Virtual Meeting Basics

Contents
(list below is linked to appropriate page in document)

Virtual Meetings and the NA Service System—June 2023

The Fellowship approved with consensus Motion 4 at the 2023 World Service Conference: "To acknowledge that an NA meeting that meets regularly in person or virtually can choose to be an NA group if they meet the criteria described in *The Group Booklet*, including the six points for an NA group, and are consistent with NA philosophy as expressed in our Traditions."

Local service bodies are encouraged to recognize and embrace virtual groups as part of the NA service system. WSC 2023 also agreed to focus efforts in the upcoming cycle on virtual service resources, including virtual service meetings, participation by virtual groups and areas in the service system, and virtual workshops and trainings.

Quick Start Guide

Virtual Meeting Basics

1. **Gain support from other NA members**
   "By working together for our common welfare, we achieve the true spirit of anonymity." Basic Text, Tradition Twelve

2. **Choose a meeting platform**
   Consider cost, accessibility, ease of use, and the features if offers.

3. **Decide on a day, time, and meeting format**
   Groups use a variety of formats to enhance the atmosphere of recovery in their meetings.

4. **List the meeting information**
   Include all the information needed to access the meeting, and consider where to list it. To be included in World Services list of online meetings (na.org/virtualmeetings), fill out this form.

5. **What service positions are needed?**
   Virtual meetings may benefit from additional service positions.

6. **Ensure the meeting settings are secure**
   Careful attention to this can prevent meeting disruptions.

7. **Set up options for the Seventh Tradition**
   Virtual meetings are free to practice the principle of self-support.

8. **Decide how to provide literature and keytags**
   Virtual meetings are encouraged to consider the Fellowship's guidance when deciding how to make literature available.

9. **Will attendance cards be signed?**
   Meetings may choose to provide some form of attendance verification for members who request it.

10. **Ensure there is an atmosphere of recovery**
    "An atmosphere of recovery in our groups is one of our most valued assets, and we must guard it carefully…" Basic Text, Tradition Two

11. **Are newcomers being welcomed and finding sponsors?**
    New members may need some extra help to get connected and start building relationships in NA.

12. **Is the meeting accessible to members with additional needs?**
    "… every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis." Basic Text, Tradition Three.

SECTION ONE – Getting Started

Introduction

This piece of service material contains guidance on a range of topics related to setting up and administering virtual recovery meetings of Narcotics Anonymous. This pamphlet uses the term "virtual meetings" to mean any NA meeting that is not held in person. This includes meetings that meet on the internet and via phones. Virtual meetings can be offered by NA groups or service bodies, and may also occur informally among friends. For geographically isolated members, those who may have physical difficulties, or those who do not speak the dominant language of the community in which they reside, virtual meetings may be the only viable option for recovery. Many members have also found that virtual meetings enable them to connect with other addicts and NA communities that they would otherwise not be able to do.

Virtual meetings have been in existence for many years in NA. Before the creation of the internet, meetings took place over the phone and through the mail. Online platforms have expanded the availability of virtual meetings and allowed for a structure more closely resembling in-person meetings, but the basic function of providing meetings to addicts remains the same. *The Group Booklet* is a useful source of guidance for organizing virtual meetings as many of the suggestions in the booklet are relevant to all NA meetings regardless of where or how they take place.

This pamphlet provides suggestions for best practices in virtual meetings based on the experience of NA members. These may not all apply to every type of virtual meeting platform, and not every NA community has equal access to ways to host virtual meetings. Members are encouraged to consider factors such as the local cost of phone calls and internet data, and access to high speed internet, when deciding how best to organize virtual meetings. Careful attention to the experience in this pamphlet can help to overcome many of the most common challenges.

Choosing a meeting platform

There are many options for platforms to host a virtual meeting, just as there are many options for venues for in-person meetings. It is advisable to discuss the choice of platform as a group, rather than have an individual make the decision. It may also be a good idea to attend other virtual meetings before making a choice so as to gain experience of how the various platforms function.

There are several factors to consider when choosing a meeting platform:

- ❖ Is the cost of the platform reasonable?
- ❖ Will meetings be accessible in a range of geographical locations and on various types of devices?
- ❖ Are members, and potential members, familiar with the platform, and is it easy to use?
- ❖ Does the platform have a large enough meeting capacity for the expected attendance?

Desirable features may include:

- ❖ The meeting can be joined simply by clicking on a hyperlink
- ❖ The audio portion of the meeting can be accessed without internet service
- ❖ There are features on the platform that help to secure the meeting from disruption
- ❖ A screen-sharing feature is available to enable literature and other material to be shown

The Group Booklet reminds us that, whenever possible, meetings should not be held in members' homes. Similar guidance applies to virtual meetings: A group should attempt to obtain its own account for whatever platform it is using for its meetings.

Choosing a meeting format

In general, virtual meetings adopt similar formats to in-person meetings, although groups may consider simplifying these where possible. Many virtual meetings choose to focus their meetings around a piece of NA literature or recovery topic. It may also be helpful to include a brief technical orientation in the meeting format.

Listing meeting information

Groups may wish to consider potential security issues when deciding where to list information about meetings. Listing a meeting publicly can result in disruption during the meeting, but it's a balancing act. We also need to ensure addicts can easily find a meeting when they need it. However and wherever a meeting is listed, the most effective way to minimize disruption is by using the settings available in the meeting platform, some of which are discussed in the Keeping a virtual meeting secure and dealing with disruption section of this document.

Some options for where information about virtual meetings can be listed include:

- ❂ On na.org by completing the form posted on na.org/virtualmeetings
- ❂ Social media groups
- ❂ In a cloud-based document that can be shared
- ❂ Meeting flyers (hard copies and electronic) that can be distributed
- ❂ On local meeting lists alongside in-person meetings

Information to include in a listing:

- ✓ Type of meeting platform
- ✓ Meeting ID, password, and phone number for audio-only connections
- ✓ Time (including time zone) and day
- ✓ Language meeting is conducted in, and translation/interpretation services if provided
- ✓ Format and topic

It may also be advisable to provide basic instructions on how to use the platform alongside the list of meetings. Links to short instructional videos, pamphlets, PowerPoints, and workshops on the basic features of the chosen platform and tips for using it successfully are all options to achieve this. Locally created training videos and other resources can be found here on na.org/virtual.

Service positions for virtual meetings

Virtual meetings have most of the same service positions as in-person meetings, but some of those positions may be handled differently. For instance, a treasurer will need a form of "virtual basket."

There are also some additional tasks that may help a virtual meeting to run more smoothly. Meetings that use an online platform can assign multiple co-hosts to assist with the technical administration of the meeting and to take over the host role if the host has technical problems. Other co-host tasks may include:

- ❂ Muting and unmuting attendees if needed
- ❂ Screen-sharing literature and keytag images
- ❂ Checking for raised hands
- ❂ Monitoring the waiting room and the chat feature if these are being used.
- ❂ Monitoring the meeting screen for inappropriate images and to minimize disturbances
- ❂ Greeting new members
- ❂ Verifying attendance virtually
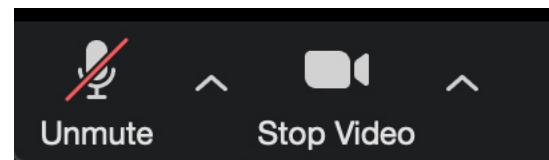
Other additional positions or tasks may include:

- ❂ A literature person who mails welcome packets, literature, and key tags and manages literature sales
- ❂ A virtual trainer to ensure the trusted servants in the meeting know how to use the platform
- ❂ Someone to manage keeping the meeting's information updated on websites and other places where it is posted
- ❂ Coordinators for virtual activities and social media
- ❂ Sharing links in the chat for NA literature posted on na.org, and for Seventh Tradition contributions

TIPS FOR ATTENDING A VIRTUAL MEETING

Common practices:

- **Mute** your microphone when not speaking
- **Use** first name and initial for your screen name
- **Familiarize** yourself with the meeting platform before the meeting time
- **Be aware** that different meetings may have different practices regarding the use of cameras, sharing, features like chat boxes, and how to make financial contributions
- **Join** the meeting early and ask questions if you need to

Tips for dealing with an unstable internet connection:

- **Turn off** the camera to preserve bandwidth (with the understanding that this may make it difficult or impossible for members with hearing challenges to participate.)
- **Connect** to the router via a wired connection as opposed to Wi-Fi
- **Use** a phone to access the audio part of an online meeting
- **Leave** and rejoin the meeting, or try a different device
- **Ensure** updates to the meeting platform software have been installed

Tips for staying safe online:

- **Be cautious** when sharing personal information and when using the chat feature in a meeting
- **Use** a secure network if using public Wi-Fi
- **Consider** using a VPN
- **Check** cookie settings on personal internet accounts if concerns exist about personal data being collected
- **Only log** into websites that start with https://
- **Use** antivirus software
- **Use** secure passwords

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SECTION TWO – Administering a Virtual Meeting

Keeping a virtual meeting secure and dealing with disruption

It is an unfortunate reality that virtual meetings can be subject to disruption more easily than in-person meetings. This may simply be due to a member's unfamiliarity with the meeting platform, but may also be a deliberate effort by non-members and can involve highly disturbing images and sounds. By planning ahead and becoming familiar with the features of the meeting platform, virtual meetings can be set up to provide a number of safeguards to minimize or eradicate these issues before they occur.

The procedures for dealing with disruptive or abusive members in a meeting, and people that are not NA members who log in to meetings with the intent to disrupt them, are largely the same.

Three essential precautions are:

✿ **Disable** any features that allow attendees except for the meeting's trusted servants to share content on the screen.

✿ **Disable** the ability for attendees to record the meeting unless a speaker is being recorded. If this is the case the ability to record should be restricted to designated trusted servants of the group.

✿ **Ensure** all attendees are muted when they first join the meeting.

Other options to consider include:

✿ **Disable** virtual backgrounds or turn off a participant's video if necessary.

✿ **Remind** attendees that the use of profile pictures that endorse outside enterprises, such as political or religious organizations, is discouraged.

✿ **Do not allow** attendees to unmute themselves—this may be particularly necessary in larger meetings to avoid audio chaos. Assign task of unmuting to a co-host.

✿ **Disable** or limit the use of the chat feature.

These actions can be taken before a meeting:

✿ **Discuss** and agree on standards of behavior for the meeting, and on measures to deal with disruption and abusive behavior.

✿ **Assign** the task of monitoring the meeting for disruptive behavior to designated trusted servants.

✿ **Provide** training for the meeting's trusted servants.

✿ **Stay** current on changes to the platform features.

And these actions can be taken during the meeting:

✿ **Include** guidance for acceptable behavior in the meeting format.

✿ **Communicate** privately with disruptive members using the chat feature.

✿ **Place** disruptive people in a waiting room if the platform provides this feature.

✿ **Remove** the person from the meeting—this option should be reserved for disruptive non-members, or only as a last resort for NA members.

✿ **Report** disruptive non-members to the platform provider.

✿ **Some platforms allow** for the meeting room to be locked to prevent anyone new joining. This can be considered if the disruption is extreme.

Protecting personal privacy

The guidance in this section applies to both an individual's privacy, and to the privacy of the other members attending the meeting. Hosting an NA meeting on the internet does not necessarily present a conflict with the Eleventh Tradition; not everything that is online can be considered as "at the level of press, radio, and films." There is a concern for some members, however, that the ease with which a virtual meeting can be accessed makes it difficult to ensure a reasonable level of privacy for those attending. It may require less effort for a person who is not an addict to join a meeting on a virtual platform than it would for them to walk into an in-person meeting, but neither method of hosting can be considered entirely private. In

fact, some NA meetings are held in public places such as parks, while others are held in more private places. Similar choices are available to virtual meetings by adjusting the settings of the platform and the places a meeting is listed. If concerns exist, these steps can be taken to make meetings more private.

❋ Settings that record the meeting and save it to a cloud or to the host's computer should always be disabled, as should the ability for attendees to record. The only exception to this is if a recording of a speaker is to be made available to listen to after the meeting. If this is the case, care should be taken to ensure this is explained to the speaker and the meeting attendees. Only the audio part of the share should be made available. Disabling the option to save the chat can also be considered.

❋ Members may be asked to attend the meeting in a private place and to use headphones to protect the privacy of others.

❋ Some groups may disable the use of cameras to ensure that members' identities are kept private, while others may ask for cameras to be turned on (in some cases only for a short time) to verify their identity.

❋ Members may choose to log in to a meeting using a first name and last initial only, rather than a full name. This can both preserve a member's personal anonymity, and help to avoid unwelcome advances. If allowing attendees to rename themselves results in people using inappropriate or obscene names, then it might be advisable to disable this feature and assign this task to a trusted servant.

❋ As with any activity on the internet, members attending NA meetings online are encouraged to check their cookie settings if they have concerns about how information about their activity may be gathered.

Groups are encouraged to discuss these options and determine what is most appropriate for their meetings:

- List the meeting information as publicly as possible so it can be found easily by any addict wishing to attend _or_ list the meeting information only on NA websites and in private social media groups to discourage disruptive intruders
- Provide a one-click link to join meetings _and_/_or_ list meeting IDs and passwords separately
- Consider restricting the ability for attendees to rename themselves _or_ requiring members to name themselves appropriately
- Consider asking for cameras to be turned on to confirm identities _or_ turning cameras off to allow members to protect their privacy and to prevent inappropriate actions or images being shown
- Disable chat feature to avoid distraction and inappropriate messages _or_ leave chat feature enabled so it can be used by meeting attendees to share phone numbers with newcomers and welcome them. [It may be helpful to consider that some meetings allow members to use the chat feature to share if they are in a location that isn't private. If this is the case, one of the meeting's trusted servants can be asked to read the share out loud.]

Practicing the Seventh Tradition

However a virtual meeting is hosted, whether by an NA group or by a service body, or even as an informal gathering of friends, there are opportunities to practice the principal of self-support. Practicing the Seventh Tradition in a virtual environment requires some different approaches to passing a basket in an in-person meeting, but these can be managed successfully. The guidance contained in NA service material related to the qualities of a treasurer and the prudent financial procedures they should follow still apply in virtual meetings. It may not always be possible to follow all the suggestions, such as having two members count the Seventh Tradition collection. If this is the case, care should be taken to closely adhere to the other guidance offered, particularly when electing a treasurer.

There are three main approaches to the Seventh Tradition in virtual meetings. The first is most similar to in-person meetings—members send their contributions either directly to the treasurer or to a group bank account via one of several cash transfer apps. Members are encouraged to review the settings of these apps to determine if an option is available to make donations without revealing their full name if they have concerns about their privacy. The challenge for meetings with members attending from more than one country is that not all apps are available in every country. It can also be prohibitively expensive to transfer funds internationally. Some meetings offer multiple methods of making contributions to get around this challenge.

One word of caution is to carefully consider local tax laws if a personal bank account is used to receive contributions as some personal tax liability may result from this.

The second approach is that members can send contributions directly to service bodies. This may be a local service body, particularly if the meeting is using a platform paid for by that body, or directly to NA World Services, or both. Some service body websites include contribute buttons to make this easier. Instructions for how to make payments may be displayed onscreen during the meeting or via the chat feature. Just as in an in-person meeting members may be encouraged to participate by including a self-support statement in the meeting format or periodically choosing the Seventh Tradition as a discussion topic for the meeting.

The third approach is simply not to collect financial contributions during the meeting, and instead ask the members attending to find other ways to support NA.

Groups that are not associated with a geographically defined service entity might find that the traditional fund-flow model of contributing excess funds to an area and/or a region may not necessarily apply to them. Groups are free to contribute directly to any service body and are encouraged to discuss what this might look like for them. As it says in IP #24, *Money Matters: Self-Support in NA*:

> "There is a spiritual satisfaction in freely giving to support the fellowship that saved our lives. We give what we can, knowing that our contributions become part of a worldwide effort to share recovery."

There are several locally created resources posted at na.org/virtual under the "Seventh Tradition" heading that may be helpful.

Distributing literature and keytags

Several options for distributing literature and keytags can be used in virtual meetings:

* NA pamphlets and booklets are posted in multiple languages at na.org/ips and can be accessed by members and shown onscreen during meetings as needed

* Hard copies and electronic versions of literature, and keytags and medallions, can be sent directly to members by mail and email

* Hard copies of literature, keytags, and medallions can be purchased directly from NA service offices and other outlets, including NA World Services at na.org/webstore and electronic copies of books from the links at na.org/elit.

* Members may be directed to in-person meetings to obtain hard copies of literature

Please remember that the NA Fellowship has determined that posting and distributing pdfs of literature is not appropriate and jeopardizes the protection of the Fellowship's intellectual property. Please honor this group conscience and only post links to the material posted on na.org rather than posting literature directly on local websites or distributing it via email.

Signing meeting attendance cards

Meetings may choose to provide some form of attendance verification for members who request it. One simple method is to create an email address for the meeting that can be used for this purpose. Many email providers offer the option to set up automatic replies to emails. This can be activated during the meeting time and set to send a simple response with the meeting's information.

Other methods include sending a text or manually sending an email in response to requests for attendance verification.

Additional guidance on this topic can be found in NAWS Bulletin #31, *Meeting Attendance Cards*, which is available here na.org/bulletins.

Hybrid meetings

The term "hybrid" describes meetings that have both in-person and remote attendees. Hybrid meetings allow groups to increase their attendance by having members from other places attend virtually, and to provide outreach to addicts who would not otherwise be able to attend an NA meeting.

These are a few simple steps to set up a hybrid meeting:

✓ Establish accessibility—does the meeting location have telephone or internet capabilities?

✓ Choose a host device based on accessibility—this device is responsible for streaming the audio and video signal to and from remote participants and could be a laptop or a smart phone

✓ Establish quality audio input by choosing the right type of microphone - audio quality is the highest priority, and sometimes the biggest challenge, for a hybrid meeting:

- cardioid and dynamic microphones gather sound from directly in front of the microphone
- omni-directional and condenser microphones gather sound from the whole room and may be more suitable for a hybrid meeting, although these may also pick up any background noise in the meeting room

✓ Establish clear audio output—the type of speaker needed varies depending on the size of the room and the host device

✓ Decide whether video of the meeting will be provided to remote participants, and whether remote participants will be visible to the in-person meeting

One potential challenge with a hybrid format is that members joining the meeting virtually may feel like they are not fully involved. Care should be taken to involve all attendees equally. Groups may consider having at least one trusted servant join the meeting virtually to help welcome virtual attendees and check the sound and audio.

Groups are encouraged to work with the resources they have, and to experiment and test different set-ups. More detailed experience from groups that are successfully providing hybrid meetings can be found here on na.org/virtual.

Group business meetings

All groups, including those that meet virtually, can benefit from regular business meetings to ensure that any decisions about how the meeting is run are made through a process based in group conscience. The service pamphlet, *Group Business Meetings*, offers a range of guidance on this topic and can be found here na.org/sps.

If voting is taking place, please remember that members who are blind or visually impaired cannot see raised hands, therefore the tally may need to be spoken aloud.

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SECTION THREE – Atmosphere of Recovery

Meeting Etiquette

A few simple, and commonly agreed upon, standards for behavior can help to preserve the atmosphere of recovery in a meeting. Many of these are the same as would be expected in an in-person meeting, such as not tolerating drugs or drug paraphernalia, or abusive and predatory behavior. (See IP #29: *An Introduction to NA Meetings*, for more information about general NA meeting etiquette: na.org/ips)

Other options that could be requested in virtual meetings include:

* **Avoiding** constant movement or other visual distractions
* **Muting** microphones when not sharing
* **Raising** hands to share
* **Limiting** the use of the chat feature during the meeting to avoid distractions
* **Not eating**, smoking, or vaping on-screen

Any actions in NA meetings, or actions that are closely associated with an NA meeting, that restrict a member's ability to freely recover should be strongly discouraged. These may include unsolicited sexual, romantic, or financial advances. The primary purpose of every NA meeting is to carry an NA message, and predatory behavior directly impedes that purpose and should be addressed by the group. The service pamphlet, *Disruptive and Violent Behavior*, offers a number of options for groups to consider and can be found here na.org/sps.

Welcoming newcomers and helping them get connected

New members may need some extra help to get connected and start building relationships in NA. This can be thought of as "in-reach" (as opposed to outreach) and can help to strengthen and grow the meeting. Suggestions for this include:

* Create service positions or tasks aimed at welcoming new members
* Include a verbal welcome to newcomers in the format and reference the Third Tradition
* Structure the meeting so there is time before and after it to talk with new members
* Share phone numbers and other contact information with new members via the chat feature or by emailing a document with a list of numbers
* Show new members where NA materials and links to other meetings can be found online
* Send welcome packs of literature and keytags via the mail
* Use social media or chat groups to communicate outside of the meeting
* Organize social activities that can be virtual or in-person where possible

Sponsorship

In addition to the suggestions offered to help new members get connected, meetings can also use these additional ideas to encourage sponsorship:

* Ask those willing to sponsor to identify themselves and stay after the meeting
* Create a list of potential sponsors that can be shared with members upon request
* Encourage sharing about sponsorship and use IP #11, *Sponsorship*, as a meeting topic
* Allow sponsors to use the meeting platform to meet with their sponsees, including the breakout room feature if available
* Share information about long-distance sponsorship services provided by service bodies

Additional information and resources are available at **na.org/virtual**

Making meetings accessible for members with additional needs

Virtual meetings can provide a unique opportunity to carry the message to addicts who would otherwise find it difficult to attend NA meetings. This may be due to being physically unable to attend an in-person meeting, because of impaired vision and hearing, or other personal circumstances. In particular, blind and deaf members may need extra help to fully participate in virtual meetings. This help may include some of these ideas:

✿ Any time that information is shared on the screen, remember to read the information out loud and describe any graphics to assist visually impaired members.

✿ Provide sign language interpretation in the member's language during meetings and include instructions in the meeting format for how to access the service.

✿ Ensure that members understand how to continue viewing sign language interpreters during screen sharing, and provide instructions if needed.

✿ Provide subtitles or closed-captioning during meetings if available.

✿ Reminding speakers to verbally identify themselves prior to speaking to assist visually challenged members or those who are not able to access the video portion of a meeting. This is also relevant in virtual meetings that do not have a visual component.

✿ Provide information about literature in audio, digital, and sign language formats posted at na.org/audio, na.org/elit, and na.org/asl.

✿ Ask members with additional needs how the group can help.

✿ Designate a contact person in the meeting who can help provide additional assistance.

✿ If voting is taking place during a group business meeting, please remember to read the result out loud to assist visually impaired members who are unable to see raised hands.

Screen shot from ASL Version of LWB

Virtual meetings that are accessible may also wish to consider cooperating with service bodies that are attempting to build relationships with organizations that provide services to addicts with additional needs.

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