Virtual Connections

Engagement Opportunities and Expectations

Virtual connections can help us all stay engaged in 4-H during this time of social distancing and may be a way to strengthen networking and sharing in the months and years to come. Below are options and guidance for you to connect with your 4-H clubs and groups, continue your annual club plans, work and share 4-H project progress, conduct demonstrations and continue learning.

VIRTUAL CONNECTION BEST PRACTICES

When conducting any virtual connection (club meeting, project workshop, etc.) be sure to follow these best practice guidelines.

- Only UConn 4-H Volunteers of Record and/or UConn faculty/staff are authorized to **host** a 4-H virtual connection.
- Ensure a minimum of two adults, preferably a combination of UConn 4-H Volunteers of Record and/or UConn faculty/staff. If another UConn 4-H Volunteer of Record or UConn faculty/staff cannot attend, a parent/guardian can serve as the second adult present.
- This two adult minimum is for all meetings and breakout sessions, within meetings.
- Minimum of two adults must be present the entire time.
    - It is recommended they join prior to the start of the meeting.
    - It is recommended they wait until all youth have signed off before they exit the virtual connection.

PREPARING TO CONNECT

- **Consider connection options**
    - UConn recommends using WebEx
    - Zoom
    - Google Hangouts
    - All of the above offer video and/or phone conferencing options. Please check any platform you choose for ADA compliance.
- **Personal options**
    - If you choose to use a personal virtual connection:
        - Be sure to have it approved by your county 4-H office prior to sending to youth and families.
    - It is recommended you invite one of your county 4-H faculty/staff to attend if available.
- **Setting up your virtual connection**
    - Contact your county 4-H office to assist in setting up a virtual connection.
    - Consider log in, password and other control measures to monitor/manage attendance.
    - Use only "group chat" and turn off "private chat" in any virtual connection.
    - Turn off "screen sharing" for participants unless the content has been approved.

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- **Consider audience and attendance options**
  - Allow for the greatest flexibility to fit the greatest number of needs.
    - It is recommended that you offer phone and video conferencing whenever possible.
    - Determine the target audience and how to control participation.
    - Limit connection to one hour or less. Anything longer would require taking a break during the session.
  - Communicating connection information and time:
    - Send connection information to parents and youth via email.
    - When posting meeting notices on social media, post to a private group with at least two adult moderators, and not a public post, which can be seen by anyone.
    - Send connection information to the county 4-H faculty/staff.

CONDUCTING THE CONNECTION

- UConn 4-H Volunteers of Record, UConn faculty/staff or parent/guardian should join prior to the start of the virtual connection.
- It is illegal to record anyone in Connecticut without their consent. Those being recorded have to be notified in writing, and if they are under 18 years old, a parent/guardian needs to acknowledge.
  - Therefore, if recording the meeting, you **must** alert all participants that it is being recorded **before** the start of any meeting/event.
  - Best practice: Alert them of your intent to record in meeting notices ahead of time too, and allow for alternate arrangements to be made if necessary,
- Mute upon entry or have participants mute their microphones unless speaking.
- Turn computer cameras off unless needed for visual aid.
- Keep track of virtual connections and participation for your club records.
- 4-H members should identify themselves with their first names only.
- Designate someone (club secretary, etc.) to take minutes.
- If an adult directly contacts youth, a second adult should be included in all communications.
- UConn 4-H Volunteers of Record, UConn faculty/staff or parent/guardian should remain in the virtual connection until all youth have signed off before they exit.

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VIRTUAL CONNECTION REMINDERS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Not all participants have access to technology to participate in virtual connections. This means that 4-H club meetings cannot be mandatory and will not count against attendance policies.

If a virtual connection is replacing a face-to-face meeting due to social distancing recommendations, 4-H members should attend from their homes and not congregate with others for the virtual meeting.

Virtual connections should have a purpose and educational value, i.e. to conduct 4-H club business, host a team practice, conduct a public speaking event or project workshop, etc.

Depending on the content of the virtual connection, additional resources may need to be shared. Consider webpages, pdfs or other documents that can support the topic/subject. They can be shared in the connection communications or links provided in the virtual connection chat.

Be sure to review the resources prior to sharing to assure they are of high quality, age appropriate and shareable.

Be aware of copyright requirements for any documents you wish to share.

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