



## Recommended Practices for Teleconferencing

There are times when all we want is more human contact and the warmth of those around us. However, special circumstances force us to rely on technology to give us the next best thing. Several Spiritist organizations are gearing up to implement conferences, study groups and workshops via teleconferencing. The USSF wants to share a list of good practices to successfully conduct online meetings.

- 1) **Maintain a Higher purpose** – First and foremost, we need to always have in mind that, regardless of distance or of the technology used, any Spiritist activity is a blessed opportunity to learn and reflect
  - a. Therefore, everyone should engage in teleconference events with the same respect that is required when physically at the Spiritist center
  - b. All teleconference sessions should start and end with a prayer to thank the time and dedication of the spiritual friends who will be assisting us
  - c. Let's never forget, no Spiritist activity would happen without the blessed participation of our spiritual mentors and friends
  
- 2) **Choose your platform** – There are several available applications on the market for telepresence. Despite all of them being similar, they have different nuances that might work better for one organization versus another
  - a. Simplicity – Members of Spiritist organizations have differing levels of technological understanding. One should select a platform that makes it easy for everyone to get started.
  - b. Cost – There are several free platforms available. However, even paid applications have come down in cost and some even are now offering special pricing for monthly subscriptions. Take your time to shop around and experiment with free trials. There might be a tradeoff in quality between image/audio and pricing
  
- 3) **Define the Meeting Etiquette beforehand and communicate it to your audience** – The same way that there is appropriate behavior in a physical center, one should expect participants of a teleconference to also adhere to an online etiquette:
  - a. All participants, except for the speaker(s), should be muted at all times, unless someone needs to ask a question.
    - Encourage participants to mute and unmute themselves so they learn how to use the tool and adhere to the guidelines
  - b. Any issues during the lecture should be directed to the technical support person (host) via text messaging or via the chat function within the platform to avoid disrupting the lecture
  - c. It is a good idea to have the cameras on so that everyone can see one another
    - This allows everyone to feel a sense of belonging

- However, one should always remember that they can be seen by everybody, so they should be cognizant of their attire, gesturing and behavior
  - If the meeting begins experiencing lagging or poor audio/video quality, the host can ask people to turn off their cameras to save bandwidth, especially if the meeting is occurring during the weekday on work hours, when all companies and business that are also working remotely are competing for resources on those platforms
- d. Think of creating one slide that can be displayed before the meeting starts that contains key etiquette reminders and /or explanations on how to use the platform
  - e. On your WhatsApp groups, Facebook posts, etc., communicate key aspects of your Meeting etiquette, e.g., the need to keep lines muted. Also include the numbers for phone access (call-in numbers and access codes) in case people cannot join via computer audio.

4) **Conducting the meeting** – Planning is at the heart of any successful implementation.

- a. Rehearsal – Once you have selected your platform, do some test runs with several participants and work out any issues that you might identify beforehand
  - If things do not work as expected in the first few trials, do not give up. There is a learning curve
  - Make sure the presenters are trained on how to use the platform, e.g. share the desktop versus a specific application, muting using the chat feature, using pointers, etc.
  - Take notes of issues the different testers experienced and address them before the real meeting. Some may involve creating explanatory guides on how to use the controls on each platform.
  - As always, remember to ask our spiritual friends for peace, harmony, tranquility, and inspiration
- b. Experts – Elect two or more members to be the subject matter experts of the tool who know not only how it works but also how to solve common problems
- c. Clearly define the roles for the meeting – During online meetings, the facilitator/lecturer (Presenter) should ideally not also be the operator (Host). Plan to have someone be responsible to take care of questions in the chat function and to mute/unmute participants who are generating background noise, while the Presenter delivers the content
- d. Begin early - The Host should plan to kick-off the meeting 15-30 min before the start time to address any last minute technical glitches
- e. Communicate frequently – Before the meeting starts, the host can display a generic announcement slide showing people how to proceed during the meeting, e.g. keeping their lines muted if not talking
- f. Take advantage of key features - Some platforms offer a functionality to mute all oncoming people as they enter the meeting room. This can be useful as people might join late and miss the announcements at the beginning; e.g. to keep their lines muted

- g. Lecturers need to stay focused - Let the technical expert(s) solve any access issues (e.g. people having trouble joining late) freeing the speaker to concentrate on delivering the presentation

- 5) **Collect feedback from your audience** – Good planning is important but often things do not go as planned. Ask your audience for feedback on what went well during the meeting and on what could be improved in the future, e.g. the difficulties they had to join or to find info, etc.

These are a few of the good practices that we collected while speaking with members from different Spiritist organizations. Feel free to contact us, share your experiences, and your do's and don'ts.

Never forget that we are never alone. We have one another, our spiritual mentors and we have Jesus.

Fraternally

U.S. Spiritist Federation

