

Creating a Welcoming Community for Friends with Disabilities

Are you interested in creating a welcoming community in your state? Here are some things you might consider and some tips from *Hangout Hive*, a proud project of the *Learning Disabilities Association of Maryland* since 1999.

Since 1963, *LDA* has provided support to people with learning disabilities, their parents, teachers and other professionals with cutting edge information on learning disabilities, practical solutions, and a comprehensive network of resources.

Don't feel that all decisions must be made before starting a community. Groups can be as small as two people to as many as you can handle. People come together to laugh, to learn, and to enjoy life. For us, each year brought new situations, decisions, and appreciation for our group. You will create your own community based on your own interests. Be confident and have fun!



Who will be part of your new community? How will they join?

Do you want membership to include all disabilities or a specific one? What age range is welcome? How can someone become a member?

Hangout Hive chooses not to discriminate based on disability. We do require members to be at least 21 years old. Our minimum requirements for membership are here:

www.hangouthive.org/join_requirements

We have a membership application on our website www.hangouthive.org/register. The Leadership Team (four annually elected members) receives each application and decides whether the applicant is eligible.

Where will you meet?

How often?

Find a place to have your frequent group meetings.

The *Hangout Hive* meets in a condo party room one night a month. These meetings can be in a home, a library, or a party room. Depending on your budget and the availability of space in your area, you might use the space for free or rent it.

How are activities chosen?

Who will organize the events?

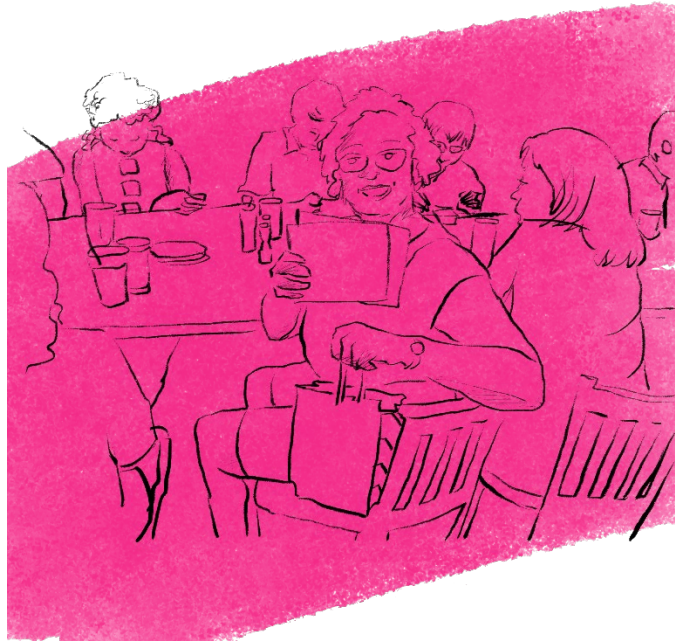
Each month, *Hangout Hive* members suggest restaurants, fairs, parades, and places to go on the weekends. The suggestions are presented to members in a questionnaire. They vote for the events they like. The events that receive the most votes are chosen for the month. The Social Events Coordinator (an elected member of the group) then announces the event to members by email: where to meet and when, and tracks who has signed up.

Each activity has a host member who welcomes participants. All members are responsible for purchasing their own food and finding transportation to the event.



**Do you want to collect membership dues?
If so, how much and for what?**

The *Hangout Hive* has an annual membership fee of \$35. Members vote on how this money is spent. For example, it might be used to purchase a birthday present for a member or to provide food for the monthly meeting or holiday party.

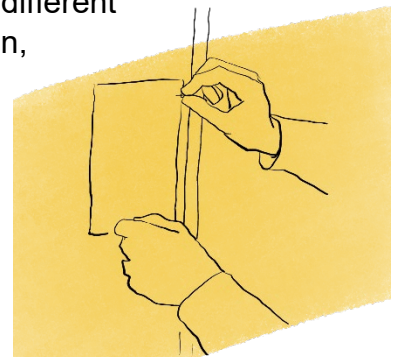


Announce the community and invite people to join.



Today, there are so many ways to announce the start of a new community. What works best for you and for prospective members? Social media? Email? Professional organizations, special education communities, libraries, schools, local colleges?

The *Hangout Hive* began in 1999, and different options were available. The Washington, DC area had radio programs and local newspapers where we could place free public announcements. We asked libraries and schools to display our brochures and posters. We started with a group of 4 adults who met in a member's condo each week.



Check out the *Hangout Hive* promotional video on YouTube. If you need a little inspiration to move forward, listen to what members have to say about why the group is important to them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFfuOm_vdng

Find the full version of *Gather: A Do-It-Yourself Kit for Creating your Own Community*.
<https://ldamd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/GatherSocialGroupToolKit.pdf>



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GATHER CHECKLIST

- ☐ Who will be part of your new community?
- ☐ How will they join?
- ☐ Where will you meet?
- ☐ How often will you meet?
- ☐ How are activities chosen?
- ☐ Who will organize the events?
- ☐ Do you want to collect membership dues?
- ☐ If yes, how much will the dues be?
- ☐ Announce the community and invite people to join!