

HOW TO HOST AN ENGAGING AND EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL TOWN HALL

The format of a Town Hall Meeting provides an opportunity to gather as a community during these unsettling times. In addition to giving you the chance to respond to questions and share the state of your camp, these virtual gatherings will help generate a strong sense of solidarity and spirited communal connection for your audience.

A few housekeeping items:

- Decide in advance on a host for the meeting, and be clear both internally and externally on who is running the Town Hall. If someone else is in a better position to answer a question or address a certain topic than the host, should invite them to respond and share.
- The host should mute all attendees at the start of the meeting. You can always unmute people -- or they can unmute themselves -- when it's appropriate to do so.

Here are some “do’s and don’ts” for running the best virtual town hall meetings:

DO: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCES

Consider different Town Halls for campers, staff members, and parents which may share the content and tone of the town hall.

DO: READ YOUR AGENDA OUT LOUD AND SET THE TONE FOR THE TOWN HALL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING

Create a slide featuring your agenda and choose “share screen” at the start of the meeting so your audience knows what to expect. They are likely going to come prepared with questions and will want to know when they can expect some time for questions and answers.

This opening slide with your agenda will set the tone and intention of your virtual Town Hall. Remember to balance the facts and updates with something fun and campy! Let people know how/if you will be taking questions/comments throughout – chat boxes, hand raising, holding all questions until the Q&A portion, etc.

DO: SOMETHING CAMPY!

Since these meetings will be big, think of something you can do to start the meeting in a fun, *ruach* (spirit) -filled way:

- Be true to your camp style and tone. Especially on the call with campers and staff, utilize songs, stories, and rituals. Open or close with a song that’s familiar to your camp community (or your camp song, if you have one). Tap into Jewish wisdom and share a folk story or piece of Jewish camp text or learning. Open with a blessing for your community or close the town hall the way you might close a day at camp. Do whatever you think will work best to evoke a shared sense of connection to your camp and community.
- Utilize virtual backgrounds Show people a comforting scene by sharing well known spots from camp.

- Make it interactive: Use a tool like [Poll Anywhere](#), [Mentimeter](#), or even the platform's chat feature to interact with participants and give them a voice in the conversation. Empower members of your team to chime in and keep the conversation going.
- Be intentional about "schtick": think about tone and consider whether or not camp schtick has a role to play in your Town Hall. Outside of the Town Hall, consider how you can involve families, campers, and staff in tapping into this piece of camp as a "what's next" to the announcement you're sharing.

DO: CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

There's more to this year than COVID-19! Take a minute to celebrate the successes of your camp and your community. Praise colleagues and lay leaders, call out front line workers for their tireless dedication to keeping our communities safe, or show a baby pic if there's a new future camper in your midst (with parental consent, of course!). Don't be phony or cheesy, but add positivity where you can.

DON'T: SKIP Q&A

A virtual Town Hall is not just an opportunity for you to discuss updates and share, it's also an opportunity for the community to ask questions. You may want to request that people submit questions beforehand so you can be prepared, but either way, leave lots of time for Q&A.

DON'T: COME UNPREPARED FOR QUESTIONS

Brainstorm what you think is on people's mind and/or reach out to a few parents, campers, and staff and ask about their concerns. Be ready to say "I don't know" and "let me get back to you". Nobody has all the answers, and that's okay! But it's always better to be transparent and promise to research and follow-up than to try answering in the moment when you don't have the necessary information.

DON'T: FORGET TO SEND A RECAP

A Town Hall by its very nature leads to multiple discussions on many different matters. It's possible your audience will miss or overlook something you've shared. Prior to each Town Hall meeting, assign two or three note-takers. Within 48 hours of the Town Hall send, everyone a recap of what was discussed. You can even include answers to the questions you were not able to or ran out of time to answer during the Town Hall in the recap. And if you promised to follow up on a question and pass along the answer, do it (or provide an update if you don't have the answer before your recap needs to go out)!