ON-LINE ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE GUIDE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

CultureLink

TORONTO

Table of Contents

—

Background

___

In March 2020, Toronto Mayor, John Tory announced that all City of Toronto facilities and programs would be closed to the public until further notice to help slow down the rate of COVID-19 infection. This was based on recommendations from Toronto's Medical Officer of Health. This announcement and the subsequent Federal and Provincial announcements to shut doors of all non-essential services (as per the recommendations of the Federal and Provincial Chief Medical Officers), led to most non-profit agencies moving their program and service delivery to virtual and remote platforms.

This new form of service delivery came with a series of challenges, including lack of participation from youth 12-19 years, concerns around virtual safety, competing digital platforms, unexpected costs and knowledge gaps around best use of these digital platforms.

To support vulnerable residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has been taking comprehensive actions that include collaborating with community agencies in addressing some short and long term emerging needs.

One such collaborative is The Youth Violence Prevention plan of the COVID- 19 Safety and Wellbeing Strategy. This strategy has created a Working Group made of various organizations across the city who are involved in youth violence prevention work. The Working Group members have identified the need for resources to support youth and agencies in online programming.

COVID- 19 Safety and Wellbeing Strategy
This strategy is an initiative by the City of Toronto in partnership with Community Agencies. This collaborative is taking comprehensive actions to support vulnerable residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Safety & Wellbeing Strategy focuses on 6 key areas:
- Youth Violence Prevention
- Legal Education & Support
- Community Safety & Healing
- Escalated Situations
- Family Wellbeing
- Community Funding

To meet these emerging needs and the recommendation from the Working Group, the City engaged CultureLink Settlement and Community Services (CultureLink) to produce practical resource materials for youth and youth-serving organizations that can help address some of those previously identified challenges. This experience-informed document is meant to be used as a guideline, in conjunction with your agency's current practices. The goal of this material is to support service providers' capacity to deliver effective, engaging and safe virtual programs.

CultureLink Settlement & Community Services

CultureLink is a settlement and community organization with more than 30 years' experience in developing and delivering services to meet the needs of diverse communities. Passionate about providing innovative services, we adapt to changes and create new programs that best respond to and address our clients' specific needs. Over the past five years, CultureLink has developed and facilitated several online programs for MVP youth, including the Youth Online Employment Strategy (YOES), this experience has allowed us to rapidly transfer all of our youth programs to an on-line delivery model.

Online Service Delivery

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all non-essential services, were forced to shut their doors and adapt programs to a virtual delivery model. Although this form of program delivery isn't ideal for youth, CultureLink has learned some practical ways of providing online programs in a way that is both engaging and safe. For example, Instagram became an increasingly effective tool for outreach and facilitating drop-in workshops through the Instagram Live feature, while other digital platforms like Zoom became a space to deliver more in-depth and outcome focused workshops. We find that applications like WhatsApp, emails and phone calls are still the best for one-on-one services.

Facilitators' tips:

- Start all sessions with a check-in, introduction and land acknowledgment

- Where possible, take the time to learn new applications and their functions ahead of your program. Explore areas of the applications that encourage collaboration from participants (Google Jamboard is a good tool for that)

- Mid check-ins are also great to gauge participation and energy levels, as virtual programs can be taxing

- Use games as much as possible when designing your workshops to increase engagement (many of the platforms have polling options for example)

Online Safety

We want to recognize the City's Youth Development Unit (YDU) along with various community partners for their invaluable contributions to designing the safety guidelines and tips. We recommend that online sessions not be facilitated without a support person present (some group sessions may require additional support for participants who may be triggered by the content or require additional supports). We recognize that some agencies may not have multiple staff available to deliver a program, to that end, we recommend leveraging other internal/external resources (volunteers, student placements, staff from partner agencies, Community PEERS program). Please be mindful that in public applications like Instagram you do not have control over who joins, who's connecting with the young people etc., which is why we recommend directing your participants to the Safety Guidelines in the Youth Engagement resource.

Guidelines and Tips

- Before each session, please ensure to designate at least 1 person *who is not* the lead facilitator to monitor the chat and be ready to support the group and/or an individual if they notice any unusual or distressing situations. It is important that the individual supporting the lead facilitator is also a staff member or someone with knowledge and understanding of your agency's policies, de-escalation techniques and the principles of Positive Youth Development.
- Ensure that both the facilitator(s) and support person(s) have their phone's readily available to communicate with one another and/or additional supports. *TIP Creating a private group chat for facilitators-only, may be an option.*
- Establish a comfort agreement with participants and include engagement guidelines at the beginning of each workshop. You may want to include the following as part of the engagement guidelines, *e.x.* "Unwanted and/or aggressive/offensive communication *may result in being removed from the group". Tip: A staff person should (where possible) connect with the individual who is making the unwanted/aggressive or offensive comments to check in with them and see if further supports or interventions are required. You may also want to check in with the group to gauge the impact of the comments.*
- If using Zoom, remind participants that there is the ability to mute messages from participants who may be private messaging them. Participants can alert the staff if a participant is private messaging them and causing discomfort or making threats. A staff person should follow up (where possible) with anyone who leaves the group abruptly to ensure their safety and provide additional supports if needed.
- If a participant is sharing traumatic experiences, feelings of depression and/or suicide, the support staff is to connect with this individual one-on-one to ensure their safety and provide additional supports (ex. Private message in Zoom, direct message over Instagram). Tip: Facilitators should be trained or have the ability to redirect conversations as to avoid inducing further trauma as much as possible.

Calling 911 should be a last resort if immediate harm to self or others has been identified and should be done only after alerting a supervisor. Please follow your Agency's Protocols.

Online Platforms

There are several applications and platforms available for service providers to conduct online programs and services. The list provided in this section is not exhaustive but does provide the prices, pros, cons and functionality for some of the more popular digital platforms currently available.

PRICES $		ZOOM	Google Meet	Cisco WebEx	Microsoft Teams
FREE		• Up to 100 participants • 40 mins limit on group meetings	• Up to 100 participants • 1 hr limit on group meetings • Google Storage: 15 GB/per user	• Up to 100 participants • 50 mins limit on group meetings	• Up to 250 participants • Unlimited online meetings & video calling • 10 GB of team file storage & 2 GB/per user
PAID SERVICE: TIER 1		• CAD $20/month • Meeting duration limit is 24 hrs • Custom personal meeting ID	• USD $10/month • 300 hours* • 150 participants • Google Storage: 100 GB/per user	• CAD $17.95/month • Meet as long as you want • 5 GB of cloud storage • Ability to assign alternate hosts	• CAD $6.40 per user/month • Host email with a 50 GB mailbox & custom email domain address • 1 TB of One Drive cloud storage per user

* Free until September 30th, 2020

INSTAGRAM

Features	Pros	Cons
• Share live videos to IGTV • IG lives in story (disappears after 24 hours) • Video call with 50 people through Messenger Rooms • Able to post video and photos	• Great tool to use to help you outreach • Use of hashtags and links allows you to connect images to your website, blog, and other social media pages. • You can easily share your post or story from this app to your Facebook. • Encourages interaction between users via private and public comment options.	• Users no longer see posts in their feed in chronological order. The user may not see the post until it's too late. • Limited to photo & video sharing: Although you can go live on Instagram it is not the best platform to use if you are looking for more two-way interaction. • Fewer features on web-version: The user must use the app on their cell phone in order to get the full experience.

(individuals need to have an existing account or set one up)

ZOOM

Features	Pros	Cons
• HD video & audio access • One-touch meeting join • Co-annotation whiteboards • Join from anywhere on any device • Built-in tools for screen sharing • Support for up to 1000 video participants • Built-in recording and transcripts • Team chat both for groups and one-on-one messaging • Hand-raising • Live broadcasts via social channels and YouTube • Q&A and polling features • Break out rooms • Able to join by phone using a local phone number	• It's easy • Low cost • Gallery View • Access from all devices • File sharing in chats • Up to 49 persons on a screen • Meeting participants can be placed in breakout rooms for small group discussions	• Cannot have multiple simultaneously meetings if you only have 1 license • The free version only gives you 40 mins • Due to the 'Zoom-bombing'* it has received a bad reputation.

*Zoom bombing is the participation of unwanted/uninvited participants on your Zoom meeting
(no account needed to participate, only if an individual plans to host their own meetings)

GOOGLE MEET

Features	Pros	Cons
• Send files through chat and instant messaging • Full integration with Google Apps • Hosts up to 250 persons for free until September 30, 2020 • Able to screen share • Able to join by phone using a local phone number	• No additional fee for call-in participants • Access from all devices • Recordings saved in the clouds • Automatic captioning is available • No time limit on calls • You can invite participants to a meeting straight from your Google calendar.	• No waiting room for participants that join early • You can only access Google Meet through Google Chrome web browser • Does not have a whiteboard tool or poll and survey options

(a Google account required)

CISCO WebEx

Features	Pros	Cons
• Up to 100 participants in each meeting • On the free version, it only allows you to stay connected for 50 minutes • Has screen sharing, file and whiteboard sharing options • Ability to record session • The host has the ability to remove participants • Has a "Call me back" feature • Polling feature • Virtual hand raising • "Meet Now" feature allows anyone to immediately transition to a conference/video call from a text-based chat	• High quality audio • Easy to join a meeting • Can make and receive landline or internet calls	• Have to purchase paid plan in order to meet as long as you want • Has poor video quality • No toll-free dial in number • Consistent issues with lagging/glitches when screen sharing • Desktop version stronger than app • Have to pay extra for the "Call me" feature

(no account required to join meeting, however, one is required to host meetings)

Microsoft Teams

Features	Pros	Cons
• The free and paid plans allow users to host meetings or workshops with up to 250 attendees • No time limits • User can create conversation channels which makes it easier and keep messaging on a specific topic • User can customize your teams to be private or public • The ability to use slash commands for quick and easy navigation. • @mention feature where you can make sure a specific team member sees your message • Has the ability to screen share	• Full integration with Office 365 • Video conferencing with background blur • Store attachments within chats and channels • Recordings are saved in the cloud • Instant messaging • Access from all devices • Tabs to make finding information easy • Automatic captioning is available • No time limit on calls • Chats are saved for life • Promotes teamwork, feedback and collaboration • Attachments are all kept in one place	• No waiting room for participants that join early • No grid view

(To use Microsoft Teams, you need a Microsoft 365 account with the appropriate Microsoft 365 license plan listed below)

Resources

Youth

Below is a brief list of some available youth resources, we recognize this isn't an exhaustive list as we wanted to provide room for individual agencies to have the opportunity to contribute some of their own resources for young people.

211 Ontario
211 is a helpline and online database of Ontario's community and social services.

Kids Help Phone
Tel: 1-800-668-6868

Children's Mental Health Ontario
CMHO has almost 100 member organizations that are providing treatment and support to children, youth, and families.

Staff

We recognize that frontline staff like many of the young people we work with may also experience similar challenges; this is why we put together a brief list of resources available to support them during these extreme and challenging times.

Ontario Psychological Association
Over 300 psychologists in Ontario will provide care at no cost to frontline workers without or with limited coverage (excluding physicians) and their families during COVID-19. Call 211 Toronto to access this service.

Ontario COVID-19 Mental Health Network
A network of Ontario-based mental health professionals dedicated to supporting frontline COVID-19 workers through teletherapy.

City of Toronto's Covid-19 Mental Health Resource
https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/covid-19-mental-health-resources/

Conclusion

This resource is not a static document, as we continue to learn best ways to serve young people, we will continue to revisit and adapt it. We recommend you choose the platform that best suits your needs, and is most accessible to your group. CultureLink's children and youth team find Instagram/IG Live is best used for information sharing, outreach and drop in programs, while Zoom is the team's recommended application for workshops that are delivered over several weeks, workshops that require a small and consistent group of youth, and workshops that deal with sensitive topics and require a safe space.

Safety considerations are important for staff and participants alike. Where possible organizations and groups should consider developing their own safety guidelines or risk mitigation strategies to ensure staff are trained and knowledgeable in mitigating situations of conflict and distress and provided with concrete steps to take in case of a particular issue or concern.

This resource provides information and tips to assist organizations and groups in considering types of platforms for engagement as well as safety considerations to think about. Please consider the unique needs of your program/service, participants and staff when making decisions related to online engagements.