#StopTheDrops Gathering Guide

Your campus has often looked to you as innovative leaders who make change for good in your community. The COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful time to rise to the occasion and lead the way in helping to keep yourself and your campus communities safe.

Connecting with each other is more important than ever, but how do you balance that with concerns about COVID-19 transmission? In-person gatherings are especially risky for transmitting COVID-19, regardless of the purpose. Chapter meetings, events, parties, eating out and informal socializing can all be risky. This guide is designed to help you think about your purpose for gathering, options for doing so and safety considerations.

How to Use the Gathering Guide

Use this guide in combination with the resources available at npcwomen.org/StopTheDrops to help you think through each potential gathering and how to plan for meaningful time together that maximizes both engagement and safety. It can also help you to decide whether to attend others' gatherings.

This guide has three sections. For each gathering, first work through the questions in Section 1. Then, go to the section that best fits your gathering type: virtual (Section 2) or in-person (Section 3). If you are working through Section 3 and discover that the in-person gathering you hoped to have is too risky, change the format to virtual and use Section 2 to plan.

> Section 1: What Kind of Gathering?
> Section 2: Action Planning: Virtual Gatherings
> Section 3: Action Planning: In-Person Gatherings

Note: Even if your campus has moved to a fully remote experience, COVID-19 is still an important topic to address as an organization. Members may still live nearby each other or be traveling to meet in person, raising the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19. This guide and the other resources at npcwomen.org/StopTheDrops can help you educate your members on what increases the risks of gathering and how to reduce those risks.

Prepare for Planning

- **Educate yourself.** Review the COVID-19 information at npcwomen.org/StopTheDrops. The #StopTheDrops video and the section called Transmission: The Problem of Shared Air are integral resources for you.
- **Know your local situation.** Review campus, community and organization rules (laws, policies and guidelines) about COVID-19. Check back frequently, as they may change over time. Note the rules that are especially relevant to gatherings, for example, requirements related to masks, distancing, size and location of in-person gatherings, visitors and any others that apply.
- **Talk with other student leaders.** The Leadership Discussion Guide posted at npcwomen.org/StopTheDrops focuses primarily on conversations with members, but the questions may also help you start conversations about COVID-19 with other leaders on campus. How are they thinking through gatherings? How can you work collectively to avoid having the types of gatherings that are most likely to lead to transmission?

Remember, there is no zero-risk in-person gathering. If you want a gathering that is 100% safe, go virtual. Using the planning tools in this guide will help you assess whether an in-person gathering is possible, and if so, how to minimize transmission risk factors. Minimizing risk takes a combination of efforts. It is not just about lowering one risk factor; it is about lowering as many risk factors as possible. Before you plan, consider reading this article by Erin Bromage, Ph.D. to learn more about transmission and why reducing risk matters. You can read more on the importance of ventilation in shared air spaces in this *USA Today* article "Why bars are hot spots for COVID-19 transmission."

YOU CAN DO THIS! PLAN, LEAD THE WAY. MAKE IT YOUR MISSION TO #StopTheDrops

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Section 1: What Kind of Gathering?

Right now, you are trying to decide if you should have a gathering and what it might look like. What's allowed? What's safe? This is not an easy decision – there are so many factors to consider! Remember, the goal is to reduce shared air (watch this video for a reminder about why that is important). The first two questions to ask are:

- First, **can** you gather in person?
    - Understand the rules of your campus community.
    - Understand the rules of your county and state.
    - Understand the rules of your inter/national headquarters.

Many campuses and communities are limiting in-person gatherings. There may be restrictions about whether in-person gatherings are allowed at all and how many people can attend. The rules may differ by the type of space (indoors/outdoors, enclosed/unenclosed, public/private) and by factors such as square footage or occupancy. It's important to take these limits seriously, as they are based on assessments of the local COVID-19 situation. We know that gathering in closed spaces can be high risk even with a small number of people, so just complying with the rules isn't enough to ensure safety.

- If allowed, **should** you gather in person?
    - Even if some in-person gatherings are permitted, does it make sense to have them?
    - Ask yourself, what is the goal of this gathering? And given that goal, what format can meet the goal AND also minimize transmission of COVID-19?

It's time to use your ABCs to think about your gathering!

A: Articulate the goal

- What is the *goal* for this gathering?

    For some goals, like conducting chapter business, the added risks of an in-person gathering may not be worth it. In fact, maybe it is both safe AND a time-saver for everyone to meet virtually. Let's say the goal is to socialize. When you think about what socializing looks like, you might be looking for a way to have the same kind of parties you had last year. Unfortunately, that's about as risky as you can get! Being in an enclosed space, with a lot of people, without masks, who are close together and talking, for a long time is the "perfect storm" for COVID-19 transmission. The situation you are in this year is going to take all of the creativity you have to figure out new ways to hang out, connect with each other and have fun.

What is your goal for the gathering?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What could be a new way of operating or thinking about how you achieve your goals for gathering?
_____
_____
_____
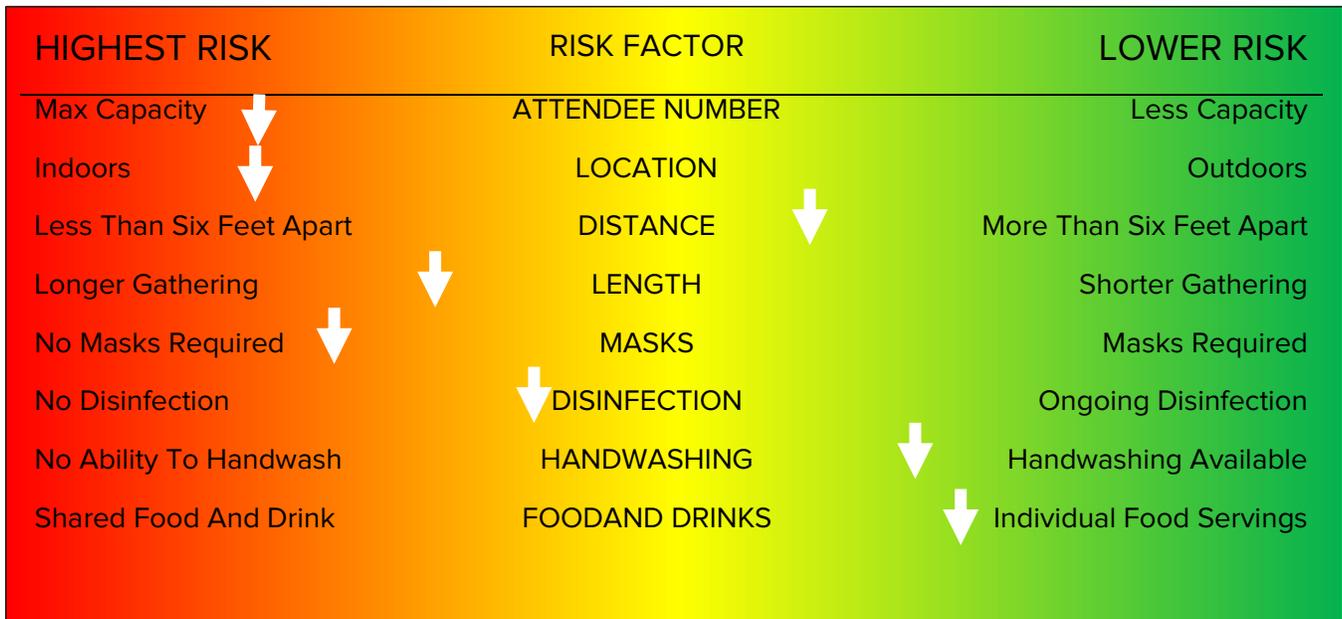_____
_____
_____

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B: Brainstorm the gathering layout and asses the risk factors

- It is time to think about how this gathering looks, keeping your goal in mind. Then think about how the layout and planning stacks up against the risk factors. First, ask yourself about the logistics of the gathering using some of the questions below:
  - How many people would be there?
  - How many people are allowed to meet in-person for a gathering on your campus (or in your community if off-campus)? What other limitations are in place (e.g., location, capacity, square footage)?
  - What kind of spaces are you considering for this gathering, and what is the size/location/capacity of each?
  - In general, what is the culture of safety around COVID-19 on your campus? Are the guests likely to wear masks the whole time? Do you have ideas for making that expectation clear and following through?
  - How many in-person gatherings have you had recently? More in-person gatherings means more potential exposure to the virus, so you will want to think about how frequently you are in group settings.

Now that you have some specific ideas about your gathering, it is time to consider the risk factors. Based on your initial ideas, mark on the spectrum where your event falls for each risk factor.

For example, your gathering has the maximum number of people, indoors, for three hours, without masks, and disinfecting is not managed by you. However, you will socially distance, require washing hands upon entry and will not provide any shared food or drinks. Your risk factors include attendance number, location, physical distance apart, length of the event, wearing masks, disinfecting, handwashing and food and drinks.

Here is how that gathering looks using the risk factor spectrum:

HIGHEST RISK	RISK FACTOR	LOWER RISK
Max Capacity	ATTENDEE NUMBER	Less Capacity
Indoors	LOCATION	Outdoors
Less Than Six Feet Apart	DISTANCE	More Than Six Feet Apart
Longer Gathering	LENGTH	Shorter Gathering
No Masks Required	MASKS	Masks Required
No Disinfection	DISINFECTION	Ongoing Disinfection
No Ability To Handwash	HANDWASHING	Handwashing Available
Shared Food And Drink	FOODAND DRINKS	Individual Food Servings

You can lower the risk of this gathering by: reducing the attendance, moving the gathering outside, structuring it so attendees can keep more than six feet of distance apart, shortening it to one hour, mandating wearing masks the whole time, helping with ongoing disinfection, washing hands upon entry and set up stations for ongoing handwashing and not providing any shared food and drinks the whole time.

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Now, that gathering looks like this on the risk factor spectrum.

HIGHEST RISK	RISK FACTOR	LOWER RISK
Max Capacity	ATTENDEE NUMBER	Less Capacity
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Less Than Six Feet Apart	DISTANCE	More Than Six Feet Apart
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No Ability To Handwash	HANDWASHING	Handwashing Available
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Evaluate Your Events

Now, it's your turn! Think about your gathering based on the above brainstorm. Using the risk factor spectrum below, think about each risk factor and mark where on the spectrum it falls for your gathering. If what you are planning is an in-person gathering with high risk factors, do **not** have this event! Go back to the drawing board and choose a format that lowers risk.

HIGHEST RISK	RISK FACTOR	LOWER RISK
Max Capacity	ATTENDEE NUMBER	Less Capacity
Indoors	LOCATION	Outdoors
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- With this analysis in mind, decide which event you'll plan for: in-person or virtual.
- If you've chosen an in-person gathering, do a final check with these questions:
  - **Can** you gather in person? Given the number of people and space when you would meet, is this gathering permitted?
  - **Should** you gather in person? Make sure you have used the risk factor spectrum exercise above to assess your risks. Are you able to do this gathering in a low-risk way?
- If you cannot adjust your in-person gathering to lowest risk levels, then go virtual and go to Section 2 to plan for an engaging virtual gathering.
- If you can plan for an in-person gathering with low risk factors, then go to Section 3 and finish your planning.

Section 2: Action Planning for Virtual Gatherings

You have made the decision to do a virtual gathering. That is the absolute safest choice, so you should feel great about that decision. This year's gatherings are going to look different than last years, so it is time to start reimaging your gathering and making it better than anyone imagined it could be. Use the guidance below as a starting place and be creative!

Here are just a few examples of virtual gathering ideas:
- All meetings (chapter, class or Executive Board).
- Live gaming or competitions (Pictionary, Charades, Card Games like Go Fish, Lip Sync Battle).
- Watch parties of your favorite shows or movies.
- Virtual storytelling events using things in your houses or rooms (go get an object that is meaningful to you and your membership because____. Or, go get a photo that tells us something more about your family/friends/etc.).
- Health and well-being activities like group meditation, yoga or a workout.
- Developing hobbies like a baking or cooking class, drawing class or the classic knitting circle.
- Weekend brunch together over video chat with all members.
- Digital escape room.

From Section 1, remind yourself of your gathering's goal.
_____
_____
_____
_____

Keeping this goal at the top of your mind, it is time to plan the logistics of the gathering. As you walk through the worksheet, go back to the goal and make sure each decision helps achieve that goal! Some key points to consider are *italicized* under each question.

1. **Planning, Communication and Expectations:**

   a. How long will the virtual gathering be?
   _____
   How frequently will you give attendees a break?
   _____
   Virtual gatherings are best in small bursts allowing for ongoing engagement and attention-grabbing ideas! If members aren't all on campus, don't forget to think about time zone. Time zone consideration is key to ensuring all members are able to participate fully. Remember to end on time to show respect for everyone's time.

b. Would having the attendees' videos turned on help achieve your gathering goal?
☐ YES   ☐ NO
Will attendees be required to have their video on? ☐ YES   ☐ NO
If yes, how will you communicate that ahead of the event?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Consider requiring or strongly encouraging attendees to be on video if that supports the virtual gathering's goal, but share that expectation in advance.

c. How can the host of the event model excitement and energy?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

As a host, your energy will have a big impact on the participants! You might have to project that excitement and positivity even more than you would in person.

d. How can the host express gratitude and empathy for attendees during the gathering?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

People might be tired of virtual meetings, and you can show empathy for that feeling. Also, do not forget that it is important to express gratitude for those who attend the virtual event – appreciation and "thank you" goes a long way!

e. How does this virtual gathering provide the experience that allows for people to be socially and emotionally connected with one another?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

You are providing something special they might not have in other places or groups.

Now it is time to think about ways to keep attendees engaged. This step is VERY important if you want to surpass your attendees' expectations for this virtual gathering!

2. Plan for Engagement
a. How will you plan to engage attendees before the gathering starts?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Sometimes you might just think about the gathering itself, but there are great ways to build up excitement before it begins. Here are a few ideas:
- *Create a hashtag for the gathering and have a social media contest for the best post using the hashtag.*
- *Make a secret game and send the members a teaser before the event. For example, secretly pick a color and attendees who are wearing that color shirt will win a prize.*

- *Have a guessing game about the special guest speaker. Post clues about the speaker throughout the week and have the members guess who it is.*

b. How can you structure the event so attendees are active participants?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

> *Every platform has different tools, so familiarize yourself with them and find ways to make the gathering meaningful. Don't be afraid to get creative! Here are just a few ideas:*
> - *Take the first 10 minutes and open the floor for recognition between members.*
> - *Use the white board feature of your platform.*
> - *Screenshare a video for discussion.*
> - *Make a Kahoot activity to support learning about a topic.*
> - *Have attendees get up and move around or respond with different physical actions.*

c. Who are the members who could host different parts of the gathering and what skills can they bring to help achieve the gathering's goal?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

> *You can draw upon the creativity and energy of your attendees to keep the gathering engaging!*

d. If planning a gathering for business purposes, what are some ways you can break up the business items to offer social opportunities for attendees?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

> *Build an agenda that mixes business and fun activities to help foster connection among attendees.*

e. If planning a gathering for business, how will you check in on the well-being of one another before you jump right into the business?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

> *Checking-in with your members on their well-being or self-care shows you care about them. You can ask check-in questions, offer suggestions or resources for self-care or make the space just to talk to one another. Some ways to ask about members and check-in could be:*
> - *Consider a prompt like, "Type one word into the chat that describes how you're feeling right now" or "What are some challenges that you are facing this week?"*
> - *Share 2-3 sentences of how YOU are doing and invite some others to do the same.*

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f. Plan when engagement will occur.

You'll want something to engage your attendees every 5-7 minutes. Remember to create engagement efforts that foster connection as much as possible. Examples: Use the chat feature. Take a vote. Use the reaction feature. Ask questions directly of people. Put them into a breakout room to discuss. Use a virtual whiteboard. Open a Google Doc and ask members to participate in documenting thoughts. Use virtual polling. Ask members to help Executive Board members deliver report or make slide decks.

Create your gathering timeline, thinking about those engagement efforts.

Time	Engagement Effort	Who	Needs
9	Welcome dance party	Social Chair	Mimi's song
9:05	Chat feature	Social Chair	Question: When was your last dance party!?
9:10	Call to Order	President	
9:12	Roll Call	Secretary	
9:15	Officer reports	Executive Board	Half of the officers present their reports. Officers ask for input or feedback in chat or create a poll in advance for voting on ideas. Officers could also have committee members report out for them to engage other members in the meeting.
9:35	BREAK	--	--
9:40	Stand Up If...	Social Chair	Create questions for the stand-up activity. "Stand up if you miss hugging your little sister. Stand up if you have learned to cook something new."
9:45	Officer reports	Executive Board	Other half of the officers present their reports. See engagement ideas above.
10	Meeting adjourn	President	Thank them for coming and invite to optional social time.
10:01	Optional breakouts for Social Time	Volunteer breakout leaders	Ask women to welcome members to the room and keep the convos going – This is about time together with one another!

Your turn! Complete the chat below to plan for engagement. Please add rows if you need them.

Time	Engagement Effort	Who	Needs

g. How will you plan to engage attendees after the gathering ends?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Even though the "official" event might be done, consider some ways to keep engagement going after your event. Here are a few ideas:

- *Solicit feedback from the attendees about the event and ask for ideas to make future meetings engaging.*
- *Have the attendees vote on the theme for the next gathering – a perk for attendees!*
- *Consider a raffle for attendees, for example, a small prize such as a gift card or sorority/Panhellenic item.*

You did great work - you have planned an engaging and exciting virtual event!

Section 3: Action Planning Tool for In-Person Gatherings

"Just because we *can* have 50 people at our party, doesn't mean we *should*."
-Student leader during an NPC focus group

Remember, there is no zero-risk situation with in-person gatherings. If you want the gathering to be 100% safe, go virtual. To plan for virtual events, use Section 2.

The action planning tools in this section will help you minimize the risk factors at an in-person gathering. Minimizing risk takes a combination of efforts. It is not just about lowering one risk factor, it is about lowering as many risk factors as possible. Now let's start planning and remember, *it is not just one thing, it is all the things*.

HIGHER RISK	LOWER RISK

From Section 1, remind yourselves of your gathering's goal.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

    a. Who is going to be there/audience? _____

    b. How many people? _____

         Remember, your event cannot exceed campus/community guidance.

Event Space

Your event location is critical. Outdoor events are better than indoor events. This increases airflow, which reduces shared air. Remember, transmission thrives in enclosed environments without good air flow.

    a. Can the events be outdoors? This is best minimizing risk option. ☐ YES   ☐ NO

         If not fully outdoors, how about in an open-air pavilion or a large tent with no sides and good ventilation?

    b. If not, why? What are the barriers that don't allow the gathering to be outside? How can you work to overcome these barriers?

_____
_____
_____
_____

If your event must be inside, what are the spaces you are considering and the max occupancy and square footage of each space?

Space Description (including name of location)	Max Occupancy/ Sq Footage

Check the campus/community rules around occupancy. For example, some state or local ordinances require a restaurant's occupancy to be cut in half. If your planned attendance does not fit into the maximum allowable occupancy, then you must find a new venue or reduce your attendance.

Now that you have an idea of the space options, let's look at social distancing at the venue/space.

Social Distancing

At a minimum, the CDC recommends keeping at least six feet of distance between all attendees at all times, even outdoors. Because attendees will be moving around and talking to one another, you will want more space. Consider doubling your six feet to twelve feet in that case.

    a. Remind yourself, how many attendees? _____
        Remember, you cannot exceed the max occupancy.
    b. How many square feet is the gathering space? _____
        Use the table below as a guide.
    c. Does your space allow for you to achieve six or more feet of distance between attendees?
        ☐ YES   ☐ NO
        If not, your options to minimize transmission risks include moving the event outside, finding a new location or reducing the number of attendees.

Use this chart as a guide to think about number of attendees, distancing and the space needed.

# of People	Distance Apart	Space Required
10	6 feet	360 sq feet
10	8 feet	640 sq feet
10	12 feet	1,440 sq feet
25	6 feet	900 sq feet
25	8 feet	1,600 sq feet
25	12 feet	3,600 sq feet
50	6 feet	1,800 sq feet
50	8 feet	3,200 sq feet
50	12 feet	7,200 sq feet

Once you know that social distancing works in your space, think about how you will help attendees maintain social distancing. Brainstorm the following ideas as you design your event space:

    d. How will you help attendees to keep six feet or more apart when **entering** the event?
_____
_____
_____

    e. How will you help attendees to keep six feet or more apart **during** the event?
_____
_____
_____

    f. How will you help attendees to keep six feet or more apart when **exiting** the event?

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_____
_____
_____
_____

    g.   What role, if any, will the event monitor, if present, play to help attendees keep six feet or more apart? How will you prepare an event monitor for this role?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Gathering Length

Now, that you have decided on the gathering's goal, designed an event space and planned for social distancing, it is time to think about how long the event should be. A longer event will undo all the risk reduction plans you just made. According to the CDC, transmission has occurred in larger events spaces in as little as one to two hours.

Shorter events are better than longer gatherings. The longer a group is together, the higher their risk exposure.

    a.   How long will the event be? _____

    b.   How will you get people to leave when the event is over? Keep in mind the need for social distancing as people exit.

_____
_____
_____
_____

The everyday actions that you take to stop COVID-19 transmission, including wearing masks, handwashing and disinfecting surfaces, are also important at gatherings. Consider now how you will carry out these everyday actions at your gathering.

Wear Masks

Masks are critical to reducing transmission because they help to block the respiratory droplets we all breathe out. Without question, masks should be required of all attendees during the entire gathering. Masks should be worn properly by covering both mouth and nose, fitted without gaps, etc. If food and drink are served, guests will have to remove masks, so you will need even more space for social distancing during that time, and you may have to remind guests to put masks back on. Think through the plan for promoting consistent and proper mask wearing, considering the following:

    a.   How do we let people know masks will be required?

_____
_____

    b.   How do you communicate that requirement in your actions (i.e. turning people away without masks, handing masks out)?

_____
_____
_____

    c.   How will you correct people who are not wearing masks properly?

_____
_____
_____

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Ongoing Disinfecting and Handwashing

Proper and ongoing hygiene during your gathering is a must. Plan your gathering so that handwashing and sanitization are available and frequent. Commonly touched surfaces should be cleaned throughout the gathering.

    a. How will attendees disinfect their hands upon arrival?
        ☐ HANDWASHING STATIONS ☐ SANTIZING STATIONS

    b. How will attendees disinfect their hands after using the restroom?
        ☐ HANDWASHING STATIONS ☐ SANTIZING STATIONS

    c. Consider the gathering space – list the surfaces that will experience frequent attendees contact (doorknobs, bars, handrails, etc.).
    _____
    _____
    _____

    d. What disinfection practices will you use during your gathering (what, where, how often)?
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    e. Who is responsible for the ongoing disinfection practices?
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    f. Who will order the supplies and how much is needed for ongoing disinfection?
    _____
    _____
    _____

Food and Drink

The key guideline here is "no communal anything." Anything that multiple people touch can increase risk, for example, multi-serving containers of food or drink, bowls of snacks, kegs, punch bowls, food with shared serving utensils and even simple things like salt and pepper shakers. First, it is possible to spread COVID-19 through surfaces, although that is not thought to be the primary way the virus spreads. In addition, people will come close together to serve themselves, which means they are not social distancing. No matter how food is served, guests will have to take their masks off to eat or drink, so that's an increased risk and you'll want to plan for how to make sure people have plenty of space around them. If you serve food/drink at all, the best bet is individual servings that the guests can obtain in ways that maintain social distancing. You can also consider allowing attendees to bring their own food, if allowed. Please note, rules around alcohol at events still apply.

Now, complete a risk factor assessment using your details you just outlined above.

HIGHEST RISK	RISK FACTOR	LOWER RISK
Max Capacity	ATTENDEE NUMBER	Less Capacity
Indoors	LOCATION	Outdoors
Less Than Six Feet Apart	DISTANCE	More Than Six Feet Apart
Longer Gathering	LENGTH	Shorter Gathering
No Masks Required	MASKS	Masks Required
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Final Questions

You've done some great work so far! After you have thought through the gathering using the questions and then assessed it using the chart above, ask yourself these final few questions:

    a. Based on the risk factor spectrum, how risky is your gathering?
       ☐ HIGHEST RISK   ☐ MEDIUM RISK   ☐ LOWER RISK
          If you checked highest risk, you should not have this event for the safety of the campus community. Rethink the gathering more or shift the gathering to an engaging VIRTUAL event.
    b. If some risks are still in the medium to high range, ask yourself: Have you lowered the risk of the gathering to the lowest possible level? ☐ YES   ☐ NO
    c. What other steps could you take to reduce as many risk factors as possible to the lowest possible level? Go back through the questions above if needed.

       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____
       _____

    d. If some of your risk factors are still in the red zone or red/yellow zones and you cannot lower them, reconsider whether you should have this in-person event.

You did it! Now take one second for a final reflection: Are you sure moving this event virtually couldn't also achieve your same gathering goal? If you feel your goal is achieved by meeting in-person and you have a realistic plan for keeping the risk factors low, enjoy your gathering. Remember, all this planning will not be effective unless you carry your plans through during the event and stay on top of whether you are creating the lowest risk environment! You can do it – you are a great leader on your campus – be safe and take care of your attendees.

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