

Learning in the time of Covid-19

Engaging with members not online – teleconferencing *Ageing Better in Camden, June 2020*

Teleconferencing has been an important and useful tool to engage with members who are not online. While one-to-one befriending calls are excellent, it's also great for people to be able to get together in groups, especially when other members may still be getting together online, via Zoom or other platforms.

Here we have created a guide to getting started with teleconferencing groups, with input from our Outreach Manager, who has many years' experience running such groups over the phone.

Getting started

Which teleconferencing service to use?

Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) are using two different phone companies for teleconferencing. There are many more to choose from. These were recommended to us and we thought during Covid –19 it was helpful to have a couple of named companies for you to look into.

WhyPay

The good thing about this company is it is 'free' to all the users *except* their normal phone charges apply. The host has to pay a small amount (about £1 a call). We trialled this by sending out six letters with instructions on how to join, and four people joined the call. One member didn't join because she doesn't make calls out on her mobile because of cost and she doesn't have a landline. So the big disadvantage of this system is that people on a low income might not be able to join.

The Phone Co-op and Community Network

There are two good things about this system, and this is the system we are referencing throughout this report. First all the costs are borne by the host so anyone can join. Second, the host can dial in all participants, so they don't need to manage instructions. They can call all the participants and connect them to the room. The downside is it is more expensive, 12p per caller per minute.

By using a system where you can dial people in yourself you can;

- Ensure everyone arrives on time
- Use moderator buttons to;
 - Control volume
 - Connect someone
 - Cut someone off
 - Do a roll call of people in the call (to check who has made it in).

When you sign up for a teleconferencing system, the company will send you full instructions about how to do the things listed above.

Setting up your group

- Invite around 6 people. Some will drop out. We have found that having around 4-5 people in the group (including the facilitator) works well
- Decide whether your group will be general or based around a shared interest – i.e. a film club, music club etc.
- Put together a very clear description of the activity and send it out in the post
- Phone each member to discuss the idea of joining a teleconference
- Check they know where # key is on the phone (they'll need this to enter the call)
- Make sure to ask them to sit in a quiet place with the radio and TV off

- Tell them you'll phone twice to try and bring them in, after that you'll need to get on with the teleconference
- Offer to give everyone a quick reminder call before the meeting. We've found that this is quite important, as trying to contact members who aren't there just before the teleconference can lead to complications.

Starting the call

- Practice dialling in and setting up the conference a couple of times before your first session - it is useful to know how it works and what could go wrong before running your first conference
- Make sure you have the dial-in commands in front of you, it's a lot to remember
- When bringing people into the call –
 - Introduce them to everyone who is already in 'the room'
 - Say you're going to get the next person, and their name
- Once everyone is in the call, acknowledge that it's a strange way to get together
- Ask everyone to say their names before they speak – just to remind everyone who we are
- Be clear and transparent about what you're there to do

Running the group

- Start with introducing what you're there to do – i.e. "Today we're here to discuss the film we all watched last week."
- Do a round table so that each person gets the chance to give their first impressions
 - "Phil, could you tell us, just in a couple of minutes, your initial thoughts/ first impressions about the film"
 - If someone starts to speak in lots of depth – you could say "that's really interesting Amna, let's come back to that"
- Prepare other questions and round table them
 - This gives an opportunity for everyone to join
- If people start talking about something unrelated you could say –
 - "That sounds really interesting, maybe we could talk about that another time?"

- “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that, maybe we could chat about it another time outside of this group?”
- If people haven’t watched the film – that’s ok! Say:
 - “Don’t worry. Maybe we can hear from Hector and Rosanne and then you can tell us at the end if you think it’s something you might enjoy.”

Tips

- Keep a list of names and make a mark when someone speaks – keep an eye on who hasn’t managed to speak and invite them to contribute
- Don’t rely on people moderating themselves
- Go around the table to hear from everyone
- If someone leaps in to interrupt someone else – interrupt them by saying something like “Oh, sorry Jo, we’re just hearing from Maria at the moment, and we’ll hear from you next.”
- This way, other people can see you’re managing the group and making it fair

Don’t say

“You’re talking too much”

Do say

“Pavel was just trying to say something at the same time there, can we just hear from him?”

“Oh, Karim, Leanne was about to say something there - could we just hear from her?”

Ending the call

Make the ending formal with the facilitator, remind people when you will all meet next. People may feel uncomfortable staying in the meeting without the facilitator holding the space.

Behaviour that challenges continually

If people continually interrupt, aren’t happy to wait or to listen to other people, have a discussion with them outside of the group about whether

teleconferencing is for them. Perhaps suggest some alternatives when you have this conversation. Do this without judging or shaming.

Guest speakers

It can be fun to arrange a speaker to speak with the group on the topic that they're interested in. Here's some tips on setting that up;

- Arrange the speaker in advance
- Speaker speaks for about 10 minutes
- Roundtable Q&A – people can ask them questions
- Free discussion or another round table

Choosing something to watch/discuss

- In your first meeting with the whole group, do a round table to ask people talk about what they like to watch
- Come to the group with 2-3 options that you have checked out – make sure to note down what channel and what time they are on TV
- Have a vote by roundtable – everyone chooses their top 1 and 2
- Allow room for negotiation - i.e. if the vote is split, someone can change their mind. It's not about the facilitator imposing their choice

Other sessions

- Talk about other things you've been watching
- Not every session has to be focussed on specific film or programme – it could just be a general catch up
- Guest speakers to talk about topics of interest



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