

Soar Valley U3A – Virtual Groups Guidelines

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While we are all confined to our isolated lives, it would be good to keep as much going in the way of group activities as possible. Below are some suggestions that you may wish to try with your own group. Some groups have already made a start – if you have a suggestion or something which is working for you, please let us know so that we can share it with all groups.

We understand that there is very little that can be done for some of the groups but every little helps.

1) WhatsApp

- This is a Smart Phone App that is linked to your mobile phone number. It is a great way of sharing short messages and pictures. Unlike SMS text messages, sending pictures is free in WhatsApp. It supports a groups feature which allows people in a group to share information easily. At least one Birdwatching group already have WhatsApp set up and are sharing hints and tips as well as sightings made while people are in their gardens or out and about getting their isolated fresh air.
- Go to your usual App Store in either Android or Apple and download the App to your Smart Phone. The App is reasonably intuitive. If you get stuck, contact details for people who can help are at the bottom of this document.
- WhatsApp supports multi party voice calls for up to four people.
- WhatsApp also supports multi party video calls for up to four people.

2) Skype

- Many of you will already use Skype to communicate with distant relatives. Skype is a Microsoft product – so if you already have a Microsoft Login you will be able to get up and running fairly quickly There are Apps for SmartPhones and Tablets as well as for desktops / laptops.
- If you have Skype running on a device, it is possible to see which of your contacts are available for a call – either voice or video. · <https://www.skype.com/en/>

3) FaceTime

- If everyone in the group has an Apple device, then FaceTime is an option for group video and voice calls for up to 31 people.
- To use Group FaceTime video calls, you need iOS 12.1.4 or iPadOS on one of these devices: iPhone 6s or later, iPad Pro or later, iPad Air 2 or later, iPad mini 4 or later, iPad (5th generation) or later, or iPod touch (7th generation). Earlier models of iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch that support iOS 12.1.4 can join Group FaceTime calls as audio participants.
- FaceTime also works on Mac desktops and laptops running macOS Mojave 10.14.3 or above.

4) Zoom

- Zoom is a cloud based video conferencing application which supports calls for up to 100 people. Presentations can be delivered and the free version allows calls up to 40 minutes in duration. It does require an App to be downloaded to PC, Mac or tablet in order to work properly. Paul Miles has produced detailed instructions for group members that can be used when people have been invited to join a meeting.

<https://zoom.us>

<https://zoom.us/pricing> - choose the free option at the left of the window.

- As a group leader, you will find it works best if you download the App to your computer. Once you have logged in through the App you will find a simple menu that enables you to schedule meetings. When you schedule the meeting, you will need to email all group members the instructions for their machines together with a start time and the Meeting Identity. Once people have opened the App and entered the Meeting Identity, they have options for how they join the conference (video, audio etc.) One of the options in the App, as “chair” of the meeting, is to share your screen. I have tested this with PowerPoint and it works well. The Share Screen button gives you choices as to which of the open Apps on your computer you actually share.
- Practice scheduling a meeting and test how things work on your own computer – it is easy once you get started.

5) Voice Conferences

- Very few of the services that provide this service are free.
- PowWowNow offers a service where it is free to register but calls are all chargeable.
- PowWowNow uses shared cost numbers which are charged to each individual Host and Guest dialling into a call. Everyone pays for the number of minutes they individually spend on a call. This charge appears on the Host or Guest’s normal telephone bill and is made up of PowWowNow’s fee and your phone company’s access charge (for minutes from a landline only).
- In the UK, these are 0844 numbers and are available to all PowWowNow conference call customers. The charge is (at 18th March) 5.8p per minute from land lines and 12.5p per minute from mobiles.
- The costs can mount up but for groups where few members are online such a service could prove useful.
- To set up a call, the host or chair registers with PowWowNow (for free) and provides everyone with a phone number to dial in to, a PIN access code and a start time for the meeting. Once the number and PIN access code are registered, these are available in perpetuity – you just need a group of people to agree a time and to dial in.
- Calls are voice only. · <https://www.powwownow.co.uk>

6) Off Line Projects

- Group contacts could suggest research projects split up into manageable chunks for group members to work on individually or in pairs to produce notes for other group members that can then be combined into a larger piece of work.

- Complete or partially complete notes can be circulated amongst the group for review or suggestions on how to fill any gaps where the original authors have become stuck.
- The aim would be to produce something which the group can then refer back to in arranging future face to face meetings when the current crisis has passed.
- It may also inform a visits programme in the future.
- Another possibility is for the group to learn something in isolation that can be shared or combined when the group next meets.

7) Online Resources

- The following link is very useful – it lists a selection of resources that enable people to access virtual tours of museums, online learning resources and a whole host of other useful things. · list-of-online-resources-for-anyone-who-is-isolated-at-home
- 190 universities offer 600 free online courses. Here's the full list. i.
<https://www.classcentral.com/report/new-courses-october-2018/>