

# Local Connections

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**Definition:**

An in-person gathering of two or more SAQA members and guests in a local community within a SAQA region

**Objective:**

To stimulate and support in-person gatherings of SAQA members in local communities for the purpose of sharing a love of art quilting

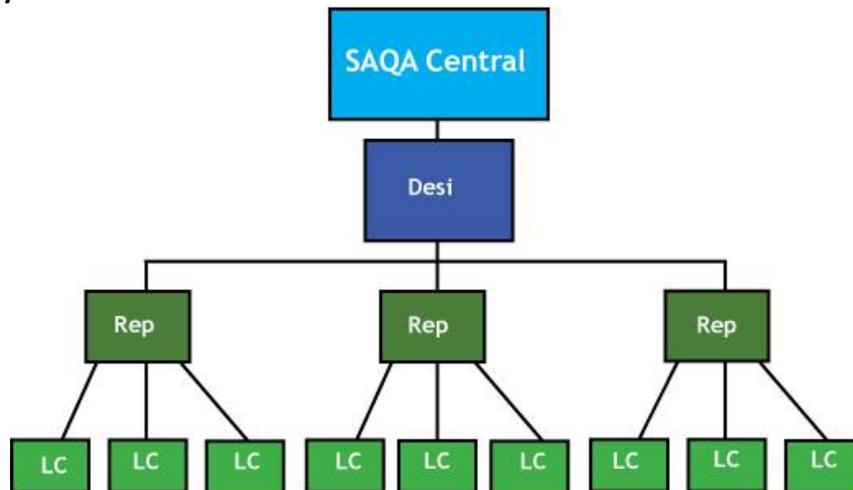
- **Is this a pod or a circle, or something new?**

Local Connections already exist in about half the regions and go by a variety of names (pod, circle, etc.). If you have them and like the name, keep it. For the sake of communication, however, we're lumping them all together under "Local Connections". The idea is to tailor them to whatever works best for *your* region.

- **Won't work everywhere**

Live gatherings aren't appropriate for every member in every region. For example, if members live great distances from each other, live gatherings are impractical. There are other ways to connect these members, such as virtual meetings, and we'll help you find them.

- **Where they will work. . .**



Local Connections are clusters of groups coordinated by the Reps. They, in turn, coordinate with the Regional Coordinator (Desi Vaughn) [repscoordinator@saqa.com](mailto:repscoordinator@saqa.com), who is the conduit between the regions and SAQA Central. The result is semi-autonomous groups tethered to the mothership.

## Local Connections Structure

- **Only two rules!**

SAQA has only *two* rules for all Local Connections (pods, circles, etc.) operating under the SAQA name. Everything else is determined on the local level.

  1. ***All meetings must be announced to the entire region by the rep.***
  2. ***All SAQA members are welcome.***
- **Size doesn't matter.**

They can be as small as two members. Success is not determined by how many are in a Local Connection, but by how many SAQA members are connecting somewhere and in some way.
- **Beyond regional lines**

Clusters of members in local areas sometimes extend into two regions. Members in these areas can form a Local Connection, but they must coordinate with the Reps from both regions.
- **Visitors welcome**

This is a great way to get new members. However, the number that can attend a meeting and how often is up to the individual Local Connections. Visitors cannot participate in SAQA-sponsored activities such as exhibits and members-only workshops and conferences.
- **One member coordinates with Rep(s)**

One member (usually the Local Connection leader) should be designated to send the Rep updates on meetings and activities to be communicated to the entire region. This means you will then have only one person to contact to get information to and from a group of members.
- **Each Local Connection unique**

Each individual Local Connection decides how often to meet, where, and on group activities. These will vary widely because each group is as unique as the people within it. It is crucial, however, that the members communicate with the Rep to ensure all activities fall within SAQA guidelines.
- **Rep-less Regions**

Local Connections can be formed in regions currently without a Rep. In these cases, they will report to the [regional rep coordinator](#) who will answer all questions and announce meetings and activities with the rest of the region. Hopefully, one of the Local Connection leaders will eventually want to become a Rep.
- **Anyone can start a Local Connection**

If members in a local area want to start a Local Connection, all they have to do is contact the Rep to get the meeting announced.

## Promoting Local Connections

Reps are often frustrated after asking a number of local members to be Local Connection leaders and then being turned down because nobody has the time. These members indicate they would, however, love to attend if someone else could be the leader. In some cases local meetings have been held and then dismissed as a dismal failure because only five people showed up. As a result, it was never tried again.

These are a few *suggestions* that have worked well in some regions:

- **Ask for only *ONE* gathering**  
Use the word “gathering” because the word “meetings” conjures fear of committing to an unknown amount of work with people they likely don’t know very well. The potential leaders back away with visions of minutes to write, programs to plan, announcements to be sent, etc. But asking them to arrange only *one* gathering as a trial run, removes the threat of over-commitment. Once they get together, *if* they like each other, they’ll have the *motivation* to meet again.
- **Stress simplicity**  
Let them know loose and casual is fine, and they aren’t expected to make this a formal production. The idea is for members to get together to share the love of art quilting. Anything they do beyond that (e.g., exhibits, museum tours, programs, etc.) is a nice bonus, but certainly not required.
- **Define success – size doesn’t matter**  
A couple of people getting together quarterly for “show and share” is success! It doesn’t have to be a large formal group. In fact, small casual meetings work very well for members in remote areas who have difficulty meeting other art quilters.
- **Take it SLOW**  
Getting Local Connections started in a region can take up to a couple of years, so be patient. Just like a child learning to walk, they’re a little shaky at first but, with nurturing they often bloom into happy thriving clusters of fiber artists.

## Starting a Local Connection

- **Any member can start a Local Connection**  
Let your regions know they have the power to do this themselves; it does not have to be initiated by the Rep. Realistically, most will come from prodding by a Rep. However, if you promote the option someone you least expect may take the initiative.
- **Contact the Rep**  
All they have to do is contact you to have the meeting announced to the entire region. You will then publish the meeting in your next regional email and any other communication vehicles (blog, Facebook, etc.) you think appropriate. When you have multiple Local Connection announcements, try to put them all in one email to avoid hitting the entire membership with too many emails.

## Resources

Several resources are available now and others are being developed to help Reps establish Local Connections in their regions.

- **Suggested Local Connection activities**  
*Suggestions for Meeting Programs* by Ellen Lindner can be found on the [Info for Reps Page](#) under *Meeting Ideas and Suggestions* or by contacting the [Regional Rep Coordinator](#).
- **Programs**  
Coming Soon - The first of a collection of programs based on information and visuals developed by SAQA will be available for all Reps and Local Connection leaders to use in meetings. These can be downloaded from the SAQA website or, for areas with low bandwidth, available on a memory drive that can also be used in a variety of venues.
- **More Resources**  
Many more resources to help launch Local Connections are in development. Stay tuned, but don't wait for us. If you have suggestions, please contact the [Regional Rep Coordinator](#). We welcome all creative ideas.

## Benefits for Reps

- **Reduced workload**  
You don't have to create all the Local Connections on your own. Communicate this to your members often so they can share the responsibility.
- **Easily connect with larger numbers of members**  
Programs like Zoom and Skype enable Reps to meet with members in distant areas without leaving home. No Travel!
- **Easier to find volunteers**  
Local Connection leaders know the members in their groups very well and they are a great resource when you need to find a volunteer with specific skill sets. The leaders are also a ready resource when it comes time to rotate off and find a Rep replacement.
- **Leaders of Leaders**  
Where Local Connections are active, the Reps' roles will gradually shift to "leaders of leaders" and communication will take on even greater importance than it does now. Reps will become supports for Local Connections and conduits for communication with SAQA Central through the regional rep coordinator.

## Alternatives

- **Virtual Meetings**

Regions where members live too far from each other to make live meetings practical, often use the SAQA Zoom program to connect them virtually. SAQA has a professional Zoom account, so we can add as many meetings as we like at no extra charge. Ask Desi how to take advantage of this service.

- **Hybrids for outliers and others**

Clusters of members are usually found in heavily populated areas. But what about the outliers living too far to comfortably drive to Local Connection meetings? If they have internet service, Zoom virtual meetings are a great way to connect these members. Just set up a computer screen at the live meeting and, once connected, they're part of the group. This also works well for shut-ins unable to leave home and for working members with a limited amount of time for meetings.

## Help!

Any time you have questions about determining if your region will benefit from Local Connections or need help launching or managing them, you can always reach Desi Vaughn at [repscoordinator@saqa.com](mailto:repscoordinator@saqa.com)