



AREA 51 REOPENING SUGGESTIONS

August 2020

Version 1.0

Note: This document is a compilation of the experience, strength and hope of AA members from the US and Canada with regard to conducting meetings that are safe and effective, keeping in mind our Traditions and the need to comply with state and local ordinances. Some of these ideas stemmed from an Area 51 workshop and a group conscience that developed as a result.

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REOPENING MEETINGS

This document is designed to help AA groups of Area 51 facilitate group conscience conversations about reopening meetings. These are **suggestions** that have been compiled from the experience, strength and hope of other Areas pertaining to reopening meetings during COVID-19.

This is in no way telling you what your group must do. The actions are not required, but we hope you give all suggestions careful consideration. Each group is autonomous and can decide for itself how best to meet the needs of its members. Hopefully some of these suggestions will help groups have focused discussion and develop an informed group conscience.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Communicating In-Person Meeting Expectations
- Contact Tracing
- Expectations for Personal Protective Equipment
- Social Distancing
- 7th Tradition
- Chips, Anniversaries, Birthdays
- Coffee/Snack/Garbage
- Literature

When some members want to meet in person and some are not able to meet in person, groups may choose to use either parallel meetings (separate online and in person meetings) or hybrid meetings (combined online and in person meetings).

GSO AND AREA CONTACTS

As your groups develop their own informed conscience, please consider sending them in to GSO to Jeff W. at groupservices@aa.org

Area 51 would also like to hear from you. Please reach out to Area 51 Panel 69 Delegate at ncdelegatepanel69@gmail.com

RETURNING TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS

COMMUNICATE IN-PERSON MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Share/Post meeting requirements in advance to potential attendees by phone, text, email or on Intergroup or District website.

Examples of requirements to discuss and determine are:

- expected behaviors,
- asking members to screen for symptoms and stay home if ill,
- physical distancing,
- hand hygiene,
- whether wearing a mask is required,
- self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 after the meeting and isolating if appropriate

CONTACT TRACING

Your group and/or your facility may require that a group collects contact information for those attending all in-person meetings.

A suggestion to discuss is Attendance logs:

These could be maintained by a designated group contact for 4-8 weeks and then destroyed.

Suggestions:

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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Provide the attendance recorder with a group conscience pre-approved script. Consider indicating that if a person becomes infected and is asked for contact information, to state that they were at a spiritual meeting or community meeting-use generic terms instead of stating AA meeting.

For Example: "Your information will be maintained by our Group's secretary and only provided to the local Health Unit upon their request. If asked about contacts after a positive diagnosis is confirmed, it is OK to say "I attended some spiritual meetings" or "community meetings" to protect anonymity. "

Once decided, 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.

Suggestion from Area 48—shared by GSO as an option to consider:

Provide slips of paper and have attendees write first name/email or phone contact information on them, being sure to sanitize pens or provide enough for each to use a clean pen. The slips (or list if that is created) goes in a sealed envelope with the meeting date on it and kept somewhere safe. Consider the money drop box for your 7th tradition where a trusted servant would have access to the list if needed for contact tracing. After 8 weeks, the list is shredded. This process continues at every meeting of your homegroup until contact tracing is no longer needed as a safety protocol.

CLEANING THE MEETING SPACE

Find out 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 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).

Suggestions:

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

EXPECTATIONS FOR PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Determine if your group will require that non-medical masks must be worn during indoor and/or outdoor meetings (Important to indicate this requirement at the door)

Suggestion: Groups will provide masks for those without.

Other considerations

Making sure speaker can be heard:

- Groups can have a clear Face Shield as PPE, for people who are speaking to prevent muffling or to help those who rely on lip reading.
- Ensure that members are at least 6 feet 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.
- 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 out. Tape X's on the floor 6 feet apart.

COVID-19 IN YOUR MEETING SPACE

What to do if attendee(s) of your meeting develop COVID-19 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.

Suggestions:

- Offer touchless options for making contributions: Examples: Venmo (mobile payment service) and PayPal® 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.

- 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.
- Sanitize hands just prior to giving out the medallion or chip.
- Individual packaging of chips or medallions.

COFFEE/ SNACK / AND RELATED GARBAGE

- Consider discontinuing food and beverage service at the meeting.
- Institute “Bring your Own Beverage” policy; ensure that all garbage is removed from the facility.

LITERATURE

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

Literature rack:

Suggestions:

- 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:

- Consider a BYOB policy - “Bring Your Own Book”
- 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

www.cdc.gov

www.nc.gov/covid19

www.aa.org/pages/en_US/update-on-COVID-19-coronavirus

www.aanorthcarolina.org/corona-virus-updates/

ALTERNATIVES TO VIRTUAL MEETINGS

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

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

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), 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.

Example of Hybrid meeting:

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 our 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.

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.

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.