HYBRID MEETINGS

When Al-Anon members and newcomers gather together in person *and virtually* to support and share with one another, that is referred to as a **hybrid** meeting.

BEST PRACTICES

The in-person component of the Al-Anon Family Group (AFG) is responsible for setting up, maintaining, breaking down, and storing the equipment needed to welcome virtual participants and to support their inclusion in the meeting.

It is vital to the success of a hybrid meeting to ensure that everyone participating virtually can see and hear everyone in the physical space and that everyone in the physical space can see and hear everyone participating virtually.

In addition to a strong WiFi connection (with a minimum of 400 Mbps) and the equipment needed to accomplish this, new and/or redefined service roles can be considered to balance meeting participation in both the virtual and physical spaces.

MEETING LAYOUTS AND EQUIPMENT

Upgrades to the Company Conference Room

Most conference rooms are acoustically designed, furnished, and equipped for this purpose; and the first "advanced" technology to enter the corporate conference room was a speakerphone to accommodate conference calls. This speakerphone was positioned in the center of the conference table; and eventually, attendees were bringing their laptops into these meetings.

Photograph by August_0802 / Shutterstock

In response to the pandemic, a large computer monitor or TV screen was hung on the wall at one end of the table to include virtual participants, the speakerphone was integrated as a room speaker and microphone, and swivel chairs enabled participants to more easily shift their focus.

Transitioning Toward In-Person Meetings via Hybrid

To test your in-person meeting space, it may be helpful to return to the "old conference room" approach as an initial step. In-person participants can sit around a table, each with his/her own device, and join the Zoom meeting from this physical space. The audio on all of these devices would be disconnected,[1] and one or more omnidirectional speakerphones (serving as both speakers and microphones) would be positioned along the middle of this table (or two tables pushed together for a larger group). These speakerphones would be connected to the laptop of the Audio Co-Host[2] via USB or Bluetooth.

No TV screen is necessary with this arrangement because each in-person participant will be part of the gallery as someone who has joined the Zoom meeting. This may seem a little odd at first to be attending a meeting in person only to sit in front of a laptop, tablet, or smartphone; however, it places all participants, both in-person and virtual, on equal footing within the combined meeting. Everyone can be seen and heard.

It is vital for each in-person participant to arrive before pre-meeting fellowship to set up tables and chairs, find a seat, set up his/her device (including disconnecting audio), assist the Audio Co-Host by participating in audio tests, and join the Zoom meeting. Sound and movement is exaggerated on Zoom; so arriving late to the in-person component of the meeting will be far more disruptive for everyone than we might imagine.

To disconnect audio on your device, you can follow these simple instructions.

DISABLE MICROPHONE ON MACBOOK
1. Click the Apple icon on the menu bar and click "System Preferences" on the dropdown menu.
2. Select "Security and Privacy" from the menu.
3. Select the "Privacy" tab at the top of the window.
4. From the options on the left side of the window, select "Microphone."
5. Toggle OFF microphone access specifically for the Zoom app.

After the meeting, follow steps 1 through 5 above and toggle ON microphone access for the Zoom app.

DISABLE MICROPHONE ON WINDOWS PC
1. Right-click on the Start button and open the Device Manager.
2. Click on the arrow to the left of Audio inputs and outputs to expand it.
3. Right-click on Microphone and disable it. When the warning pops up, click Yes. Your microphone is now disabled.

After the meeting, follow steps 1 through 3 above and enable the microphone.

DISABLE iOS/iPAD OR ANDROID
Go to App Permissions (location is different for each device manufacturer, but start with Settings > Privacy) and toggle OFF Microphone access specifically for the Zoom app. After the meeting, toggle ON Microphone access specifically for the Zoom app.

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1. Turning the volume all the way down and muting the device is not enough to prevent feedback. According to most audio professionals, the audio on all but one device in the physical space must be disconnected, and there can be no exception.
2. See page 10 for a more detailed description of the role of the Audio Co-Host.

During this transition phase, the group's primary investment will be in speakerphones (depicted in the illustration below as black circles), which range in price from roughly $100 to $400 each. Near the high end, the Jabra Speak 710 can pair wirelessly with a second Jabra Speak 710 through its own link technology, thereby providing 360° audio coverage for twelve people around the table. For a longer or second table, the Audio Co-Host may require a USB adaptor for his/her laptop (cost: about $20). In-person participants may also want the ability to power or charge their devices, to benefit from surge protectors and USB cables, to pass the basket, and to have a literature table available for newcomers.
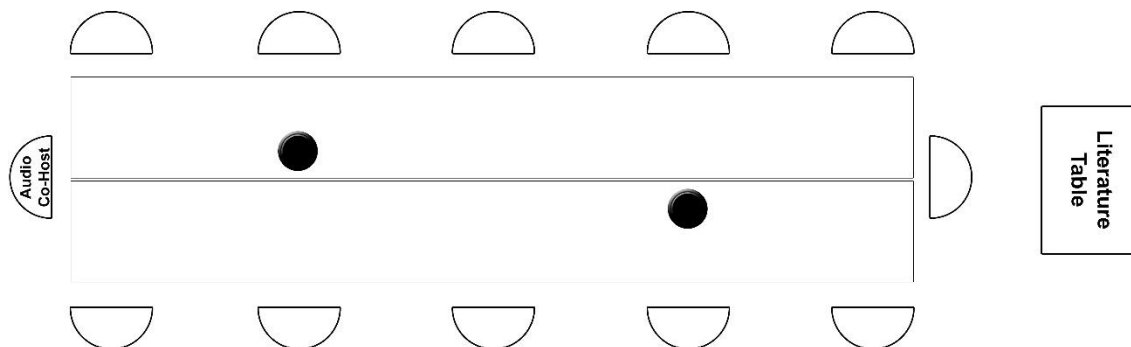
The hosting team (with the exception of the Audio Co-Host) would start or join the meeting from home, and there would be no need for a Tech Team Lead or a Hybrid Facilitator.[3] Only the Audio Co-Host and the Literature Coordinator would be required to join the Zoom meeting from the physical space while all others in service could choose whether to join from wherever their hearts desire or to arrive with their devices at the in-person location.

If the number of in-person participants is relatively small, particularly in comparison to those who are joining the Zoom meeting from home, *this hybrid arrangement may be sufficient for the long term and is certainly the most cost-effective*. It also minimizes setup and breakdown time, substantially reduces the number of recommended and new or altered service positions, and creates a hybrid meeting that is simple, inclusive, and in keeping with our Legacies.

For a larger and more complex hybrid meeting, there are two "costs" to consider: **service** and **financial**. When we chose to gather virtually in response to the pandemic, this decreased our "rent" but required new service positions (e.g., hosting teams, safety committees, and/or Zoom account administrators). As we transition into hybrid meetings and cobble together various pieces of equipment, we are finding that the increased need for service is exponential. By investing financially in more sophisticated equipment, however, essential service commitments are fewer and far less demanding. Including the cost of a specific Zoom subscription, a financial investment in one comprehensive design or another could range from $2,000 to $7,500. These pros and cons can be weighed using the KBDM process[4] as well as the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Twelve Concepts of Service.

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3. Please see pages 10 through 11 for service positions supporting a more intricate hybrid meeting layout and equipment system.
4. See page 7 for details on the KBDM (Knowledge-Based Decision-Making) process.

Redesigning the Hybrid Meeting Space

Although it is the responsibility of the physical component of a hybrid meeting to arrange and equip the meeting space, the very core of a successful hybrid meeting is the video-conferencing platform. For this reason, companies like Microsoft and Zoom have invested in considerable research to design and develop optimal spaces and to test and integrate equipment from such technology sources as Jabra, Logitech, Neat, Owl Labs, Poly, and Yealink.[5]

Based upon this research, the ideal layout for a hybrid meeting space is pictured below. This configuration creates a sense that all participants are seated at the same round table, particularly when cameras are set at eye level for in-person participants.

Illustration by nobeastsofierce / Shutterstock

The wide-angle webcam positioned below the center screen in the above illustration is merely a clue that audio-visual equipment is required to convert this space into a fully functioning hybrid experience. As an example, we will explore **Zoom Rooms** as one standard of excellence when seeking this experience.

In addition to video-conferencing software through the *Zoom Client for Meetings* (aka the "Zoom app") with which we are all familiar, Zoom offers professional services to: 1) assess a company's needs and design the optimal meeting space or "Zoom Room"; 2) a project manager to remotely manage the implementation of this design plan; and 3) certified experts to complete the installation on-site or remotely. The software includes *Zoom Rooms for Conference Rooms and Touchscreen Displays* as well as *Controllers for Zoom Rooms*. Audio-visual, hosting/controlling, and connectivity equipment can be purchased or leased; and developer/technical support and training services are also available through Zoom for a monthly or annual fee.

Zoom Rooms require a display, computer/laptop, camera, speaker, microphone, and controller.

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5. In keeping with Tradition Six, Al-Anon/Alateen District 11 Marin does not in any way endorse Microsoft, Zoom, Jabra, Logitech, Neat, Owl Labs, Poly, Yealink, or any other video conferencing software or equipment.

Equipping the Hybrid Meeting Space

Smart TVs are the best display screens because of their HDMI (high-definition media interface) capability, as HDMI is a common connector for sound and for video. The best screen size for your Smart TV is determined by the distance between the screen and the farthest viewer.

Farthest Viewer	Display Size
14 feet or less	55 inches
15 to 16 feet	65 inches
17 to 19 feet	75 inches
20 to 22 feet	86 inches
Greater than 22 feet	Consider a video wall

Video soundbars include a camera with a field of view spanning up to 180° combined with built-in speakers and microphones. Ideally, the camera is positioned at the general eye level of seated, in-person participants; and depending on the camera's ability to zoom, tilt, and pan, the video soundbar can be placed above or below the display screen.

©123RF.com: virtual participant and living room space photographed by **luckybusiness & mavoimage**; in-person participants photographed by **wavebreakmediamicro**

One Zoom Room feature is the **Smart Gallery**, which utilizes AI (artificial intelligence) to take a single-camera view of multiple in-room participants and generate up to three unique video streams: 1) as a group; 2) highlighted and framed as individuals; and 3) as a series of separate video thumbnails. These video streams are incorporated into the Gallery displayed on the devices of virtual participants as well as in the Zoom Room itself, thereby equalizing the field of view for in-person and virtual participants to improve the interactions between them.

Stable and reliable audio is an essential element for successful hybrid meetings, which is why video soundbars and other audio equipment recommended for Zoom Rooms have features that may include:

- Intelligent algorithms to filter or reduce disruptive noise, to suppress disturbing feedback, and to provide acoustic echo cancellation;

- Automatic gain control for volume normalization;

- Beamforming microphones which benefit from automatic calibration to optimize the parameters of audio processing for speech reinforcement; and/or

- Acoustic fencing, which creates a boundary around the hybrid meeting space and filters out unwanted sounds originating outside that boundary (e.g., someone running a copier in the next room).

Connecting Hybrid Meeting Space Equipment

Equipment Connectivity Hubs

A computer or laptop serves as the connectivity hub for hybrid meeting equipment; and this role can be filled by a Mac desktop or notebook or by a PC-based desktop or laptop with a current or recent version of Windows.

From its inception, the desktop computer was designed as a box (platform or tower) to which numerous peripheral devices could be attached, including a monitor, keyboard, speakers and, eventually, a mouse, camera, microphone, and graphics tablet. Because of this fundamental design, ***the desktop computer is ideal as a connectivity hub*** for hybrid meeting equipment.

By contrast, a laptop is a slimmer, lighter computer with a built-in monitor, keyboard, camera, microphone, speakers, and a mouse-like feature (e.g., a touchpad or a pointing stick that looks like a pencil eraser). Most laptops have far fewer connections for peripheral devices than are generally available on desktops, which limits their use as connectivity hubs for hybrid meetings.

Zoom Room Kits

One example of a Zoom Room kit includes a desktop PC, a video soundbar, an iPad Mini (which serves as the controller), an iPad console (to house the controller), a wireless keyboard and mouse, a TV mount (for the video soundbar), and very specific cables. To assemble these components, first plug in the video soundbar and connect it to the PC; then mount the video soundbar on top of the Smart TV (which is used as a display screen). Connect the PC to this display screen using the HDMI cable, then connect the PC[6] to a wired network using the Ethernet cable.[7]

To set up the Zoom Room controller, secure the iPad Mini in its console and then download the Zoom Rooms app from Zoom's web portal. Power up the PC and Smart TV, which automatically starts the Zoom Rooms app. Using the controller, enter the pairing code that appears on the display screen. Sign In to your Zoom account as an administrator and select an existing Zoom Room or create a new Room. You are now ready to start a meeting.

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6. When the hardware setup is complete, the PC can be mounted to the back of the Smart TV.
7. Ethernet is faster and more consistently reliable than a WiFi connection.

ADJUSTING THE ZOOM ROOM MODEL FOR AN AL-ANON MEETING

Most AFGs do not have access to a professionally designed, furnished, and equipped space. If the location where you meet has hybrid equipment, please remember that:

- "Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions" (*Tradition Seven*); and

- To avoid the appearance of affiliation or influence by others, parameters governing the use of this equipment should be specified in the group's rental agreement.

If it is necessary for the group to acquire and maintain its own hybrid meeting equipment, there is a Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) process you can follow to reach an informed group conscience as to whether this meeting format is right for you, how it can be equipped and managed, and when to launch your hybrid meeting.

The KBDM Process

Suggested KBDM questions to be answered by the group, or by a committee created by the group for this purpose, are as follows:

1. In reference to returning to in-person meetings, continuing virtual meetings, or testing hybrid meetings, what do we know about the wants, needs, and preferences of the members of our group?

2. When will our former meeting location be available to us, and what are the protocols required for us to be able to meet there?

3. What equipment and supplies will we require for an in-person or hybrid meeting and what is involved in collecting, setting up, maintaining, breaking down, and safely storing this equipment and these supplies?

4. What are the ethical implications (pros and cons) of our choices, and will our recommendations be consistent with our Legacies?

5. What do we wish we knew, but don't?

Anonymous Zoom polls[8] are a great way to determine the needs, wants, and preferences of individual Group members throughout the KBDM process.

By staging a transitional in-person meeting first (see pages 2 and 3), your group can become more familiar with advantages and drawbacks of the physical space to make informed decisions. The arrangement of furniture and the placement of equipment can then be tested for sight lines, video capture, and audio quality. In a hybrid meeting, *it is vital to ensure that everyone participating virtually can see and hear everyone in the physical space and that everyone in the physical space can see and hear everyone participating virtually*. If this is not achieved, then we may fall short of fulfilling our primary purpose and spiritual aim.

Relying on the Traditions and Concepts can ease the group's way through the KBDM process: our common welfare should come first, personal progress for the greatest number; principles before personalities; welfare of the whole may require unpopular actions; listen with consideration to differing opinions, then respectfully accept the group conscience decision; and balance responsibility with necessary authority to avoid double-headed management.

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8. See the sidebar section under "Virtual Al-Anon Guide" at *www.marinal-anon.org* for details about Zoom polls.

Physical Meeting Space Layout on a Budget

Instead of a curved conference table where everyone is facing a video wall or multiple Smart TV screens against a concave surface, one or more display screens can be mounted on a flat wall or positioned on a table. Chairs are lined up on one side of a table so seated individuals are facing the display screen(s). If more seats are needed, a second table and row of chairs is added with these chairs offset for better viewing.
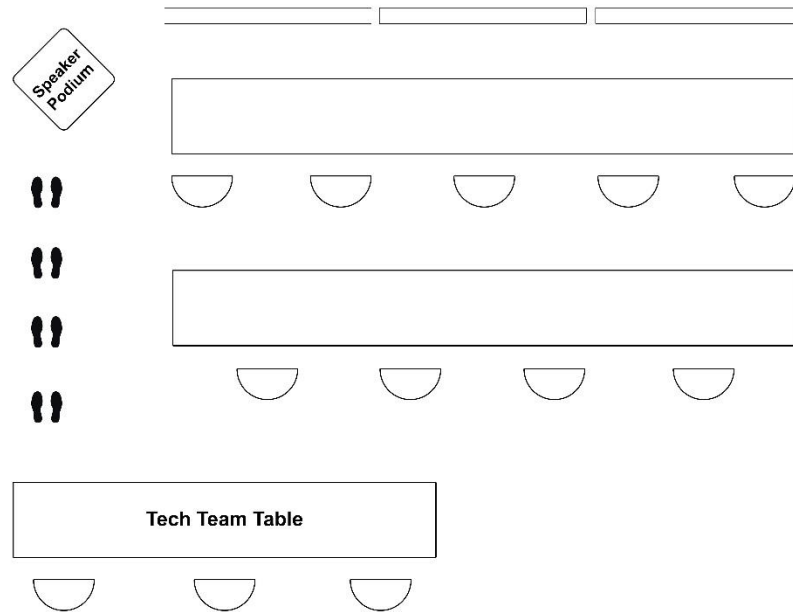
To avoid blocking the view, seating at a table should not extend beyond the outer edge of the screens. Tables positioned in front of in-person participants provide space for reading and writing materials and for additional hybrid meeting equipment as needed. If full tables cannot be provided, consider using small end tables or empty chairs between participants for program literature from which to read during the meeting.

A speaker's corner enables in-person participants to be included in the virtual gallery as they take turns sharing during the meeting. A stationary laptop, to which a unidirectional boundary microphone[9] has been connected, joins the meeting via the Zoom app and remains on a podium in the physical space. Depending upon how disruptive this may be, in-person participants may even "line up" to share.[10]

The hosting and tech teams will also need a space from which to operate, and their table(s) can be positioned at the back — either centered behind participant tables and chairs or off to the side where most of the cables run. Protecting these cables and preventing wayward feet from seeking them out is paramount to everyone's safety.

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9. By connecting the boundary microphone to the laptop used by those who speak or share, both audio and video will be recognized for Zoom's Speaker View. Choose a unidirectional boundary microphone that is designed for the spoken word, focuses only on the speaker (filtering out sounds from others in the physical space), and minimizes such sounds as the rustling of papers.

10. Arrangements detailed in this paragraph can be eliminated if the meeting's video and audio equipment supports Zoom's Smart Gallery, which "targets" the in-person speaker at the table so s/he is seen and heard.

Hybrid Equipment on a Budget

Most video soundbar kits include a controller that is compatible with the Zoom Rooms app. If a video soundbar is not available in your meeting space and is not within your group's budget, then the meeting host's laptop (using the standard Zoom app) can serve as the meeting controller.

Audio in the Physical Space

A collection of sound devices can be substituted for the soundbar and connected through a small USB audio mixing board which is also connected to the laptop of the audio co-host. This laptop is used to join the Zoom meeting virtually from the physical space before the meeting begins and to test all sound devices, which may include:

- Multiple wireless microphones used as lavaliers or headsets with bodypacks; and
- A second boundary microphone (in addition to the speaker's boundary microphone) to amplify sound from the Zoom gallery through the Smart TV or, if the Smart TV audio is insufficient, a standalone speaker. Sound testing well in advance of an actual hybrid meeting is essential to determine which system of amplification is most effective.

The wireless microphones will be provided to: 1) the hybrid facilitator; 2) the secretary leading the meeting if s/he is in the physical space; and 3) the meeting host. The audio mixing board will balance the sound in the physical space and transfer it to the devices of virtual participants through the Zoom video-conferencing platform.[11]

Disconnect the audio on ALL but one device within the physical space. There can be no exception. According to most audio professionals who work in a hybrid environment, turning the volume all the way down and muting the device is not enough to prevent feedback.

Video in the Physical Space

It has been proven in Al-Anon meetings that a TV screen works better than a projector screen to view the Zoom gallery. As previously mentioned, Smart TVs are the best display screens for hybrid meetings because of their HDMI (high-definition media interface) capability.

In the absence of a video soundbar, one or more cameras can provide enough coverage in the physical space to capture all in-person participants and include them in the gallery. Positioning these cameras is the responsibility of the tech team lead.

Webcams are the most commonly used cameras for hybrid meetings and are built in as part of a laptop or smartphone OR they are attached to a desktop, notebook, or laptop as a separate device. To connect a "real" video camera to a laptop, you will need a power cord for the camera and a USB or HDMI cable to attach the camera to the laptop. Connecting the latter requires an HDMI video capture card, and a higher investment is well worth the quality of the results. Whether a camera is part of a laptop or smartphone or is attached to a desktop or notebook, that device can join a Zoom meeting and share video as a participant.

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11. Using an audio mixing board for this purpose will place the emphasis on gain control over volume control. It is also important to ensure that the mixing board has a feature to prevent sound from the audio co-host's laptop from looping back to the physical space and causing feedback. By learning as much as possible about the USB audio mixer selected in relation to Zoom as part of a hybrid meeting, the audio co-host will be empowered to make supportive and informed decisions in collaboration with the hybrid facilitator and the meeting host.

RECOMMENDED AL-ANON HYBRID MEETING SERVICE POSITIONS

Ideally, everyone who is physically able to attend the in-person component of the group's hybrid meeting will help to arrange the furniture and set up the equipment to welcome and support the virtual participants. They will also help to leave the room clean and orderly after the meeting. This is service.

Tech Team Lead: This individual has a comprehensive understanding of how all of the hybrid meeting equipment works together within an effective meeting layout to create a shared audio-visual experience for both in-person and virtual participants. S/he delegates the following responsibilities to other Tech Team members and works alongside them to complete these tasks:

- Maintain an inventory list of equipment (including cables, connectors, power strips, battery backups, and surge protectors); check this list during setup and breakdown to determine what needs to be replaced or repaired.
- Arrange the furniture; set up and test the equipment.
- Maintain the equipment throughout the meeting.
- Break down and store the equipment.

The Tech Team Lead is responsible for positioning the video cameras for maximum coverage of the in-person component of the meeting, although this duty can be delegated by him/her to another Tech Team member. As a trusted servant, the Tech Team Lead also has a key to the meeting room.

Meeting Host: This individual Signs In to the group's Zoom account on a laptop from the physical space, starts the Zoom meeting, conducts an in-meeting settings review (see page D-3 of this Guide) before other virtual participants arrive, makes co-hosts as they arrive, and assists the Tech Team with the hybrid meeting setup and breakdown. During the meeting, the Host concentrates primarily on Zoom activities (e.g., opening Chat to Everyone at a specified time, locking the meeting if this is in accord with group conscience, and ending the meeting for all after fellowship). The Host also supports the Secretary or Lead with the flow of the meeting, assists the Virtual Co-Host with his/her duties, and coordinates with the Hybrid Facilitator to maintain balance between the virtual and in-person components of the meeting.

Audio Co-Host: This individual joins the Zoom meeting from the physical space using the laptop that is connected to the USB audio mixer and manages the audio equipment throughout the meeting. As a member of the Tech Team, the Audio Co-Host sets up, tests, and breaks down this audio equipment, reporting to the Tech Team Lead anything that needs to be repaired or replaced. The Audio Co-Host also assists other members of the Tech Team with their responsibilities.

Virtual Co-Host: Like other virtual participants, this individual joins the meeting from home or a similar location. Once s/he is made a co-host, all virtual participants become the primary focus of the Virtual Co-Host; and s/he serves as a primary resource for these virtual participants via Chat. Other duties include managing the waiting room, ensuring that each person is identified by a first name and last initial, lowering hands for virtual participants who are called on to share, and posting to Chat pertinent meeting/group/program information. There should be one Virtual Co-Host for each screen of 25 individuals in the Zoom gallery with all of these duties divided between them; and when the gallery meets or exceeds three screens, an additional Virtual Co-Host can be added to focus on managing the waiting room.

Hybrid Facilitator: This individual maintains balance between participants in the physical space (where the Hybrid Facilitator is located) and the virtual space, calls on those who wish to share, supports the Secretary, responds to suggestions from the Host, and communicates with the combined group when there are technical difficulties. This individual is on his/her feet for most of the meeting, moving quietly about the room while scanning everyone and everything. Ideally, the Hybrid Facilitator joins the meeting as a participant using a laptop (or a smaller device that can be carried) through which s/he can receive Chat messages from the Host or a Co-Host(s). S/he can also see the Participants List in the order that virtual hands were raised. The Hybrid Facilitator stops video and disconnects audio on his/her device to avoid being a distracting member of the gallery; yet, s/he can still see everything on Zoom. This individual also wears a wireless microphone controlled by the Audio Co-Host. The Hybrid Facilitator is the ringmaster for this three-ring circus: the speaker's corner, in-person participants, and virtual participants.

Secretary/Lead: This individual reads from the script and manages the substantive flow of the meeting, and s/he can fulfill his/her duties from the virtual space or the physical space. If it is the latter, the Secretary wears a wireless microphone that is controlled by the Audio Co-Host.

Timer: This individual times the speaker and/or the shares, depending upon group conscience; and s/he can fulfill his/her duties from the physical space or the virtual space. If it is the latter, the Timer needs to be able to unmute. A small bell is a wonderful device to announce that someone's share has reached the end of his/her time and works well in person or virtually. For a speaker's five-minute warning, the bell can be combined with a sign with the number 5 on it or a show of five fingers on one hand.

Literature Coordinator: This individual arrives early with the Tech Team in the physical space to set up the literature table and remains behind after the meeting to break down the table and store the literature. In advance of the meeting, the Literature Coordinator provides information about obtaining literature to the Virtual Co-Host to be posted in Chat for virtual participants.

Treasurer: This individual can fulfill his/her meeting duties from the virtual space or the physical space. In advance of the meeting, the Treasurer provides Tradition Seven information to the Virtual Co-Host to be posted in Chat for virtual participants. During the meeting, the Treasurer provides this information verbally and/or makes a report to the combined group.

Group Rep: This individual can fulfill his/her meeting duties from the physical or virtual space. In advance of the meeting, the Group Rep provides information for the group as necessary to the Virtual Co-Host to be posted in Chat for virtual participants. During the meeting, the Group Rep provides this information verbally and/or makes a report to the combined group.

Speaker: If/when the meeting has a speaker, this individual can address the group from the virtual space or the physical space. If it is the latter, the speaker will use the speaker's corner (unless, of course, the meeting's audio-visual equipment supports Zoom's Smart Gallery).

Participants: It is very important for all hybrid meeting participants to arrive early. Any sound made by a latecomer to the physical space is exaggerated on Zoom and is equally disruptive for those in the physical space. Virtual participants should also arrive early to position their devices, check their lighting, and settle into a seated position. Hybrid meeting participants (gathering virtually and in person) should be especially mindful of the efforts of the tech and hosting teams, as it is vital for them to know before the meeting begins that everyone and everything is in place for a successful hybrid experience.

Preparing for a Hybrid Meeting

All participants who are using devices to join the meeting in the virtual or physical space should check for updates to their devices and to their software (especially Zoom) earlier in the day.

The Virtual Co-Host should also ensure that s/he has all of the details s/he will need to enter into Chat regarding literature, Tradition Seven, or any other meeting/group/program information.

Members of the tech and hosting teams should arrive at the physical location amazingly early.[12] This includes the Tech Team Lead, all Tech Team members, the Meeting Host, and the Audio Co-Host. They should soon be joined by at least one Virtual Co-Host, the Hybrid Facilitator, and the Literature Coordinator. If the Secretary is leading the meeting from the physical space, s/he should also arrive early so his/her wireless microphone can be fitted and tested.

Setup volunteers are always welcome to assist the Tech Team, and every in-person participant can be trained to assist with the setup and breakdown of the meeting room.

Setting Up a Hybrid Meeting

The Tech Team Lead can establish a setup checklist which may include the following:

- Set up the furniture based on a floor plan;
- Establish power sources and charging stations;
- Connect the display screen to the connectivity hub (which may be the Host's laptop) and establish a WiFi or Ethernet connection;
- Have the Host start the meeting for testing and *disconnect audio* on his/her laptop;
- Position a laptop on the speaker's podium, connect a boundary microphone to that laptop, and join the Zoom meeting with that laptop;
- Place a second boundary microphone near the display screen (or connect one or more speakers to the display screen) to amplify sound from the Zoom gallery;
- Connect the USB audio mixing board to the Audio Co-Host's laptop, join the meeting with that laptop, and then connect to the mixer the wireless microphones and the display screen's boundary microphone or speaker(s);
- Set up the video cameras (mounting and stabilizing as necessary) for maximum coverage of participants in the physical space, join the Zoom meeting with each camera/device, then *disconnect the audio* on these devices;
- Have the Host admit from the waiting room the Virtual Co-Host(s) for testing purposes;
- Remind the Hybrid Facilitator to join the Zoom meeting and to *disconnect audio* and *stop video* on his/her device;
- Check room lighting and secure all cables throughout the physical space;
- Outfit and test wireless microphones for the following individuals: the Hybrid Facilitator, the Host and, if necessary, the Secretary;
- Test, test, test and triple-check everything!

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12. Consider providing refreshments for those who arrive early. Fully supporting the technical aspects of a hybrid meeting requires a significant commitment of time, focus, and energy; so make sure those providing this level of service are well-nourished and hydrated.

Orchestrating a Hybrid Meeting

Fifteen minutes before the meeting begins, most in-person participants should be seated while virtual participants are admitted from the waiting room. This establishes fellowship on a level playing field. During pre-meeting fellowship, the Hybrid Facilitator can begin to create balance between in-person and virtual participants by ensuring that both sides are heard in equal measure. When it is time for the meeting to begin, the Hybrid Facilitator announces that the Virtual Co-Host will mute all virtual participants and the Secretary, if s/he is among them, can unmute him/herself to start reading from the script. In-person participants should consider themselves "muted" as well.

The Secretary manages the substantive flow of the meeting while the Hybrid Facilitator ensures a balance between in-person and virtual participants who wish to make announcements or to share. They are both supported by members of the hosting and tech teams.

In-person participants should also remain seated — for a short time, at least — for after-meeting fellowship, particularly if there are newcomers with questions that the group can answer openly. In such a case, the Hybrid Facilitator would manage this exchange by encouraging equal participation from in-person and virtual members. The Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual clarifies that the primary purpose of after-meeting fellowship is to answer program-related questions for newcomers, to sell or distribute program literature, and to break down, clean up, and store what was set up before the meeting. This is also true of hybrid meetings.

Feedback

Always encourage hybrid meeting participants to provide feedback on what works and what doesn't when it comes to the meeting layout, the equipment, new or altered service positions, and the overall experience. Al-Anon is a "we" program, as signified by the Twelve Steps themselves; and we are here to support one another along this shared path to recovery.

A GENTLE REMINDER

For some among us, Zoom fatigue has spiraled into Zoom burnout; and those who have been able to fully return to in-person meetings appreciate them far more than they did prior to the pandemic. However, a considerable number of Al-Anon program members are immune-compromised or are categorized in other high-risk groups for COVID-19 and its variants. It is important for us to consider their needs while determining how best to gather together to share our experience, strength, and hope.

Our common welfare should come first, and personal progress in recovery for the greatest number depends upon unity. This is group conscience in action. The role of Al-Anon meetings is to carry the message; and if some group members require virtual access to the meeting, then a willingness on the part of everyone in the group to accommodate this is in keeping with our Legacies — even if it means bringing a device to an in-person meeting so everyone can be heard and seen in the Zoom gallery on a level playing field.

We are not going back to the way things were; rather, we are moving forward with all that we are continuing to learn from this pandemic and incorporating this knowledge and experience into our meeting formats, whether they are virtual, hybrid, or in person.