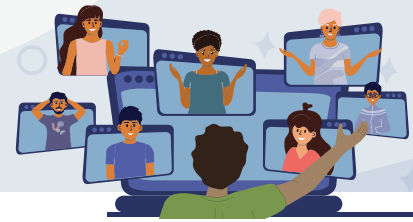


# *How to* Program Virtually

Creating a Community That  
Students Want to Belong to





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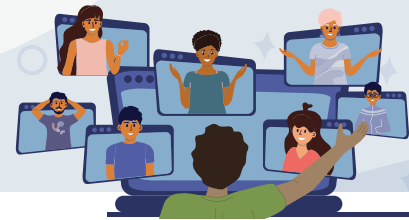
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## Messaging Apps

Messaging apps allow a wide variety of ways to stay connected and archive when your group was talking about what. Using apps offers the additional benefit of setting notifications to “on” so that when you send the group a message, it will not only appear in the app, but individual members can get notifications about it on their phones.

### Discord

Discord is a messaging platform that allows invite-only groups to arrange their messages in channels and also has private messaging, screen sharing and video conferencing options. Discord calls each group’s private meeting space a “server,” which can then be divided into channels for different topics or interests. Users can use asynchronous “text channels” to message each other, or “audio channels” for audio or video calls.

#### To Start a Discord Server:

1. Visit <https://discord.com/create> to download the app (you can also log in on the website) and set up a profile.
2. To create a server, click on the “+ add a server” button at the bottom of the server list.
3. Click the “create a server” button and invite users to join the channel (everyone you invite must set up an account to join your server).
4. To create channels, click on the “+” next to the icon for text or voice channels. A menu will pop up where you can name the channel, whether it will be text or audio, whether you want to make the channel private and who will be able to access it.
5. Once your server is up and running, set roles for each member by clicking on the members tab in the server settings menu and then clicking the “+” sign by any member who you would like to assign a particular role.

#### Using Discord

To start messaging with members, you can choose a text channel or audio channel in the menu on the left side of the screen (screen sharing is possible in a video chat, which is an option in audio channels). The audio channel is more like a hangout space, where people can pop in or out, but the content is not archived. For example, a staff member could use this option for office hours with a student group or student leaders. To send a text message, you click on the “chat box” in a particular text channel. Files can be attached by clicking on the “+” on the left side of the chat box. Only 2,000 characters per message are permitted.



## Messaging Apps *continued*

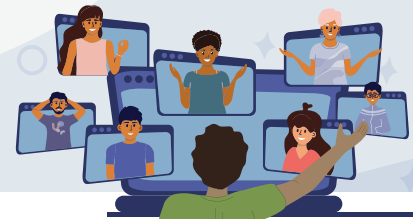
### Gather.Town

Gather.Town allows a user to create a digital gathering space that looks like an old-school video game. Users can walk their avatars across a shared space and engage with inserted options, like watching a video on a TV, and layer on video calls over the top of the interface. The free towns can hold up to 25 people, while the premium plan towns can hold up to 2,000. For example, you could set up a Gather.Town to host a student organization fair, where each group could upload an image and meet with students. A student organization might want to set up a Gather.Town for its monthly meeting.

If your user walks within 5 steps of another user, they'll be connected by audio and video. Other features include a chat function, integrating a call from an external video platform, setting up games like poker and Tetris and linking in audio from platforms like YouTube and Vimeo that users can watch on little TVs placed in your Gather.Town.

#### Here's How to Get Started with a Free Gather.Town:

1. Visit <https://gather.town/private> to enter a space name and choose a password.
2. Choose a template. If you choose the tab for "University," you can choose from options like a residence hall room, campus, classroom or a quad.
3. Share the link and password with anyone who you want to use the space.



## Community Service Projects

Many community service organizations have added virtual opportunities in order to tap into a volunteer base that wants more flexibility in scheduling or prefers to help from home. Whether connecting students to service learning opportunities that were created with distance in mind or improvising with community organizations to convert service that was previously done in-person, students can still find ways to continue their work in their communities. Consider the following:

**Identify a Variety of Ways to Satisfy Requirements for Academic Service Learning Requirements.** The Center for Community Based Learning at Humboldt State University (CA) brainstormed several ways that students could remain engaged with community organizations without doing service in person including:

- Completing a research project related to the organization
- Conducting informational interviews
- Devising a mock-continuity plan for public health-related reasons
- Recording video presentations
- Creating case studies or training manuals for use by students in the future.

**Focus on Community Service Opportunities Designed for Distant Interactions.** At American University (DC), the Center for Community Engagement and Service has opportunities for students that were designed for distance that include:

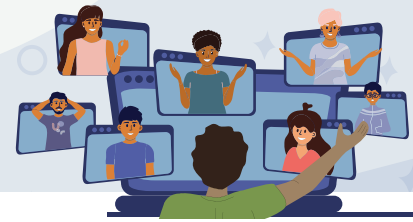
- Meal delivery and social media support for a women's shelter
- Texting intervention for a national crisis hotline
- Virtual reading clinics for local first- and second-graders
- Chatting by phone or video with immunocompromised kids
- Transcribing handwritten conference notes of U.S. Supreme Court Justices
- Grocery delivery services for seniors
- Helping Amnesty International's researchers review pictures, information and documents

### Transitioning Online to Keep Community Members Safe

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, students at Johns Hopkins University (MD) found creative ways to move formerly in-person community service to remote service.

- A student who normally tutored elementary school students helped her partner teacher move her lesson plans online and recorded videos of herself reading picture books to share with the class
- Working with a local organization, another student started making check-in/wellness calls to elderly people living on their own
- A student who volunteered at a local synagogue as a Hebrew teacher moved her lessons onto Zoom

**Source:** *The Johns Hopkins News-Letter*, 4/24/20



## Community Service Projects *continued*

**Work with Community Groups to Facilitate Interaction.** VolunteerHub.com advises that students who are utilizing distant service opportunities should still have the same opportunities for training, feedback and responsibility as those volunteering in-person. Check in with community groups new to virtual volunteering to ensure that online orientations are conducted, requirements and deadlines are clearly expressed, and organizations and volunteers will have a way to check in with one another.

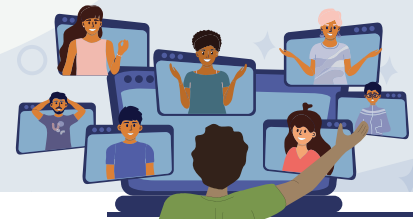
**Sources:** VolunteerHub blog on “Virtual Volunteering”; The Center for Community Based Learning, Humboldt State University

### There Are Apps for That...

Two apps/websites that allow students to find, track and share volunteer opportunities and hours are:

- [www.letserve.com](http://www.letserve.com)
- [www.volunteercrowd.com](http://www.volunteercrowd.com)





## Engaging Educational Programming

It's estimated that participants start to lose focus after about ten minutes on a particular educational topic. How can you keep your audience engaged while imparting knowledge in your educational programming?

### 1. Build in Interactive Components.

Every so often, have audience members take a poll or answer a reflection question in the chat feature.

### 2. Think about the Passive Nature of Video Clips and PowerPoint Presentations.

Jesse Blocher, assistant professor of finance at Vanderbilt University (TN), worried that his students weren't engaged when he asked them to passively watch a video. He started using the "Pages" feature in a program called **TopHat** to create interactive texts including graphics and comprehension questions. As he talks his students through the material, they take an active role by answering and posing questions.

### 3. Imagine the Presenter's Space is a Movie Set.

Trying to pay attention to a presenter with poor lighting and audio quality is an exercise in frustration. Do a dry run to test the audio and visual quality and lighting issues. During the presentation, appoint a "production assistant" to handle any technical issues and monitor the chat, so that questions and issues can be flagged for the presenter.

### 4. Outline Ground Rules for Participation.

Let participants know that they will have opportunities to interact, but that they need to stay audio-muted until those times so that everyone can hear. Utilize break-out rooms or channels so that students can discuss in groups of five or six. Decide whether you'd rather participants ask questions:

- In the chat feature
- By raising their virtual hands
- By chiming in when they feel like it

## Student Testimonials

At Northern Virginia Community College, student services started a program called Rise Up when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Students created short presentations about how they overcame challenges. These were then posted and shared with other students.

**Source:** *Inside Higher Education*, 9/11/20

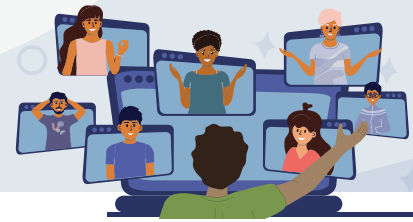
## There Are Apps for That...

**BlueJeans** ([www.bluejeans.com](http://www.bluejeans.com)) allows users to record or broadcast themselves giving a presentation.

The videoconferencing/presentation platform **Kahoot!** (<https://kahoot.com>) allows presenters to build in interactive elements like polling, quizzes, "pulse checks" and word clouds.

In addition to videoconferencing capabilities, **TopHat** (<https://tophat.com>) allows you to create interactive texts that work a lot like a blog page.

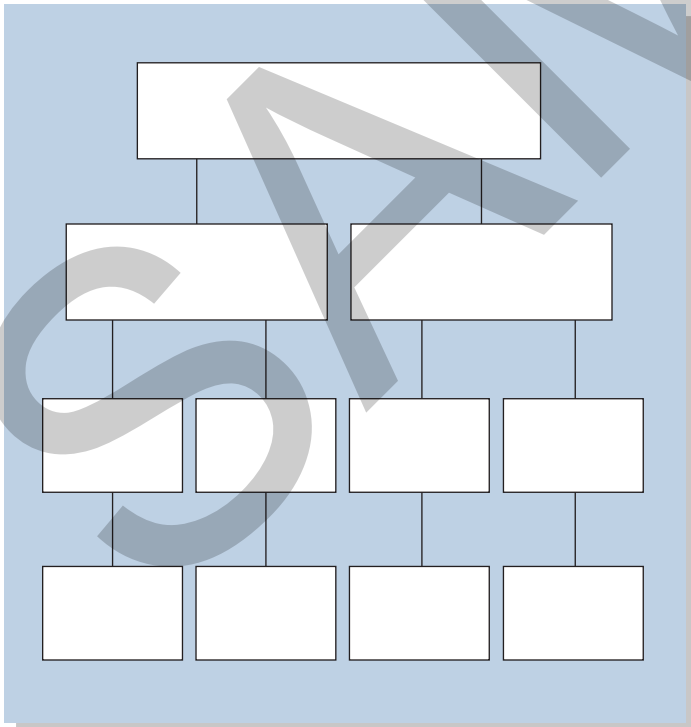
**Sources:** Stanford Graduate School of Business, 9/26/16; Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University, 4/29/20



## Graphic Organizers

Research suggests that when facilitators introduce graphic organizers, student learning improves. Graphic organizers allow students to process information in visual and verbal form. This might be particularly useful when you're teaching students about multi-step policies or procedures, like how to go about accessing funds for a student organization or submitting paperwork. It also provides a document students can revisit in the future. Here's how it works:

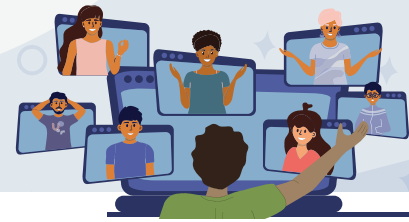
1. Present student leaders with a document with a basic graphic organizing shape, like a VENN diagram or the chart pictured below, before starting your training. (If students don't have a printer, they can draw the shape on their own. You can also have students download a shared file and update it on their own devices.)
2. At the start of the training, let the students know they should slot summaries of each step of the process into the organizer.
3. At the end of the training, ask participants to use what they've recorded to explain the process back to you.



### There's an App for That...

- **Padlet** allows users to post notes on a digital wall and is a nice way to engage students, whether with synchronous or asynchronous content. For example, a student organization might create a Padlet where members can post updates about plans or ideas that they'd like to discuss at their next meeting. Padlet has a whiteboard and collaborative note-taking features, among many other ways to engage: <https://padlet.com>
- **Jamboard** is Google's digital whiteboard application. You can insert images or text, and there's a fun disappearing laser feature that you can use to draw the eye to a particular area. During a meeting, a facilitator or note-taker could take minutes on Jamboard so everyone can access them during or after the meeting. <https://edu.google.com/products/jamboard>
- **Zoom** also has a whiteboard feature, which you can save at the end of the session and share with participants: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205677665-Sharing-a-whiteboard>
- The **Microsoft Whiteboard** app pairs with Microsoft Teams: <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/manage-whiteboard>





## Shared Social Media Spaces

You can increase interaction and a sense of community by using social media platforms to cultivate a space for students to talk with each other and you. But, it's important not to take a “let's try everything” approach when it comes to communication with students.

Respondents to Rutgers University New Brunswick's study of distance learners stated they were suffering from information overload as they tried to juggle using multiple platforms to communicate with various faculty, staff and other students. So, if you decide that a closed Facebook group will be the best way to keep in touch with your Resident Assistants or a Slack channel would be the best way to keep members of a student organization in touch, let the students know and stick to that platform.

At the University of New Hampshire (UNH), Resident Assistants realized that most of their residents preferred to use **Instagram**, so they encouraged students to follow their accounts. They then started making regular posts about programs and resources using a special hashtag for their hall.

At the start of the academic term, the UNH RAs made biographical videos and posted them to Instagram. One Hall Director hosted an **Instagram Live** so students could tour her apartment and ask her questions. Meanwhile, at Dartmouth College (NH), RAs used the app **Gather.town**, which offers a common room where each user has an avatar and can chat with others in the space. The RAs specifically chose this app because it afforded the opportunity for one-on-one conversations.

When Cuse Youth BLM started at Syracuse University (NY), members kept in touch with each other through a group chat. The group saw exponential growth, expanded to high school and students who attend other colleges, and now uses the app **GroupMe** (groupme.com) to internally communicate with its hundreds of members.

**Sources:** Medium.com, 8/20/20; CultOfPedagogy.com, 10/22/17; *The Dartmouth*, 9/30/20; *The Daily Orange*, 9/30/20; *The New Hampshire*, 10/2/20

### Student Success Coaching at MIT

Messaging apps aren't just for communication with students. At Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Division of Student Life launched a virtual coaching program where 500 coaches were assigned to 4,400 undergraduate students in groups of about twenty students each. Coaches, who were faculty and staff members, checked in with students once a week using Zoom, FaceTime, phone or email.

Once the program launched, the program added a **Slack channel** where coaches could connect with each other to discuss the problems their students were raising. One coach explained how helpful the Slack channel was in helping her find the appropriate resources for her students. “I had one student ask me about the career fair, and it was so great because there's a Slack channel for the MIT coaches ... and I was able to Slack [a coach] while I was on a Zoom call with the student” and immediately answer the student's question.

If the coaches were hearing about certain problems, like sleeping troubles, from multiple students, coaches would flag this on the Slack channel. Then, the program coordinators developed webinars on those subjects that coaches could share with their students.

**Source:** MIT News, 5/1/20



## Hosting a Virtual Fair

### Benefits of Virtual Fairs

By converting fairs into online events, you can avoid facilities headaches and eliminate travel expenses and geographic limitations, which might attract more employers and organizations to a job fair or service fair. CNBC listed the following advantages for students:

- Meeting with a wider range of companies/organizations, since geographic constraints are removed.
- Meeting with more than one or two representatives of the same company/organization.
- By knowing exactly which organizations/companies they will meet with, students can research ahead and be more prepared for meetings or interviews.
- Some students might find in-person fairs overwhelming. Virtual fairs afford more private interactions and allow students to target their true interests, rather than just wandering around in a bustling room and hoping to find something that piques their interests.

For fairs focused on careers or service opportunities, CNBC reported that virtual fairs offer benefits for external groups as well:

- Eliminate time and resources spent on travel
- The removal of geographic constraints means that they can meet with a broader range of institutions and students
- For employment fairs, virtual, private meeting rooms allow for organizations and companies to conduct interviews on the spot, rather than just reviewing resumes

Hayden Kornblut, head of university relations at Kraft Heinz, explained to CNBC that in addition to information sessions on campuses, virtual events will be an integral part of intern recruitment, explaining, “We’re focused on getting out in front of underrepresented students and campuses that we traditionally haven’t targeted before.”

### Student Organization Fair at the University of Texas at Austin

The University of Texas at Austin took a divide and conquer approach with its virtual student organization fair. Instead of having everyone meet at once, student organizations were divided into four categories hosted over four days. Students could meet with each group by joining an organization’s webpage on the University’s learning management system, then could go onto a Zoom forum hosted by that organization. The groups were divided as follows:

- **Day 1:** Academic, educational, graduate, pre-professional
- **Day 2:** Art, culture, faith and religion, ideology and politics, international, special interest
- **Day 3:** Service and philanthropy, social, sororities and fraternities, student governance
- **Day 4:** Recreational

**Source:** <https://bit.ly/310z3mh>



## Hosting a Virtual Fair *continued*

### Logistical Considerations

Though you won't need to reserve a large meeting room and lots of tables for a virtual event, there are a number of logistical preparations to consider.

- Will students need to register in advance or can they pop in as they please? If you do want students to register, how will they do so?
- What registration system will you use for employers/organizations? If you aren't using software with a built-in registration system, **Google Forms** has some easy-to-build tools that might work well for this purpose.
- What software/program will you use to facilitate interactions? For a smaller event, it might make sense to use the breakout rooms or channels built into your preferred video conferencing program. For larger events, each company/organization might need its own stream, requiring students to click a new link for each party with whom they hope to interact.
- How will you track participation?

### Cross-Campus Career Fair Collaboration

St. Ambrose University (IA), Augustana College (IL), Western Illinois University Quad Cities (IL), Black Hawk College (IL) and Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (IA) combined forces to host a virtual career fair with 50 different employers. Each employer had a virtual booth, with the ability to hold interviews and one-on-one sessions.

Source: OurQuadCities.com, 9/28/20

### Campus Spotlight: University of Wisconsin-Madison

In 2020, the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Morgridge Center for Public Service and SuccessWorks at the College of Letters and Science moved its Public Service Fair online for a four-hour event that utilized the videoconferencing platform **Handshake**. Over 50 non-profit organizations and government entities attended.

Students did have to do a bit of leg-work before the event. First, they had to create an account on Handshake, which they could access with their campus digital ID. Students were required to sign up in advance for 10- to 15-minute one-on-one interactions with the groups in which they were interested. Thus, students needed to do a bit of research in advance to determine with which organizations they wanted to meet.



## Hosting a Virtual Fair *continued*

### Student Development Opportunities

With in-person fairs, students often show up at the event and dive right in. One benefit of a virtual fair is that students can be shepherded into conversations that will prepare them for their interactions with different companies/organizations.

For example, first-year students might not know what questions to ask of student organizations. Before sending students to breakout rooms, student life professionals can provide an overview of the different types of organizations on campus (academic, social, cultural, etc.) and then arm students with some important questions, like:

- How much of a time commitment does membership entail?
- Are there requirements for membership?
- Are there any costs or fees that I'd need to plan for?
- What steps do I need to take to join the organization?
- What sorts of skills and experiences does the organization help its members develop?

Once students have registered for a fair that involves external companies or organizations, student affairs professionals could follow up via email or text message and invite students to use campus services like the career development center.

At Trinity College (CT), the Center for Student Success and Career Development ramped up online options for services that students could only previously receive in person. Its director, Joe Catrino, explained, "The Center for Student Success and Career Development helps students navigate transitions, find internships, do resume reviews, and improve study skills and time management... We want students to know we are here and that a lot of the programs that students were used to on campus are still available [virtually]."

**Sources:** CNBC, 8/1/20; Morgridge Center for Public Service, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 9/10/20; Health Resource Center at the National Youth Transitions Center, George Washington University Graduate School of Education & Human Development; Trinity College News, 9/28/20

### There Are Apps for That...

- **Handshake** has been called the LinkedIn for college students and has capability to host virtual job fairs: [www.joinhandshake.com](http://www.joinhandshake.com)
- **Brazen** was developed to help higher education institutions host virtual events. Colleges and universities can use Brazen for career fairs, admissions events, alumni networking or orientation sessions: [www.brazen.com](http://www.brazen.com)