Virtual networking event ideas and best practices

Virtual networking events provide an incredible opportunity to easily engage your local HBA members and build meaningful connections, without adding significant burden to you, our leaders. In an effort to make these virtual events even easier, please find below a list of virtual networking event suggestions and best practices. Hold them as one-offs or create a series for your local members to engage more regularly. Be sure to follow the guidance on the previous page, but don't forget to have some fun!

Virtual networking event ideas

- **Book club**: pick an HBA mission or professional development-related book, a few discussion topics to think about while reading and have an interactive discussion!
- **Happy Hour**: create opportunities for intimate networking groups (10-12 capacity max) to interact with each other and an HBA leader from your area about whatever topics they like. Could be over take-out or cocktails at home!
- **Coffee chat**: intimate morning networking opportunities to connect individuals before the workday begins.
- **Topic-based networking**: determine a topic relevant to your membership and frame the networking discussion around it.

Bonus ideas:

- Share a related video or article with attendees prior to better inform or guide the discussion.
- Have a facilitator who can guide the discussion and help to answer questions. Remember to keep networking events as interactive as possible!
- **Networking game night**: create a series of icebreakers to help your attendees get to know each other.
- **Speed networking**: a bit more complex, but using the breakout room feature, move attendees to small breakout rooms and rotate them throughout the session so they get to meet multiple people.
- **Sweatworking**: fitness activities, such as walking, running, yoga, mindful meditation, etc.

Best Practices:

- Create an environment of inclusion and a safe space for sharing. Remind attendees when the event begins that HBA is a supportive space where we can learn from one another. Invite people to bring their lived experiences and authentic selves to the conversation. Thank your attendees at the end for their thoughtful participation!
- Always be prepared with some drafted questions or conversation starters for attendees to keep the conversation going!
- Use breakout rooms: regardless of the type of virtual networking event you're doing, large groups can be hard to manage online. Take advantage of a platform like Zoom with a breakout room feature to divide a large group into smaller groups that can interact more intimately.
- Encourage participants to share their information or LinkedIn pages in the chat in lieu of business cards we would normally exchange in person. This is a great way to keep conversations going even after the event has ended.

Have other virtual networking event ideas or best practices? Please share them with us.