




Virginia Cooperative Extension
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To: Unit Offices & 4-H Clubs

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Best Practices for Youth Protection with Virtual 4-H Meetings

Use of Zoom

Zoom is the recommended virtual platform to use for conducting virtual 4-H club meetings, workshops, etc. Zoom is supported by CALS IT, and each faculty/staff member at Virginia Tech has an educational Zoom account for their use. There are other platforms that are available (Google Meet, Webex, etc.), and it is at the discretion of the Unit office if these will be available for clubs to use. If Units allow for other virtual platforms technical support from CALS IT may or may not be available.

The State 4-H Office has authorized 4-H programming to take place in a virtual setting, and all meetings held using a virtual platform are to be considered bonafide club meetings provided they adhere to any other meeting requirements. Even though restrictions on face-to-face programming have been lessening, clubs are encouraged to continue regular meetings using virtual formats when necessary/expedient, and/or to make virtual options available to accommodate those who may not be able to participate in-person.

Creating Virtual 4-H Meetings in Zoom

Whenever possible, a faculty or staff member from the Unit office should schedule the Zoom meeting for the club. This allows the use of the educational level account through Virginia Tech which does not have restrictions as to length or features, and it also allows the Units to choose settings that help ensure protection of youth in the meeting.

When a faculty/staff member from the Unit office creates the meeting, that person will need to briefly sign in to start the meeting at the appointed time as the “host.” Once a club leader/officer signs in, host and co-host privileges can be transferred to one or more of those individuals.

Use <https://virginiatech.zoom.us> to sign in with your PID and schedule meetings. You can control the meeting settings from this site.

Zoom Meeting Settings

In order to maximize participant safety and enjoyment, it is recommended that the following settings be utilized when creating virtual 4-H meetings through Zoom:

- Password protect meetings so that participants must either click the direct link to join the meeting, or must enter a password. The password can be selected by the person who creates the meeting and does not have to be complex.
- Do not post links, meeting IDs, or meeting passwords online or on open social media accounts. Send these links directly to participants. This will help ensure that only those who should be in the meeting are able to have access.
- Utilize the “waiting room” feature so that every person who signs in must be “admitted” by the host or co-host in order to enter the meeting. If utilizing this feature, it is important that a host or co-host monitor the participant list to make sure that no one is left in the waiting room that should be in the meeting.
- Disable private chats so that participants can only send chat messages to the entire group. This helps ensure that there are not private conversations happening outside of the group as a whole. This setting can be found under “Settings” when signed in a virginiatech.zoom.us.
- Limit screen sharing to the host(s) or those authorized by the host, and disable letting participants annotate on the screen unless this is being monitored/facilitated by a host.
- When scheduling a meeting, set videos to be off and microphones to be muted when joining. This allows all participants a moment when they sign in to “get oriented” without being heard or seen. Participants can turn on their cameras and unmute themselves when they are ready. Also, if connections seem unstable, this can sometimes be improved by having a participant turn off their camera and use audio only.
- If an unauthorized individual does gain access to / tries to disrupt a meeting, the host or co-host can remove them by exercising that option in the participant list.
- After a meeting has begun, and it appears that no additional participants will join, the host or co-host may choose to lock the meeting by clicking on the security tab. This prevents others, including any unauthorized individuals, from gaining access to the meeting.

Conducting Meetings

For tips on conducting effective virtual meetings and parliamentary procedure, please refer to this video from April 2020:

https://video.vt.edu/media/Do+I+Still+Need+a+Gavel+A+Meetings+%26+Parliamentary+Procedure+in+the+Age+of+Zoom/1_h0dbm0w8

There are also useful tip sheets from the University of Maine Extension program:

<https://extension.umaine.edu/plugged-in/program-volunteer-resources/4h/go-virtual/tips-for-hosting/>

4Help at Virginia Tech also has helpful documentation:

Video Conferencing - How to Hold Zoom Conferences on a PC or Mobile Device

https://www.4help.vt.edu/sp?id=kb_article&sys_id=1c56da51db5c9fc41c1e86171b961980

Recording Meetings

Allowing for the recording of meetings is a helpful feature of Zoom. However, before recording a meeting, leaders should determine if the meeting truly needs to be recorded. A recorded meeting does not take the place of minutes (which are still required for all club meetings), and some participants may feel uncomfortable if the meeting is recorded. If a meeting is to be recorded in Zoom, participants should be told beforehand and should be asked if they are comfortable having a recorded meeting. It is not recommended to record routine club meetings, or any meetings with youth without the approval of the Extension Agent.

Youth Protection in Virtual Settings

Even when 4-H programming does not take place in a face-to-face setting, maintaining Virginia 4-H standards for creating safe and supportive environments for youth remains of paramount importance. To that extent, it is important to adhere to the following when conducting virtual meetings and programs:

- Adult 4-H leaders should be present at all 4-H meetings and programs where youth are present. Leaders should perform the same function as they would in a face-to-face meeting: to guide, mentor, and support youth activities while ensuring Virginia 4-H expectations for behavior and conduct are being met.
- Members participating in virtual meetings and programs need to be properly enrolled 4-H members, including a signed Code of Conduct and Media Release. Ideally, full enrollment should take place via 4-H Online.
- Only fully screened 4-H volunteers should participate in meetings. Guests such as speakers, visitors, etc. should still complete the *4-H One-Time/Occasional Volunteer Form*. This form may be completed and submitted electronically to the Unit office.
- Please be mindful that not everyone has easy access to internet connectivity, and it is important to also provide telephone access information for each meeting. Clubs that normally maintain attendance requirements for membership should be mindful of the ongoing pandemic and not penalize members who have issues meeting requirements.

- Clubs and leaders should be cautious about any information which is shared online or through social media channels, and should consult with the Unit office for guidance.
- The 4-H Code of Conduct for youth members and the Standards of Behavior for adult volunteers still apply even in a virtual setting.
- Clubs should consult with Unit offices for guidance regarding any questions and issues concerning virtual programming.

Above Suspicion Policy

Virginia 4-H's Above Suspicion Policy remains in effect, even when programming is not taking place in a face-to-face setting. Adults should be mindful of the following practices when interacting virtually with youth:

- Adults should not maintain one-on-one correspondence with a youth member through text, social media, etc. Any messages should always be sent to a group (such as a message to the club), or should include another vetted volunteer, the Extension Agent, and/or parents. If a member initiates one-on-one correspondence, the adult should convert it to a group that includes another adult.
- Adults should avoid being alone in a Zoom meeting with a single 4-H member.

Mandated Reporting

All adult 4-H volunteers and Extension personnel remain mandated reporters under Virginia law, even when interactions with youth take place in a virtual setting. This means that if an adult has any suspicion or knowledge that a child is being subjected to any abuse or neglect, this must still be reported to the Virginia Department of Social Services – Child Protective Services (CPS) and Virginia Cooperative Extension within 24 hours of becoming aware of the situation.

- Volunteers should report by contacting their local office CPS office or the Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline (open 24/7) at 800-552-7096 **AND** volunteers must also report this information to their local Extension Agent.
- Extension Agents need to ensure that the report was made to CPS within 24 hours, and also report the information to their District Director and the State 4-H Office. State 4-H Office reports should be made to the following:
 - Jeremy Johnson, Asst. Director & State 4-H Leader; jejohns1@vt.edu
 - Sam Fisher, 4-H Camping Specialist; safishe3@vt.edu
 - Chad N. Proudfoot, 4-H Organizational Specialist; cnproudfoot@vt.edu