Beyond cameras and microphones
A guide for preparing your organisation for delivering online content during COVID-19

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Introduction

Providing online services can be a great way to maintain existing clients, students, and staff, but keeping you and your stakeholders safe presents real but manageable challenges.

Unlike a conference or studio session, video conferencing allows people to interact in unusual environments that would often be the subject of societal boundaries. Most organisations would consider a one-to-one tutoring session in a child's bedroom inappropriate, but video conferencing tests these boundaries, often outside the control of the organisation.

Video conferencing may also provide an unparalleled window into a family's life. This may reveal situations and issues which are otherwise concealed from external view. Organisations should be aware that online events may reveal:
- Child or elder abuse
- Domestic violence
- Illegal and/or inappropriate drug and alcohol use

While it is important to ensure that organisations and students are protected, staff must also be supported and protected. Organisations should ensure that staff have access to support mechanisms in place to consider, evaluate and discuss issues and episodes that can occur during on-line events. This can be a mixture of existing management/supervisor support and external support networks.

It is recommended that all organisations conducting online events have a code of conduct which is disseminated and enforced for all such events. The following points should be considered for incorporation into your code of conduct.

Online session management – all sessions should:
- Be initiated as "log-in" sessions where each participant enters the session in their time and under their own control. The initiation of a direct video conference between staff and students should be avoided, and where vulnerable people are concerned, prohibited.
- Be scheduled and a record of the session time, detail, content description and attendance maintained

Dress standards – all participants in the event must be attired in a manner similar to what would be worn if attending the event in person.

Where doubt is raised, the convenor of the video conference should:
- terminate the video feed from the attendee
- advise the attendee to correct their attire
- make a note and report the issue

Recording – recording of participants during an event should only be undertaken with the specific consent of all parties. Organisations should have a process for gaining consent from either the participant or the legal guardian.

Consideration must also be given to protecting organisational copyright and intellectual property rights.

Backgrounds – should be plain and free of potentially offending content.

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Protection of vulnerable persons – organisations should ensure that the standards applied in the normal place of business can be extended to the online event. This should include policy and procedure for:
- Ensuring supervision of staff where low staff – student ratios exist
- Random monitoring of online sessions, both live and post event
- Reporting of suspected breaches including both suspected staff and student misconduct
- Managing recordings to ensure their appropriate use or destruction.

Policy should be established to provide a methodology for reporting concerns observed during an online event. These should cover situations including:
- Suspected/observed child abuse
- Suspected/observed domestic violence (including elder abuse)
- Suspected/observed drug and alcohol use, particularly for vulnerable persons
- Threats, intimidation, or inappropriate behaviours toward the convenor

All convenors should be made aware that vulnerable persons may use an online event as a method for seeking assistance or intervention. Organisations policies should include procedure for contacting authorities for suspected, urgent, or emergency assistance.

Reporting Officer – organisations should provide staff and stakeholders with a point of contact to raise or discuss potential code of conduct breaches. Contact options should be provided in line with accessibility requirements.

Mandated Reporter – organisations need to consider if they or their staff fall under the definition of being a mandated reporter under s356 of the *Children and Young People Act 2008* (ACT but similar in other jurisdictions). Where this isn't applicable, procedures should be in place to report suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities.

Workplace health and safety – unlike holding a session in a controlled environment, the organisation is rarely able to control the physical space used by the participant. Organisations should provide activity specific guidelines to advise participants to have adequate space, light, equipment as applicable to the activity.

Where the convenor observes an unsafe practice, they should immediately provide correction advice. If the situation is not remedied, the convenor should consider terminating the connection with the participant until the situation can be resolved.

Where a participant requires urgent medical treatment during an online session, the convenor may be required to contact emergency services.

Risk management – all organisations should continue to implement their normal risk management protocols and review the risk management plan for online activities.

Useful resources:
- *COVID-19 Resilient Resource Series,* contact ineed@resilientresults.com.au for resources
- *Keeping Children and Young People Safe*, ACT Government, (https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/keeping-children-and-young-people-safe)
- *Video Conferencing Etiquette and Guidelines*, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court
- *Online Delivery of Dance Class and Tutorials*, Ausdance Victoria, www.ausdancevic.org.au
  (under COVID Resources)