Meeting While Isolated

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Amateur Radio Clubs throughout the world face the same dilemma. How do we keep meeting while maintaining the isolation required to stop the coronavirus pandemic? And how do we keep our clubs alive and active under these circumstances.

One way is to use virtual meetings. These can be as simple as telephone conference calls and on the air gatherings on the local repeater all the way to full up video streaming on a YouTube or Facebook channel. Many of us are using Zoom. It's an easy to use platform that will run on virtually all devices from PCs and Macs through smartphones.

In my board work, I have Zoom meetings several times a week. My wife and I have Zoom dinners with our friends to stay in touch and share news.

Zoom is available for free. The limitation is that if you have more than two clients (computers/smartphones, etc.) then the meetings are limited to 40 minutes. However, you can connect up to 100 clients.

The Midwest Division has a Zoom Pro account that is available to any club in our Division.   This will allow you to connect up to 100 clients for an unlimited period of time. If you'd like to use this account, please let me know. I can set up the meeting so that I can host it (in case anyone needs to have mics muted, etc.) or you can be self-policing without my involvement. We can discuss that. Unfortunately, I will not be able to turn hosting over to anyone else, but that could change as we gain experience.

So how do you set up a Zoom session? If you are doing it yourself under your free account (or paid account if you have one), simply log into Zoom.com and schedule or start a meeting. Zoom will provide a URL that you can send to all participants. When they log in, if they have not used Zoom before, a window will pop up asking them to install the Zoom app. This is virtually automatic. Once that's done, the client simply connects with their computer's audio and video.

On some devices you may be asked to enter the Meeting ID number. (Usually just clicking on the link you are provided is sufficient.) Also, we may require a password. That, too, will be sent out.

A camera and microphone are not required. If club members would like to just watch the Zoom meeting, they can do that without providing an image or audio. If there are club members without computers, Zoom also supplies telephone numbers to allow participation with audio only via telephone.

Two suggestions. If possible, use a headset with a mic. That improves the audio you send to the meeting. I also like using the earphone since it doesn't disturb my wife. Also, when you enter the meeting as a participant, please mute your own mic. That prevents extraneous noises from interfering with the meeting. The space bar can be used as a push-to-talk. Normally enabled, the space bar status can be set in Zoom settings.

If you would like to use the Midwest Division's Zoom account, please send your request to me (k0aiz@arrl.org) giving me the time, date, and length of your meeting. I'll go ahead and schedule that and send back login information and telephone numbers.

And if you've never used Zoom, I will be happy to set up a private Zoom session. We can meet via Zoom so that you and whomever you choose to join will find out what it is like.

If you have questions or comments, please let me know.

And please stay healthy. See you on the air … or on Zoom.

73, Art K0AIZ