Setup Tips for Home Videoconferencing

- First, check the *How To* information in the *Bryan on Scouting* article posted on March 16, 2020. Read through both the Guidelines and the Tips – good advice on both proper procedures and technical matters. https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2020/03/16/how-to-conduct-a-board-of-review-through-videoconferencing/

- Second, the rules for conducting boards with this technology can be found in section 8.0.1.6 of the Guide to Advancement. Have a look. While some of the guidelines were established for use of dedicated videoconferencing facilities, they can still be followed when using individually based systems on mobile devices. Regardless of the system used, a cardinal rule is that each of the participants should be visible – there should be no unseen voices.

- Also, you should remember that *Eagle* boards of review conducted in this way must be *approved in advance* by the council. That's not necessary for other ranks.

- And be aware that this technology may also be used for boards of review under disputed circumstances and appeal boards. Scoutmaster conferences can also be conducted this way, so long as a parent or another adult Scouter can observe the conversation.

- Youth protection rules apply, including the need to include a BSA registered female adult among the participants when the Scout is a girl.

- Of course, the type of hardware and software to be used will need to be decided well in advance to provide sufficient features and reliability, and of course to assure full compatibility between all locations. The meeting organizer needs to confirm that this has been accomplished in advance, and testing of any system that is new to the others is a must. And with free conferencing software readily available, getting everyone set up at home with compatible systems is much easier than with systems available in the past.

- Well before the meeting, give any participants who are new to this technology a chance to take an informal trial run with it. A few goofs in that setting are no problem; during a board of review they can be very distracting and possibly embarrassing.

- Each person should select a place where the background is pleasant looking but not distracting. A bright window behind a participant is especially bad, forcing the person's face into a dark silhouette. Lighting is especially important too. A soft light like a table lamp off screen slightly to one side can help a lot. Faces and backgrounds should be lighted to about the same brightness.

- Using the camera and microphone in a laptop computer is a simple way to get the picture and sound of a participant. The framing of the picture is easy to set by adjusting the tilt of the screen. If anyone is using a smartphone to join in, they'll need to find a way to hold it at the correct angle for the camera without a lot of motion – propping it up securely can help.

- A major problem can develop with sound if both the microphone and speakers of a laptop, tablet or phone are used together. Some very irritating sounds can result from feedback, but that is easily avoided. Use headphones, or better yet earbuds, to listen to the others in the conversation. This will mute the speakers to avoid feedback, but it will also provide clearer sound so everyone can be understood.

- Another way to avoid potential sound problems is to eliminate sources of noise that may suddenly pop up. Remove (or mute) all phones, clocks, pets and small children from the room, and close the door if possible. TV and radio noise and household conversations can also be ruled out in this way.

- Be certain that all participants have the items they need to do their job. Remember that you can't pass documents around a table; everyone will need to have their own copy. An alternative approach for some of this, such as project photos, is to have digital images ready to provide for the entire group to see on screen. This is far better than trying to show pages or photos with a camera, but it requires preparation and familiarity with the image controls.

- The minimum number required for a board of review is three, but It may be wise to plan on four. If one is unable to join in, the required minimum will still be met.

- Because the candidate at a board of review is present for only a portion of the entire meeting, a plan for bringing the Scout in and excusing him or her will be necessary. If the Scout is comfortable with the process of joining a meeting already in progress, this can readily be done by texting a cue to join after initial discussion, exit from the group on cue, and then rejoin on a text cue after the follow-up discussion and vote.

- With multiple copies of letters of reference needed, electronic distribution to all board members may become a necessity. While this is usually discouraged (see GTA 9.0.1.7), it's doubtful that distributing paper copies to all board members well in advance would be practical, especially under adverse conditions. In any event, all copies (paper or electronic) *except* the original must be destroyed immediately after the meeting by each participant. The confidentiality of these reference letters must be guaranteed in all cases.

- Another thing to avoid is recording of a board of review. That is *prohibited* in GTA 8.0.1.6.

- Finally, share your experiences with this process with others who are just beginning.

— Be Prepared. —