

NSDA Support Group Meeting Suggestions

We have all experienced many changes on how we meet and host local support meetings since March 2020. At a time when in-person meetings were not possible, the NSDA quickly shifted to help our leaders host virtual support meetings. We have learned that these meetings, done correctly, are effective and efficient. In virtual meetings, people don't have to travel and leave their families. In addition, more people can become involved and you can have people from any location who might attend, including some who might not have participated otherwise like guest speakers.

As restrictions regarding in-person meetings continue to change, we know some of our local groups are eager to host in-person meetings once again. A virtual meeting is no substitute for face-to-face meetings and people want to be together and see each other. Some leaders may be comfortable returning to in-person meetings while others may prefer remaining on-line. Others may choose a hybrid where they set a schedule for both virtual and in-person meetings. In addition, incorporating a virtual option at an in-person meeting could be an option if your location has the necessary resources including a computer, wifi, and screen. We will continue to provide access to Zoom meeting rooms for our support leaders. The NSDA would like our local leaders to make the best decision for their groups, in consultation with their members.

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) continues to update their guidance regarding the resumption of activities following the pandemic. When planning an in-person meeting, it is recommended that you follow current guidelines on its website: [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). There may also be policies to take into consideration based on your location, including state, city, county and/or municipality mandates. In addition, the meeting location may have its own policies that need to be followed. While complicated, it is important to be aware of any restrictions and share this information in the meeting announcement. People will then be aware of what is expected if they join the meeting so they can make their own decision whether to attend.

In planning, also consider the number of attendees that you expect and determine if the meeting room allows enough space for social distancing. If your meeting venue has a patio, you might want to consider hosting the meeting outside, depending on the weather. Also, some meeting locations, like a hospital, may not be ready to welcome outside groups into their space, so you may need to consider a new meeting place. You may also want to think about food and beverages. Consider asking people to bring their own beverages or provide individual bottles of water. The same is true for snacks. Possibly, having on hand and recommending individually packaged items may be the way to go.

When you do reconvene, allow participants to reconnect. Your community members care about one another and will likely want to hear about how they and their families are doing. Many of the habits that we have adopted to stay safe during the pandemic will continue with us for some time. Consider keeping Covid-19 precautions in place as the impact and implication of the pandemic will be processed differently by people.

Regardless of the type of meeting you are hosting, the NSDA is here to assist with publicizing your meeting. Simply submit your event online with the form: <https://dysphonia.org/submit-an-event/>. The information will be added to the NSDA's calendar of events on its website and an email notification will be sent out to your local community. The NSDA will continue to adapt based on what makes sense across most scenarios. We appreciate your continued leadership and support of the community!