

Think Babies Virtual Events

Tips for Engaging Families



The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of families with infants and toddlers and changed the ways in which advocacy happens. As the context of the pandemic shifts and changes, families are continuing to navigate a complex web of economic and health concerns while also attempting to support their children's healthy development. While the pandemic has been a time of unparalleled stress for families with young children, it is also a time when families are demonstrating incredible resiliency and creativity to meet the challenges of the moment. Even though stretched beyond normal limits, many families are eager for opportunities to let policymakers know what they need for their babies to thrive. The tips below are intended to complement the existing recommendations for engaging families found throughout the [Think Babies™ Events Toolkit](#).

Tips for engaging families in virtual events

- Lead time is important. Begin your outreach for virtual events far enough in advance to give ample time for recruitment and preparation.
- Build your capacity to provide interpretation/translation, including for information in your outreach to families.
- As always, relationships are key. This can be a particularly challenging time to build new connections with families. Think through who you or your partners have existing relationships with and build on for engagement in your event.
- Every family has a different story. Do your best to engage more than one family to paint the broadest picture possible.
- Ask questions to get a sense of what families are experiencing during this crisis and the story they have to tell, related to your event goals. For example, if you are focusing on child care, ask families about their child care situation before the pandemic and their fears for when they need to return to work. If you are asking about paid leave, inquire how paid leave was or would have been helpful to them during this time.
- Take the time to prepare families before your event so that they know exactly how things will go logistically, what the goals of your event are, and what their role is.
- Expect to play the part of tech support to families participating in your event. If you are planning a live event or meeting, schedule practice time to ensure that all technology is working, and families feel comfortable with it.

- If families will be on video, help them prepare ahead of time. While families are invited to these events because of the stories they bring, and not the state of their home, many of us would feel self-conscious about visitors in our homes right now. Help them think about a place where the lighting is good, and they feel comfortable about the background. Consider sharing with families the option to use a Zoom background if they feel uncomfortable having their home visible.
- Be flexible and family friendly. Ask families what they will need to be able to participate and do your best to meet those needs. There is no need for families to find a quiet place to speak with you. Welcome interruptions and acknowledge that it is okay if they occur during events. Families are juggling a lot right now and policymakers seeing that firsthand is authentic and powerful. Circumstances may change for families and they need to know that while their commitment to the event is important, you understand that the needs of their family take priority.
- Recognize that this is a stressful time and that not all families will have the capacity to engage in every type of activity right now. Consider offering multiple ways that require varying degrees of effort. For example, if a family doesn't feel they have the capacity engage in an event directly as a speaker or meeting participant, perhaps they could engage with your event on social media or share a quote that you use in support of your event.
- Plan to follow up with families personally after your event to debrief and thank them. At in person events, this can happen naturally at the end of event, but the end of virtual events can feel abrupt. Share any metrics from the event and how it helped you make progress toward your goals, so they know the impact of their participation. Include information about additional opportunities and support for advocacy engagement in your follow up.