

Alpha Online Platform Handbook



Introduction

Thank you for being part of the Alpha Online Pilot to test the Alpha online platform. As one of a select group of churches piloting the platform, your feedback is crucial in helping us continue to improve the platform and user experience.

This handbook is designed to guide Alpha Leaders and Alpha Administrators through the use of the platform and is accompanied by instructional videos to walk you, step by step, through the site functions.

The Alpha online platform is a video conferencing platform that is customised for running Alpha. It is branded to look and feel like Alpha and the functionality is designed to mimic the Alpha experience in a simple and easy to use flow. This will allow you and your Alpha teams to better host guests.

Our approach to the development of the platform is to iterate quickly based on your feedback so you may see improvements as you progress through the pilot.

You will have received a link to the platform and your admin login details with this handbook. You are now ready to login and set up your Alpha!

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We welcome your feedback on this guide as well as the other training and support materials provided as part of this pilot. Please provide feedback to **comms@alpha.org**

Alpha team roles and responsibilities

Before starting your Alpha, agree who is playing what role:

Alpha Administrator

The person who will set up and manage Alpha on the platform. This person will also need to be available during the Alpha session to add any guests who sign up at the last minute, and to reconfigure the groups sizes if they get too large.

The Administrator will also be the point of contact for any guest, host or helper having trouble with the system. They will be the person who will liaise with the Alpha online platform help desk if there are any queries.

Alpha Leader

The person who will welcome and broadcast the Alpha Film Series into the groups at the appropriate time.

Host and Helpers

The Host and Helpers will not play an active role with the platform itself. They will have the same platform privileges as guests for the pilot version. This will change as we add more functionality to the platform.

Prayer team

Your prayer team are an important part of your Alpha team, however they will not need to use the platform.

Tip: During the first few Alpha sessions you will want to have two separate people perform the role of Alpha Administrator and Alpha Leader, so that any last-minute changes and help can be managed smoothly without disrupting the evening.

Inviting guests to your Alpha

You will need the name and an email address for all guests and Alpha team members in order to register them on the platform.

You must inform all participants that Alpha International will hold this information and how we will use it. See page 14 on **Data Safety** for more information.

All participants will receive a simple automated email invitation to access the platform when you register them. You will still need to communicate directly with your guests and Alpha team, in your usual way, before your Alpha.

The following text must be included in all your Alpha sign-up documents and emails:

How Alpha Will Handle Your Details

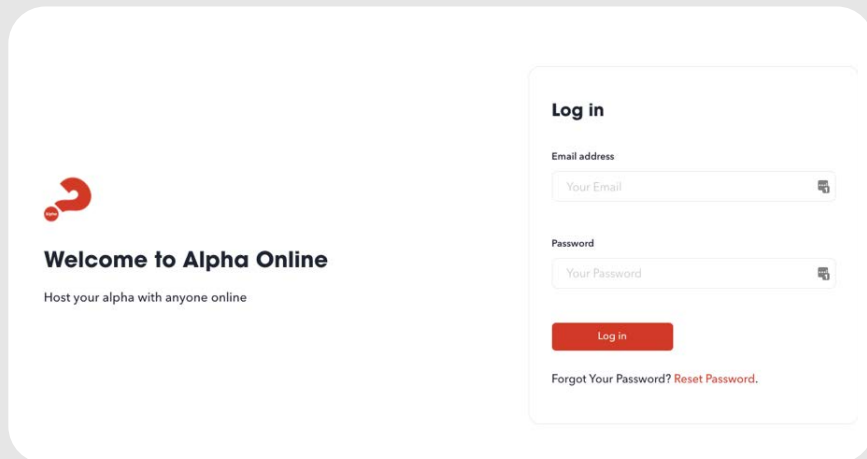
Alpha International processes your data on behalf your church who hosts your Alpha group. Your church will provide us your email address so we can send you login details for the start of your Alpha on the Alpha online platform. We will delete your information 120 days after your Alpha group has begun. If you would like to know more about how we look after your details, please visit our **privacy policy***.

*Hyperlink to: **<https://www.alpha.org/privacy-policy>**

Creating and managing your Alpha

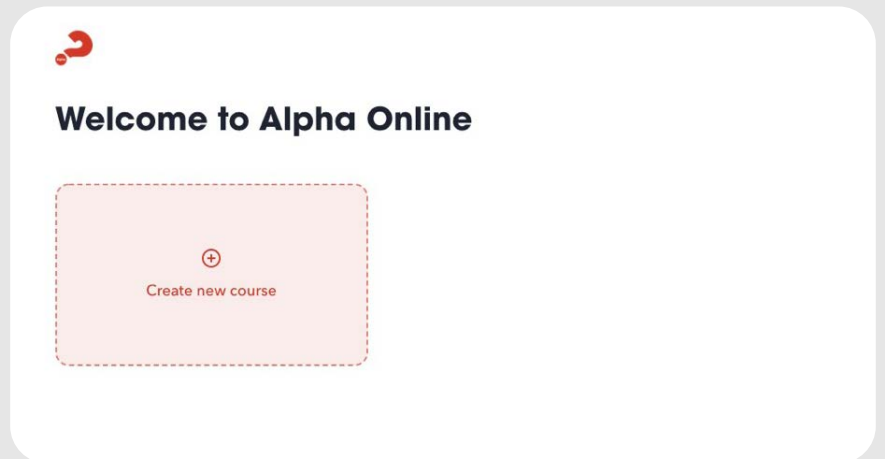
Create an Alpha course

Log into the platform.



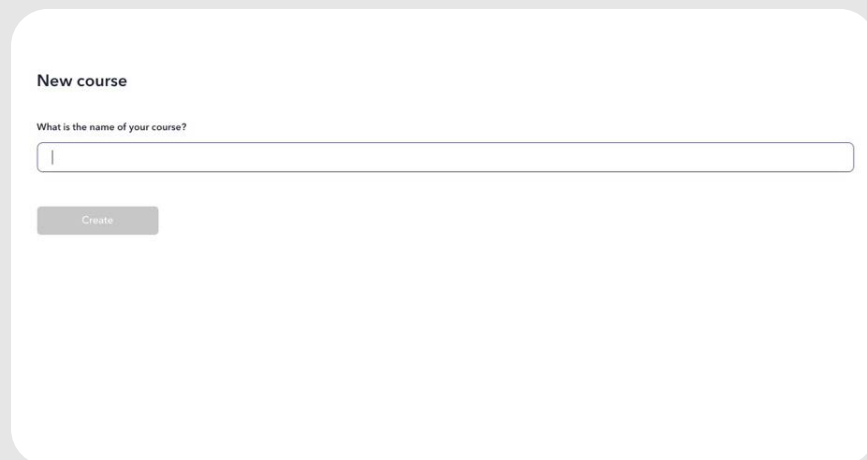
The login screen for Alpha Online. It features the Alpha logo on the left and a 'Log in' form on the right. The form includes fields for 'Email address' (with placeholder 'Your Email') and 'Password' (with placeholder 'Your Password'), both with eye icons for toggling visibility. A red 'Log in' button is at the bottom of the form, and a link for 'Forgot Your Password? Reset Password.' is below it.

Click “Create new course”.



The 'Welcome to Alpha Online' screen. It features the Alpha logo at the top left and the title 'Welcome to Alpha Online' at the top center. Below the title is a large red dashed box containing a plus icon and the text 'Create new course'.

Enter a name for your Alpha then click “Create”
– this will create your Manage Course page.

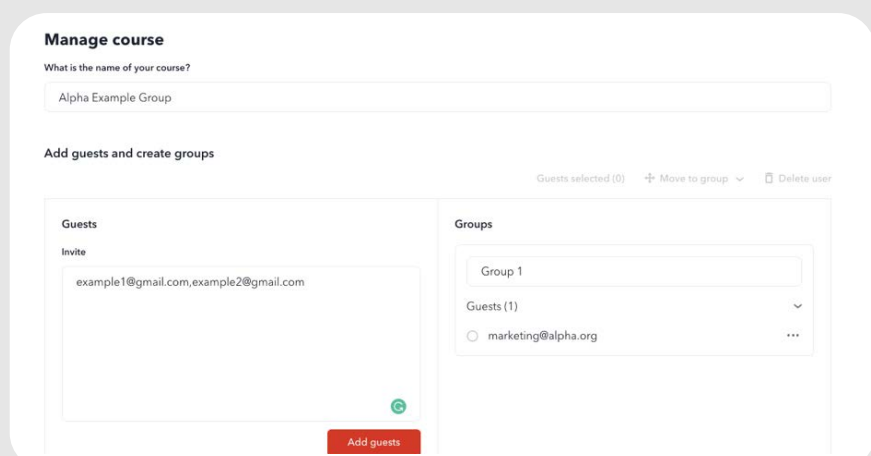


The 'New course' form. It has the title 'New course' at the top left. Below it is a text input field with the placeholder 'What is the name of your course?'. At the bottom left is a grey 'Create' button.

Tip: The guests you invite will see the Alpha course name every time they use the platform so select a name that is recognisable to them, for example, the name of your church/organisation.

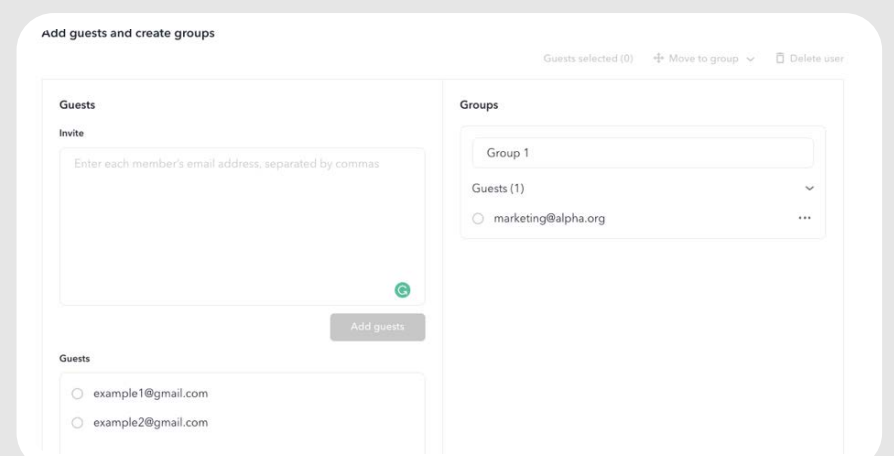
Input guests who are coming on your Alpha

In the Manage Course area, enter the email addresses of all those participating in your Alpha. To enter more than one at a time, separate the email addresses with commas.



The 'Manage course' screen. It shows the course name 'Alpha Example Group' at the top. Below is the 'Add guests and create groups' section. It has a 'Guests' panel with an 'Invite' field containing 'example1@gmail.com,example2@gmail.com' and an 'Add guests' button. To the right is a 'Groups' panel showing 'Group 1' and a list of guests including 'marketing@alpha.org'.

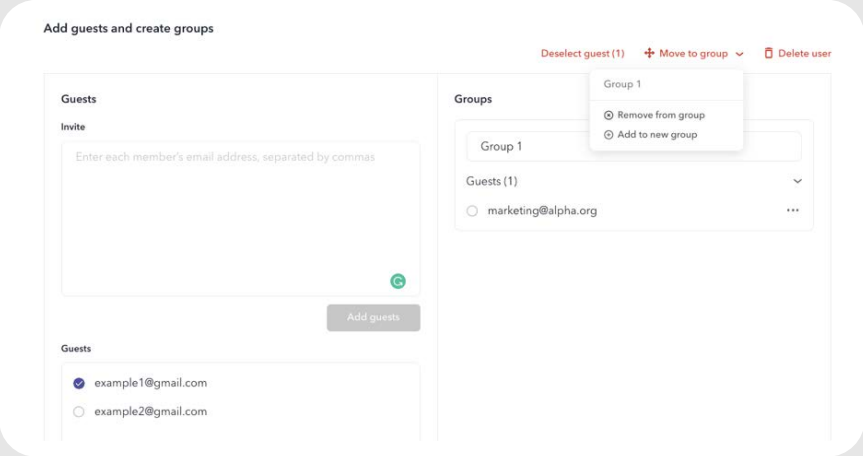
When ready, click “Add Guests”, you are now ready to assign them to groups. **Tip:** If you’ve mistakenly added a guest, you can select user and choose “Delete User” to remove them.



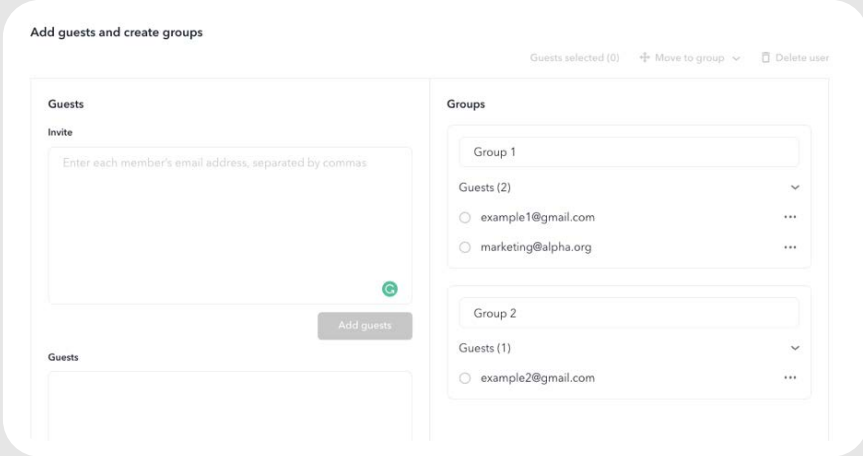
The 'Add guests and create groups' screen. It features a 'Guests' panel with an 'Invite' field and an 'Add guests' button. To the right is a 'Groups' panel showing 'Group 1' and a list of guests including 'marketing@alpha.org'.

Assigning participants to groups

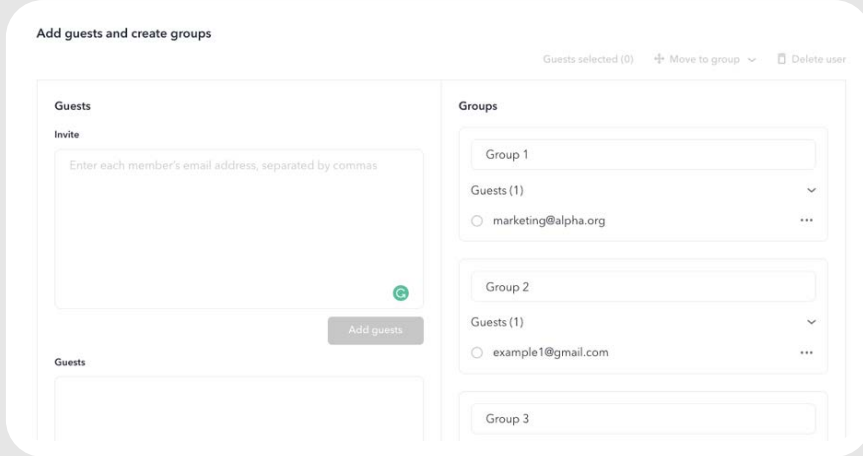
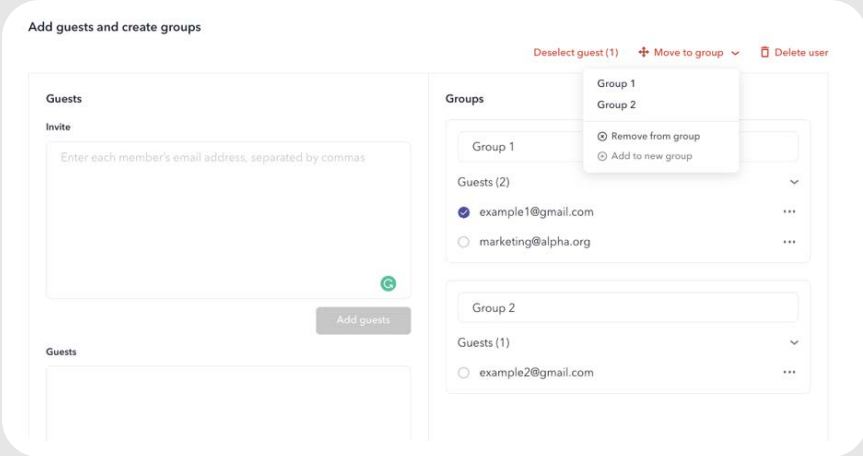
To create separate groups, check/tick the guests you want to add to a group, and select “Move to Group”.



You can select an existing group, or create a new one. **Tip:** You can create your own names for groups e.g. ‘Amal & Sam’s group’

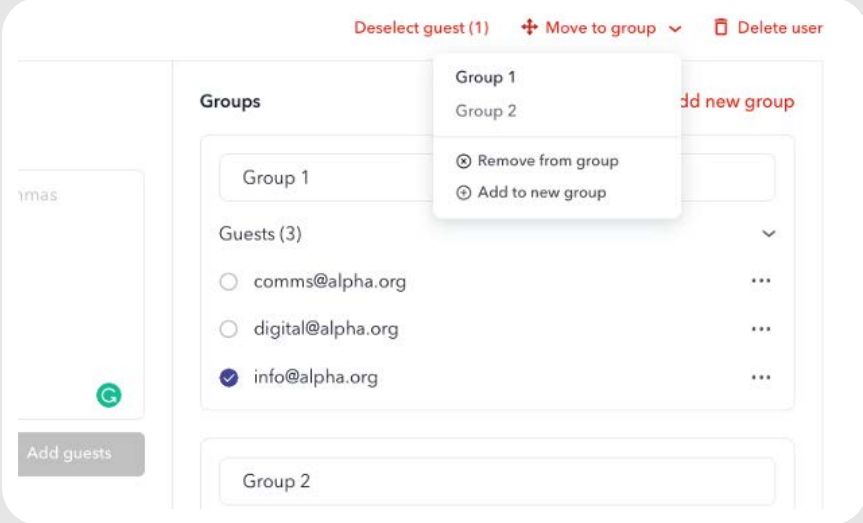


If you want to move a guest to a different group, simply select “Add to new group” from the “Move to group” dropdown menu.



You can create and move users to a new group while your Alpha is in session. In the Manage Course area, check/tick the guest you want to move and use the “Move to group” function to reassign them.

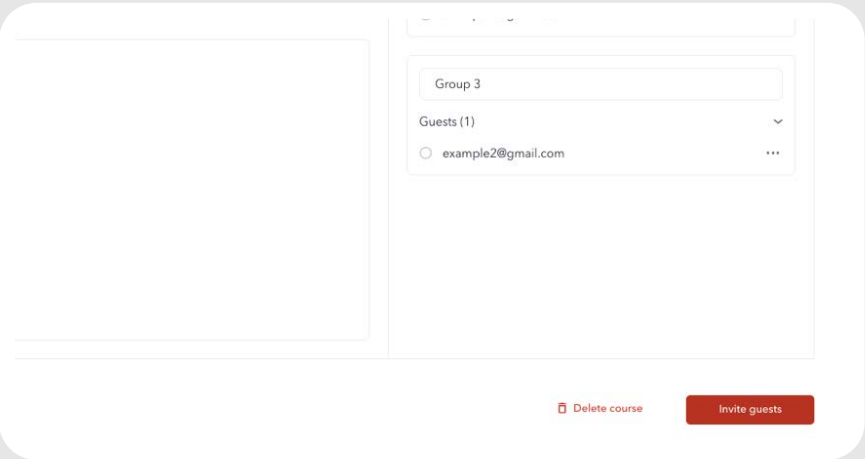
Note: There might be a short delay and the guest may need to refresh their page before they are transferred to their new group.



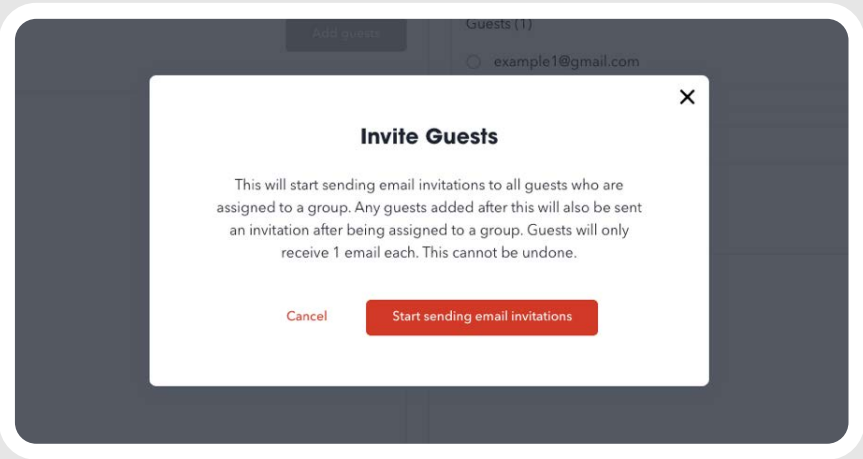
Tip: Have an Administrator available during your Alpha sessions. Guests may want to join just before the session and they will need to be registered and assigned to a group. Agree how hosts and helpers can contact you to let you know of any last-minute additions.

Inviting guests to the Alpha platform

When you’re ready to invite your guests, you can select “Invite Guests” (at the bottom of the page).



This will send an automated email to your guests with the link to join the course, as well as including your contact information.

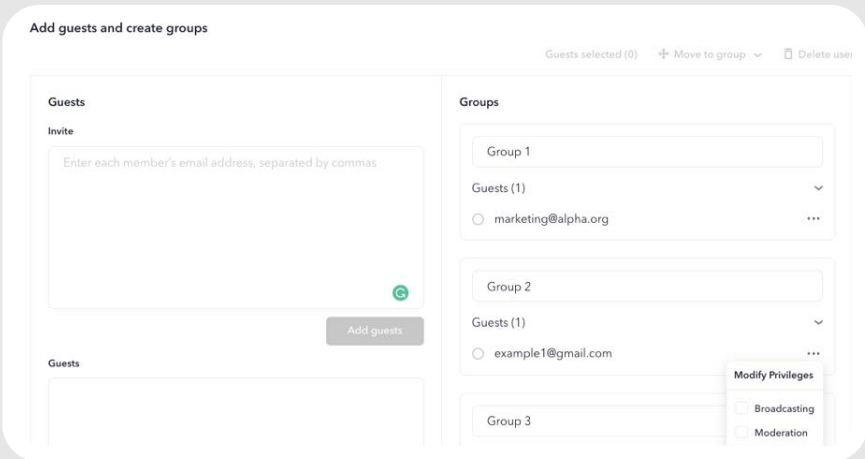


If you add new guests in future, they will automatically receive the invite once they’re added to your course.

Tip: You can copy the URL – the website link – that guests need to join your Alpha by clicking “Copy meeting URL” in the top right corner.

Assigning privileges

You can assign other people ‘Moderation’ or ‘Broadcasting’ privileges. Select the three dots beside their name and select the privileges you want to assign from the dropdown menu.



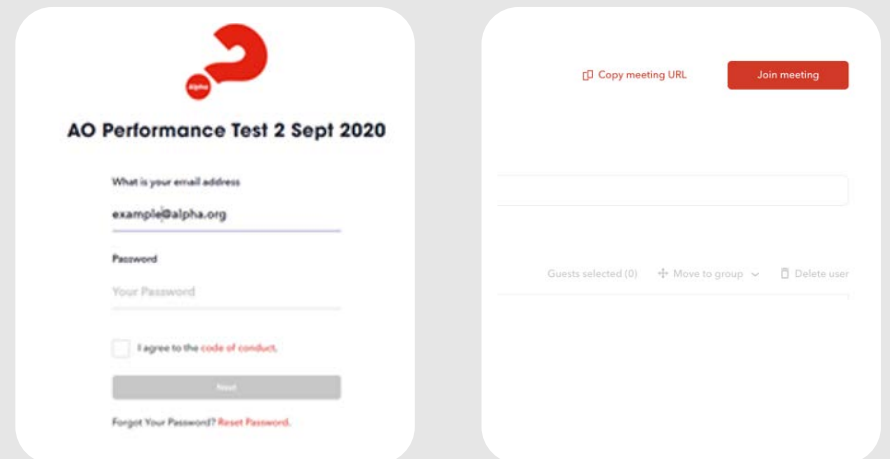
Tip: Assign all your hosts and helpers ‘Moderator’ privileges. In the pilot, ‘Moderator’ privileges will allow the user to eject a guest from their group. In the future it will also allow the user to mute and disable the videos of guests.

You are now ready to start your Alpha!

Managing an Alpha session on the platform

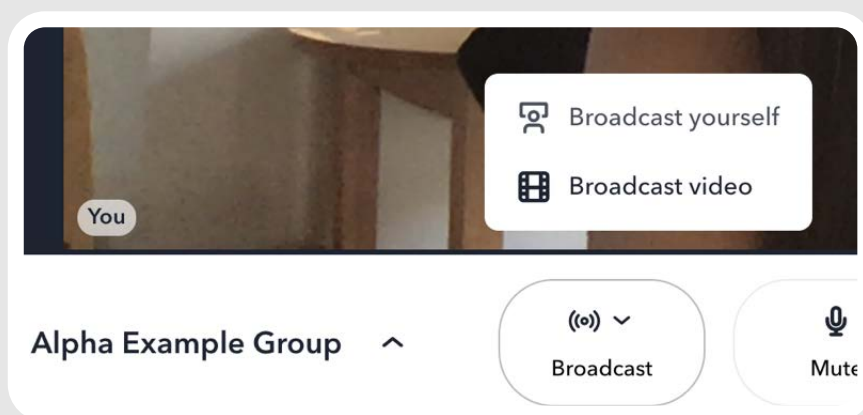
Starting your session

When you're ready to begin your Alpha, log in to the platform with your administrator account, find your Alpha, and select "Join Meeting".



Broadcasting into groups

Once all your guests have joined, you can then simultaneously broadcast yourself into each group to welcome everyone, (see p.8 on how to assign broadcasting privileges). Broadcasting is password protected. If you have been given Broadcasting or Moderation privileges, you will be asked to enter your email **and** password whenever you log in to the platform.

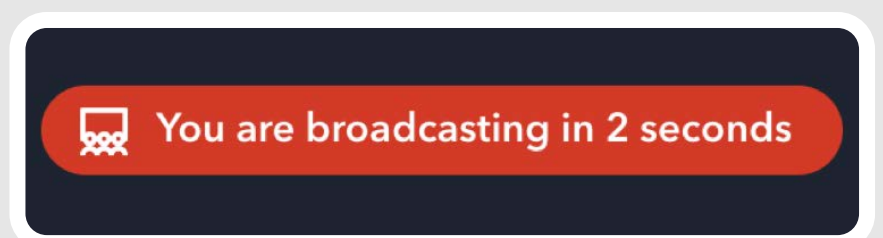


Groups will receive a 5 second countdown notification prior to the broadcast, so you won't take them by surprise.

When you broadcast, everyone attending your Alpha will be able to see and hear you. This is a great time to welcome them to Alpha, let them know what to expect, and give them a schedule for the session. Click "Stop Broadcasting" to end.

- If you do not yet have a password or have forgotten your password, click on the "Create New Password" or "Reset Password" link
- This will automatically send you an email with your password link. Go to your email and select the link given to set your password
- Once you have set your new password log into the platform. Enter your email and select "Next", enter your password and select "Next". This will take you to the preview screen where you can type in your name

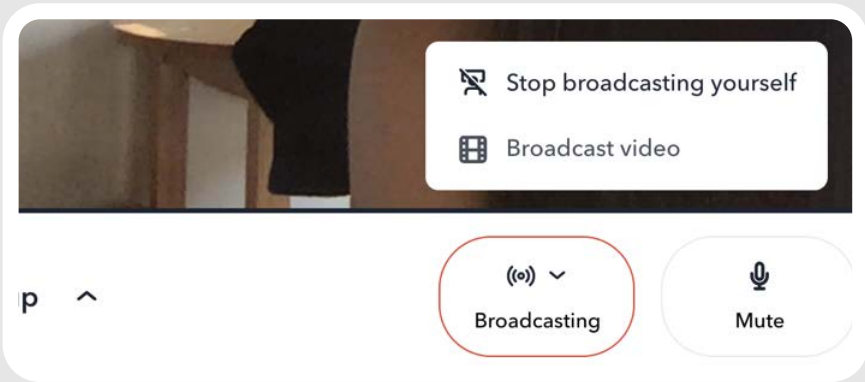
Please note: Guest users will only be required to enter in their email to log in to the platform.



Note: When you broadcast, everyone can see you but you will only be able to view the participants in your small group.

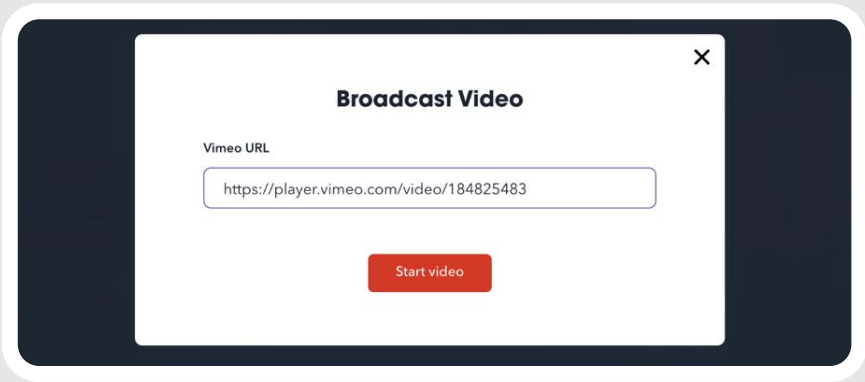
Showing the Alpha Film Series

When it's time to show the Alpha Film Series episode for the week, select "Broadcast Video".



When the video is complete, click "Broadcast Yourself" in order to broadcast yourself again before transitioning into small group discussions, or click "Stop Broadcasting" to end the broadcast and let the hosts in each small group lead the discussion right after the video.

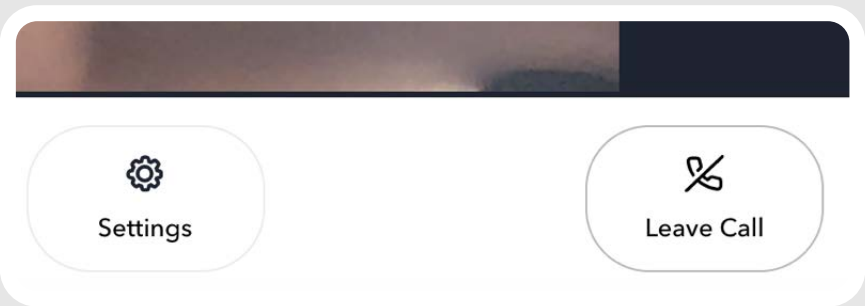
Insert the link to the video from the Alpha you registered in MyAlpha and click "Start Video". The video will start after the countdown, and synchronize for all participants.



Tip: To find the video link, go to the materials page in MyAlpha, select the video, select "Share Link", and copy the link. You will need to have created an Alpha in MyAlpha beforehand.

Ending the Alpha session

At the end of the session, once all guests have logged off, select "Leave Call" to finish. "Leave Call" will only log you off the session, it will not close the session for everyone else.



Showing other videos

In the pilot phase of the Alpha online platform, you can broadcast any video from the Vimeo video platform by pasting the link to the video in the broadcast function. This will allow you to play worship videos, for example. No other video platform is supported at the moment.

Removing disruptive guests

If a guest is being disruptive, rude, or you need to remove them for any reason, click on their name, and choose "Remove from call". They will be banned from joining again. If you would like to reverse this action, go to the Manage Course area, find the guest. Select the three dots beside their name and uncheck the "banned" option. This function can be carried out by anyone with 'Moderator' privileges.

Advice on training hosts and helpers

We want to encourage churches to run a training for hosts and helpers every time they run Alpha. The main difference to the training for hosts and helpers for Alpha online (as opposed to a face to face Alpha) is an additional focus on e-safety and an introduction to the code of conduct for hosts and helpers. Please find more detail on this in the 'keeping vulnerable people safe' section and refer them to the e-safety training video.

Team training materials are available to pilot churches at alpha.org/aotraining. These materials will be updated throughout the pilot to better reflect the running of Alpha online using the Alpha online platform. In 2021 these materials will then be made available, as usual, through the regional MyAlpha platform.



Keeping vulnerable people safe

Please take all the necessary steps to ensure you as the church or ministry are Online/E-Safety aware and competent as you run Alpha online.

We know it is much more difficult to monitor what goes on in the groups when you run Alpha online, which is why we encourage hosts and helpers to work together in trusted pairs or teams.

Dangers in this area include cyber bullying and online grooming. These are both very serious and should be treated with utmost caution and care by hosts and helpers.

Alpha online code of conduct for hosts and helpers

In order to use the Alpha online platform, all hosts and helpers will be required to sign up to the Alpha online code of conduct. All administrators, hosts and helpers will be prompted to read the code of conduct in a pop-up on their first-time logging into the platform. After reading the code of conduct, they will check a tick box to signify their agreement and adoption of the code of conduct.

We recommend you introduce the code of conduct to your hosts and helpers before they access the platform so they are aware of it and so that you can discuss the implications of it with them.

There is a short training video on the **resources for team training page**, for hosts and helpers on creating a safe environment in their online small groups and some useful dos and don'ts.

Five practical steps you can take to encourage a culture of e-safety in your Alpha

1. Have a minimum of two Alpha team members (hosts and helpers) facilitating any group and have a contingency plan in case of sickness or absence.
2. Encourage your hosts and helpers to keep their videos on throughout the Alpha session and get them to encourage their group members to do the same.
3. Don't allow guests to be in a room without a member of the Alpha team present. This will mean that hosts and helpers need to login early and be waiting as guests arrive and then will need to wait until all guests have logged off at the end of the session, before they leave the platform.
4. Make sure the whole Alpha team is aware of your policies on looking after vulnerable people and they know who to approach if they have any concerns. We recommend providing an email address and phone number to hosts, helpers and guests to ensure they know who to contact with any concerns of this nature.
5. If a guest is behaving inappropriately, a host or helper will be able to remove them from the group. In the unlikely event that a member of your Alpha team uses this function we would ask that the incident is reported appropriately as soon as possible.

More information

More information about e-safety can be found here:

<https://www.alpha.org/e-safety>

Data safety

When you register your Alpha team or guests on the platform, you are giving Alpha International their personal data (their names and email addresses).

The Alpha online platform is hosted in the European Union and is subject to laws about how we collect, store and protect people's personal data. You must therefore let your team and guests know that Alpha International will hold their personal information and how we will use it.

You do this by copying and pasting the text (and hyperlink) below into any emails or forms where people give you their information when they sign up for your Alpha.

The following text must be included in all your Alpha sign-up documents and emails:

How Alpha Will Handle Your Details

Alpha International processes your data on behalf your church who hosts your Alpha group. Your church will provide us your email address so we can send you login details for the start of your Alpha on the Alpha online platform. We will delete your information 120 days after your Alpha group has begun. If you would like to know more about how we look after your details, please visit our **privacy policy***.

*Hyperlink to: **<https://www.alpha.org/privacy-policy>**

Troubleshooting

In the first couple of weeks of your Alpha online, it is likely that some guests will experience technical difficulties as they become familiar with using the online platform.

Guests have access to a **help page** (<http://alpha.org/guest-faqs>) for common technical issues however they may contact you directly if they need some initial support in getting online.

The **Alpha online troubleshooting page** (<https://www.alpha.org/aotrainning/troubleshooting>) outlines some of the common issues you or guests may face and what you can do to solve them.

As you and your Alpha team use the platform during this pilot, we recommend you have a back-up plan, in the unlikely event that you are unable to access the platform for an Alpha session.

Where to go for help

You will have received a link to the platform, your admin login details and a dedicated pilot training page with this handbook. Please log in to the platform at your earliest convenience so you can identify any support you need well in advance of your first Alpha session.

This handbook and the training videos are designed to support you as you set up and run your Alpha. If you can't find an answer to your query here then there are two additional resources we have for you below.

Troubleshooting workshop

If you have questions as you set up your Alpha and before you start your course, please register here for an Alpha online trouble shooting workshop. At the workshop, the team will be available to answer questions you have. These are designed to help you trouble shoot any issues.

Help Desk

You will be able to access the Help Desk via the 'Manage Course' area of the platform. The Help Desk will be limited to technical questions about the platform and available to Alpha Leaders and Alpha Administrators only. For help with best practice on how to run Alpha sessions (non-technical) please reach out to your National Alpha Office Director. If a guest requires help, they should come to you in the first instance and if you are unable to help them you may access the Help Desk on their behalf.

Giving feedback to the project team

As part of the pilot we would love to collect feedback on your experience of the platform so that we can continue to improve with input from practitioners. Your National Alpha Office will be sending you a short feedback form on weekly basis for the first several weeks of the pilot which you can either fill in online or in discussion with them.

