We can't meet in person, now what? Adapting to Business in a Digital World

With all of the changes in the next few weeks & months, it is important that we all continue to disseminate information and handle the business of our Unions. We need to make our communication efforts effective, inclusive, engaging & informative. Transitioning from in-person to Virtual meetings may not be easy, but we are all up to the task. In the rest of this document, you will find resources and guidelines taken from several resources to assist you in providing effective Virtual communications. Safety of Local Leaders and union Members is key & effective communication will help us all as we move forward.

What is a digital meeting & how is it different?

A virtual meeting is a way to gather, organize, and do work from many different physical locations using phones or computers, an internet connection and a digital meeting app.

Digital meetings are different from webinars. Rather than a lecture format where you are a silent participant, a virtual meeting is designed so that we all participate & contribute.

One thing to ask yourself or your team before scheduling a virtual meeting: If our goal is only to share information, not interact with our group; should we do an email, text push, posting, or recorded message instead of an interactive meeting?

As you plan for digital meetings, keep in mind that all of the skills you use for face-to-face meetings will still come in handy:

♦ Practice good time management—Start & end on time!
♦ Plan an agenda. Keep in mind how you will ask folks to contribute their thoughts as you move through the agenda
♦ Communicate clearly the purpose and goals of the meeting — post purpose of the meeting, remind folks at the beginning of the meeting, be clear what the end action will be, i.e.: is it scheduling a vote? If so, how will that be conducted?

We Recommend:

www.freeconferencecall.com provides free conference call numbers you can use with passcodes for privacy

https://zoom.us/ provides free 40-minute sessions for up to 100 participants

www.gotomeeting.com virtual meeting app, starts at $12 per month for 150 participants

Google Hangouts Meet: works with your Google Sign In; videoconferencing for up to 100 people; starts at $6 per month

www.slack.com video conferencing for up to 15 people starting at $6.67 per month

Tips for Participants:

✳ Ask for help. We want everyone to be able to participate in meetings. If you cannot hear/read captions/see video, direct message the facilitator.

✳ New technology can be intimidating. Know that tech support, family, facilitators, or other participants can help you figure it out.

✳ If you do not have internet access at home, most apps can be downloaded on your phone & used with your data package.

✳ Pay attention to the roll call, so you know who else is attending, and who to direct questions or comments.

✳ Eliminate background noise in your location so other attendees can hear.

✳ If people cannot hear you, first check whether you have been muted & unmute yourself!

✳ Be patient with everyone else while they get good at handling meetings this way!

Tips for Facilitators:

✳ Have folks introduce themselves & keep a roll call of who is attending.

✳ Can everyone participate?

✳ Have a plan in place in case participants have technical difficulty. If using video, offer an audio-only connection.

✳ Use your techie friends to help engage people through polls, breakouts, screen-sharing, etc.

✳ Allow space for folks to share ideas or thoughts; use your list from roll call to ensure everyone have a chance to speak.

✳ Don't rush. People need time to take in information & understand what is being presented. If you are using online apps, there often is a "raised hand" button or the ability to mute users who have a lot of background noise during information sharing.

A Few Ground Rules to consider for digital meetings:

Just like in-person meetings, we need to develop a common understanding of how we will be communicating digitally.

Robert's Rules of order may have to be slightly modified as you work through your Local business. Agreeing how we will correct each other on protocol or practice is something to consider.

Noise Level: Use the mute button when you are not speaking, it cuts down on distracting background noise.

Turn on the video if you are using visual meetings, it makes it easier to determine who is speaking & makes the meeting more interesting.

Eliminate distractions around you before you join the meeting. Everyone is busy, if we all focus on the purpose of the meeting, then we can all get back to all of the other things we have to do!

Make Space/Take Space: Because only one person can speak at a time in a virtual meeting, determine styles of taking turns or including all participants.

If conversations are off topic, or are derailing what needs to get done; take those off-line & put them in the "parking lot" for a future meeting or perhaps a smaller group of affected individuals.

Test the Technology before the meeting starts! This cannot be overstated:

★ **Do you need to download the meeting app?**
★ **Is your internet connection sufficient?**
★ **Every meeting app has a help section. If you are not sure how to use the technology, check out a tutorial before the meeting starts.**