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Reaching Women in Agriculture:

A Guide for Virtual Engagement

This guide brings together information, tips, and tools to deliver effective, engaging online (and hybrid) education for farm and ranch women on topics related to farm viability, resilience, and conservation.

A Partnership Between American Farmland Trust and University of Vermont Extension

The Women's Agricultural Network

American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

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EXTENSION

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United States Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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Acknowledgements

It Takes a Network

We are grateful to the many farmer organizations and Extension professionals who shared information, tips, and lessons learned over the past several months. This guide would not have been possible without their generous contributions.

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Recommended Citation

Brucker, A., Holtzman, B., Joseph, C., Roesch-McNally, G. (2020). *Reaching Women in Agriculture: A Guide for Virtual Engagement*. Washington D.C.: American Farmland Trust and University of Vermont. https://farmland.org/virtual-learning-circle-guide/.

Introduction

This guide brings together information, tips, and tools to deliver effective, engaging online (and hybrid) education for farm and ranch women on topics related to farm viability, resilience, and conservation.

While COVID-19-related restrictions issued in 2020 that restricted in-person gatherings were the impetus for developing this resource, online offerings can help address barriers -- travel time and costs, and conflicts with farm, family, and off-farm employment -- women may encounter accessing in-person education. As such, the strategies, practices, and lessons learned from this shift to online engagement will be applicable well beyond the global pandemic.

Intended Audiences

This guide is intended for practitioners such as nonprofit staff, Extension agents, farmer educators, and facilitators who have prior experience conducting face-to-face education with women farmers and ranchers and who want to transition their programs online. It also provides information that will assist people who are new to offering programs for women farmers, ranchers, and farmland owners.

Gendered Focus

The guide incorporates both the characteristics of high-quality programs for women in agriculture audiences, and the emerging best practices for adapting farmer education and networking events to virtual platforms. It shares innovative approaches and lessons learned from our efforts and the efforts of our partners to engage women in agriculture under the social distancing requirements associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Framework

After highlighting key considerations in designing an effective adult learning program, the guide offers ideas, suggestions, tips, and resources for the three phases of an event: Pre-Event (planning); the Event itself, and Post-Event. We also have included short

vignettes of programming delivered with these principles in mind, which help bring these lessons to life. And finally, we provide a toolkit of resources that facilitators can use to navigate specific practical and technological aspects of adapting for online engagement.

Limitations

It is critically important to recognize that many Americans lack access to the kind of reliable, high-speed internet that is needed to fully participate in online education and networking opportunities. At the writing of this guide a solution to this issue has not been discovered, but several local work arounds are being implemented, including through the use of technologies that are compatible with smart phones and cell networks, workspaces in libraries, hot spot check outs from local organizations, and programs such as PCs for People providing computers for those in need. These challenges should be considered at the outset of online engagement planning, and local communities should be consulted to help design programming that will enable adequate and equitable access for all women.

Getting Started

There are many different options for delivering online outreach – from social media and streaming video to web meetings, webinars, and multi-session online courses. Selecting the right platform and approach begins with thinking through outreach and educational objectives. Before planning an event, consider the following questions:

Goals
- What do you want the group to learn and/or accomplish?
- What is the overall change you are working toward?

Audience
- What cultural, regional, racial, ethnic considerations need to be taken into account?
- What motivates participants to attend? What takeaways do they want?
- What do they already know/believe?
- What are their barriers to participation?

Logistics
- What is the size of the group?
- How many sessions/how long will they stay together?
- Are there speakers who would normally be hard to get to an in-person event that the virtual model would enable you to engage?

Equity
- Does this virtual approach bias our content towards certain audiences over others? Are there ways we can overcome this?
- Is there a way that BIPOC women or communities might not feel welcome in the virtual space we are creating?

Inclusion
- Who might be left out by moving to a virtual platform?
- Who might a virtual event provide additional opportunity for?
- Will there be ways to bring folks into the planned event/experience if they don't have internet connectivity?

The answers to these questions will help you decide both on the technology and the facilitation and instructional methods that are well-suited to meet your goals.

Challenges

When approaching online program design, there may be a tendency to assume that the Internet is a democratic public space where race or class or geography don't exist. Unfortunately, the Internet is not a racial utopia and many "utopian hopes for the Internet as a space that transcends racism" is largely a byproduct of early Web users being primarily White as there continues to be segregated uses of online spaces (and access issues as laid out in the limitations section above) by different racial groups based on where people feel safe or seen[1]. Much as we are seeking to create safe spaces online for women in our outreach, we have to acknowledge that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women may not feel safe in those same spaces unless organizers take a critical approach to thinking about how Whiteness informs their organizational approach. Indeed, Nakamura and Chow-White[2] argue that no matter "how digital we become, the continuing problem of social inequality along racial lines persists."

Further, those who lack access to broadband, which includes many rural farmers and ranchers, are also at a disadvantage in accessing online content, and therefore we acknowledge that there is "a digital divide in racially determined access to online spaces"[2] and more generally, broadband access is a space of growing inequality along intersecting lines of gender, race/ethnicity, rurality, income, education, and age[3]. In rural areas, according to the FCC, about 65% of residents have access to high-speed fixed service, compared to about 97% of Americans living in urban areas[4]. And on Tribal lands, fewer than 60% of residents have access[4]. Nationwide, racial minorities are less likely to have

[1] Kanjere, A. (2019). Defending race privilege on the Internet: how whiteness uses innocence discourse online. Published online: *Information, Communication & Society, 22*(14), 2156-2170. Retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1477972

[2] Nakamura, L., & Chow-White, P. (2012). Introduction – race and digital technology: Code, the color-line, and the information society. In *Race after the internet* (pp. 1–18). New York, NY: Routledge. Retrieved from: http://web.mit.edu/schock/www/docs/pubs/race-internet-newvoices-scc-ew.pdf

[3] Tolbert, C. J., & Mossberger, K. (2006). New inequality frontier: Broadband Internet access. *Economic Policy Institute Working Paper*, (275). Retrieved from: https://www.epi.org/publication/wp275/

[4] Federal Communications Commission. (2020). *Bridging the Digital Divide for All Americans.* https://www.fcc.gov/about-fcc/fcc-initiatives/bridging-digital-divide-all-americans

broadband service at home. For example, 67% of Black and 61% of Latinx households had broadband, compared to 79% of White households, according to the Pew Research Center.

While online offerings are an important way to continue farmer education and networking when in-person meetings are impossible, and they may provide access for some people who could not attend in-person gatherings, they may remain beyond the reach of underserved audiences for whom information, skill development, and networking could have critical impact. While our work here does not contend with these issues explicitly, we think it important to guide the way we think about putting on online events, particularly because mainstream agricultural and ranching spaces (and resources) are typically dominated by White people and infused by a culture of whiteness given the legacy of agricultural landownership[5].

We encourage organizers to take an equity lens to their programmatic work, including their online work. To this end, you may need to think of additional issues when organizing your events, including whether you want to or can provide interpreting resources for participants whose language is not the dominant language to be used in the online event. This also might require organizers to seek out new partners who are embedded in communities you are trying to reach to be partners in the coproduction of your events so that they truly meet the needs of the target audience. We recommend engaging with this work with great humility and compassion, as well as earnest commitment.

> *"This spring, we had to make dramatic changes to our field day season to keep event attendees safe during the ongoing pandemic. The only path forward was to shift to a completely virtual format. Outreach during this time has also included virtual field day training, troubleshooting, and providing event assistance with other organizations, partners, and members. I've given six different trainings to a total of 220 participants and shared the training resources with numerous other organizations and individuals. It's been a really rewarding experience as a new employee and allowed me to build my network along the way."*
>
> *-Maggie Norton, PFI*

[5] Horst, M., & Marion, A. (2019). Racial, ethnic and gender inequities in farmland ownership and farming in the US. *Agriculture and Human Values*, *36*(1), 1-16. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328570754_Racial_ethnic_and_gender_inequities_in_farmland_ownership_and_farming_in_the_US

Learning Objectives

We encourage you to take the time to develop learning objectives that identify specific and measurable ways to understand what learners will be able to do because of participating in your program. Many times, this is not an easy task, but it pays off in several important ways, especially in the virtual environment. It helps you focus the design of your program -- both in terms of format and content -- to achieve those core learning goals. Well-crafted learning goals include both the objective and an indicator that the goal has been met. Here are some example learning goals and indicators.

Learning Goal	Indicators
Participants will adopt approaches that other farm women have found successful for having family conversations about farm succession planning.	End of Session Indicator: Participants **identify** at least one approach they heard about in the session that they plan to try in the next six months. Follow-up Indicator (at 6 months): Participants report **using** at least one approach they heard about in the Learning Circle.
The learning circle will foster supportive connections between participants	Post Event Indicator: Participants list 2 people from the Learning Circle with whom they plan to continue to communicate with over the next 12 months. Follow-up Indicator (at 12 months): Participants report **ongoing contact** via email, phone, social media, or face-to-face visits with at least one person from the Learning Circle. Follow-Up Indicator (at 12 months): Participants describe these interactions in positive language.

Tools & Technology

This section provides information on what technological tools you might utilize to meet the goals and objectives you laid out during the planning phase.

The technological platforms for hosting virtual gatherings are constantly evolving and improving, so these recommendations are by no means comprehensive but rather provide a few tips on which platforms have worked well for women in agriculture programs in 2020. Many tools mentioned below can also be combined and integrated across platforms to enhance the user experience.

"We also had to learn the ins and outs of the Zoom platform, ensure security via registration, build curriculum appropriate to the online setting, and test out how to play videos within Zoom meetings to replace the hands-on components of in-person events."
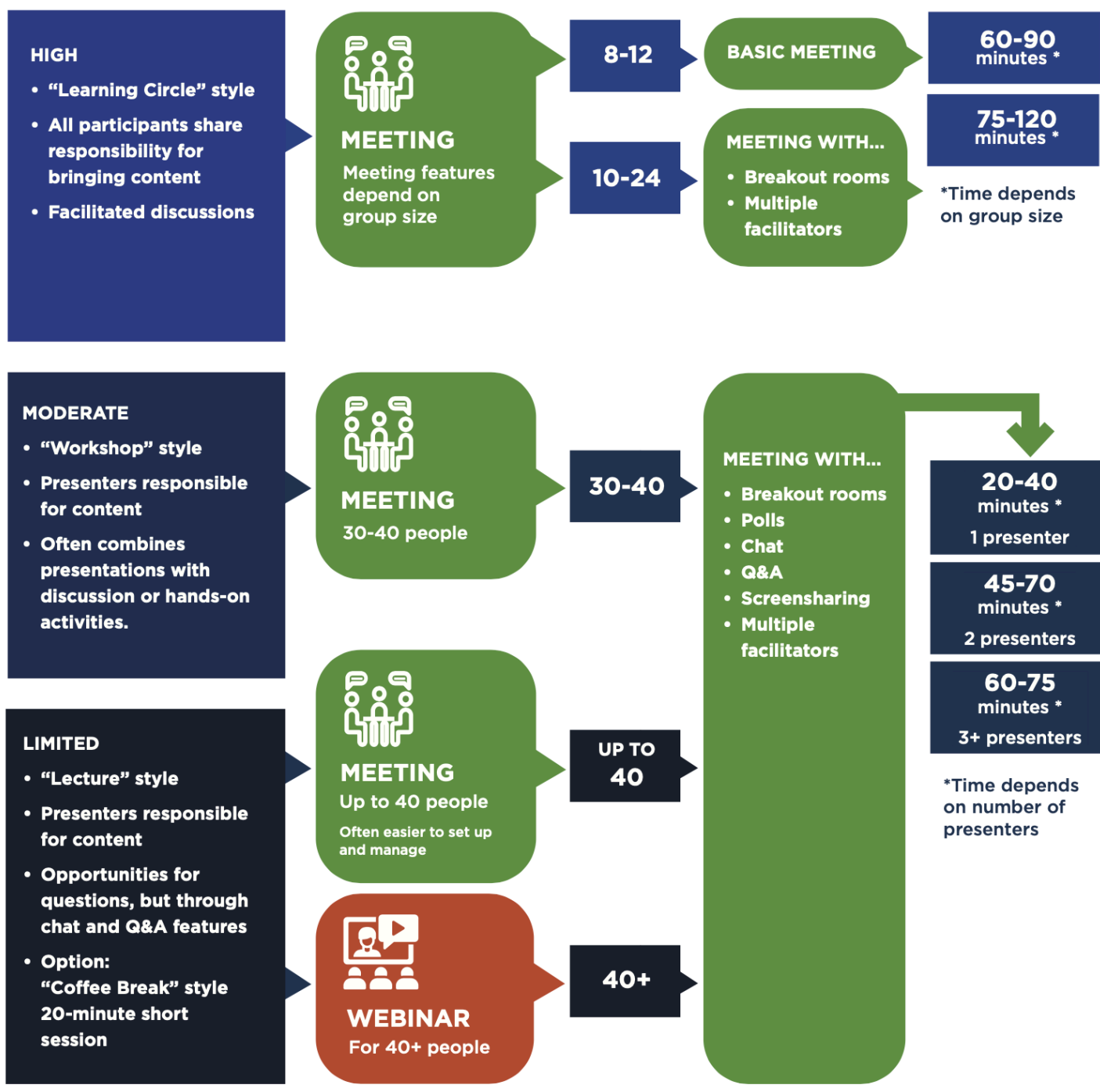
- Caitlin Joseph, AFT

WHAT KIND OF
VIRTUAL
SESSION?

1 LEVEL OF INTERACTIVITY? | **2** HOW MANY PEOPLE? | **3** HOW LONG?

HIGH
- "Learning Circle" style
- All participants share responsibility for bringing content
- Facilitated discussions

MEETING
Meeting features depend on group size

8-12 → BASIC MEETING → **60-90** minutes *

10-24 → MEETING WITH...
- Breakout rooms
- Multiple facilitators
→ **75-120** minutes *

*Time depends on group size

MODERATE
- "Workshop" style
- Presenters responsible for content
- Often combines presentations with discussion or hands-on activities.

MEETING
30-40 people

30-40 → MEETING WITH...
- Breakout rooms
- Polls
- Chat
- Q&A
- Screensharing
- Multiple facilitators

20-40 minutes *
1 presenter

45-70 minutes *
2 presenters

60-75 minutes *
3+ presenters

*Time depends on number of presenters

LIMITED
- "Lecture" style
- Presenters responsible for content
- Opportunities for questions, but through chat and Q&A features
- Option: "Coffee Break" style 20-minute short session

MEETING
Up to 40 people
Often easier to set up and manage

UP TO 40

WEBINAR
For 40+ people

40+

Platforms

When you need to. . .	. . .you could use:	Available Tutorials
Capture input before & between meetings	Google Forms	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtoOHhA3aPQ&ab_channel=Simpletivity
	Microsoft Forms	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOoTBzHM4fQ&ab_channel=CollaborationCoach
	1000 minds	Online suite of tools and processes to help individuals and groups with their Decision-Making, and to understand people's preferences via Conjoint Analysis. - https://www.1000minds.com/
	PollEverywhere	Great for engagement to show where folks are on a map, polls that result in bar charts, wordle responses to questions, and other polling options. Also, you can insert the polls into your PowerPoint presentation, so it is seamless and not switching between PPT to web browser and back. https://www.polleverywhere.com/
Gather & interact in real-time (e.g. Learning Circles, Collaborative Meetings)	Zoom	How to prevent "Zoom bombing" in meetings - https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/style/zoom-security-tips.html Dealing with Zoom Fatigue - https://www.vidyard.com/blog/zoom-fatigue-tips/
	Microsoft Teams	Many topics on the features of Teams - https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us How to use with external guests - https://collab365.community/microsoft-teams-hacks/#1
	Stormz	Collaboration Tool for Online and In-Person Workshops - https://stormz.me/en
Deliver in-depth information, but not necessarily get in-depth feedback from the audience (i.e. Webinar or Lecture)	Zoom	https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200917029-Getting-started-with-webinar
	GoTo Webinar	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rl3kVf87hew&ab_channel=GoToWebinar

Show a process, demonstrate an outcome, or provide hands-on experience. (i.e. Workshop, Farm Tour, Field Experience, or Demonstration)	Zoom (live or pre-recorded)	How to play a video with sound on Zoom - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX8GgFkw7Ls&ab_channel=EvgeniiPermiakov
	Facebook Live	Schedule a live video broadcast on Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/business/help/2087325741287572?id=1123223941353904
	Instagram Live	How do I start a video on Instagram live? - https://www.facebook.com/help/instagram/292478487812558
	USDA Climate Hubs 360° Demonstrations	'As If You Were There' recordings of field tours from around the country - https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/hubs/northeast/project/360
	Streamyard	This platform is free to use with paid options for certain additional features (such as removing the Streamyard logo from the livestream). - https://streamyard.com/
Engage participants during meetings and webinars	Mural	Tool for real-time collaboration, organizing participant input, & feedback. It helps with visual collaboration much like sticky notes / brainstorming sessions at in-person workshops. - https://www.mural.co/
	Icebreaker	Tool for facilitating virtual icebreakers - https://icebreaker.video/
Host Ongoing Networking or long-term Online Learning	Mighty Networks	Overview Tour - https://faq.mightynetworks.com/hc/en-us/articles/360035818592-Watch-a-Full-Tour-of-a-Mighty-Network
Language interpretation	Zoom (translation audio channel available with business account)	Language interpretation in Zoom - https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360034919791-Language-interpretation-in-meetings-and-webinars Tips for ASL interpretation in Zoom - https://deafunity.org/article_interview/tips-on-using-zoom-with-a-sign-language-interpreter/

Effective Learning for Women

Benefits of Women-Centered Spaces

One of the reasons to create women-focused and women-only events, virtual or otherwise, is to establish a comfortable space for women-identifying individuals to find and access resources, information, and networks that they typically don't have easy access to in the agricultural services world. This effort is less about excluding men and more about defining a space for women to learn from one another and gain confidence. Many women who have participated in women-focused events report being able to find their voice in a space created *for* them. This can allow them to show up more fully than in spaces that tend to be male dominated in mainstream agricultural virtual and in-person events. One of the challenges we can face with this approach is feedback from men who are spouses or farming partners who may feel excluded from the conversation. However, when we can clearly describe the benefits of creating an intentional space for women in agriculture, most get on board with the idea. With the increase in actual numbers *and* growing recognition of women farmland owners and farmers, these women-oriented spaces are likely to be both more accepted and, in some cases, less necessary as women take on new leadership roles in agriculture.

When the situation warrants women-oriented programming, it is critical to integrate best practices for adult education oriented towards creating meaningful learning experiences for women farmers, ranchers, and landowners.

In their 2012 Sustainable Agriculture through Sustainable Learning: Improving educational outcomes with best practices for adult learning – A Guide for Educators,

Sandy Bell and Janet McAllister[6] identify five best practices for adult learning that have particular relevance to programs for education oriented to farm and ranch audiences:

These are:
1. Provide a safe, non-judgmental environment for learning.
2. Identify learners' assumptions and beliefs about topics (and themselves).
3. Link the content to learners' prior experience by providing opportunities for discussion and making connections to prior experience, future goals, questioning assumptions, etc.
4. Let learners work together to experiment and solve *genuine* problems through hands-on activities.
5. Give learners choice in content, process, and outcomes.

We hope you can take some time to review the guide[6]. It provides many easy-to-digest insights into the brain science of adult learning, strategies to help educators design successful programs, and a slew of practical suggestions for operationalizing these best practices before, during, and after events.

Providing a safe, non-judgmental online learning environment.
As Bell and McAllister[6] point out, learners are most receptive when they feel safe, both physically and emotionally. When people feel threatened, it can often shut down their ability to receive and process

"The networking and conversations amongst participants and resource providers has been even more open than in person. We have had smaller groups and they are from all areas of the country so perhaps that extra bit of anonymity is encouraging. I have always heard that it doesn't matter how many people you have at an event as long as you have the right people. The women who have participated have definitely been the right women. They come from every type or background: farm owners, operators, absentee, organic, conventional, beginning - everything. However, they still wanted to help each other, encourage each other, and listened to each other. In four years of Learning Circles, the virtual sessions have been the most rewarding."

- Ashley Brucker, American Farmland Trust

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[6] Bell, S., McAllister, J. Sustainable Agriculture through Sustainable Learning: Improving educational outcomes with best practices for adult learning. (2012). *Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE)*. Retrieved from: https://northeast.sare.org/wp-content/uploads/SustainableAgriculturethroughSustainableLearningGuideforEducators.pdf

information, whereas the emotions of joy and pleasant surprise prime the brain to receive and process new information. For these same reasons, it may be appropriate to consider getting even more specific with your targeted audience to develop affinity groups for women who share other intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, language, and/or non-binary gender expression. Zaretta L. Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*[7] explores these issues in regard to K-12 students, but much of the neurological patterns can support designing effective learning for adults, as well.

When it comes to online learning for women, some participants may be very familiar and comfortable with functioning in online environments. Others may experience anxiety over their technical proficiency or having to speak in front of a large group of people that they don't know and can't read well because of the reduction/skewing of nonverbal cues in a virtual environment. Also keep in mind that farm women are often juggling a range of farm, family, and off-farm work responsibilities, and that there may be things happening in the home or on the farm that could be distracting them from full participation.

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[7] Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Corwin. Retrieved from: https://crtandthebrain.com/book/

Organizing your event

Pre-event

Designing your event

"To make sense of a new experience adults first pay attention to components that match in some way to past experiences. Once that occurs, adults are better able to focus on the components that are completely new."
-- Bell and McAllister[7]

In the Women for the Land Learning Circles, introductions of each participating individual are used both as a way for all participants to get to know each other, and to situate knowledge and expertise so that participants can learn from one another and integrate information from technical experts.

Female brains, according to some studies, tend to be well adapted to making connections between analytical reasoning and intuitive processes. Additionally, farm and ranch women bring a wealth of experience to learning events: On average, they are over the age of 50, have diverse on and off-farm work experience, and their identities encompass a variety of life roles.

Learning Circles, whether online or in person, provide a rich environment for the kinds of conversations that allow participants to build on existing connections to integrate new information and knowledge.

More on Learning Circles

American Farmland Trust's Learning Circle model (https://farmland.org/learning-circles-for-women-landowners/) arose out of early partnerships with Women Food and Agriculture Network's Women Caring for the Land™ program, which has been developed and tested, and ultimately proven effective, as a way to specifically engage women landowners and producers in conversations about land management, particularly regarding agricultural best management practices for soil health and water quality.

With no visible hierarchy at these gatherings, everyone is ensured in the security and value of their input to the discussion. Experts are encouraged to communicate their information without PowerPoints, while hands-on, interactive demos (potentially via pre-recorded or livestream digital versions) and in-depth discussion are encouraged.

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It can be more challenging to provide those kinds of learning experiences in single-session online offerings such as webinars or meetings. Especially when a technical expert is presenting, there can be a strong temptation to fill a session with as much information as possible. Some strategies for providing learners creative ways to integrate the information include:

- Use break-out sessions to allow for smaller group conversation about some aspect of the presentation.
- Provide a short (30- 60-second) "reflection" break during which learners respond to a simple prompt, such as how the information presented connects with their situation.
- Use the platform's chat feature and/or polls to allow participants to share how they might use what they are learning.
- Include a farmer who is somewhat representative of the group as a co-presenter who provides a short presentation of how the content "plays out" in their farm -- both successes and challenges.
- Show a video of a farm tour or practice for participants to react to and discuss.

Let learners work together to experiment and solve real life problems

Learning opportunities that allow women to work together to solve real life problems are effective approaches, according to Bell[7], because they:

- Make learning relevant
- Allow learners to transform information into knowledge and skills
- Foster increasing complexity in knowledge and skills
- Help learners transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts.

It's also important to give women learners opportunities to do research and synthesize information from a variety of resources before making decisions.

Give learners choice in content, process, and outcomes.
This might mean changes to the content that you cover, the pace of delivery, and/or revisiting your expectations for what your participants will know, believe, and do because of participating.

Promotion & Outreach

As with in-person events, established partnerships with key stakeholders that have pre-existing communications platforms can support the success of outreach and promotion efforts. Set up a spreadsheet or online database to collaboratively track the contacts that you and your team have who can help promote the event. Utilize this centralized place to track who reached out to whom and what the responses was. Consider using the support of interns, students, and other external partners who can help you spread the word on social media, as well as through email newsletters of partner organizations. Recruit participants by promoting registration for at least four weeks in advance of the event.

Registration & Reminders

To ensure security in the online setting, it is best to require participants to register ahead of time and to manually approve all registrants before the event. This can reduce the risk of people with malicious intentions from joining the event and causing a disruption (a.k.a "zoom-bombing"). With this added layer of security, participants will receive a unique link to join the meeting. You can also have them enter a password to join for additional security.

The trade-off to this added security is that registrants may receive the confirmation email from Zoom in their junk email box, so it is good to follow up individually via email from a staff member directly and to call participants a day ahead to remind them of the event, confirm they received the join info, and to clarify the nature of the event. Many people are used to being able to passively engage in online events, such as webinars and meetings, so it is helpful to clarify how your event may be different if you intend to generate conversation, ask for their active participation, or hope to have them on video and audio. Given that many women are often multi-tasking, it is helpful to provide a heads-up that they are expected/invited to participate actively and be focused in front of their computer and webcam for the duration of the event, if that is your aim.

Depending on your target audience, you may need to provide additional support to help women access the online platforms you are using. One week prior to gathering, you might send instructions on how to join the platform along with their registration confirmation. Include tutorials for folks who need support getting their devices set up to use the platform. Potentially host a pre-event call with people new to the platforms to help them work out technical challenges.

Video Tutorials on Zoom Setup for Farmers

In English -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLBaRE9-dVM&list=PL3zWtXzGVCax2IafuATCk_Mru8YLwRVxG

In Spanish -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du4yKYb1i0U&list=PL3zWtXzGVCayIKFaZGnwxbiwrtFwxEGv5

Practice Session

As opposed to in-person events where an organizer can adjust on the fly, the online event requires a good deal more advance preparation. Facilitators should consider hosting a practice session for co-facilitators and expert discussion leaders prior to the event. During this time, the facilitator can establish guidelines for what to do should the facilitator lose connectivity during the event, who will be designated as a co-host, and the roles/responsibilities for leaders involved in the call. A practice session also allows technical experts to test their demonstrations, equipment, sound, and space, as well as features of the virtual platform in use for the session.

Pre-work

"One KEY thing learned (the hard way) in an unrelated virtual event earlier this year and emphasized in [my online Learning Circle] training, is to PRACTICE."

-Cayla Bendel, PF

To enhance relationship building and maximize interaction during the event, sending key information or asking participants to begin their learning ahead of the first gathering can help them get acquainted with the format, each other, and what to expect during the event. If your event has a theme or plans to share in-depth information on a particular topic, you may want to send some questions to understand participants' baseline knowledge of the topic and what they hope to get

out of the event. You may want to encourage some homework ahead of time, such as viewing informational tutorials about the topics covered in the event, to get them excited and engaged prior to the event. Or you may wish to learn more about their relationship to agriculture, the type of operation they run, or their land tenure situation. These can be captured in the registration questions and elaborated on via some pre-work questions.

Along with pre-work, you may consider asking participants to send photos of themselves or their agricultural land/operation. Using a poll in Zoom to get their permission, you can potentially then use these photos of your participants and their land in future marketing. Since in-person events usually yield photos that can be used, this request of participants can be one way to substitute day-of-event photos.

One or two days prior to gathering, send participants' answers to the pre-event questions to all participants via email or in an online group (such as a Facebook group).

"Presenting virtually is a skill set and it isn't necessarily something that is immediately transferrable from other settings – i.e., someone who may do fine presenting in a large room via a PowerPoint on a screen can't just take that same format and run with it online necessarily. PowerPoint slides should be much simpler/less content as attendees are viewing on their computer or even on phones."

- Lisa Kivirist, In Her Boots

Event

Managing people in the virtual space:

It is important to create a safe space for vulnerability and difficult conversations in online learning. Women-only spaces can often elicit deep sharing by participants, and it is important to respect that space. We recommend not recording online sessions where there is deep personal information being shared. A good strategy is to record technical service information or more traditional teaching moments in an online webinar but turn off the recording when folks are sharing personal information and reflection. It is really important to be transparent about when you are recording and when you are not and give folks the option to turn on and off their camera if they do not want to be recorded.

Remember that when you are facilitating a group process online or in person you have a special role in guiding the group through the agenda. Consider choosing a co-facilitator to help you in doing the work of managing the group process as it can be a lot for one person to do. In fact, for virtual sessions we recommend having three co-facilitators who can help with the agenda and the technical details. Divvying up roles between facilitators, including having someone on-board for dealing with technical difficulties or other challenges individuals might have that would otherwise derail the group experience, is critical. A facilitator's role is about working in service of the group process so that folks can meet each other, learn, grow, share, and reflect.

> *"We learned it is difficult (and frankly unnecessary) to try do "everything" in a virtual event. That was a frustrating realization as we can and historically have covered so much ground at in-person field days, including definitely prioritizing and fostering networking and social connections."*
>
> *– Lisa Kivirist, In Her Boots*

Here are some ways you can welcome and engage participants and set the stage for a productive and supportive online cohort. Not every suggestion will apply to every situation – and you may have other ideas about ways to create a safe learning environment.

- Depending on the audience, length of the session, and the season, schedule one or more short (2-5 minute) breaks during which participants can step away from the screen, stretch, use the bathroom, grab a drink/snack.
- Address the limitations and frustrations of technology from the start of the session. Reassure women that at some point everyone will have a screen freeze or talk while on mute. If facilitators acknowledge that issues arise due to technological difficulties and a plan to work through them, participants will be much less anxious about the technology and better situated to focus on the content.
- Allocate time for introductions and facilitate the session to make connections between participants' interests and concerns.
- Provide time in introductions for individuals to share their story in relation to a particular session's content. Allow them to identify things that might be potential distractions for them in that specific time and place. Acknowledge these concerns are real and important.
- Use break-out/small group sessions to give women an opportunity to establish connections with each other and get experience using the platform and technology in a smaller "audience."
- Model empathy, respect, and clear communication. Facilitators may need to work on making their non-verbal cues more visible by bigger actions and reactions.
- Co-create ground rules that set common expectations for how the group will function. Revisit at intervals to fine-tune to meet the group's needs (see Toolbox).
- Create space - through facilitation and ground rules -- that acknowledges and works to reduce power dynamics.

Setting the Tone

An excellent practice is for the facilitator to set the tone by modeling the introduction first or asking an experienced co-facilitator to do so. Set your participants up for success by sending, in advance, a few topics they can use to guide their introduction.

Repeating the guiding questions prior to starting the introductions as well as entering them in a chat box allows participants to both hear and read what is being asked of them. One facilitator should then give their own introduction, keeping the format and time limit they have asked of their participants, concluding with a final repeat of the questions.

Finally, alerting women who will be up next and one person after them allows the next participant to prepare and alleviates some anxiety. Alphabetical by first name is an easy order to follow.

- Set out clear expectations for the session (agenda, start and end time) and keep the session on track.
- With cohorts that will meet multiple times, allocate some time at the beginning of each session for check-ins. Consider using an ice-breaker question that gets everybody contributing, for example: "My favorite thing to do on a snowy winter day is . . ."
- Provide an associated platform, possibly through social media or a blog site, where participants can share bios, photos of themselves and their farm, and contact information (with participants' consent).
- Consider providing childcare/elder care stipends for in-home care, or possibly "replacement labor" stipends. Knowing that these things are "under control" can help give space to focus on the online session.

Identifying and Addressing Assumptions

The women who attend online education will arrive with mental models – knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, and values -- about farming, their land, their role on the farm, and themselves as learners that have been formed by their experiences and that will affect how they engage with the topics you are focusing on. Bell and McAllister[7] observe that mental models are often tacit – individuals are not fully aware of them – and that unless these are known and addressed, new information is unlikely to result in behavior change.

The following are statements gleaned from participants in the AFT Women for the Land program (www.farmland.org/women) that provide insights into these experiences, assumptions, beliefs, and values:

- "Taking care of the animals comes naturally to me, but I don't have a knack for the business plan."
- "My husband is the farmer. I just manage our staff and keep track of financial records."
- "My farm is an integral part of the community in this area."
- "I know I will have a difficult time getting a loan."
- "I never really thought of myself as a farmer before now."
- "I feel like there is some kind of secret society I don't belong to with an alphabet soup of acronyms."

There are a variety of ways to begin uncovering participants' mental models so participants are acknowledged and addressed through the program. Facilitators can include questions about expectations, needs, and what participants are currently doing in registration materials, as a pre-workshop assignment or survey, or embed those questions in the introductory portion of a session. Sharing that information back with the group and asking participants to respond and discuss the information can be a powerful way to get participants to begin identifying and questioning their own mental models.

It is also important to uncover the mental models the facilitator and technical experts hold – and those that are embedded in the curriculum – regarding content, learning, and learners. What experiences, beliefs, values, and assumptions about gender and/or online learning are your participants, presenters, and facilitators bringing to the session? How do they support or inhibit your educational goals? Understanding those things can help shape both content and format for a more successful program.

Post event

Evaluations

As part of the post-event work, we recommend spending time debriefing as a team to think about what worked well and what could be improved upon. For many, increasing the work in the virtual space means learning through practice. This will require iterative learning and an approach that allows for tweaks and changes between events, particularly if planning a series of coordinated events.

As with all group educational events, it is important to think about objectives and the intended outcomes associated with the event or convening. What information are people to walk away with? Is the event designed to help change knowledge, attitudes, intentions, or behaviors around specific practices? Establishing clear learning goals and indicators at the start of your planning process sets the stage for implementing practical and meaningful evaluation activities to document outcomes and identify ways to improve your programs and process. In many cases, these pieces have been developed for in-person events and thus can be modified and adapted for the virtual environment. If you're just getting started developing an evaluation framework or are thinking about

updating it, the Gaining Results Through Evaluation Project (https://casfs.ucsc.edu/education/bfrdp/eval-tools.html) has compiled an extensive online library of resources relevant to evaluation of farm and agricultural programs. Included is an Outcomes List (https://casfs.ucsc.edu/education/bfrdp/evaluation-outcomes-list.pdf) that provides example outcomes, indicators, and data collections.

Gathering some evaluation information before the close of your meeting is recommended. This could be done through a virtual poll (see Zoom polling feature, for example) or simply ask folks to reflect and share one thing they learned to wrap up the meeting. Use a chat box feature if time does not allow for a live discussion.
A follow-up evaluation will most likely be wanted, either via an online survey tool or a paper copy that gets mailed to participants. However, mail-in evaluations are costly from a time and resource perspective; an online survey of some kind is recommended with a few email reminders to boost response rates. Anonymity is achievable in an online evaluation tool by not requiring people to leave their name/contact information and for most online tools you can click a box so that you are not collecting IP addresses. It is important to be transparent with respondents if the evaluation tool is designed to be anonymous rather than just confidential. It always helps to explain how the information is used and why it is valuable for planning future events.

Another option is to develop a questionnaire and have staff call participants to conduct a phone interview. With that route, be aware that anonymity is hard to achieve unless an outside evaluator conducts the interviews.

As with all things associated with evaluation, have a plan in place before your event and be thoughtful about ensuring collection of information to aid in tracking intended outcomes. Keep in mind the expectation of a smaller response rate for virtual evaluation tools due to the optional nature of an online survey/questionnaire or do a follow-up interview.

"For me, the loss of evaluation data discerned by watching the participants during the day is very problematic in understanding how effective the training is. Relying only on an online survey means an additional loss of data if participants don't reply."

- Jean Eells, EResources,LLC

Participant Follow Up

The final piece is to follow up with participants. A great deal of work went into developing their relationships in the group, but participants in online programming may find it challenging to sustain these connections without your facilitation. Due to the shortened nature of online events and the lack of built-in networking times such as coffee breaks and lunch, a facilitator has to be creative in keeping their participants connected.

You can encourage continued networking in a number of ways, dependent on the requests of the participants. Private groups on social media can be established for members or a participant email list can be shared with permissions.

In-person learning circles often also provide a resource table for participants to access informational materials. In the absence of this, one of the facilitators should be aware of participants looking for more information on a topic during discussion and follow up with those resources. The same is true for access to the technical experts featured during the session. Time should be allowed after the official session for one-on-one questions of the expert or a method of contact if possible. Most technical experts are happy to share their email and provide any supplemental support to those in attendance.

Facilitators should send a follow-up email to participants (including registrants who did not attend) and provide resources from the meeting. These can include, but are not limited to:
- A recording of the meeting (if you have been transparent ahead of time with participants that this would be shared)
- A copy of slides/handouts and technical information covered in the discussion
- A contact list of all participants to support continued networking
- Links to resources raised during the session
- Contact list for relevant technical service providers and clear information about where to go next for more information, support, resources, etc., including a breakdown of common agency and program acronyms they may encounter when seeking technical support.

Sample follow-up email language and examples of resource lists used by AFT are provided in the Toolkit section of this guide.

Virtual Networks on Social Media

Facebook groups, Google Groups, Mighty Networks, or other online platforms can be helpful ways to support women in staying connected after events. GreenMaps and Google Maps are free tools that allow people to create maps of locations and add details about the locations. These can be good tools for supporting women to self-organize and create a network organically over time.

If these are too onerous to create, continued engagement via your organization's own social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) can be good ways to keep the conversation going with women in agriculture in your communities. International Women's Day, Women's Equality Day, and other national celebrations are good opportunities for "social media take-over" days when your team can focus on a communications campaign to engage and solicit input from women in agriculture. Efforts like this are good ways to help amplify the women-led farms and ranches online, as well, by leveraging the platforms of your organization or institution to highlight the work and perspective of women you serve. You could also consider doing virtual "office hours" using a social media platform such as Instagram or Twitter or simply have Zoom "office hours" for encouraging people to login and engage.

> **Informal Engagement Ideas**
>
> Check out the Virtual "office hours" that SoulFire Farm hosts with their Ask a Sista Farmer programming on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/events/614166582543371/?active_tab=discussion) during which every Friday, "experienced Black womxn farmers" answer questions about all manner of farming and food preserving questions.

Case Studies from Partner Organizations

As part of our effort to understand how organizations in the agriculture and natural resources field pivoted to the online format, we sought input and stories from partners in the field, sharing successes and challenges in doing their work in the virtual space.

We asked respondents to reflect on a series of questions regarding how their events changed in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, what they learned, what challenges they faced, including what surprised them about pivoting to the virtual space. We also asked them to reflect on what they will take with them for future events, both virtual and in-person events as well as a general reflection on their experiences. Below, we provide a brief synthesis of their responses to our questions and reflections, in their own words, to illustrate the key themes.

We encourage you to dive into these wonderful case study vignettes - https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AFT-Case-Study-Vingettes.pdf

Toolkit Resources:

Example Learning Circle Pre-Work Email

Attachments:
- Participant agenda

Thank you for registering for our Women for the Land Learning Circle! The purpose of this event is to connect you with fellow women farmers and agricultural service providers in your area. Our conversations will center on the climate-change-related stressors you may be observing on the land and what you can do about them, both on your farm and in your community.

We hope you will join for both days of this event (X and X) as the learning and networking opportunities will build in each other from week to week.

How to join the meeting in Zoom:
(COPY AND PASTE THEIR CONFIRMATION LINK from Zoom for each individual)

If you need assistance setting up Zoom, audio, or video on your device, please explore the Zoom Help Center (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us) or this YouTube Channel (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3zWtXzGVCax2IafuATCk_Mru8YLwRVxG) for advice, or reach out to me!

Expectations during the Learning Circle:
Attached is an agenda that outlines what to expect throughout the event. If you have access to a printer, you may want to print this out to have in front of you during the meeting, but that is optional.

Please plan to be seated at your computer during the Learning Circle.

Below is a set of Ground Rules for the ways we invite you to be in the virtual space with other participants: https://www.ucar.edu/who-we-are/diversity-inclusion/community-resources/ground-rules-tools

Introducing ourselves:

By midnight X/XX, please reply to this email with a photo of yourself in your role in agriculture (or just a photo of yourself) along with the answers to the questions below. *I will share these with the group* before the event so we can all get to know each other a bit!

1) Who are you? (i.e. What is your name? Where are you from?)
2) What is your relationship to land? (i.e. What is your role in agriculture? How long have you been in that role? What drives you?)
3) What motivated you to join this Learning Circle?

Looking forward to getting to know you!

Facilitation Tips: Setting Ground Rules

Adopting a set of ground rules can help all participants feel comfortable in a Learning Circle or discussion group. One approach is to start with a blank whiteboard and shared screen and use a brainstorm process to elicit suggested guidelines from the group. Another option, which can save some time, is to start with a set of possible ground rules and invite the group how they might like to modify or add to the list.

The table below offers some overarching "norms" that are important to establish for a successful Learning Circle/group, and some options for the wording for a ground rule or guideline.

Please note: This table offers multiple ways that a group can express the norms that it wants to follow. Pick and choose from those that you think make the most sense for your group. Depending on the group there may be additional considerations that need to be addressed and/or different ways to word a particular guideline for your group. This list is not exhaustive – other ideas may emerge that are relevant to establishing and maintaining a safe, non-judgmental learning environment for your group.

Norm	Sample guideline language.
Respect	• We listen respectfully to each other. • We respect each view, opinion, and experience offered by any participant. • We assume a positive intent.
Responsibility	• We share responsibility to make this circle/group work. • We show up on time and we come prepared to participate – this includes advance reading or viewing and completing any individual work assigned from the previous session. • We speak for ourselves, not as a representative of a group.
Confidentiality	• What's said in "the circle" stays in "the circle." – or - • What's said here stays here. What's learned here leaves here.

Reciprocity & equity	• We give everybody the opportunity to speak without interruption, **except the facilitator** who may interrupt to keep the conversation on track. • We allow time for silence and for more reserved voices. • Each person has an opportunity to contribute an idea/speak to a topic before anyone can contribute a second idea. • We may choose to pass if we are not ready to speak on a topic. • When we are confused, we use clarifying questions to obtain better understanding.
Technology & distractions	• We can choose to use the chat feature to share resources and add to the discussion as a whole. • We refrain from using the chat feature for crosstalk and side discussions. • We keep our attention in the circle by closing other computer programs and silencing our phone and turning off apps and notifications. • We understand that at some point any of us may experience a farm/family situation that could interrupt our participation.

If you opt to develop the ground rules from scratch, it can be helpful to begin by having the facilitator suggest a guideline. Then solicit ideas from the group, adding five or six more guidelines to the list. If suggestions emerge that do not appear conducive to the learning environment, gently challenge those ideas using clarifying questions.

You can post the guidelines in a common space (such as a google folder) that everyone can access. You may want to set aside a couple of minutes at the beginning of every session to remind the group about the ground rules. Depending on how well the group is functioning and how many sessions your Learning Circle will have, you may want to check in midway through the series to see if the group wants to modify the ground rules.

Other examples of Ground Rules and Agreements include:

Working Agreements for Virtual Meetings - Farm Based Education (https://www.farmbasededucation.org/calendar?amp%3Bqid=)

Soul Fire Farm's Guidelines for Safer Space (https://www.soulfirefarm.org/about/safer-space/)

Ground Rules and Tools: Facilitating Production Discussions – UCANR (https://www.ucar.edu/who-we-are/diversity-inclusion/community-resources/ground-rules-tools)

Additional Facilitation Resources:

Delia Clark, Confluence (http://www.deliaclarkconfluence.com/facilitation)

Margaret Reil's guide to the Learning Circle Model (https://sites.google.com/site/onlinelearningcircles/Home/learning-circles-defined)

Ellen Rowe and Mary Peabody, UVM Extension, Strengthening Your Facilitation Skills

Leading Groups Online: A Guide: http://www.leadinggroupsonline.org/ebooks/Leading%20Groups%20Online.pdf

Tips for Hosting a Learning Circle: https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Tips-for-Hosting-a-Learning-Circle-UpdateFinal.pdf

Using Technology to Optimize Virtual Sessions: Tips for Facilitators & Participants

- Use a high-quality microphone if you have one.
- Have three to four staff play different roles: main facilitator, note taker, chat watcher, trouble-shooter, etc.
- Send instructions to participants ahead of time, or maybe host a pre-event run-through. Some tips to provide participants before Zoom meetings include:
- Join the meeting at least five minutes before start time to make sure you can.
- If possible, it's best to use a device that allows you to join through both video and audio (i.e. computer with webcam or smart phone).
- If you don't have a computer with webcam or smart phone, you can also call in, but your ability to participate will be more limited.
- If you have trouble with the video cutting out on your computer, you can call in by regular phone, then mute your audio and keep your video on in Zoom. That way you can watch and be seen, but you'll still be caught up to the conversation even when your video cuts out.
- It is best to use earphones and mute your microphone when you are not speaking. This keeps us all from hearing noises in your home and prevents echoing and audio feedback.
- There is a "raise your hand" function you can use to alert the speaker that you have something to say. The chat function also allows you to write down your questions or give input throughout the meeting. Occasionally the facilitator may ask you to write something into the chat.
- If you are using break-out rooms, assign a moderator for each to help participants get the most out of the experience.
- Manage your expectations for how much you will accomplish, noting that it will likely be less than you would in person.
- Use a poll to ask people to consent to use their photo if they sent one.
- Learn more at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-meetings.

Virtual Adaptations for Hands-On Experiences

Description: In-person farm tours are a great way to provide nuanced information about growing practices and their impacts in a farmer-friendly manner. Virtual platforms can be utilized to conduct pre-recorded footage of a farm tour with the farmer joining live to provide commentary over the footage, or by using a livestream service to provide participants a direct glimpse into the inner workings of a farm, its practices, and the impacts those practices have had on the land.

Benefits:
- Farm tours are especially helpful when sharing information about specific on-farm practices, as they allow growers an opportunity to ask each other questions and showcase specific examples of how they adapted the practice for their context crop, scale, and geographic context.
- Research shows that delivering content via a trusted messenger supports behavior change, and farmers tend to trust each other a great deal so having a fellow farmer share their practices with peers is a powerful tool for supporting innovative practice adoption.
- In-person farm tours sometimes require setting up additional bathrooms or safety procedures on site, adding amplification, arranging transportation, and other logistics.

Depending on the technological access of the farm and organizers, virtual farm tours can simplify the logistics of planning.

> **Virtual Engagement Resources from Others**
>
> Soul Fire Farm's BIPOC-Led How to Videos, Gardening Projects and Online Learning Resources:
> https://docs.google.com/document/d/18Wa3UJ3xHvMrsvRLy38qXyPsX5BWfj4NgVcgMolfZfA/edit
>
> Practical Farmers of Iowa: Virtual Field Days: How-to and Best Practices:
> https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-KFHR0Vk2elyoZf-JhavK-kmd9Vm12LX
>
> Wallace Center started a Virtual COVID-19 response group and listserv, taking a new approach to virtual engagement, check them out here:
> https://www.wallacecenter.org/ournews/wallace-center-launches-fsln-covid-19-response-group/

- Whether conducted via livestream or via pre-recorded footage, recorded farm tours can live on organizations' websites or YouTube channel, allowing more people to benefit from the content than would have been able to attend in person.
- Pre-recorded videos can be translated into multiple languages via closed captioning translation services.

Challenges:
- Weather and wind can pose challenges for audio quality. Special audio and video recording equipment, such as microphones with wind covers, can support organizers with quality control.
- Using amateur equipment such as a smart phone to record audio and video can result in high quality footage, but should be approached with some best practices in mind, such as reducing movement of the camera during recording, ensuring that the smartphone is in the landscape vs portrait orientation while recording, and supporting the farmer to have some talking points for the tour.
- Limited rural broadband access can make livestream tours challenging in some places.

Virtual Farm Tour Examples

Farm tours are one of the most valuable aspects of in-person Learning Circles, field days, and gatherings for women farmers and ranchers. There's no better trusted messenger than ones' peers. That's why it's so important to try to bring the farm to the people when you can't bring the people to the farm. This section offers a few formats for Virtual Farm Tours that our team and partners recommend, including some considerations for which one might be right for you, as well as recordings of each example format.

Organization visits a farm and uses cell phone to film the farmer, interviewing them about a specific topic while filming footage of their land. The team at American Farmland Trust employed this strategy in 2020 using an iPhone to record and iMovie to edit short stories from women farmers to include in Women for the Land Virtual Learning Circles. View these examples at:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6kH004Kij1KO6m6uQenZIY_lCOQdCH04
- Pros –
  - o Does not require advanced video or audio equipment, if a high-quality smart phone is already available from someone on the team.

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- Allows the farmer to answer a set of questions to keep them on topic for the event and draw out specific information the organizers hope to highlight for the participants.
- Allows the farmer to share their experience on the farm, and join the event live to answer questions of participants after viewing the video.
- Cons –
  - Access to video editing software is necessary to make the interview more polished and stitch together still images, music, and logos into the finished product.
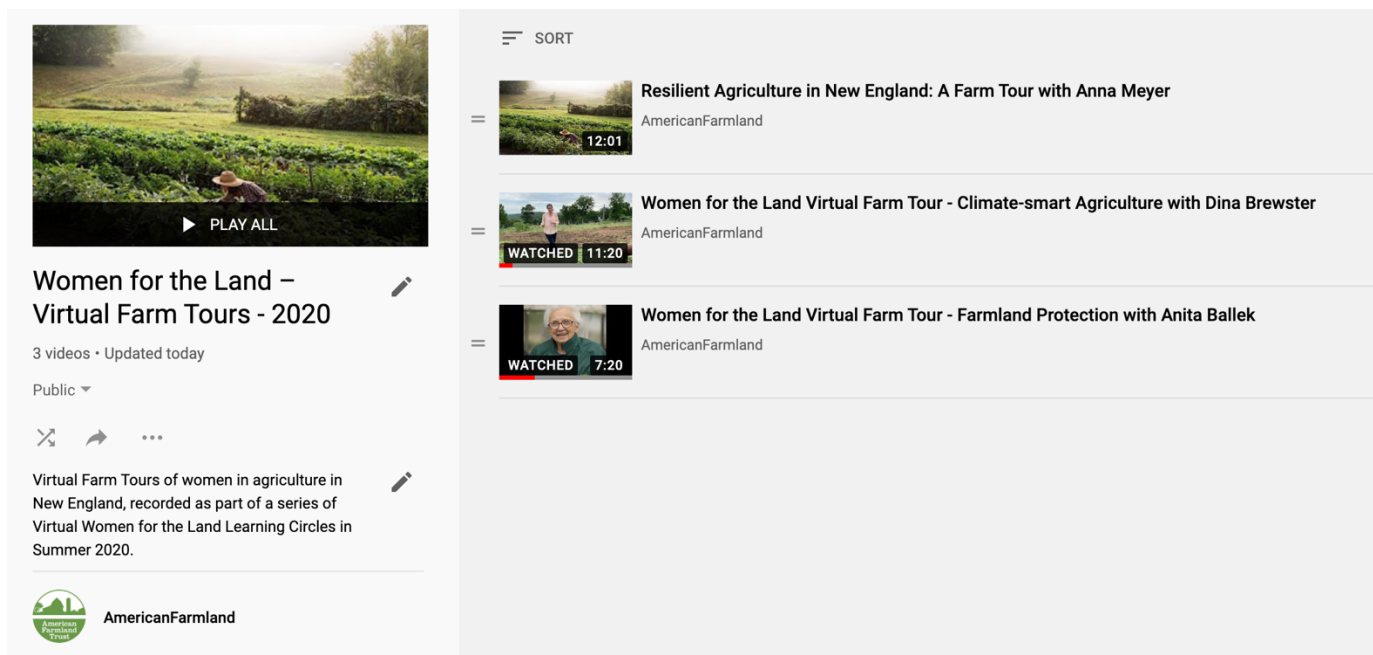
Farmer uses cell phone to record their own tour of their farm, including commentary that they can play during the Zoom call - https://www.chatsworthfarm.ca/virtual-farm-tours.html

- Pros –
  - Cheap to produce. Any farmer with a cell phone can record this.
  - Provides an intimate glimpse into the farmer's experience and perspective.
- Cons –
  - Can be choppy, distracting, and difficult to watch, if not filmed carefully and in the right phone orientation.
  - Doesn't allow you to see the farmer recording the video
  - Lots of background noise will be picked up in audio.

○ May require editing to cut out transitions between location to location.

Farmer uses drone to record footage of their farm silently and provides commentary live during Zoom call - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvqtInMJieU
- Pros –
  - Potentially improved video quality
  - Bird's eye and 360-degree views possible
- Cons –
  - Need to obtain a drone, get farmer consent, and/or support farmer in using drone to film, if they don't already have experience.
  - May not show close-up views of soil, root structures, or other ground-level features as well.

Organization hosts a facilitated livestream farm tour, filmed by someone other than the farmer giving the tour, and the facilitator curates questions from the audience to have the farmer answer live - https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=581732072463947
- Pros –
  - Allows relationship to be built between farmers and audience, via the facilitator taking questions from the viewers in chat box.
  - Video quality may be improved by having a third-party film the farmer giving the tour.
  - Curated questions from the facilitators.
- Cons –
  - Higher degree of equipment, staff capacity, and preparation of the farmer invested.

Virtual On-Farm Practices Demonstration

Hands-on demonstrations are an excellent tool to get more interaction from the audience, explain concepts and practices with a visual component, and, if done correctly, further emphasize the impact or severity of an idea. Pivoting to online discussions requires a slight adjustment in the delivery of demonstrations but ultimately is very similar to conducting them in person.

Tips for Conducting Online Demonstrations
- Practice the chosen demonstration in advance and online.

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- Ensure the video quality, sound, visual aids, and background are all conducive to communicating the intended message. White, tri-fold poster boards are excellent backgrounds.
- Consider a macro lens attachment for your camera.
- Think through how the demo is normally done in person and what adaptations need to be made for online. Hold small items close to the camera to take the place of passing around a circle.
- Consider how to describe different qualities of a sample, such as touch and smell, to paint a picture for you audience.
- Provide participants with a list of supplies to do an at home demo
- Keep in mind your video and sound limitations and adjust accordingly. Make sure the entire demo is visible and the audience can still hear the speaker.
- Demos do not need to be conducted live. They can be pre-recorded and played back during the online session. A best practice is to narrate live while the recording is playing due to often problematic audio playback.
- A series of photos can be implemented to show close up views of samples prior to a video.