

# Shift to In-person Community Events to a Virtual or Hybrid Format

Much of the insights and tips enclosed in this Guide to Hosting an In-person Women's Empowerment Community Building Event apply to the 2020-and-beyond shift toward more Virtual or Hybrid events.

## Leveraging your live and on-demand virtual streaming Platform

The most significant factor when hosting community events in the COVID-19 and post COVID era relates to shifting the emphasis from the traditional Facility and Refreshment planning to effectively leveraging a virtual streaming/meeting platform that best meets your event goals. i.e. ([Zoom](#), [GoToMtgs/Webinars](#), [Wofemtech](#) or a host of others)

It is important to note that most of what is accomplished through an in-person event can be achieved in a virtual or hybrid event. It all depends on the capacity of the platform, the technical support and the experience of moderator. With the heightened uptake of virtual connectivity during the pandemic, a potential audience is likely to be fairly savvy in attending virtual meetings; however, providing instructions and keeping things simple will ensure the event runs smoothly. The tips contained in the Guide related to selecting guest speakers and securing sponsorships apply to all event formats; in-person, virtual or a hybrid. The importance of ensuring that speakers are fully aware of the goal of the event and are clear on their specific contribution cannot be stressed enough. These items include: 1) confirming the topic of focus, 2) the time allotted for their contribution and if relevant 3) instructions for submitting a presentation. Also, if a Q & A segment is anticipated, you may provide some anticipated sample questions to assist with their preparation. As a virtual event does not afford the opportunity for a display or networking with participants, it will be important to clearly indicate how you plan to recognize your sponsors. Apart from featuring the sponsor(s) logo in the promotion leading up to the event, one additional suggestion is to provide the primary event sponsor an opportunity to offer opening remarks.

## Virtual Fireside Chat/ Interview

Depending on the platform and the package options, you may decide to host a simple, live fireside chat between an interviewer and guest speaker. A few examples would be; a high profile speaker who recognizes the importance of empowering women, someone willing to share advancements being pursued or achieved in their organization that may include groundbreaking policies associated with, cultural, diversity, and inclusive workplace practices, or it may be someone willing to share their personal journey to empowerment. Your one-on-one conversation can offer participants a more interactive experience by inviting questions in advance through the registration process and/or by monitoring the question or chat functions during the event.

## Virtual Panel Discussion

Another event option is to feature an expert panel that can showcase the benefits of women's empowerment and, in a very tangible way, can introduce the seven Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). Similar to the fireside chat you can increase the level of participant engagement by inviting questions in advance and monitor the chat for a more interactive experience. Depending upon the time allotted for your event, the anticipated number of participants, the functional capacity of your platform and moderator capabilities you may include break-out discussion groups to increase the level of participant engagement.



## Shift to Virtual and Hybrid Events continued...

### Virtual Workshop

A virtual workshop can be conducted to achieve similar outcomes as an in person event. Typically, as in the case for most in person workshop experiences, a virtual workshop can be kicked off by an emcee, followed by the primary sponsor's opening remarks and a keynote speaker to set the tone for the interactive component of the event. Either, the emcee, keynote speaker or designated skilled facilitator can conduct the workshop portion of the event. The small group discussions will engage participants in interactive break-out activities that will be reported back to the large workshop forum. The detailed tips for conducting an interactive Community Building Workshop set out in the Guide apply to an in person, virtual or hybrid event. Providing detailed instructions that prepare the breakout group facilitators to lead participants through the workshop activities is essential for all workshop formats and more importantly will ensure that all participants enjoy an engaging virtual workshop experience. The sample PowerPoint associated with the Community Engagement Workshop referenced in the Guide with detailed lead facilitator notes can be made available upon request.

<https://cceb.ca/cceb-contact.html>

### Event Registration, Event Email Marketing and Follow-up Survey

The references outlined in the Guide associated with standard event planning such as, registration, email, marketing and follow-up require careful attention regardless of the event format. There are, however, a host of economical resources and platforms that are particularly helpful in planning and promoting a virtual event: Eventbrite, Facebook and Website Event pages, a variety of Social Media promotional avenues such as facebook, twitter, Instagram, Survey Monkey and MailChimp to list a few.

Several comprehensive event planning platforms such as [Gotowebinars](#) or [Aventri](#) can automate and assist with online planning, promotion, registration and evaluation. If you are comfortable with and/or have access to these more robust, complex planning platforms through a sponsor, that is great; however, many successful virtual community engagement events may be managed by leveraging one or more of the resources as listed in the previous paragraph.

### Benefits to Virtual and Hybrid Events

One of the main benefits of hosting a virtual or hybrid community building event is the potential for more expansive and more inclusive community outreach. Needless to say, the costs associated with travel, accommodation, facilities and refreshments will be greatly reduced and may be passed on to participants. It is likely that in the post COVID-19 age, consumers will expect that most events will offer a virtual component. Moving forward, event planners will be wise to leverage the lessons learned around hosting virtual or hybrid events and the importance of ensuring that diversity and inclusive outreach strategies are employed when designing the content, selecting speakers and promotion of community engagement events.

**Note:** This addendum was incorporated into the 2019, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of The Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Community Engagement Guide on January 25, 2021. Access the complete WEE Community Engagement Guide @ <https://cceb.ca/resources.html>

**Have fun and enjoy your Women's Empowerment Community Building event planning!**

