



## Guest Blog: YouthBank Online, A Snapshot

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### YouthBank Online, A Snapshot (by Alice Zhang)

The meeting starts in five minutes, and I don't feel ready. For the past five weeks, I worked as a facilitator in YBO but to be honest, I still don't feel confident when preparing for the meetings. My co-facilitator said that it would be fine. We could just improvise. I agree out loud, but still, write out a plan detailing the time frames and what we'd be doing. I also make a list of icebreakers--just in case. For the first couple of minutes, it's just the two of us. We catch up on what we're going to do for our birthdays, and I tell her that her hair looked amazing--she already knew that though.

"Do you want to lead this first part or should I?" I ask her.

"Whatever works for you," she answers.

Just like that, we decided on our roles for the day. I would lead the first part of the meeting, and she would lead the second part. I was nervous about leading the second part and grateful she didn't mind taking that part of the meeting. Once the meeting started, we continued on we continue talking about what we had been doing and what we were looking forward to in the fall. When the opportunity to work with YBO, I agreed because it was a chance for me to gain experience, meet new people, and I could participate while I was in high school. Just before the other group members logged in, we talked about my (lack) of ability to take care of succulents. My friend sent me one for my birthday, and I was new to the idea of taking care of a succulent. My co-facilitator did not miss an opportunity to tease me about how naive and inexperienced I was in caring for the plant. As other group members started to appear, they overheard our conversation. I remember my co-facilitator saying as people appeared: "succulents also need sunlight, you know."

The meeting starts out really casual. It ended up being all girls, as both of our groups were all female. We introduce ourselves and do an icebreaker. I don't remember the exact activity, but I'm sure it was something like: where would you go if you could go anywhere? The icebreaker takes about 15 minutes, which is typical as we get carried away a lot. Every question always leads to a conversation rather than an answer to the question. It was fun, though, like doing facetime with friends.

We move on to the work we need to do and the discussion flows so freely I feel nervous about how well things are going. My co-facilitator and I lead as if we had been working together for years--strange because we have never co-led a meeting before. I had the agenda pulled up to keep track of the time and make sure we were on track, but I stopped looking at it after the first few minutes. With a co-facilitator I had time to think, respond, and pay attention to what needed to come next. Working alongside another facilitator, I could both facilitate and participate. My co-facilitator was so natural at leading. I always felt like I was rambling and so flustered if I didn't know exactly what we were doing next, but she never seemed to get flustered. It was like she had done this 100x over. I settled into the flow of the meeting and focused on enjoying the conversation.

We get to a difficult part of the discussion. I think it was about the models of decision-making, which were really confusing for a lot of people, including me. I'm asking questions, but it doesn't seem like our group is following. My co-facilitator then steps in and tries to reword my question, which seems to clear things up. I notice then that one of our group members has been quiet and ask her what she's thinking, acknowledging the fact that this is a really difficult topic to think about. Thankfully, that seems to get the conversation rolling again.

Just like that, we get through all items on the agenda right on time. There are around five minutes left, but no one seems to want to leave the call. My co-facilitator and I wrap up, telling everyone that they did a great job today. Then we get off track as per usual as one of our group members asks me about my birthday and we begin talking about birthday plans during COVID. That soon turns into a whole 30-minute discussion on hair. Another group member and I have very very straight hair that's impossible to curl. My co-facilitator has really tight curls, but we're all very jealous of how she could pull off any style regardless. We get really off task and talk about how she could be a beauty vlogger. We even start sending links to Patreon chats: buymeacoffee, paypal, kofi--isn't it strange how productive we were even as we were completely off task?





**About the Author:** Alice is currently a first-year student at the UMN-Twin Cities and was one of the lead facilitators this past

summer for Youthprise's YouthBank Online. Alice is currently planning on majoring in computer science and hopes to one day help develop technology for anything from education to neuroscience. She's still exploring her options! When she is not focused on the school and the future, Alice enjoys reading, ice skating, watching kdramas, and bothering her cat.

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