

Local I-O Groups Managing Through COVID-19

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It is hard to believe how much has changed since the last *TIP*. Our usual means of staying connected with friends, family, and colleagues has changed quite a bit. But through any great tragedy, we show our strengths and sense of resolve. The Local I-O Groups are doing just that.

Local I-O Survey

As I-O geeks, let's start with some data. Earlier in the year, the Local I-O Committee, and new chair Anna Erickson, collected feedback from local I-O group leaders to learn more about how they would like connect with each other. This first of its kind survey was sent to leaders throughout the US with whom we have created alliances.

The results were quite encouraging. Of 31 leaders, 21 leaders responded to the survey resulting in a strong 68% response rate. Leaders voiced strong agreement in the desire to connect with other group leaders via technology:

- 100% expressed interest in an email discussion list
- 95% expressed interest in a phone conference
- 95% expressed interest in meeting in person at the annual SIOP conference
- 89% expressed interest in using a social media platform
- 84% expressed interest in using a video conferencing technology

What makes these results interesting is this survey was conducted *before* COVID-19 was rearing its ugly head. We think that there has been a growing trend in our profession to connect with like-minded people at local and regional levels. Having the option to meet virtually as well as in person has been a topic of conversation for quite some time for group meetings, and having the ability to meet virtually is also true for the leadership.

Why do the I-O group leaders want to meet? The most common reasons for wanting to connect include

- Sharing best practices, tips, lessons learned, and tools for creating and sustaining an effective group
- Discussing ideas for engaging and providing value to group members
- Networking
- Finding areas for mutual support across groups

Local I-O Response to COVID-19

Our desire to meet with our I-O colleagues remains strong, but as can be seen in our survey results, many of the reasons for gathering do not have to be thwarted by a pandemic, whether it be the desire to share recent trends or the need to simply interact with one another. At this time, increased communication is paramount. Many organizations are conducting COVID-19-specific surveys. At the beginning of the pandemic we needed knowledge about people's reaction to the virus and to create plans should things go badly. After our situations had changed, there was need for communicating with employees on work-from-home policies and investigating if people had the tools and information they needed to continue working in their job. Additionally, we needed to characterize the context of increased pressures with children home and with technology difficulties. Most recently organizations have been communicating about returning to work; how can we do this with the new ways of working while remaining safe and avoiding additional outbreaks?

All of these issues are important considerations. As I-O professionals we need to meet now more than ever. This unprecedented event requires us to think in different ways and to share what we have learned. What works? What hasn't worked? How are things different by industry? To that end, a number of groups have been forced to get creative to continue to meet. Below we have a few examples of local I-O groups who took the initiative to continue to meet to share and continue our network.

Arizona Collaborative—Virtual Meetings Increase Participation

The Arizona Collaborative is designed to bring practitioners, academics, and students together to provide monthly professional development opportunities, share best practices, network with other professionals, and provide actionable insights that drive positive change in organizations. They have approximately 200 followers on LinkedIn and a steady group of full-time members who participate each month. Just like the rest of the nation, when COVID-19 entered the scene in Arizona, they had to make a shift from meeting primarily in person with a small virtual component to exclusively virtual connections. The board of the Arizona Collaborative places a high value on connection and relationship, so the thought of indefinite online meetings was a bit discouraging, at first. However, what has blossomed out of the virtual meetings was something that they could have never imagined. Through the actions of the meeting facilitator placing an emphasis on connection and community during this time, they have increased their attendance/participation, continued to foster

collaboration, and broadened the scope of businesses and professionals they can support through monthly meetings. What could have interrupted a collaborative and supportive community instead brought more opportunities and connections to the table. When the “new normal” arrives, the Arizona Collaborative will continue to practice the virtual lessons they have learned and ensure this aspect remains an integral part of their organization.

MIOP—Hosts Virtual Happy Hour

Memphis Industrial and Organizational Psychologists meets quarterly and serves around 40 I-Os in the Memphis and surrounding area. In lieu of their regular post-SIOP conference “data dump” meeting, MIOP hosted a virtual MIOP Happy Hour. While sipping on the adult beverage of their choice, MIOP members participated in a Zoom conference call and discussed how COVID-19 has impacted work in academic, organization, and consulting settings. Highlights included

- A significant **increase in meetings** required to keep up with the constantly changing news regarding health and the economy to discuss impact on day-to-day actions and returning safely to work.
- Use of **surveys** to find out employee engagement and perceptions about work productivity.
- Perception that **productivity has increased**—less fuss getting dressed or showering!
- Perceptions of a **new normal** and that many professionals may choose to continue working from home in the future.
- An **increase in collaboration** due to use of technology that people are being “forced” to use due to virtual settings (e.g., Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, Skype, SharePoint).
- Discussion about whether folks are “**playing hooky**” (Most think not!) and how to handle vacation hours.
- **More corporate-wide webinars** to communicate news *en masse* using moderators to feed questions from chat to leaders. Perception is that questions and ideas are better.
- **A perception that introverts are more engaged**; they like the ability to think about their questions and ask in online chats versus in person.
- **Creative team engagement** strategies, such as hosting work-related happy hours, planning time for some non-business-related discussions, and playing online games.
- **Leaders and employees feel closer** due to the personalized nature of video conferencing, as they catch a glimpse of someone’s cat walking across their lap or overhear their kid asking for lunch.

Finally, the meeting was attended by two members who were out of state, thus showing another benefit of virtual meetings.

METRO—Engaging Members With Virtual Speakers

METRO (Metropolitan New York Association for Applied Psychology) is the distinguished, oldest professional organization of applied psychologists in the United States, being in existence for over 80 years. METRO serves 236 members with a mailing list of over 2,000 people. They meet once a month from October to June, from 6–8pm, socializing before and after the presentations. The METRO Board comprises the president (Comila Shahani Denning), the vice president (**Christina Fleck**), the treasurer (Roza Jankovic), and the secretary (**Dan Simonet**). Although their prior model has worked very well, they have been exploring different options for reaching a broader base, considering virtual options while not detracting from the live experience.

With New York at the forefront of the crisis, METRO had to adjust early and swiftly. Even before the NY governor instituted a shelter-in-place order, the METRO board shifted to a virtual format. They rescheduled speakers who preferred in-person engagements and reached out to others who may have been initially more difficult to schedule due to travel and financial constraints. METRO is a nonprofit, thus they strive to uphold the organization’s financial integrity, ensuring funds serve members and further their mission. Their modest dues cover speaker expenses, space, and food and wine at events. Given that METRO’s mission is to bring high quality research to the widest audience possible, and the virtual event meant that they were not incurring these costs, they were excited to offer this first virtual presentation at no cost, with **Richard Landers** from the University of Minnesota as their speaker. Registrations surpassed 200, over double the usual. Further ensuring that members received full value this year despite disruption, they extended current paid membership an additional 2 months. The Zoom presentation was smooth and engaging. Following best practices, they made it shorter and moderated questions using the chat feature. The event generated wide interest, running over the time allotted, which prevented the facilitators from getting to all questions—not unlike their live events. They’re fortunate to have thought-provoking speakers and topics that stir up lively discussion. While it is their plan to reconvene in person once it is safe again, this crisis let them test technology. Moving forward, it is their plan to offer in-person meetings supplemented by remote options and/or recordings for members. COVID-19 taught the world we may not merely adapt to a more digital environment but also thrive and grow in it. Digital offerings allow them greater flexibility as they strive to offer more while maintaining METRO’s long-term financial health.

MPPAW—Benefits From Local Virtual Meeting Experts

Minnesota Professionals for Psychology Applied to Work (MPPAW) canceled their March meeting in response to health concerns and the state’s “stay-at-home” order. The organization came back strong in May with support from local consulting firm MDA Leadership. MDA founder and SIOP Fellow **Sandra Davis** was the featured speaker for MPPAW’s first ever Zoom-based meeting. A second virtual meeting is

planned for June as the previously scheduled March meeting was moved to June 16 and will feature **Karen Grabow**, Joy Hazucha, and **Stu Crandell** discussing their experiences working with boards to select CEOs.

MPPAW President Kevin Nilan offers the following tips for other local groups wishing to hold their own virtual meetings during this pandemic.

1. Rich application at your ready.

Zoom has much functionality that casual users might not realize. That functionality would not be needed in a two- or three-person Zoom meeting. However, for a large group (say N of 25 or more), knowing what is available in the application you are using might change the dynamics available in the meeting. In MPPAW's case, MDA's learning enabled MPPAW to take advantage of that via the depth of planning MDA staff put into our session.

2. Requires more staff than you might expect.

Multiple operators might be needed if you are broadcasting content and want to also have a rich two-way exchange during the session with participants. MDA offered MPPAW not only Sandra Davis but also an in-session host to staff the chat function and to read the participant written exchanges. Sandra relied upon this individual to read and bring to her important nuggets from either the written exchanges or from the chat function.

3. Preparation.

MDA staff worked on the preparation and delivery of this session. On the preparation end, the visuals were multiple (whereas a solo act might work to minimize time dedicated to developing good visuals). The content used in a virtual presentation is important and often different from what might work in an in-person presentation. Seeking advice and feedback from colleagues who are seasoned as remote presenters can ensure that the content is on target for the medium.

4. Time management.

Timing is crucial in order to keep participants engaged and maximize learning. The MDA cohost Erik Williams recommended setting up breakout groups, which could be done while inside the virtual session. He noted that our original block of time allocated to the session (i.e., 90 minutes) might only accommodate one such high-quality breakout event.

5. Experience pays dividends.

Clearly MPPAW was advantaged by the depth of experience held by the MDA staff involved in the session. We might not know what we did not know, but they did. In the end, our participants benefited from that awareness.