



Using Technology with Youth

Using Technology with Youth Toolkit

Practice Brief

Introduction

Using Technology with Youth shares some of the lessons learned about the key ways of connecting with young people when you are working on a local project or initiative. The Halton Youth Initiative (HYI) utilized technology extensively to connect with our youth volunteers. The HYI compiled pages of testimonials, records of personal experiences, and advice reflecting this experience. The information was used to create a toolkit filled with knowledge that will support your personal and professional development. The toolkit answers some of the most important questions about using technology with youth. Youth volunteers shared what they are looking for when participating in community service. The toolkit was created for community organizations and committees that want to engage youth in their community.

So you want to run a youth committee?

Context: HYI had a number of breakout room leaders who were youth. We created a consistent tool so that all breakout room leaders have a similar understanding of how to run meetings and how to use the associated technology for efficient and empowered team facilitation. While HYI and co-op student Amber created the structure of this document, all breakout room leaders were asked to share their own strategies and tools, and it was considered a living document until the fall of 2021.

Utilization: In addition to supporting the breakout room leaders of the Halton Youth Initiative, this tool is also part of the Using Technology with Youth toolkit for use by community organizations, school clubs and grassroots movements.

Running successful teams

Leaders

Summary: While all volunteers can be leaders, in this context, leaders are those with the designated role of facilitating and leading teams. Here are some tips and tricks for successfully leading and connecting with teams:

- Make time for connection! Say people's name, do icebreakers, give kudos
- Be confident! It's okay to make mistakes and own up to them, but don't let that dishearten you.
- Look for team members strengths and assign them tasks that suit those strengths, but also provide them opportunities to improve their weaknesses.
- Keep camera on to focus on engagement with team mates (and encourage others to do the same!)
- Listening is a huge part of being a leader. Doesn't have to be a formal environment, think of it more

as a discussion.

- Providing leadership opportunities (eg. allow team members to lead icebreakers or help with note taking) to share the power and engage everyone
- Keep track of who is contributing and who isn't - sometimes folks need a minute to process and join the conversation. Calling people by name to encourage their voice being heard.
- Do not get disheartened if there is minimal engagement during a meeting (with the nature of virtual meetings, sometimes there will be silence, regardless of your expertise as a leader)
- Be positive! Have a great mood during the meetings so that the group's vibe is high!

Virtual Meetings

Summary: Virtual meetings are here to stay - so let's dive into how to successfully lead virtual meetings as well as some platform-specific advice for running these teams

Facilitation tips and tricks

- Welcome everyone upon arrival
- Spend some time at the start of a meeting for casual conversations (e.g., how school/work is, icebreakers, just chatting, etc.)
 - Listening is very important! Try and remember at least one detail from each conversation with each team member -- build strong relationships
- Develop script and/or talking points beforehand for smooth running during the meeting
 - Be prepared to adapt the script and/or presentation during the meeting in case something changes
- Assign specific roles to facilitators and notetakers (if needed)
- Include team members in the process of determining agenda items and schedule
- Share the roadmap of the agenda - share the link in the chat, share screen

Platform tips and tricks

- Encourage folks to use the reaction tab, raise hand feature, and chat as a workaround for video connection
- Incorporate virtual features into icebreakers (e.g. ask everyone to choose a virtual background of a place they'd like to visit)
- Monitor chat during the virtual event to ensure all discussion taking place is appropriate and relevant (and also to include those who do not feel comfortable unmuting)
 - Consider assigning a team member with the role of monitoring the chat and incorporating chat comments into the team discussion
 - Share responsibilities with other team leaders if possible
- Breakout rooms are an excellent tool for splitting up team members and projects into smaller portions for a more productive and engaging meeting
 - Utilize the "ask for help" feature (sends notification to the host of the meeting) during breakout rooms
 - Smaller numbers typically help team members feel more comfortable to speak and share during meetings

Group chat

Summary: Email is not always top of mind for young volunteers, especially in the summer months. So a group chat via Instagram can be a great method to staying connected in between meetings; sending reminders and looking for confirmation on tasks. Read along for how to set one up and how to moderate your team's group chat.

Process and Logistics [Instagram]

- Everyone must follow your account in order to be added
- Name the group chat with a title that is relevant to the volunteer team
- Send reminders the day before a meeting and/or event and the day of
- Remove Instagram accounts from the group chat of youth who are no longer on the team

Moderating the Chat

- Encourage people to “like” meeting reminders as a confirmation that they saw the message
- Permit appropriate language use only--be respectful, no profanity, etc.
- Guide people on how to use the reply feature for clarity on who the message is for
- If an informal or “fun” group chat needs to be made, do so -- keep the main group chat limited to relevant texts about the team and team meetings to maintain professionalism, organization, and clarity
 - Consider creating a server on platforms such as Discord or Slack for the ability to maintain several channels (group chats) for varying purposes
 - Need team buy-in for use of these platforms, ensure that team mates are able to access these platforms ahead of starting and be prepared to have alternate avenues to connect and repeat messages

Key technology and tools to engage with the community

Email Etiquette

Summary: Despite shifts to the social media world, email continues to be a significant communication tool -- meaning it is important that youth have an understanding on how to appropriately use it for enhanced engagement.

- Consider hosting an “email 101” learning session for team members
- Ask volunteers to reply to emails in a timely and respectful manner
- Send email reminders prior to team meetings
- Send weekly updates and/or emails after team meetings to summarize, reflect, and remind volunteers of tasks
- Emails can be sent to volunteers with unfinished assignments to gently encourage them to complete their work
- Include your name, email address, and any other forms of communication deemed necessary and/or appropriate in your email signature

Canva

Summary: Canva is a fantastic graphic design platform that can be used to create social media graphics, presentations, posters, documents and other visual content for your team's projects and initiatives. The platform is free to use and offers paid subscriptions like Canva Pro and Canva for Enterprise for additional functionality.

HYI Branding

- Canva makes branding images as simple as a drag and drop
 - Whether you choose to use your logo, social media handles, or a hashtag, a seemingly time-consuming task can be completed in a small amount of time
- Canva's transparency tool also means that branding your images can look sleek and non-invasive to the viewer
- Including Instagram post templates and other commonly use sizes and purposes that are HYI branded - especially helpful to newer volunteers or those with less experience in Canva

Canva tips and tricks

- Try to use Canva templates to complete posts and more in a convenient and time- efficient manner
- Use the Canva Animator to create animated GIFs
- Canva Pro has a tool called Canva Magic Resize - use this feature to resize your graphics in bulk to fit multiple, pre-set formats (especially helpful when trying to change a graphic to fit social media ratios)
- The new Canva brand kit feature helps to save time in the design process - you will be able to easily access your color swatches, Canva fonts & brand imagery
- A Canva keyboard shortcut to know: You can hold the ALT key and drag your design elements out to scale them proportionally

Instagram

Summary: For each campaign, event or call to action for your community - your team should determine who should receive this message and how. Creating a list of relevant community partners and local influencers can be a great starting point for getting the message out on Instagram. Read below for some additional tips and tricks for using this platform to spread the word:

Posts

- Ensure that all posts are branded with the HYI logo and follow a common theme for post consistency
- Share high-quality images only
- Know your audience: Posts should be colourful, bold, fun, and clearly communicate whatever message you and your team are trying to share
- Add geo locations to every post to organically increase engagement
- Encourage followers to "tag a friend" and/or share the post on their story
- Keep hashtags to a minimum for a professional look -- but when a hashtag(s) is necessary, make sure they are relevant and helpful
- Write engaging captions (if possible, try to include a call to action)
 - Keep them short, simple, and clear
 - Make sure to include keywords and leave the rest of the information to the post itself
- Tag volunteers, businesses, organizations, etc. when appropriate and necessary

- Consider posting behind-the-scenes pictures of volunteers to share the work that is being done with audience
- After an event, make sure to post pictures in a timely manner

Stories

- Share all recent posts on story for maximum engagement
- Use relevant and bold text/gifs/graphics to captivate viewers
- Keep story posts to a minimum on the daily basis to ensure that important messages do not get lost and/or overlooked
- Tag volunteers and/or locations when appropriate and necessary
- Create highlights for best stories, to preserve memories, and to develop organized categories for story posts

Virtual Events

Summary: Throughout these unprecedented times, more and more organizations and businesses have been shifting their events to the virtual world - even after the pandemic, it is clear that virtual events will remain a popular alternative to their in-person counterparts. As such, it is important to ensure that there is a collective understanding of the most effective and inclusive ways to host these events.

Logistics tips and tricks:

- Develop script and/or talking points beforehand
- Be prepared to adapt the script and/or presentation during the event in case
- Assign specific roles to facilitators and notetakers (if needed)
- Ensure that all event leaders are prepared and on the same page -- on the off chance that one of the leaders is unable to attend, someone should be ready to step up
- Assign one of the leaders to be the meeting host and share their screen (if needed)
- Draft a schedule for events so you have an idea of what needs to be done at specific times
- Leaders should join meetings prior to the event to leave some wiggle room and to ensure that everything is in place before the event begins
 - Do a test run of the presentation (if needed) or whatever other media component is required for the event

Designing welcoming and inclusive spaces:

- Begin virtual event with a land acknowledgement
- Ask attendees to include pronouns in Zoom names if they feel comfortable
- Consider icebreakers so the participants can get to know each other better in the main call, prior to any breakout rooms
- Monitor chat during the virtual event to ensure all discussion taking place is appropriate and relevant (and also to include those who do not feel comfortable unmuting)

Call to Action

Things to remember about using technology with youth

- **Make time for connection** – It builds relationships regardless of whether you are in person or virtual
- **Listening is a huge part of being a leader** – Think of all interactions as discussions
- **Scripts or agendas help keep things organized** – Have a plan or a reason for connecting or posting
- **Breakout rooms are excellent tools for productive meetings** – Specific projects or topics helps keep participants engaged, smaller numbers typically help team members feel more comfortable
- **Group chats are great for staying in touch** – Send reminders between meetings and updates
- **Don't forget about email** – Consider hosting an Email 101 learning session for team members
- **Branding is important** – Tools like Canva can help you develop a brand package for your project, this will help all of your communication pieces to look more unified and professional
- **Virtual events** – Virtual events will remain a popular addition to the ways that we can gather and work together, take the time to feel comfortable and plan for success.

More information about the Halton Youth Initiative can be found at www.haltonyouth.com

Published by Our Kids Network. *Halton Youth Initiative: Using Technology with Youth Toolkit - Practice Brief* shares the journey of the HYI and creates awareness of how a municipal initiative can successfully provide a platform for youth voice and action.

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