

Events at Messiah University

Events have always been an important part of campus and community life at Messiah. Given the risks involved with large crowds, the way that we do events will necessarily look different this year. This section outlines the changes that will be implemented in order to safely conduct events at Messiah University. These changes are in line with expectations from the State Department of Health and guidance from the CDC for Events and Gatherings. Specific guidance from the CDC dictates the following:

- A gathering refers to a planned or spontaneous event, indoors or outdoors, with a small number of people participating or a large number of people in attendance such as a community event or gathering, concert, festival, conference, parade, wedding, or sporting event.
- The *more people* an individual interacts with at a gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and COVID-19 spreading.
- The higher the level of community transmission in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering.
- The size of an event or gathering should be determined based on state, local, territorial or tribal safety laws and regulations.
- The risk of COVID-19 spreading at events and gatherings increases as follows:
 - **Lowest risk:** Virtual-only activities, events, and gatherings.
 - **More risk:** Smaller outdoor and in-person gatherings in which individuals from different households remain spaced at least 6 feet apart, wear cloth face coverings, do not share objects, and come from the same local area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).
 - **Higher risk:** Medium-sized in-person gatherings that are adapted to allow individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and with attendees coming from outside the local area.
 - **Highest risk:** Large in-person gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced at least 6 feet apart and attendees travel from outside the local area.

Event Guidelines & Feasibility

The majority of traditional events held in the fall will not be able to take place in-person. Large events that bring outside guests to campus such as Family Weekend, Grandparent's Day, Homecoming, the American Democracy Lecture, and Messiah Christmas have already been cancelled. Event hosts must critically evaluate the need to have an in-person event this fall. Any event that can effectively be moved to a virtual platform should pursue that option. In cases where a virtual environment would be detrimental to meeting the event's goals, the guidelines below will be in place.

Event Approval Process

Departments, faculty, and student groups have traditionally been able to reserve campus space virtually through the EMS application. If there were no set-up, catering, or technical needs for the event, the reservation was finalized automatically. Due to the considerations that must be made for each event, regardless of size or needs, this process must be made more robust. Any department, division, employee, or student group wishing to host an event will be required to complete a web-request form. This form will launch the planning process to determine if the event is feasible to take place in person. Conference & Event Services staff will then work with the contact on the details of the event. As in the past, no arrangements should be made with catering and no advertising should take place prior to receiving approval from Conference & Event Services.

Understanding that many events will be denied due to space and safety considerations, Messiah University will offer an appeal process for denied events. The appeal process will be outlined to the event contact in the event their initial request is denied. Appeals will be considered by a team consisting of representatives from the Division of Operations, Conference & Event Services, the Provost Office, and the Division of Student Success & Engagement.

Event Attendees

During the fall semester, no attendees from off-campus will be permitted at any indoor event held on campus. The only exceptions to this will be immediate family members of students participating in athletic contests, arts events, or academic presentations or ceremonies. This policy will provide maximum protection for the student population, while still accounting for the need to have family support at significant events in the academic careers of students such as senior recitals, research presentations, and athletic competitions. Taking this approach also reserves the majority of event seating for our students. Messiah University students, both residential and commuter, and employees are permitted to attend events.

Limited Capacities and Seating Layouts

All seating at events will be laid out in a way that allows for social distancing. This will result in greatly reduced capacities in all event spaces. Seats and rows will be blocked off as necessary and ushers will be required at many events in order to assist with spacing. Events may require reserved seating as opposed to open or general admission seating. An event which would typically take place with attendees at round tables may need to adapt to one in which attendees sit in rows of chairs. Events that cannot ensure adequate social distancing among attendees will not be approved. One exception is residence hall floor events or gatherings. Because these floors represent an “extended family” they may meet in a space with adjusted social distancing guidelines in place. In this case, no one outside of the “extended family” should be allowed to attend the event.

Event Location

Events must accept an assigned room based on event needs and anticipated attendance. Due to the need to convert many of our traditional event spaces into classrooms, there are fewer options of rooms to use for events. Set-ups in many rooms are unable to be adjusted. While preferences will be considered, the Office of Conference & Event Services will make the final decision of where each event may be held.

Safety Protocols

The event contact will be responsible for ensuring that all attendees adhere to social distancing requirements and safety protocols such as mask wearing, hand washing/sanitizing, and surface cleaning as needed. Event contacts are responsible for ensuring that the number of attendees does not exceed the new capacity of the space (posted near the door).

Meetings at Messiah

Meetings should be conducted virtually whenever possible. No in-person meetings should take place unless 6 feet of social distance can be maintained.

Private Lessons, Coaching, or Tutoring

In accordance with our off-campus visitor policy, private lessons, coaching, or tutoring of any non-Messiah students may not take place on campus. This limits the exposure of the university community as well as reduces the liability of the institution.

Facility Use by Guests

No guests will be permitted to use Messiah University facilities. This includes those that have traditionally been open to the public, such as Murray Library, the indoor track, Fredrickson Natatorium, and gymnasium space for activities such as “noontime basketball” or “noontime soccer”.

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers should be scheduled as ZOOM/virtual guests as often as possible. Guest speakers on-campus will be strictly limited to those whose engagement is considered a critical component of the curriculum and/or co-curricular programming. Due to the need to limit visitors, in-person guest speakers are not permitted for clubs and organizations.

Facility Rentals

Messiah University will suspend all facility rentals through November 30, 2020. This policy will be reevaluated on October 1st to determine if rentals can begin at the conclusion of the fall semester.

Large Event Logistics

In Pennsylvania’s “green phase,” events cannot exceed 250 attendees. Outside of Hitchcock Arena and Shoemaker Field, we do not have venues with a capacity of 250 people with social distancing in place. Events must adhere to the new venue capacities that have been provided. Larger events (exceeding 50 attendees) may require additional safety measures to be implemented including:

- Attendee screening – Each guest may be screened prior to entry into the event, including a health questionnaire and temperature screening. In the event that health screenings are necessary, anyone who has had recent direct contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter. Anyone displaying a temperature over 100.4 F will be taken to a private area for a secondary temperature screening. Patrons confirmed to have a higher temperature will be denied entry and directed to appropriate medical care.

- **Controlled Entry** – Guests may be required to line-up while maintaining social distancing. We will use temporary indicators to assist with maintaining distance. Where possible, line-ups will take place outdoors with a select number of guests permitted to enter at a time to avoid crowding. For events larger than 100 people, we may assign arrival times to guests in order to reduce wait times and congestion.
- **Intensive restroom cleaning** – Restroom attendants may be provided for events with larger crowds. Personnel will have the sole responsibility of continually sanitizing high touch areas of the restroom including door hands/knobs, toilet stall hardware, toilet/urinal flush mechanisms, toilet seats, sinks, sink faucets, soap dispensers, and paper towel dispensers.
- **Usher services** – Ushers may be provided to help maintain social distanced seating among guests. Ushers will also assist with emptying the room at the conclusion of the event. Social distancing requires that egress be managed the same way passengers exit an airplane at the end of their flight. Patrons nearest the exits should leave first, by row or section, in order to clear space for patrons further inside to follow. For this same reason, events should not plan to have an intermission. Those events that may have had an intermission in the past should be shortened in an effort to avoid the need for a break.
- **Guest illness plan** – Event hosts should identify and reserve an isolated space to be used in case a guest becomes ill during the course of the event. Guests who cannot immediately leave the facility should be directed to this space in the event they cannot immediately depart. If this space gets used for this purpose during the course of the event, the Department of Safety and the Office of Conference & Event Services should be notified immediately. Isolation areas must be closed off until proper disinfection can occur.

Virtual Events

With the understanding that there will be fewer in-person gatherings, but that events offer unique social, spiritual, and intellectual benefits, Messiah University is prepared to offer support to events that are able to take place in a virtual environment. Virtual events may take place on a platform provided by the institution and as approved by Conference & Event Services. Events will go through a similar web request process to ensure availability of resources to support a virtual event and to manage the number of events happening on a given day. The University is currently processing additional parameters related to the expected increase in institutional requests for these types of events, and will release additional details to the campus community as they are finalized.

Accessibility Considerations

Both live and recorded virtual events require additional considerations regarding accessibility. All such events **MUST** arrange for closed-captioning of any speech. This is much easier to accomplish for pre-recorded content. Events taking place live, but virtually, should be aware that closed-captioning services must be paid for from the event's budget.

Copyright Considerations

There are restrictions on the type of content that can be played or offered virtually. For example, using background music of your favorite song without the rights to do so is a violation of copyright law and places the institution at risk of litigation. Showing a movie virtually without the license to do so would also be problematic. Use common sense about what you show or play during online events. When in doubt, err on the side of caution.