



Looking to Strengthen Your Team and Build Community? The Benefits of a Virtual Retreat

As we move further into 2021 and the ongoing pandemic, chances are good that you are feeling more “out of gas” than usual. Given your role as an organizational leader, you likely feel pressure to bring energy, enthusiasm and a sense of togetherness to your team. That’s a natural tension, and we encourage you not to bear that burden alone.

Over the last few months, we’ve been helping organizations facilitate team-building and community-building retreats involving board members, staff members, and/or a combination of both groups. There’s no one right or wrong way to organize these sessions, but here are a few things that we’ve learned about these virtual retreats over the last 12 months.

- **Pay Attention to Mindfulness:** A great opening for these meetings is a “mindfulness” exercise that focuses on participants’ breathing and being “present.” [Mindful](#) is a great resource for ideas and videos that can be integrated into your virtual gathering.
- **Allow for Time to Check In on Stress Levels:** The reality is that teams want to talk about their heightened levels of stress and anxiety during this pandemic. Routines remain disrupted, and the boundaries between work and our personal lives are more blurred than ever. Make time to talk about these challenges as a team, so you can devise approaches to address stress together. Intentional, organization-wide changes can signal compassion and care, like working agreements and scheduling norms: no emails on weekends, no back-to-back meetings, built-in breaks during meetings, etc.
- **Create Space for Fun:** Teams are also looking for a brief reprieve from the stress and anxiety of the moment. At Support Center, we’ve participated in Pictionary, Scattergories, and Code Names via Zoom, and participated in virtual trivia competitions and scavenger hunts. Make the space for community building.
- **Right Size Organizational Discussions:** As Zoom fatigue grows and stress levels remain high, it’s important to “right size” the scope and complexity of discussions about organizational issues. We suggest finding opportunities to reconnect with your mission and programs (often referred to as “mission moments”), and then identifying issues that can be addressed in a limited amount of time. Using breakout rooms in virtual meetings can allow for smaller, more intimate discussions that foster greater engagement.

- **Identify One or Two Concrete Action Steps:** All too often, meetings can be described using the catch phrase “a good time was had by all and that was all.” Meetings that don’t produce follow-up action items or concrete changes can leave participants feeling drained and unproductive. Be sure to leave your virtual retreat with one or two concrete action steps -- even if it’s just a commitment to changing the format and structure of future meetings -- and make sure to follow through. You and the team will appreciate it.

If you’re thinking about self-organizing such a session, feel free to reach out with any questions. We’d also be happy to plan something together. You can contact Gabriela Barria (gbarria@supportcenteronline.org) to set up a time to talk.