

Dear Friends in the Fellowship,

We know that many members are excited by the prospect of meeting in-person again. There is a temptation to rush to re-open meetings. Central Oregon Intergroup (COIG) is not an authoritative body over A.A. groups, nor does it initiate rules or directives, as each A.A. group and entity is autonomous and decisions are made through an individual group conscience. Central Oregon Intergroup has put together suggestions and guidelines for your groups to consider when making an informed group conscience about how to re-open safely once our respective jurisdictions allow it.

AA is so amazing in how freely our shared experience has been made available by Intergroups, central offices, Areas, and districts across the country to determine best practices to protect A.A. members going forward. COIG has put together these suggestions in hope they will be helpful to our local AA groups. In addition to suggestions for groups to consider, there are also 'musts' that groups need to abide by to stay within the regulations and mandates of our state. While there are no 'musts' in the A.A. program, there are legal musts in the larger community. Fortunately, our programs of recovery has taught us how to be responsible citizens both in A.A. and the world.

To protect A.A., groups should be mindful of the Traditions. Tradition 1 tells us "*Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.*" When making group decisions, we say, "*Each group is autonomous.*" However, the second part of Tradition 4 is just as important: "*except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.*" These traditions remind us that we must ensure that our group decisions do not negatively impact our fellow members or A.A. as a whole, and that we as individuals act in ways that ensure our common welfare. Traditions 1 and 4 are important now more than ever. We have to consider the health and well-being of other A.A. members, and we need to protect the positive reputation and goodwill of A.A. in the community.

Here are considerations for your groups to discuss:

WHEN CAN A.A. GROUPS SAFELY RE-OPEN MEETINGS?

- **A.A. must abide by the mandates of local jurisdictions where our groups meet. As an organization and as individuals, we are not exceptions to the law.**
- **Since different areas have been hit more severely by COVID-19, Gov. Brown has allowed each state jurisdiction to mandate its own restrictions regarding re-opening. As of June 5th: Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook Counties are approved for Phase 2 opening on June 6th. In Phase 2, indoor gatherings can increase to 50, provided that the safety guidelines are being considered, and outdoor gatherings of 100 are**

permitted, again, with the understanding that guidance regarding physical distancing, sanitation and other precautions are being employed.

- *Check Oregon statewide & regional regulations <https://coronavirus.oregon.gov>*

WHAT SAFETY PROTOCOLS SHOULD GROUPS HAVE IN PLACE?

- Groups should be aware of the state restrictions and guidelines churches and facilities have in place, as well as each facility's individual requirements which may include.
 - Limiting the number of people into the space
 - Recommended distancing of 6 feet between individuals
 - Suggests wearing face masks
 - Sanitizing contact surfaces before and after each meeting
 - outside as safer than being inside for gatherings

Getting Started

It is suggested that each group be prepared in advance for reopening. Group members are encouraged to meet virtually & create their own reopening plan.

- Discuss with your landlord or facility contact:
 - If the facility is ready for meetings to return. **Having a key does not automatically mean that meetings can resume**, even if your group has a reopening plan.
 - Be prepared to consider other options if the group will not be able to return to the space
 - Ask if there are facility-specific procedures
 - Let them know the group's safety procedures (sanitizing, social distancing, masks, etc.)
- *Check Oregon statewide & regional regulations <https://coronavirus.oregon.gov> "The law of the land does not stop at the door of AA."*
- *Reach out to Area58 / GSO/District 5 with questions*
- Do a walk-through to create a checklist of surfaces to disinfect & other safety procedures
- Consider new or revised service opportunities

Suggested Topics for Discussion as You Plan for Reopening

- **Meeting Procedures**
 - Safety protocols if someone comes to the meeting & is sick:
 - It is strongly encouraged that sick individuals do not attend meetings, to protect the well-being of other attendees, their families, the meeting space, etc. (This can be put in meeting scripts/formats.)
 - Provide them with phone numbers, Zoom meeting info, & other resources in a plastic baggie to take home with them
 - Announce anonymously at the meeting & inform GSR / District that the group may have been exposed

- Consider collecting email addresses or phone numbers to alert members
- Consider contact tracing in the event someone becomes sick there is was to communicate while still maintaining anonymity. The office has some experience other groups have share on how they plan to do this. Meeting scripts/formats can be adjusted to include:
 - Group & facility safety guidelines - explain that these are for everyone's safety
 - How to stay connected if not able to come to in-person meetings
 - Where group members can find info GSO <https://www.aa.org>, Area 58 <https://www.aa-oregon.org>, District 5 <https://www.district5aa.org>
 - An explanation of contact tracing if your group decides to implement it
- Coffee / snacks:
 - Consider suspending hospitality for the time being
 - Consider a BYOB policy - "Bring your Own Beverage"
 - Consider having one person handle all hospitality while wearing face mask & gloves
- Literature:
 - Consider a BYOB policy - "Bring your own Book"
 - Change format from passing book to one person reading
 - Disinfect shared literature before / after the meeting
 - Consider alternatives to sharing literature (or have at least a 72 hour quarantine period for pre-owned or donated literature)
- Newcomers:
 - Pre-printed sheet of group members & phone numbers
 - Literature, phone numbers, pamphlets, & other resources in a plastic baggie
- Anniversaries:
 - Consider how to handle coins, cake, cards, etc.
- Finances:
 - Some of the items that the group discusses & determines to be requirements for reopening may require money (for example, the purchase of cleaning products or hand sanitizer). Ensure the group members and treasurer are informed of this.
- Accessibility:
 - Virtual options to increase accessibility
 - Small in-person meetings for homebound individuals & how to do so safely
- **Meeting Delivery Format**
 - Discuss whether your meeting will continue as an online meeting, have a hybrid meeting (combo of in person and online), or meet in person only
 - Consider offering an online meeting at a day/time that does not conflict with other meetings
 - Consider adding a service position for chairing online meeting(s)

- **Accessibility - In-person Meetings with Virtual (online) Component**

- Consider costs & availability of technology, WiFi, tech knowledge, etc.
- Consider whether the group will purchase their own account / technology or use a group member's.
- Consider the anonymity of those attending the in-person meeting
- Consider adding service position(s), e.g. virtual meeting host(s), "spiritual bouncer" for Zoom bombers, and/or technology chair

7th Tradition-How to Pass the Basket:

- Consider having one group member carry the basket around
- Provide gloves to the Chair / Treasurer (or whoever handles the money)
- Consider digital options contributing - hand out laminated sheets with digital basket info

- **PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)**

- Asking people to wear masks or face coverings at your meeting
- If someone does not wish to comply with wearing a mask, they could be brought outside the meeting space by two Home group members to talk or given a list of phone numbers & virtual meetings
- Meetings could provide masks - purchased or made by group members - for free or at cost
- Make hand sanitizer available to attendees (alcohol-free suggested)
- Provide gloves to trusted servants who handle meeting materials, 7th tradition, etc.

- **Social Distancing**

- Maximum number of meeting attendees:
 - Check on number of people able to meet in your room with social distancing requirements
 - Consider overflow space if too many people show up
 - Have 2 Home group members go to overflow space with attendees
 - Check with facility on whether this is an option
- Seating arranged 6 feet apart as per Executive Orders from the governor
- Greeters: no handshakes or hugs
- Consider how to end meeting with a socially distant circle
- Consider fellowshiping before / after meeting in parking lot outside of meeting space

- **Contact Tracing**

- What is it? *Trace & monitor everyone who came into contact with someone who is ill. Notify them of their exposure. Support the quarantine of contacts. Help ensure the safe, sustainable & effective quarantine of contacts to prevent additional transmission.*

- Consider how your group would inform other members and attendees if someone attended and tested positive for COVID-19
- Consider if / how your group will participate in contact tracing
- Consider how your group will handle confidentiality / anonymity
- Consider adding information in the meeting script/format to explain contact tracing

WHAT IF GROUPS WANT TO COMBINE IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS?

- Some groups have talked about the possibility of combining in-person meetings with Zoom meetings to form a “hybrid” meeting. If your group is leaning toward this option, here are some considerations:
 - Is everyone at the in-person meeting comfortable participating in a video Zoom meeting?
 - Would it be better to disable the video capability but allow the phone function?
 - While Zoom meetings “should not” be recorded, it is still important that groups abide by the electronic communication portion of the statute to be safe. This means everyone participating in the meeting must give their consent before any electronic communication is started. In Oregon, implied consent is enough to make the call legal, meaning, anyone who stays at the meeting is giving consent. Making a statement and having clear signage would comply with any recording law. One recommendation is for group secretaries to make an announcement at the beginning of the meeting such as, “This is to inform everyone that there is electronic equipment being used to connect to online platforms so that others online may participate.”

ARE THERE WAYS TO CARRY THE MESSAGE THAT WE HAVEN'T CONSIDERED?

Fortunately, newcomers have been getting sober in Zoom meetings. What this pandemic has taught us is that there are many ways to connect—not just locally, but internationally—and there are lots of ways to carry the message. While we all miss meeting safely in person, we have more tools available to us to stay sober. We can attend meetings anywhere in the world; we can invite speakers from afar to chair our meetings; we can attend workshops, round-ups, and other events from the comfort of our homes. Phone and online meetings do not replace the need for in-person meetings, but they've added to all the ways that we can carry the message of hope and recovery to still suffering alcoholics and old-timers, alike. So, our decisions to re-open should be made carefully and deliberately. A higher power guides us through this process if we ask for help.

Finally, we hope this has been helpful and informative. Please feel free to pass this information on to A.A. friends and home group members in the fellowship. We look forward to seeing you one of these days soon, and we wish everyone continued sobriety and good health.

Frequently asked question that your home group may want to consider as well have been added.

- Has your home group scheduled a group conscience or business meeting to consider resuming face-to-face meetings?
- Is your group familiar with the latest CDC, state and federal regulations regarding gatherings (such as wearing masks, meeting size limits, social distancing)?
- Has your group had a discussion with its landlord to learn if it will be allowed to resume meetings and if so with what guidelines?
- If the group typically attracts more attendees than can now be accommodated with the new restrictions, how will it handle this challenge?
- What will the group do at the point it reaches its capacity as defined in the latest regulations?
- Does the group have access to additional rooms for overflow or an alternative space?
- Will your group provide supplies, such as hand sanitizer and masks?
- Will the group institute new protocols for cleaning/disinfecting common surfaces?
- Will your group provide hospitality service? (coffee, tea, etc.)
- If a literature meeting, will your group share literature between members?
- Has the group discussed concerns around the common handling of the basket, secretary book, chips, pamphlets, etc.?
- Will your group expand the Greeter's role? Create new service jobs?
- Has the group considered how it will respond if requested to cooperate with health department contact tracing efforts?
- Has the group considered not reopening its in-person meeting until such time as it can meet unrestricted?
- Has your group considered how its actions and decisions could affect other groups or AA as a whole?

- If your group has been meeting on a virtual platform, will those meetings continue in any form after the group reopens?
- Has your group discussed its processes for accepting contributions?
Electronic contributions options? Making contributions in keeping with its group conscience?
- Are there ways to combine face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings as one?