

Summaries from Area 83 Round Table Discussions

on

SAFELY RETURNING TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS

NOTE: This is a summary of discussions that have transpired over two round table meetings hosted by Area 83. The information in these summaries should not be viewed as directive coming from Area 83 nor supersede recommendations from medical professionals. Rather, these are considerations that might be helpful to aid in handling our meeting routines as groups start to open their bricks and mortar meeting spaces. Any item underlined represents a link to government health resources on Covid-19.

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Summaries from Area 83 Round Table Discussions on

Returning to In-Person Meetings

For our in-person meetings we are expected to find ways to mitigate risks for our members that align with public health advice and are respectful of attendees, the facility and the communities in which they occur.

Personal prevention practices (such as handwashing, staying home when sick, maintaining 6 feet of distance, and wearing a cloth face covering) and **environmental prevention practices** (such as cleaning and disinfection) are important ways to prevent the virus's spread. This summary of the Area 83 Round table discussions has been augmented with Public Health and Provincial best practices.

MITIGATING SPREAD OF COVID-19

1. Separating people from each other and limiting access to shared surfaces through physical distancing and physical barriers.
2. individuals to consistently and properly follow personal protective practices (e.g., hand hygiene, wearing of non-medical masks (NMM) or cloth face coverings).

COMMUNICATE IN-PERSON MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Share/Post meeting requirements in advance to potential attendees

(do this by phone, text, email or on Intergroup or District website):

- information on the expected behaviours
 - Ask members to screen for symptoms and stay home if ill
 - physical distancing and hand hygiene
 - whether the use of non-medical masks (NMM) or cloth face coverings is required
 - self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 after the meeting and isolating if appropriate.

Ensure that strict exclusion policies are in place and provide alternatives to in-person meetings if:

- attendees are symptomatic, even if symptoms are mild
- attendees have been advised by the public health authority to quarantine (self-isolate) due to exposure.
- Post non-stigmatizing, culturally appropriate, and accessible signage to identify symptoms of COVID-19 with clear instructions for what to do if members are experiencing symptoms. (see self-assessment tool to determine if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19).

Maximum Occupancy: Determine the maximum number of attendees allowed in the meeting venue at any one time to maintain physical distancing (this may be dictated by the facility).

To calculate capacity of a meeting space is one person per 2 square metres, or 4 square metres of floor space.

Post signage in multiple locations reinforcing the above expectations. Make sure signage is accessible (easy to read) to all members.

CONTACT TRACING

The province strongly encourages, and your facility may require that a group collects contact information for those attending all in-person meetings.

Attendance logs

These should be maintained by a designated group contact for 2-3 weeks and then destroyed. Minimize the number of people who will be touching the attendance log or pen used to sign in.

Two approaches:

1. Have at least 2-4 people waiting outside the door to inform and request contact information-
2. Have a printed copy of the group list, with the meeting date recorded. Check off the members on this list that are present. Any attendees not on the list can be added by hand. Create a separate document for each meeting held in-person.

Provide the attendance recorder with a group conscience pre-approved script

For Example: *this is a requirement of the local health unit to attend this meeting. Your information will be maintained by our Group's secretary and only provided to the local Health Unit upon their request.*

Mode of Communication:

- Have a group email list so that information about covid-19 and possible active cases can get sent quickly. Alternatively, have a phone tree if you don't have an email list
- Identify a group member to act as contact person whose information would be distributed to meeting attendees as a point-of-contact for any person(s) who reports having contracted the Covid-19 virus

Homegroups need to communicate the importance of these attendance logs and how they can facilitate follow-up by local public health authorities if a case was present at the meeting. If attendees refuse to share personal information, a group needs to determine in advance whether these members will be refused entry.

CLEANING THE MEETING SPACE

[Click here](#) for link to Public Health's recommendations for cleaning Public Spaces during Covid-19
Respect facilities guidelines around cleanliness / cleaning procedures or policies

Before the meeting:

- Assess whether facility is clean for meeting to take place, if not have spiritual sanitizers clean
- Instead of shaking hands, a greeter can welcome attendee while putting a dollop of hand sanitizer in their hand.

After the meeting:

- Make sure any garbage generated in the meeting is taken out of the facility.

- All touch-surfaces must be cleaned including chairs, tables, podium and all touch-points in all rooms including kitchen and washroom(s).
- have sanitization products ready and available (bucket and rags, wipes and disinfectant spray and gloves, the latter if necessary)

Two approaches:

1. Ask everyone to put their own chair back and clean up after themselves
2. Designate spiritual sanitizers to clean up after the meeting

EXPECTATIONS FOR PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

All round table participants were unanimous in their support that non-medical masks must be worn during indoor meetings held indoors. (Important to indicate this requirement at the door)

Two approaches:

1. Groups will provide masks for those without
2. Groups will not provide masks for those without

Other considerations

Making sure speaker can be heard:

- Groups can have a clear Face Shields as PPE, for people who are speaking to prevent muffling or to help those who rely on lip reading.
or
- ensure that members are AT LEAST 2 meters away from speaker
- Hand sanitizer should be stationed in various places in the meeting (i.e., entrance, podium)

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- Traffic coordination of people entering meeting, ensuring social distancing principles are practiced
- Signage about social distancing expectations
 - There are many printable signs on government of Canada and government of Ontario website
- Include a reminder in the greeter blurb about social distancing
 - Greeters greet with hand sanitizer, and do not shake hands, but greet with a nod / blink and reminder about social distancing.
- Set up of the meeting should have chairs spaced **2 meters apart**

COVID-19 IN YOUR MEETING SPACE

What to do if attendee(s) of your meeting develop covid-related symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19?

- The ill attendee(s) should contact the designated group contact immediately
- The ill attendee(s) should share with the Health Department the contact details for the Group's Contact.

- Possible Secretary's Announcement: *Should the Health Unit notify us of a positive test, our Secretary will notify all attendees based on the contact tracing list. Our Secretary will keep the members informed of all communication from the Health Unit.*
- Anticipate that the Department of Health will call group contact and ask for list of members who were in attendance at the meeting in question.
- The Group Liaison to the facility should contact the facility regarding the possible positive exposure in the meeting space.
- Group Contact should call members who attended meeting in question and notify them that an individual at the meeting has become ill; contact can also let these members know the Health Department might be calling.

7TH TRADITION

In-person meetings during Covid-19 will have new expenses to cover cleaning supplies and PPE if supplied by the group.

Two approaches:

- Offer touchless options for making contributions:
Examples: etransfer and pay pal options or a square app for physically tapping of debit card.
- Accept Cash: place a basket at the door, no passing the basket in the meeting

CHIPS, ANNIVERSARIES, BIRTHDAYS

While these traditions have great importance in our meetings, modifications may be required to maintain social distancing.

- Keep celebrations simple
- Do not overcrowd the meeting space; no standing
- Medallions/Chips could be put on a table and move away – and sponsee/newcomer could pick up chip
- Sponsor could give the medallion or pin
- Sanitize hands just prior to giving out the medallion or chip
- Individual packaging of chips or medallions
- No physical birthday/anniversary cards– use electronic boards – such as kudoboard.com

COFFEE/ SNACK / AND RELATED GARBAGE

Round table discussions did not come to a single conclusion on how to handle gastronomic gratuities

Consider discontinuing food and beverage service at the meeting

Institute Bring your Own Beverage policy; ensure that all garbage is removed from the facility

Either, by

- Individuals being responsible for removing their own garbage
- Group responsible for collecting and removing garbage

Cigarette butts should be carefully extinguished and removed from premises

LITERATURE

Create newcomer packages that are stored, clean and handed out when needed

Literature rack:

Two Approaches

- Do not set up literature table
 - instead have signage for AA.org or local Intergroup website for access to pamphlets online.
 - Allow AA literature like Big Books, 12 and 12 to be sold, but not on display.
- Have a literature table
 - Supervised by group members wearing gloves and masks
 - Have supply of sanitizer at the table
 - Request that items not be picked up unless purchasing
 - Clear plastic sheet can be put over the literature and if someone wants to inquire about any of the literature it can be viewed wearing gloves or after sanitizing hands.

Literature used in the meeting:

- Bring your own, unless it is a newcomer
- Read Big Book or 12 and 12 from electronic devices from AA.org

MEETING ROUTINES THAT ARE CONSIDERED RISKY AT THIS TIME

Kitchen services (coffee and snacks)

Hugs

Holding Hands

Shaking hands

Passing any items that will be touched by multiple people (anniversary card, readings, literature, basket)

Any paper that will be touched (i.e., readings) should be in protective sleeves that can be disinfected

Literature displays

USEFUL RESOURCES ON BEST PRACTICES FOR GATHERINGS DURING COVID-19

- Federal Government: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html#fn3>
- Provincial Government: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread>
- CDC considerations for gatherings <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>

Some Members Want to Meet in Person, Some Are Not Able to Meet in Person

Hybrid Meetings: Considerations with Suggested Approaches

This document includes meeting procedures for Hybrid meeting assuming WIFI is not an issue.

If WIFI is not available, see section on data sticks under **OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES**.

When we eventually can start meeting in person, there will be reasons why some members will not be able to attend the in-person component of the meeting:

- Health Concerns
- Accessibility issues
- Physically Unable to leave home
- Attendance limitations of facility

There are two ways to address the above limitations:

1. **Parallel meetings:** two separate meetings, happening at the same time- one online meeting and one in-person meeting, that have nothing to do with each other.
2. **Hybrid meeting:** one meeting that includes some attending in person and other members participating in the meeting from remote locations via online platform like Zoom.

PARALLEL MEETINGS

Advantage: it is the simplest solution to address those who cannot attend the in-person meetings. We continue as we have, limitless attendance to online meetings, and the necessary limitations to the in-person meetings.

Disadvantage: If someone shows up to an in-person meeting, and for some reason cannot be admitted (health reasons, and/or will not comply with the requirements for attendance [see safety guidelines from Breakout room 1]), they may be disappointed when directed to the online meeting to find that the same folks attending the in-person meeting are not there.

Eventually, the group will start to feel as though they are two entities and may result in a division of the online vs in-person attendees.

HYBRID MEETINGS

Why Bother with Hybrid meetings?

Tradition I: Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends on AA unity. Making the effort to include group members who cannot attend in-person meetings is a very noble effort to keeping a group unified. A lack of coordination between the needs of all group members will undoubtedly result in Group disharmony.

From our literature:

The moment Twelfth Step work forms a group, a discovery is made—that most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. Realization dawns on each member that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the Fellowship. He learns that the clamor of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group.

It becomes plain that the group must survive, or the individual will not.

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Examples of Hybrid meeting: District 08 Topeka Kansas 1100 Group: Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 PM Eastern
aatopeka.org Discussion format.

- There were about 15 people socially distanced in a room
- There was a Chairperson in the physical In-person meeting
- The Chair, using their cell phone was dialed into the Zoom meeting
- Meeting opened in normal fashion, (could point camera at the chair speaking or point it out to the members in the room).
- After the discussion topic was presented, the chair of the meeting walked around the room and let each member share on a discussion topic.
- The Chair had a cell phone mounted on a tripod. Some were videoed while they were sharing, others who did not want to be videoed the camera was pointed at the floor when they were sharing.
- The phone (with built-in camera and mic) was about 3-4 feet away from the speaker, and for most, the sound was adequate for those attending online.
- There was a Host in the Zoom meeting who allowed people into the meeting and made sure everyone was muted while talking in the in-person meeting was taking place
- When zoom attendees shared, the online connection for the in-person meeting was muted to eliminate feedback.

Is it worth the trouble?

Some might say *Keep It Simple*. Is it really worth the trouble to have a meeting that might be full of glitches just to maintain the online component of the meeting? Or would it just be better to have two separate (parallel) meetings that each run smoothly? With some practice, much like out intro to Zoom meetings, the hybrid meetings initially may be full of glitches, but will soon be running smooth.

Advantage of Hybrid format:

- + All members of the group have ability to stay connected to the whole group
- + If there is a second wave in the pandemic that requires in-person meetings to be temporarily suspended, the group is flexible and can continue to have meetings online with a meeting code and password that everyone knows.

Area Assembly: Hybrid format: The delegate from Area 51 shared that many members from Spanish groups could not participate online (limitation of technology or translation). Majority of Area attendees met online, and the Spanish members met in one place with a translator. They watched the Assembly on one computer and were fully engaged in the process, asking questions at the Assembly via their interpreter who had the computer.

Experience shared on hybrid meetings: Be sure to include those online equally with those who are meeting in person. It was shared that sometimes when attending as an online participant to a hybrid meeting, those online don't feel like they are part of the meeting.

Good coordination between zoom portion, and in-person meeting.

Be sure, especially in business meetings and/or discussion meetings that those online are included in the discussion and able to participate freely. That may require a dedicated person in the in-person meeting to look after the folks online, looking for raised hands and watching the chat for issues or problems raised in addition to the in-person chair/facilitator

Equal Participation: Consider alternating between in-person share and online person share.

Good idea to have at least 1 person, maybe 2 online facilitating the online component (aka a zoom tech and an online chair).

Anonymity: have an announcement, or let people know as they are coming into the meeting that this is a hybrid meeting and advise people at the In-Person meeting where they can sit to be out of view of the camera, if that is a concern. Also, give people the option to be on camera, or point camera at their feet if they do not want to be captured on video. For those online, they should be advised and may not want to have their video turned on.

IMPORTANT: Zoom Host should disable the option to record the meeting.

TECHNICAL SET UP FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEETINGS:

- **Simplest set up (small groups, small space):** tablet, phone or laptop pointed at whoever is sharing and pass the device around. When online participants are speaking, put microphone on mute.
- **Simplest set up (small groups, big space):** If the sound coming from the device cannot be heard by those at the In-person meeting, it may be necessary to introduce a Bluetooth speaker to project the online participants better. Set up for this method is outlined below:

2 smartphones and Bluetooth speaker:

With a mobile device, if the Bluetooth speaker is connected it will also try to use the mic on the Bluetooth speaker to pick up the sound from the in-person meeting. This results in very poor sound quality for those online.

To get around this, using 2 smartphones-

1. Set up one smartphone horizontally, facing the in-person members, so online members can have a sense of the group. Join the Zoom meeting.
 - a. Video should be on and functioning.
 - b. Audio output should be connected to the Bluetooth speaker.
 - c. Audio input should be disabled.
 2. Join the Zoom meeting on the smartphone.
 - a. Video should be on and functioning.
 - b. Audio output should be turned off.
 - c. Audio input should be on and functioning.
 3. It is recommended that the sharing alternates between online members and in-person members. Hand raises can be used in both locations.
 4. There should be two chairs, that are in touch with each other - one online, one in person, to manage sharing. The primary chair is ONLINE.
 5. Before an in-person share begins, the smartphone should be taken and placed in front of the person who will share, so that they are speaking into the phone and their face is visible on the phone camera. The smartphone that is connected to the Bluetooth speaker should then be muted, so the in-person sharing is not echoed on the Bluetooth speaker.
 6. Before an online share begins, the roaming smartphone should be muted, and the smartphone connected to the bluetooth speaker should be unmuted.
- **Laptop and Bluetooth speaker:** It may be possible on a laptop to go to the setting panel and select the Bluetooth speaker for sound output and make sure that the laptop's microphone is connected.

➤ **MULTIPLE DISCUSSION ROOMS in-person coordinated with multiple Zoom breakout rooms:**

Hybrid format when the in-person meeting breaks off into separate discussion rooms.

More complex, but it can be achieved.

For Example: 3 discussion possibilities at a closed meeting:

- Big Book
- Steps
- Newcomer

One person in each of the in-person discussions rooms will have to be online and make the zoom host aware which room they are attending.

The Zoom host will assign all online participants to one of the 3 breakout rooms.

The in-person zoom contact will also be assigned to one of the breakout rooms.

Using a cell phone, or a laptop, as above, point the device at whomever is sharing, and when it is time for online participants to share, mute the microphone on the device at the in-person meeting.

➤ **Hybrid SPEAKER MEETING set up:**

Laptop at a podium, and when someone is reading or speaking, they stand in front of the laptop. If the speaker is online, then the laptop can be turned around and face the those at the in-person meeting. *Be sure to have a part of the room not included in the camera view for those who do not want to be seen online.*

MINIMALLY, A HYBRID MEETING WILL REQUIRE

In-person members: Reliable participants in the In-person location to open the meeting and ensure that safety precautions are being followed (see suggested guidelines from the Breakout Rooms on Safety for In-Person meetings)

In-Person Zoomer: One person in the In-Person meeting will provide the computer/cell phone to sign on to zoom (data charges may apply) and give those Online access to the in-person meeting.

Zoom Host: this will be someone attending the meeting remotely and will let online participants out of the waiting room and into the zoom meeting.

Zoom Tech: depending on the size of the meeting, it might be helpful to have a zoom tech, who can assist the Zoom host in the necessities of online meetings.

Their responsibilities can include welcoming folks as they arrive, ensuring the anonymity of online participants (first name, last initial), bounce out any disrupters.

Informed Group Conscience: be aware that those who want the in-person meetings to resume may not be attending the zoom meetings; including business meetings. Make sure when deciding how to move forward you are in touch with all group members and that it comes from a place of an informed group conscience.

Acceptance:

We will have to get our heads around the fact that our meetings have changed forever. It is doubtful that our meetings will ever return to what they were prior to Covid-19. Accepting that this is the case and move ahead and see this as a new experience full of opportunity going forward. Keep it simple, accept that it may not be as free flowing at the beginning, and know that someone is getting something out this program and your meeting. One way to look at it, if a group can adopt a hybrid approach, it is twice as likely to be found by a newcomer, then if it offers access to its meeting in only one format.

Alternatives to Zoom

Conference Calls

For those who are not comfortable doing the video (or don't have the capability) then a conference call might be an alternative.

Check out the online link

<https://www.freeconferencecall.com/global/ca>

With Freeconferencecall.com you can talk as much as you like, for as long as you want. Conference call participants only pay standard local rates, if any.

HOW TO MAKE A 3-WAY CALL

1. **Call** the first participant
 2. Put them on hold
 3. Click on the '+' icon
 4. **Call** the second participant
 5. Click on the **merge** icon
- Repeat the same process to add the other

Mobile Phone on Speaker

call a person in the meeting and leave the phone on speaker during the meeting. If multiple people are trying to connect to the meeting, the In-person member can do 3-way calling to connect 2 additional members (see below for instructions on 3-way calls).

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

Organizing a Hybrid AA Meeting: https://aanorthdakota.org/nodak52aadocs/oth_Hybrid_AA_Meetings.pdf

Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings - COVID-19:

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>

Information on data stick to create a WIFI hotspot for your meeting:

Data demands for a 1-hour zoom meeting: Depending on the video quality, it can use up approx. 2-3 GB of data. Lower video quality, you could aim for < 1 GB.

Where can we find data sticks that would offer a monthly data plan to cover the WIFI needs of a group?

Unlocked data sticks can be found on Amazon.ca for roughly \$100 or from Telus or Rogers that will range around \$200 for the stick.

You'll have to get a data-only plan on top of that (usually around \$50-\$70/month).

Alternatively, if someone has a decent data plan (8GB or 10GB) with their phone, they could create a hotspot for their laptop to use to stream the meeting. If the meeting is indoors or close to a facility, it's always best to use the local building WIFI (which is probably on a secure network). Even with an unsecure public network, they could still stream the meeting, since traffic over the meeting (Zoom) is encrypted, but the laptop / device will still be open to attack.