



NNEDV

## Tips for Hosting a Virtual Event

Whether your event is a 2-hour webinar, or of larger scale, ensuring that you know the ins and outs of what is required will be important to delivering the best experience possible. Even when you think you have planned for every possibility, **there are going to be bumps in the road**. Some of those may require you to change course and figure out a new plan.

**But, it will be okay!** There were times during our planning process where we thought we had it figured out, only to have to adjust based on unforeseen circumstances, glitches in the technology, or realizing that to make sure we provided the best experience for all participants, we would need to make some difficult and costly decisions to ensure **accessibility and equity**.

All of our work is grounded in the same best practices and guidance that we provide the field. We believe in practicing what we preach. We followed our guides, such as the [Zoombombing Guide](#), scoured the [Digital Services Toolkit](#), and created our internal Zoom management guide to help us articulate to staff roles and responsibilities. Develop a protocol of responsibilities and procedures, so that when you get ready to test, everyone knows the plan. We made certain that we tested, double tested, and triple-tested our tech. But what do they say about best-laid plans? Many of us are hands-on learners and we had to demo the products to ensure we had them figured out. Things almost always go right in testing; it's when you get to the actual event that unexpected things happen. Our goal was to lessen gaps and issues to ensure that the user experience wasn't disrupted.

Here are a few lessons we learned along the way:

1. **Don't hesitate to ask questions and then ask even more questions.** We thought we asked all the right questions, but over time realized we needed much more information. Whether it was from our Zoom and Conference Site vendor, the level of experience our contractors had with our materials, or how we planned to provide certificates, there was much to consider. If something doesn't make sense keep asking questions. Pair up with team

members to think through, step by step, each process, and goal. This can help to identify where more information may be needed.

1. **Test. Re-test. Test it Again.** We thought we had this one! We realize now that it would have been best to test from various views, whether it be web browsers, apps, phone, or tablet. It would have been helpful to do more testing and then after that gone back to question number 1, as we would have discovered more questions. This step would have helped us understand that some people had a completely different experience and understanding of their options than what our screens and platform allowed us to see. Since platforms are always updating, testing again before other events will be important.
  
1. **Layout the Needs for Each Platform.** There are SO MANY PLATFORMS! Will you need a registration system? How will you communicate with both your intended audience and the registrants? What will you use to host the actual event? What will be needed to ensure accessibility? To ensure control of your data and the level of privacy that you need? Will you need to provide resources, materials, or certificates to the attendees? Will you want to send content out, post publicly, or post privately to a password-protected site? During this process, it's important to involve any IT support that you have and communicate about the full plan.
  - Some conference hosting sites offer an integration package with video conferencing or online educational platforms that can save you A LOT of time, but only if the system works correctly! Issues with our Zoom & Cvent integration prevented people from getting the session links, for example.
  - For captioning, you can use YouTube captioning for a free option or pay for a live captioner. Either way, there is an “acceptable” margin of error in the industry that can mean people miss context and important information. A completely unplanned part of our follow-up was editing captions for every single training video to fix pretty significant errors.
  - When using a captioner, Zoom does not record the captions in a recording of the event/training. Who knew?! Integrating the captions into the recorded video is another step after the videos are ready for posting/sharing.

- When using platforms, it is imperative to think about the ways these systems can be misused. Zoombombing doesn't just happen on Zoom. Develop strategies around what your agency will do for staff, presenters, and attendees if online harassment takes place during the meeting. If the events are shared online find ways to ensure privacy and security by checking out the platform settings before the meeting.

1. **Do what feels right, equitable, and accessible.** We can't say we do this work for all survivors, all programs, all service providers if we do not provide access that is equitable to everyone. This means a dedication to accessibility. This is an ever-evolving process. Providing accessible services doesn't just mean checking off a box. It means making sure you are doing everything you can to ensure the online space, the materials, and the event as a whole is truly accessible. If the interpreters are not present, or there is a technical difficulty like the closed captions not showing up, we wait and fix this before we begin. It may mean we have to cancel or postpone the event to ensure the technology is working for every person. Others may have to adjust their expectations, but it doesn't mean we don't do our best to provide an inclusive and welcoming space. During our Summit, for example, it was clear that our priority to show the interpreter was sometimes distracting or frustrating for others, so it became important for us to explain the process and why we chose the set-up we had. We have long included interpreters, but during this process, we also realized how to be more selective to ensure the person can effectively interpret for the context of our work. The nature of our work requires someone to have a trauma-informed lens when captioning and interpreting. Factor this in when thinking about who can and should interpret and caption your events. The Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Victimization and Safety can help you [learn more about providing accessible events and services](#).

1. **Staff Appropriately.** Create detailed internal agendas and assign roles to everything and then assign back-up help in case something unexpected happens. For Summit, it was all-hands-on-deck, all the time, even when it was only one presenter speaking. We had different people assigned to the live chat and also to incoming emails to answer questions. We also had separate point people for the ASL interpreter, the captioner, and the

Spanish interpreter. Every person was needed. We used our back-up people when tech failed when we had to swap out interpreters' mid-session when a team member had a crisis. Plan for that staffing or plan less content to fit your capacity. It's not if something will go wrong, it's when so, it's best to be as prepared as possible to adapt quickly and have enough staff to keep the event going. Luckily, though we encountered challenges, few were seen by the attendees and that's the goal. When hiccups and problems happen, it is important to be flexible, team-oriented, trauma-informed, and remember to center joy and support. When we do these things, we reduce stress especially as we navigate these uncertain and hard times.

1. **Remember who we are doing this work for.** Whether you are an advocate, local program, technologist, researcher, law enforcement officer, or national TA provider, we know we do this work to help survivors. So, when we - as a movement, advocates, or service providers - make mistakes, we learn from them, we adjust, and then we do better, knowing that our work matters to the survivors who come to us for support.

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