to the community are additional reasons as to why a virtual meeting may be required.

This document will provide overall guidance and best practices on holding a virtual meeting.

**How long should the virtual meeting be?**

This all depends on how many questions from the Scenario & Questions document are chosen to be discussed. You may want to choose a limited amount of questions, the ones that address the most pressing needs of your community, so as to limit the length of time of the meeting. You may want to schedule two half days within the same week, or one full day, or two full days within two weeks. It’s really up to you and what works best for the community and participants.

**Choosing the right web video conferencing tool**

There are many platforms you can use, but the two following ones are free or low-cost, and user-friendly options.

**ZOOM** - <https://zoom.us/pricing>

**Google Meet -** <https://apps.google.com/meet/pricing/>

**SKYPE** - <https://www.skype.com/en/free-conference-call/>

**WEBEX-** <https://gts-ee.webex.com>

**Virtual meeting norms**

“Meeting norms” are standards that refer to processes, preparation, and communication practices that can apply to any meeting. Virtual meetings may have some specific norms, such as:

* We will use the technology that is most accessible to every participant.
* Test your technology before the meeting, and resolve any technical issues.
* Use a phone line with audio clarity and stability.
* Do not multi-task (do other work) during the meeting.
* Follow an organized line-up to ensure each person has a chance to respond.
* Find a quiet space to participate.
* Use the mute button at your site to prevent transmitting background noise.
* Speak up to get attention if you have something to say.
* Turn on your video whenever possible, and be camera-ready

Meeting norms should be shared with your agenda at the top of your meeting, used to reinforce different behaviours, help you improve your virtual meeting process, and should be a shortlist of no more than six. Meeting norms should be co-created and discussed with your organizing team because for them to work, everyone has to own them.

## Remember that virtual meeting design is more than agenda planning

While agenda planning covers what topics will be discussed for how long and by whom, virtual meeting design requires more designing. You need to think through purpose, roles, meeting norms, materials, facilitator agenda (especially if you are using online tools to do activities like brainstorming), technical, scheduling, and communication.

If you want to get better engagement, identify different people to [assume different roles](http://blog.meeteor.com/blog/rotating-meeting-roles/) on a rotating basis. Roles may include:

* Technical support: Helps with technical troubleshooting
* Bridge moderator: Someone who can assist remote participants in a face-to-face meeting or those unable to use a video conference platform or facilitates in the chat
* Timekeeper: Keeps time

**Avoid technical issues**

It isn’t a matter of whether or not technical problems will happen—expect them to happen and have a Plan B or a way to avoid getting derailed because of one person’s technical issue or you experimenting with a new tool, and it doesn’t work as planned. First, make sure everyone [troubleshoots their technical issues](http://blog.lucidmeetings.com/blog/missing-guide-troubleshooting-audio-video-conferencing) before the meeting, if possible. Many platforms have a technical testing page and good tech support; include those links ahead of your meeting. Here’s a good resource to help you plan a successful virtual meeting.

<https://www.quill.com/content/index/computer-center/more-resources/make-sure-your-next-web-conference-is-not-a-complete-failure/default.cshtml>

## Always do a virtual icebreaker or check-in

A great meeting or training starts with a great icebreaker. Icebreakers are discussion questions or activities used to help participants relax and ease people into a group meeting or learning situation. It is important to build in time for an icebreaker because it can create a positive group atmosphere, break down social barriers, motivate, help people think about the topic, and get people to know and trust one another. Almost any icebreaker you do in a face-to-face meeting can also be done virtually.

But you can also have some fun with [virtual icebreakers](https://www.polleverywhere.com/blog/virtual-icebreakers-for-remote-teams/) that build trust and engagement. For example, you can share photos of your workspace or your location.

## Create a line for participants to follow

Establish a method for call-in participants. This might include alphabetical order by first or last name, or if you are using a video conference platform, by order on the screen.

Tip: If you are using a video conference platform, watch for eye movement (means the person is reading something), arms moving or typing sounds (they’re typing), or bored expressions. Don’t call out the person specifically, but remind people that one of your meeting norms is full attention.

## Use techniques for virtual energizers

During face-to-face meetings, you can easily tell when participants are getting tired or the energy drops.  With virtual meetings, even with video conferencing, it is more difficult. You can ask people about their energy level and then [ask them to do a simple stretch movement](http://www.bethkanter.org/movement-training/) to help replenish energy. There are also some fun [virtual energizers and games](http://virtualteambuilders.com/the-best-virtual-meetingever-5-fun-games-to-engage-your-virtual-team/) that make it fun.

## Evaluate and continuously improve virtual meetings

Your virtual meetings will get better over time if you allocate 5 or 10 minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate how it went and what you need to improve upon. You can also allocate time for them to fill-out the Participant Feedback form, which they can scan or fax to the organiser.

**Make sure virtual participants aren’t left out in hybrid meetings**

When you have both remote participants and people in the room, use a bridge moderator (someone in the physical meeting) who ensures that there is a linkage between all participants. The bridge moderator reminds people in the face-to-face meeting that virtual participants are part of the meeting. They check to make sure that virtual participants can hear, see, and speak. If you’re using video conferencing, project remote participants on the screen or give them a seat at the meeting table.

## Send meeting notes and documents

Once the meeting is over, the Note takers will organise or type their notes, and the Exercise Organizer will complete the *Improvement Plan*. These you may share with all participants to close the loop on the tabletop exercise.

You may also want to send a brief, concise follow-up email that summarizes who is working on what. This may be more effective than meeting minutes.

**Sample Invitation Email (adapt as needed)**

*Dear XXXX,*

*Our community will hold a virtual tabletop exercise on communicable disease emergency planning. The exercise will be held on (date) and (time).*

*Indigenous Services Canada created a tool to plan for communicable disease emergencies. This tool lets us practice our response to an emergency. It will help participants understand their duties during an emergency. The results will help improve or draft our Communicable Disease Emergency Plan.*

*Please join us in this XX day activity. Day 1 will be the tabletop exercise. Day 2 will be a review meeting (these can be half days as well).*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DATE AND TIME** | **DURATION** |
| XXXX | XX days |

*All the people who would respond to an emergency should attend (i.e. Local Public Health contact, Police services, Fire services, Ambulance services, local Red Cross, community members with specific roles on the emergency response team Please identify a replacement if you are unable to come. We look forward to hearing from you!*

**Sample agenda for the tabletop exercise –DAY 1 (adapt as needed)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Activity** | **Who** |
| **08:30** | Ensure all participants are able to connect (video/teleconference) | All |
| **08:45** | Welcoming remarks | Facilitator/Organiser |
| **09:00** | Opening prayer/ceremony/protocol | Elder |
| **09:15** | Roundtable introductions | All |
| **09:30** | PowerPoint presentation – *Exercise to Assess or Draft your Communicable Disease Emergency Plan*  | Facilitator |
| **10:00** | Discussion of Scenario and Questions | All |
| **12:00** | Closing prayer/ceremony/protocol | Elder |
| **12:15** | End of exercise |  |

**Sample agenda for the review meeting – DAY 2 (adapt as needed)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Activity** | **Who** |
| **08:30** | Participants gather | All |
| **08:45** | Welcoming remarks | Facilitator/Organiser |
| **09:00** | Opening prayer/ceremony/protocol | Elder |
| **09:15** | Review Responses * Review Response Sheet
* Review flipchart notes
* Identify main points of discussion
* Decide on actions to improve or draft communicable disease emergency plan
 | All |
| **12:00** | Fill in Participant Feedback Form | All |
| **12:15** | Closing prayer/ceremony/protocol | Elder |
| **12:15** | End of meeting |