

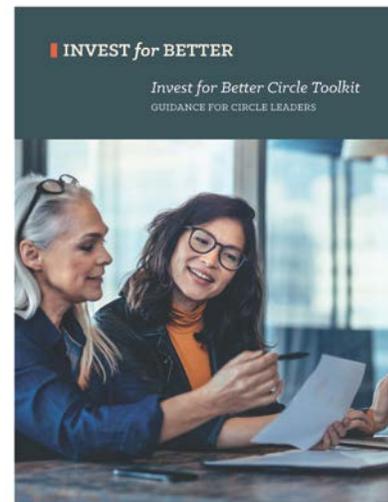
# INVEST *for* BETTER

## *Invest for Better Circle Toolkit* SUPPLEMENT FOR VIRTUAL CIRCLES

### *Why this supplement?*

From the beginning of the Invest for Better initiative, there has been interest in both virtual IFB Circles and augmenting in-person groups with online meetings. The COVID-19 pandemic mandated that all Circles move to the virtual realm and both existing and new Circle leaders have shared their overwhelmingly positive experiences with virtual gatherings. While we know that there will be challenges in transitioning the model, we are also excited to see how new IFB circles will take shape and how existing groups will adapt to this different style of meeting. These are unprecedented times--and we look forward to learning together.

This supplement is intended for use *in conjunction with* the Invest for Better Circle Leader Toolkit and provides tips and suggestions for helping you build a successful Circle via virtual meeting technology.



### *What is a Virtual Circle?*

When an Invest for Better Circle meets online, many things remain the same as the in-person model. The content and flow of the Circle will likely be equivalent. Virtual meetings can take place via Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout or similar hosting platforms. Some circles will likely be virtual “by design;” others will default to virtual (perhaps temporarily) in order to adapt to our new reality; while others will intentionally blend in-person and on-line meetings in order to maximize the benefits of each model.

### *Pros/Cons of Virtual Circles vs. In-person Circles*

Virtual Circles will have some real upsides. The inherently more-flexible format can present exciting opportunities: for example, members don’t have to live in the same community (expanding the pool of potential participants) and speakers don’t have to travel (and thus could be chosen from a wide range of national experts). It will be easier to schedule meetings and increase attendance. And think of how much logistically simpler – and cheaper -- meetings will be with no food or meeting space to arrange!

There are challenges to the virtual format as well. It will take greater intentionality to build trusted community, and a sense of safety and confidentiality that is vital for thriving IFB Circles. The bonds that hold groups together are developed more easily in person-- and online meetings generally don’t offer the serendipitous side conversations that enrich our interactions.

Virtual meetings are likely to be shorter –perhaps 90 minutes rather than several hours over a meal. But without the need to for travel time, the meetings might be more frequent, enhancing continuity. More structure may be needed in order to optimize the time spent for shorter meetings.

### *Tips/Advice from other Virtual Circles*

Circle leaders have offered the following advice and ideas for your virtual circle. We look forward to gathering more ideas as more Circles undertake the on-line experience.

1. **Keep it small:** Aim for 8-12 people, just as you would with a face-to-face group. We want to retain the intimacy of a small gathering and build relationships among members.
2. **Tu amiga es mi amiga:** Make sure everyone invited has a pre-existing relationship with somebody in the Circle; e.g. one of the hosts or another participant.
3. **Pair participants as accountability partners** who encourage each other to show up to the virtual event and maintain their participation throughout.
4. **Build in some socializing time in the beginning, middle or end:** If it is up front, it may be too rushed, but once the content is covered, folks often feel more relaxed and social. Some participants may stay on after the 90 minute scheduled time.
5. **Have some one-on-one “get to know you” circle member dates** outside of the formal online meetings– perhaps rotating after each circle so that participants get to know everyone on a 1 to 1 basis.
6. **Address confidentiality:** Online platforms usually offer the option to record meetings. Find out whether your group thinks this would inhibit open conversation and, if so, suspend that functionality.
7. **Expect technical mishaps:** Bad connections, outages, and poor sound quality are bound to happen. Expect them, and it won't be as disruptive when they occur.

### *Other Useful Resources*

[How to Run a Great Virtual Meeting](#) (Harvard Business Review)

[How to make your virtual Circle meetings a success](#) (Lean In)

[The Art of Facilitating Virtual Discussion Groups and Breakouts](#) (CMX)