

## How to Host an Online Group

New to hosting a group online? An online group is an incredible tool to help people connect with each other when an in-person group may not be possible. You can encourage each other's faith, share authentically, and watch God work in ways you may not have dreamed possible.

As you look into launching a group online, or having your group try it out for a week, this page will help you figure out the technology to use, best practices for a good online experience, and what a typical group meeting might look like.



Here are the steps to help ensure success for your online group meetings:

- A. Adopt Best Practices for Online Etiquette as a group; share #'s 1 through 7 with your group members a week before your first group meeting
- B. Begin with a Practice/Get to Know You Session for your first group meeting to help your members become familiar with the online format.
- C. Choose the right Technology Option for your group after investigating each one to learn their ins and outs, pros and cons, etc.

Your first few meetings will take some adjusting as everyone gets acquainted with the technology and the format and works out all of the kinks. Assure your group that you will begin and end each session on-time but if they are running late to please still join in the meeting. Please don't give up too quickly if your first few meetings are a bit of a challenge.

### **BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE ETIQUETTE**

1. Download meeting software prior to meeting.
2. Login to the meeting software in advance to be sure you're set up on the right camera and microphone settings or preferences (depending on the platform). Your own familiarity with the settings/preferences will make it easier for group members.
3. Make sure your face has sufficient lighting and is centered in the video camera
  - Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
  - Make sure your face is centered in the video camera.
  - We don't want to see your forehead, or neck, or miss you all together.
  - Position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
  - Make sure your computer or device is angled properly.
  - The closer you can come to looking directly into the camera the better.
4. Select the quietest room/location you can find.
  - Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
  - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
  - Places like a coffee shop or restaurant can work but sometimes background noise can be an issue. Noise canceling headphones can help with this.

5. Only use one device per household.
  - When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback (really annoying noises).
6. Mute your computer unless you're talking.
  - If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking. So the best policy is to mute yourself when you are not talking.
  - If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them.
  - You will be muting and unmuting A LOT, so get used to it.
  - Also, you'll get called out if you don't unmute, so don't be offended.
  - Or maybe, the moderator will mute you, so don't take that personally.
7. Give full attention, don't multitask.
  - When participants are not paying full attention it can be a big distraction online just like an in-person group.
  - When talking, spend some time looking at the camera, not just the screen.
8. Be an assertive moderator.
  - The moderator/host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure as host you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone.
  - Learn how to use "mute" and "unmute." Although your members can do this for themselves, it is helpful for the host to know how to do this.
  - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude but is necessary to manage a good online experience.
  - The moderator should talk 20% of time and listen 80% of time.
9. Create a plan for participants to indicate they'd like to talk.
  - You may try something like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.
  - Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.
10. Stay in touch afterwards.
  - Assign prayer partners to call each other after group is over and pray with them.
  - Or text each other in gender specific text chats to share requests.

Leverage [GroupMe](#), [Facebook Groups](#), [WhatsApp](#), etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week

## **FORMAT/SCHEDULE**

- **Practice Session/First Meeting (30 minutes)**
  - It can be helpful to have a 30 minute practice session together, or take the first half of your first online group get everyone acquainted with how an online group will work.
  - Review online etiquette/best practices (listed above). You may want to review some of these talking points the first several meetings until people figure it out.
  - Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
  - If you are a new group, make sure to introduce yourself, share you name, and share how you got connected with Northridge and the online group.
  - End by sharing prayer requests; have 1 person pray

- **Typical Meeting (45-60 minutes)**

- Connect - 15-20 minutes
  - Welcome people as they login (people tend to arrive late online, just like in-person groups).
  - Begin ice breaker.
- Discuss - 30-40 minutes
  - Discuss [study questions](#), leaving plenty of time for application questions.
- Wrap Up - 5 minutes
  - Ask for any prayer requests.
  - Have 1 person wrap up in prayer (do not volunteer someone - ask ahead of time).
  - Encourage people to text each other afterwards for further prayer requests and to pray together. (Prayer Ideas: men's group text, women's group text, whole group text, prayer partners, etc.)

## **TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS**

### **1. Google Hangouts**

- Pros: Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.
- Cons: Requires a google account for all participants. (sign up for one [HERE](https://accounts.google.com/signup) <https://accounts.google.com/signup>). Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account. (If you have a [G Suite business account](#), you can also share a phone number for people to call into the meeting if they don't have access to a computer or smartphone. GSuite accounts are free till July 1.)
- Capacity (25 Participants/Devices)
- How to use:
  - Open Google Hangouts in [web browser](https://hangouts.google.com/) (<https://hangouts.google.com/>) or mobile app ([apple device](#), [android device](#), [chrome web browser extension](#))
  - Login
  - Click "Video Call" button
  - Click "Invite People" and type in their email address (**NOTE: If they don't have a google account it will send them an invite to setup an account**)
    - You can also schedule a meeting on your google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. [Watch 6 minute YouTube tutorial](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOabtqUb2bY>

### **2. Zoom**

- 1) Pros: Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.
- 2) Cons: Limited to 40 minutes for group use unless you have a paid account (\$14.99/mo). Have to download Zoom application to phone or computer.
- 3) Capacity (100 participants/Devices)

- 4) How To Use:

- Open Zoom in a [web browser](#) or [mobile app](#) ([apple device](#), [android device](#), [chrome web browser extension](#))
- Login
- Click “Host a meeting with video on”
- Click “Invite participations”
  - Select how you’d like to send an invite:
    - Default Email, Gmail, Yahoo to send email invite
    - or “copy URL”, “Copy Invitation” to copy a link and send it via a text message, email, facebook message, etc.
- You can also schedule a meeting on the zoom website and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. ([See Instructions; https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362413-Scheduling-meetings](#))

[Watch tutorial videos in Zoom video library](#)

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials>

### 3. Facebook Messenger Groups

- **Pros:** Free. Accessible via [web browser](#) on computer. Can access without a facebook account. (If you don’t have a facebook account you’ll need to [download the app](#) to your phone and use phone number.)
- **Cons:** Phone-in option not available.
- **Capacity (50 participants/Devices: 6 video, 44 audio)**
- **How To Use:**
  - Open facebook messenger on [web browser](#) or [mobile app](#)
  - Login (with facebook account or phone number)
  - Click “New Message” button to add facebook friends to group chat After adding contacts, click the “Video Call” button to start video chat.

[Watch 2 minute tutorial](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldhrAQz4r8A>

### 4. [freeconferencecall.com](#)

- If your group is not as tech savvy or doesn’t have the technology to do a video chat, this website offers a free conference call option to phone in. It will be a long distance number most likely.
- How to use:
  - Sign up for an account [HERE https://www.freeconferencecall.com/](#)
  - Share the dial-in number and access code with your group.

Please remember, The Church is God’s people gathered. When you gather, whether you’re on-campus, off campus or online, you are The Church!

Have questions? Contact Jason DeGraaff on Community Group Leaders website, [HERE](#). They love to help! Clipped from: [https://www.northridgeleaders.com/online-groups?fbclid=IwAR1rWjoGDzha-jG9dDSB2ZLGTcGkEiW2Wlfn\\_NSvUN33D2A1v6xiBWlyzr8](https://www.northridgeleaders.com/online-groups?fbclid=IwAR1rWjoGDzha-jG9dDSB2ZLGTcGkEiW2Wlfn_NSvUN33D2A1v6xiBWlyzr8)