



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Guide to Creative Virtual Events

June 2020



Introduction

This guide is meant to inform you on how to effectively plan a virtual event. Virtual events are becoming more prevalent and necessary due to the Coronavirus pandemic, so it is in your chapter's best interest to sustain member engagement with online programming. Here you will find creative ideas and best practices to planning and hosting virtual events with your chapter.

Overview

The topics discussed in this guide include:

- Benefits to virtual events
- Creative virtual event ideas
- Best practices to employ before, during, and after your virtual event



Benefits of Virtual Events

Besides the fact that virtual events are necessary during a time of social distancing, there are many benefits to hosting a virtual event.

- Virtual events may be **cheaper and easier** to plan and organize.
 - For example, you do not have to book a venue, you do not have to arrange refreshments, etc.
- Virtual events can **engage young members** who may be more tech-savvy.
- Virtual events may attract **larger audiences**.
 - Attendees do not have to consider commute times and may have more time availability during quarantine.
 - Virtual events are more accessible to those with physical limitations or disabilities that make it difficult to attend in-person events.
- Virtual events can easily toggle between a **local reach and a broad reach**.
 - Virtual events can strengthen community ties and maintain engagement on the local scale .
 - On the other hand, virtual events can engage regional, national, and global communities. Consider:
 - An international speaker
 - A collaboration with another chapter or partner that is in another region
 - An audience that is more widespread and possibly international



Virtual Event Ideas

A Virtual Watch Party

encourages members to engage with relevant topics in interesting, digestible mediums.

- Stream a video or recording live through a virtual platform to emulate the experience of watching a video in-person with your chapter.
- After watching, facilitate a group discussion or discussion in breakout rooms so members can reflect on the video and share their thoughts.
- What to watch: a GEOS session, a recorded panel event, a documentary about an SDG or a UN initiative, etc.

A Virtual Concert

is a fun and exciting way to feature creative artists who are involved with your topic or issue of interest.

- Provide a platform for people to share their work in a certain topic, or frame it as a fundraiser for your chapter or a cause.
- For example, UN Youth Observer, Jay'len Boone, hosted a virtual Juneteenth concert to amplify Black creative voices.
- Host your concert on Zoom, G Suite (Google), Instagram live, Facebook live, or other similar platforms.
 - It is easier to broadcast your event live and run through your performers during the event, rather than pre-record each singer and edit all the clips together.





A Virtual Webinar Series

with community figures can engage your members with a specific topic or current event.

-  Plan a webinar series to contribute to the global discussion on topics like the refugee crisis in a certain region, racism and inequalities in the US, or women's health in developing countries.
-  Find a panel of speakers and moderators, and set time for Q/A. Choose a specific topic relevant to your community and find speakers from within your chapter, local organizations, or other local institutions.
 - For example, if sustainable agriculture technology is a topic especially relevant to your community, organize a webinar that invites the full community of stakeholders, and provide a platform for a local farmer and a local grocer to speak.
-  Spotlight a very specific issue. Start by selecting a topic, then zero in on one element of that topic.
 - For example, if the topic of LGBTQ+ rights particularly interests your community, zero in on the element of LGBTQ+ health during COVID-19.

A Live Event Illustrator

can spice up a regular panel, webinar, or topical presentation by providing an interesting visual element.

-  Hire a live event illustrator to create a visual summary of key points and takeaways from the discussion at your event.
-  This will provide a tangible, dynamic illustration to keep your audience attentive during the event and to remind your audience of your event afterwards.



An Arts Exhibition

is a unique and creative way to engage members with local artists whose work relates to a UN topic or SDG.

- Invite poets, writers, singers, dancers, or visual artists to present and discuss their work, and prompt audience members to interact and respond to the "artivism" or "art-activism."
- This can be hosted virtually or can be a pre-recorded video which you post to your chapter's website and social medias.
 - You can also publish an online picture gallery or writing piece (with the artist's permission and credit for the artist) on your chapter's website, social media, or email newsletter.
- Further involve your community by inviting local artists or performers. Local artists often appreciate the opportunity to display their work to wide audiences.
 - Seek out nearby cultural organizations or associations, local schools or universities, and community centers to scout for aspiring artists.
 - At the same time, since your event will be virtual, consider inviting an artist or performer who is not nearby or even international.

A Podcast to Discuss a UN Topic or SDG

is a unique way to foster enlightening discussion and provide continuous virtual content to members.

- A committed chapter leader or member can host special guest speakers from within and outside the chapter to have in-depth discussions about global issues.
- If your chapter has the time and resources, you can formalize the process and publish the podcast online.
 - On the other hand, you can still create an informal podcast simply by recording a dialogue and sending it out on a newsletter or publishing it to your chapter website.



A Game Night or Friendly Competition

is a fun and lighthearted way to connect your members and strengthen your chapter's sense of community.

- Create a simple trivia quiz on a Powerpoint presentation, or use a website like Kahoot to create an interactive quiz.
 - Incentivize members to participate with prizes like a UNA t-shirt.
- Start a competition to see which member can run/walk the most on an app like Charity Miles, which donates money to charities as you log miles.

A Live Interview

can create a more intimate, personal environment for a guest speaker to share their work or perspective on a UN topic.

- On a smaller scale than a panel, a live interview is easy to coordinate and will allow members to learn more about the issues they advocate for.
 - Find an interviewee, utilize a platform like Zoom or Facebook live, and prepare questions or discussion topics.
- Consider interviewing an author of a book that relates to a UN issue or SDG.

A Wellness or Exercise Session

is an inviting way to strengthen personal connections within your chapter.

- In times of social distancing, people may lose the opportunity for small talk and casual dialogue. These are important elements that contribute to a strong, united community.
 - Chapters should make an effort to connect not only through advocacy, but also on a personal level.
- Host a yoga session or a virtual workout to give members the space to stay active physically and with each other.



A Joint Event with a Chapter Partner

or another local organization can integrate your members with the broader community.

- Host a traditional panel or topical presentation, or involve a partner organization in a creative event like the arts exhibition or a career fair.
- Or, consider creating a space for participants to informally discuss an issue and brainstorm ideas.
 - Members can casually engage with other chapter members, as well as members from a partner organization, without the structure of a presentation or panel.

A Virtual Career Fair

is an engaging way to connect working professionals in your chapter with younger members who are still deciding on a career.

- Host a fair on an online meeting platform and create breakout rooms that correspond to a certain industry or sector.
 - Invite members in your chapter to speak about their careers and background, and reserve time for Q/A.
- Additionally, members who are volunteers for a specific organization or group may also have expertise to share with young professionals or young members.

A Virtual Book Club or Read-a-Thon

is a casual, consistent way to involve your members with the UN by reading books that discuss UN issues or SDGs.

- Set a weekly schedule for participants to read a section of text and discuss it as a group through an online meeting platform.
- For a scaled-down version, assign one news article per week for participants to read and discuss.



Best Practices to Employ Before Your Event

During the early planning stage, **send out a survey** or another similar communication to gauge the interests of your members.

If you are in need of **technical assistance**, there are many useful video tutorials online for a number of virtual meeting platforms.

Start **promoting your event** at least 2-3 weeks in advance so your audience has time to plan.

Hold a **practice run or rehearsal** with main organizers and your speakers, if any.

- Present broad topics for members to choose from (climate change, gender equality, refugees, etc.), as well as potential event ideas (virtual book club, watch party, interview, etc.). Be sure to see what times and days they are usually available.
- Use this information to tailor your event to your audience's interests. At the same time, try out new events or topics occasionally.
- You can also contact Young Professional members, Campus Fellows, or Campus Chapter leaders — all of whom are often glad to help.
- Draft a document of instructions or frequently asked questions that tell your audience how to log onto your event in case they have difficulties.
- As soon as you set the date for your event, publish it onto your chapter website so members are in the know.
- Once you gather key details like a basic agenda or who your speakers are, create a more formal announcement by email and/or social media.
- Use the same online platform you plan to use during your event to pinpoint and address any technical issues in advance.



Best Practices to Employ During Your Event

Keep your panel or presentation interactive by **encouraging attendees to list their thoughts**, reactions, or answers to questions.

- By actively writing something rather than clicking a poll question, attendees feel more involved and have tangible notes to revisit afterwards.

Designate a Chapter Leader or member to **live tweet** or post on your chapter's social media stories during the event.

- This will make it feel more like a special event and less like a regular meeting.
- Members who cannot attend the event will be able to see live updates and feel included.

If your event discusses a global perspective on an SDG or a UN topic, be sure to tie the discussion back to how it applies to your **local community**.

- By framing a part of your discussion in a local context, members can more easily picture the concepts discussed and may be more motivated to take action. Remember, think globally, act locally.

Consider using a **platform besides Zoom** or your typical meeting platform to add variety and newness to your events.

- This can be simple as using Facebook live or Instagram live. These platforms also allow you to record and save your event for members to watch afterwards.
- If you decide to stick with Zoom, vary the content you display by showing videos or navigating to external websites, like a word cloud generator.



Best Practices to Employ During Your Event

Utilize an online meeting platform that enables **breakout rooms**, like Zoom, to encourage small group discussion.

If your event is live, consider **recording the meeting** and publishing to your chapter website or to social media.

Remember, virtual events or programs **do not always have to be live**.

- This will allow members to build personal connections with each other.
- Draft a list of talking points or questions so small groups can have substantive conversations.
- This will include the members who weren't able to attend live, and will allow attendees who are still interested to go back and re-watch it.
- Virtual member engagement could be a collective project where members submit a video submission or quote with their opinion on a specific topic.
 - Think of "Wisdom Wednesday" from the 2020 United Together Campaign.
- Consider a virtual donation drive, where members donate to a specific cause for the chance to win a prize.
 - Members of UNA Los Angeles collectively raised \$2000 for the COVID-19 Response Fund, and those who donated were entered into a raffle to win a trip to Napa Valley.



Best Practices to Employ After Your Event

Create a **list of key takeaways**, quotes, who your speakers were, and other key details.

Analyze **your attendee numbers** after your event.

- Broadcast these takeaways in your next email communication and on your social medias.
- This will engage those who weren't able to attend and motivate members to come to your next event.
- Many virtual platforms allow you to download an attendee report. Make note of demographics like age, as well as how many people registered versus how many attended.
 - If you cannot access this report, take simplified records of key details, such as how many attendees there were.
 - Send out a feedback survey to those who attended your event to analyze the success of your event.
 - You can also send out a survey to members who did not attend to learn why they did not attend.
- Use this information to adjust future event plans to cater better to your audience, or learn how to attract an untapped demographic.