



How To Host An Online Group

Online groups are an incredible tool to help people connect with each other when in-person groups 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.

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. So, don't give up too quickly if your first few meetings are a little clunky.

As you look into launching a group online, or having your group try it out for a week or two, this resource 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.

Platform Options

- **Google Hangouts**
 - **Pros:** Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.
 - **Cons:** Requires a google account for all participants. (can sign up for one [HERE](#)). Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account.
 - **Capacity:** 25 Participants/Devices
 - **How to Use:**
 - Open Google Hangouts in [web browser](#) or mobile app
 - Login
 - Click "Video Call" button
 - Click "Invite People" and type in their email address (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. ([See Instructions](#))
 - [Watch Google Hangouts Tutorial](#)
- **Zoom**
 - **Pros:** Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.

- **Cons:** Limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account (\$14.99/mo). Have to download Zoom application to phone or computer.
- **Capacity:** 100 participants/Devices
- **How to Use:**
 - Open Zoom in a [web browser](#) or [mobile app](#)
 - 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](#))
- [Watch tutorial videos in Zoom video library.](#)
- **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
 - **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 (see image below)
 - After adding contacts, click the “Video Call” button to start video chat. (see image below)
 - [Watch 2 minute tutorial.](#)

Best Practices/Online Etiquette

1. Recommend group members to download meeting software prior to meeting.
2. Make sure your face has sufficient lighting. Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
3. 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.
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. 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.
8. 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.
9. Stay in touch afterwards.
 - Assign prayer partners to call each other after 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.