Tips for doing the work of our union during a time of physical distancing

When we can't meet in person with members, co-workers and employers, we can still continue to do the work of our union. Using internet-based resources like GoToMeeting, WebEx, Skype, Zoom*, FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, WhatsApp video chat and traditional telephone conference calls, we can meet with members, plan with local executives or negotiating committees, update the membership and so on.

We're not all as familiar with these tools as we are with face-to-face meetings, so it is a good time to try learning some new skills. Here are some suggestions so you can have a positive experience, ensure that everyone who wants to gets a chance to speak and be productive.

Many platforms are now offering free accounts to help users communicate during a time of physical distancing.

How to make virtual meetings (of three or more people) more effective:

- Mute your phone or computer audio when you're not talking.
  - o If you cannot mute, be aware of the open mikes near you, especially on conference-call consoles, and avoid rustling papers, tapping pens or making other noises.
  - o If you are the host, ask at the beginning that people mute their microphones whenever they are not talking.
- Speaking into the mike on a set of ear buds may reduce the volume and sound quality, unless you move the mike closer to your mouth. It is best to use the microphone on your computer and speak loudly and clearly.
- Choose a method so that only one person speaks at a time:
  - o A. Create a speaker's list. Ask everyone to text a designated person when they want to go on the list, and don't speak until called upon.
    - ▪ A.2 For video conferences, participants could raise their hand to be put on the speaker's list or use the platform's chat function to send a message to the designated keeper of the speaker's list.
  - o B. For each discussion item, the chair or meeting host calls on each participant in turn to speak or pass. No one speaks until called upon, but they listen and take notes. Participants are always called in the same order.
- Have a Plan B. In case of technical difficulties, the meeting host should decide ahead of time how long to put up with the malfunction before ending the meeting AND when and how to resume. Many video conference services also offer a call-in line for anyone who is not able to do the video portion. This makes it more accessible for everyone.

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- E-mail the meeting agenda and related material to participants ahead of time. This way, if technical problems prevent some participants from seeing the materials you show using screen-sharing, or if participants can only join by phone, there is an alternative.
- Be patient with yourself and others. For many people, using virtual meeting platforms is a new thing and takes time to learn.
- If possible, video meetings should be kept to 45 minutes. During this time, many people are also juggling other responsibilities at home, which require attention.

Advice for using GoToMeeting successfully:

- Go to www.GoToMeeting.com and log in at the top right.
- It is not necessary to download any programs to use this software.
- Set up the meeting in the dashboard. Make sure to choose the right time and to give your meeting a name. You should choose 'One-time meeting.'
- Copy and paste the meeting information, including the link, into an email or a calendar invitation.
- Set your meeting up so that it is open 15 minutes before it starts. This will allow everyone to get comfortable with the various functions.
- Once you want to start the meeting, you can click on Start Meeting. A pop-up will appear on your screen and you should click on 'GoToOpener' for the program to launch.
- If desired, you can share your screen in the case of a PowerPoint presentation or sharing documents.
- As the host, you can also mute all other participants. Use this sparingly. It is best to ask participants to mute their own microphones.

Advice for using Zoom successfully:

*Recently, there have been a number of security and privacy breaches with Zoom, to the extent that many businesses, school boards and government bodies have banned its use. Accordingly, the USW IT Department does not suggest or support the use of Zoom. The following advice is given with the recognition that Zoom has become the platform of choice for millions of people across North America and the globe. Our union does not recommend its use, particularly for the exchange of any confidential information.

- Provide the participants with the meeting link and website address (www.zoom.us) a couple days prior to the meeting. They do not need to create an account in order to participate, but they might want to look at a recorded training session on how to use Zoom, found at the bottom of the web page, under "Support."
- Inform participants that the meeting can be accessed by computer or cell phone.

- o Older-model computers may not support the platform.
  - o When joining a meeting via computer, you will need a computer with a microphone.
  - o A webcam is recommended but not mandatory. Many recent laptop computers will have a tiny camera at the top of the screen.
  - o Headphones can be useful if there is background noise in the room where you will join the meeting.
- Prior to hosting your first Zoom meeting, watch some of Zoom's video tutorials to get an idea of the platform, the layout and functions, including how to sign in for your conference call. See https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials.
- It's also a good idea to run a test meeting with your family and friends to make sure you are comfortable.
- Join the meeting a few minutes before its official start and use the time to check your computer's mike and speakers.
  - o Invite participants to do the same in your meeting invitation. Ask them to join the meeting from a room or other location that is as free of background noise as possible.