

Hosting a Virtual Memorial: Tips for 2020 Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Remembrances

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NATIONAL
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As the United States is still struggling with the Coronavirus pandemic and working to avoid large gatherings, communities must re-consider how to honor Homeless Persons' Memorial Day (HPMD). [Care for the Homeless](#) in New York City, in partnership with several organizations, began virtual memorials this summer to honor people without homes who died due to COVID-19. This brief provides lessons from their experience organizing virtual memorials as well as other tips to help communities develop impactful Homeless Persons' Memorial Remembrances.

Event Planning

- **Determine which platform to use**
 - Consider the audience and what resources the community can access.
 - If your community members have access to smart phones, a virtual memorial on Zoom may be a great fit. You could use Zoom meetings if you want everyone to see each other, or Zoom webinars if you want to limit who is visible to the attendees. Zoom can also be used for video or audio, if people only have the ability to call in.
 - If smart phones are a limiting factor, consider how to hold a socially distant memorial that can be streamed online to encourage a hybrid event. Churches or auditoriums may have enough space to ensure attendees are seated 6 feet apart, with directions on the floor to facilitate one-way walking patterns and limit contact. For communities in warmer climates, outdoor memorials in parks could provide a more communal feel for individuals who have been isolated for a while.
- **Consider what timing makes sense for your community**
 - Many communities have historically held their events after 5pm to allow people who work to attend; however, during the pandemic, childcare options and night events might be more challenging.
 - Homeless Persons' Memorial Day (December 21) is also the Monday of a holiday week, when many people may be taking time off to spend with family and friends.
- **Send personal invitations to those who you want to attend**
 - Share the event information widely with homeless service providers, consumer groups, and community allies.
 - If the event will be on Zoom or streamed on Facebook, ask community providers to stream the event in their communal spaces (i.e. the dayroom at the shelter, or common room in a supportive housing building).
 - Consider creating a Facebook Event to crowd source the audience. Some meeting platforms, like Zoom, also allow for streaming live to Facebook.

- **Collecting the names can be challenging – start early**
 - Gathering names of those who passed away can be a difficult task during normal times, yet the COVID pandemic will likely make this even more trying.
 - Begin reaching out to service providers, community members, and/or the Medical Examiner's Office at least a month in advance, remembering that people are very busy during these times and you may have to reach out several times before getting a response.
 - As you collect names, you could create a video or GIF with photographs and names to promote your memorial and highlight those your community has lost.

Event Logistics

- **Develop a planning team to support the event**
 - The planning team should include at least two people to coordinate the event logistics, gather names, invite speakers, compile videos, and develop program management for the event.
 - For the event itself, you should have at least one person moderating the event, one person facilitating the space (i.e. letting people into the room, ensuring people are muted, and sharing their screen), and another person supporting participants' technology needs.
- **Consider how to set up the event to engage participants**
 - Encourage people to use the chat box function to share their experiences with those who we have lost or their feelings related to this grief.
 - Focusing the event on eulogies and centering those we have lost has been important for Care for the Homeless in making these virtual memorials as impactful as in-person remembrances.
 - It is likely the list of names will not be complete. Consider leaving a moment of silence for all those whose names were not able to be collected or unmute attendees for people to share the names of others who have passed.

Other Ways to Celebrate

- Crowd source photographs of those we have lost to create a collage or scrolling video that can be shared on social media, websites, or outdoor screens. You could also include messages submitted about the people who have passed or a name scroll which includes all the names of those who have passed.
- Create an outdoor memorial (i.e. a wood sign with all the names written down or ribbons written with the names that can be tied around trees) and encourage your community to visit the memorial and share their experience on social media.
- Share graphics from the National HCH Council's Homeless Person's Memorial Toolkit to increase awareness of HPMD and the friends we have lost. The toolkit can be found at: <https://nhchc.org/consumers/events/homeless-persons-memorial-day/hpmd-2020-social-media-toolkit/>

Sample Virtual Memorial Agenda (from Care For the Homeless)

- **Welcome**
 - Share the importance of remembering those without homes
- **Faith and community leaders offer support (i.e. reflection, poem, prayer, word offering)**
- **Name reading**
 - This is usually done by consumers but this year they have realized it is hard to ensure that the Consumer Advisory Board members have access to a device to connect to Zoom to read the names live. For HPMD, they are considering recording videos of the name reading and sharing them when it gets to that portion of the memorial.
- **Sharing stories (broader social service sector engagement in the memorial)**
 - Invite specific people to share eulogies for people they knew that have passed away this year.
 - Ask people to be mindful of the tone of the event, which is intended to be a memorial service rather than a political event.
- **Music (or visuals, poetry)**
 - Artistic interludes are great for setting the right tone and acknowledging those we lost in different ways.
 - Pre-recorded music seems to go smoother and seem more professional.
 - Ensure that the music and other presentations are respectful and set the appropriate tone before the event, if possible.