

Hosting Successful Virtual Meetings

NE/SAE THINK TANK | AUGUST 2020

ABOUT THE THINK TANK

NE/SAE held its first-ever Think Tank on Tuesday, August 25, 2020. Association professionals from throughout New England gathered virtually to share their insights on hosting successful virtual meetings. This resource outlines participants' challenges, success stories, and favorite tools and technologies for planning virtual meetings.

VIRTUAL MEETING CHALLENGES

It's no surprise that associations face many challenges when pivoting from in-person to virtual meetings. Participants shared the following challenges as the most significant.

Support. Running a virtual meeting is a big endeavor, and it requires a lot of support from staff, often in addition to their normal job responsibilities. Or, external vendors must be engaged.

Uncertainty. Virtual meetings are new to everyone, so staff may not know what to anticipate when it comes to running a virtual meeting, until it happens.

Tech glitches. There are many opportunities for things to go wrong including technology outages, feature issues, or user errors.

Meeting structure. You must redefine your meeting structure to create an agenda that works virtually.



93%

Think Tank Participants who are currently planning a virtual meeting as of August 2020

31%

Participants who identified that they "love" planning virtual meetings; 69% of participants are neutral

95%

Participants who envision that they will be hosting virtual meetings well into the future, as complements to in-person events

CHALLENGES (CONTINUED)

Getting buy-in. Virtual meetings require extra promotion of the value proposition for attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors. And, the value proposition is all new.

Monetizing your events. It can be hard to preserve the income stream from your in-person meetings, especially if your industry has been hit hard by the pandemic.

Decisions, decisions. There are so many tools and services available for virtual meetings. You have to consider many options, identify what tools will work for you, and then figure out how to pay for them.

Meaningful engagement. It can be challenging to develop ways for members to not only attend the virtual meeting, but to actively participate and engage with one another and with your association.

How can you overcome these challenges and plan a successful virtual meeting? Our Think Tank participants had a few ideas!

SUCCESS STORIES & WORDS OF ADVICE

Think Tank participants shared the following insights about what they have done, or what they would do, to ensure that a virtual meeting is a success.



Keep it short and sweet. Reduce the length of sessions and adjust your agenda to accommodate the new virtual environment, and keep the attention of attendees.

Access new opportunities. Reach out to speakers that were previously difficult to secure because of their location or your budget. You may be able to land a deal for your virtual meeting.

Show your value. Don't undersell the value of participating in your virtual meeting. Exhibitors and sponsors will have an opportunity to engage with your members, and attendees will leave with the professional development they need to succeed in their careers. There's a whole lot of value for everyone!

SUCCESS STORIES (CONTINUED)

Record your sessions. Use the recordings as enduring materials that attendees can reference later, or sell access to the recordings to bring in additional revenue, even after the meeting ends.

Offer training. Schedule practice sessions for speakers, develop instructions or how-to videos for attendees, or host a virtual training session to show exhibitors how to build their virtual booth. For formal training meetings, you can also send your attendees protocols in advance so they are aware of expectations or participation requirements.

Open the doors early. Give attendees an opportunity to access your virtual event platform early so it's familiar to them when the event is live. Offer instructions, how-to videos, or even a happy-hour how-to training session.

Embrace the chat. Your speakers have a lot of great information to share, and so do your attendees! Encourage attendees to participate in the chat feature or on discussion boards so everyone leaves with even more insights and information – from their peers.

Send some swag. Send attendees physical materials and fun swag items to complement the online experience. This is a great sponsorship opportunity, and attendees may even be surprised by receiving something in the mail.

Consider pre-recording. Some tools allow you to record sessions in advance and broadcast them to your attendees at their designated time. This can minimize technical glitches that could happen live. Encourage speakers to answer questions in real-time via the chat feature, and consider following recorded sessions with a brief, live Q&A session.

Have fun. Host a virtual trivia competition, ask your speakers to incorporate icebreakers into their sessions, or plan beer, wine, or whiskey tastings as opportunities to encourage attendees to have fun.

Share photos. Your members make connections with one another at your in-person events. Share photos of past events to spark memories, rebuild connections, and remind members of their great experiences with your association. And, be sure to take screenshots during your virtual meeting!

Identify yourself. We all wear name badges at in-person meetings. Ask your attendees to make sure they rename the device they are logging in from so it shows their name and not just “iPhone 10”.

Be sympathetic. Remember that we're all learning how to plan and participate in virtual meetings together, whether we're staff, speakers, attendees, exhibitors or sponsors. Mistakes and technology issues happen, and that's okay!

TOOLS & SOLUTIONS

There are countless virtual event platforms, web-based tools, and other tech solutions available for planning virtual meetings. Here are a few that NE/SAE members are using.



Audience Engagement

Slido | [Learn More](#)

Mentimeter | [Learn More](#)

Social, Networking, and Icebreakers

Remo | [Learn More](#)

Icebreaker | [Learn More](#)

Gatherly | [Learn More](#)

Conversation Starter | [Learn More](#)

Video Streaming

Zoom | [Learn More](#)

Blue Jeans | [Learn More](#)

Video Production

CCR Solutions | [Learn More](#)

O'Design | [Learn More](#)

Virtual Meeting Platforms

Map Dynamics | [Learn More](#)

PSAV Chime | [Learn More](#)

Hopin | [Learn More](#)

Intrado | [Learn More](#)

vFairs | [Learn More](#)

Whova | [Learn More](#)

Pathable | [Learn More](#)

Note: The tools and solutions listed above were identified by participants of the Think Tank. NE/SAE does not endorse these companies and makes no representations, warranties or guarantees as to, and assumes no responsibility for, the products or services provided by them.

58%

Think Tank Participants
who have planned 5 or
more virtual meetings as
of August 2020

ABOUT NE/SAE THINK TANKS



NE/SAE Think Tanks are virtual opportunities for members to discuss timely topics, assess emerging trends, and share challenges and success stories with one another.

Think Tanks will be held on the last Tuesday of each month, starting in August 2020.

Upcoming topics include The Future of In-Person Meetings, Emerging Trends, Strategic Planning in an Age of Disruption, and Getting Creative with Non-Dues Revenue.

Registration is FREE for NE/SAE members, but pre-registration is required. [MORE INFO.](#)

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who participated in this Think Tank.

And, a special thank you to the presenters from each breakout group for sharing their groups' stories and ideas:

- Deborah Sousa, Executive Director, Massachusetts Mortgage Bankers Association
- Jennifer Pederson, Executive Director, Massachusetts Water Works Association
- Elaine Gebhardt, Executive Director, New England Golf Course Owners Association
- Emily Westhoven, Executive Director, German-American Business Council of Boston

ne/sae
NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY OF **ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES**

Copyright 2020. New England Society of Association Executives, Inc. All rights reserved.

4 Lan Drive, Suite 310, Westford, MA 01885
office@nesae.org | 978-364-5059