

# Society of Sensory Professionals

Sensory Agility During COVID-19  
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As your Chair, I wish you good health as the world and our loved ones manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many of you, my plans changed drastically as COVID-19 became more prevalent in my country, which required pivoting on personal and professional levels.

As a way to serve the community, SSP executives and members recently ideated against scenarios many of us are facing during the current pandemic. As with any dynamic situation, these ideas should be considered along with the guidance of governments and public health officials in local communities.

We hope you find the following helpful and find connection within our great sensory community during these hard times.

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- **Thank you to the ideation team:** Alisa Doan, Brittany Ehrenkrook, Alyssa Porubcan, Kristine Wilke, and Felipe Hernandez. Special thanks to Clare Dus for facilitating.
- **Ideation Date:** 3/27/20
- **Approach:** Summaries and themes are built from the pool of ideas; when relevant, details behind the themes are preserved for those with interest.

# Working remotely

*My teammates are working from home and we need to develop a learning plan for an innovation project. What are some ways to collaborate?*

## Connection

Be intentional about maintaining relationships

## Creative Collaboration

Ideate in new ways

## Technology

Harness the broad range of platforms

## Autonomy

Trust that the work is being done

<b>Autonomy</b>	Trust the team - assign accountability to specific tasks
<b>Autonomy</b>	Allow flexibility in getting tasks done - don't treat everything as urgent
<b>Connection</b>	Take social time like you do in the office - get coffee, virtual happy hour
<b>Connection</b>	Manage morale - check in at beginning of call
<b>Connection</b>	For social time with co-workers, apps such as HouseParty
<b>Connection</b>	Regular check-ins that are directly to the point, but other times light and uplifting
<b>Connection</b>	"Question of the day" to kick off meetings
<b>Connection</b>	have planned moments throughout the week as idea-bounce-off times; to replace the casual pop-by-the-desk encounters.
<b>Connection</b>	short check-ins with text or messenger types of apps just to see how people are doing with the plan
<b>Connection</b>	Create a messenger... drop-offs at one another's homes
<b>Connection</b>	short daily team standup just for social connection
<b>Connection</b>	encourage motivation across the team
<b>Connection</b>	social time while doing work - some work best with other around, create a more interactive space
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	divide up the typical tasks of an innovation project and have people ideate separately, then bring together to build
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	for innovation - watch a movie or something together remotely and then brainstorm ideas that come from it
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	have a mind shift - think of teams as distributed, versus remote
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	Pre-work - take inspiration from music, movies, etc. like an ad agency would to pitch their comms
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	search internet for tangential products or related areas to get thinking broadly and outside my house
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	have conversations around shared items to build teamwork and spark remote collaboration - view the same content (ted talk, training, article, etc.) then have a virtual 'book club' about it.
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	Brainstorm on innovation - what would our hashtag be?
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	Manage moral - check in a beginning of call --> incorporate with pre-work --> build a collage together
<b>Creative Collaboration</b>	create a virtual improv where you are the thing you are trying to innovate
<b>Technology</b>	use a shared drive?
<b>Technology</b>	Tech - Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Video Call, Miro, Conceptboard
<b>Technology</b>	Google Docks or Dropbox access to share a file?
<b>Technology</b>	conference call to kick off project
<b>Technology</b>	Ensure easy workspace to contribute information (and share), but also easy to access quickly and anywhere
<b>Technology</b>	find an item around your house and find a connection to the project, then share it with a visual collaboration/picture/text to "pass it on" and have the next person build.
<b>Technology</b>	Daily connection time for smaller teams (over Zoom, Skype, etc.) without a formal agenda

# Alternatives to Large Panel

*I received a request for a drivers of liking study from my business partner. Both the CLT and my descriptive panel would violate the CDC recommendation of no more than 10 people in a room. What are some alternatives? (both DA and a consumer alternative)*

Theme	Considerations
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gamify responses or develop reward system</li><li>• Add value for families (e.g., develop kids' activities)</li><li>• Acknowledge the panelist's situation and contribution</li></ul>
<b>Curbside Sample Pick-up or Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a sample drive-through</li><li>• Manage timing through scheduling</li></ul>
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility (if meeting in facility is feasible within your community)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave space between panelists (pull apart chairs, use tape on floor)</li><li>• Utilize different rooms</li><li>• Create individual waiting rooms</li></ul>
<b>Switch to In Home Evaluations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider utilizing remote employees</li></ul>
<b>Increase Sanitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider plastic guards, availability of hand washing materials, materials to clean surface</li><li>• Communicate efforts and guidelines to panelists</li></ul>
<b>Research Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider secondary sources (ratings, reviews, social media)</li><li>• Reduce number of panelists needed</li><li>• Think creatively of connection platforms (e.g., inside Minecraft)</li><li>• Consider if consumers can recount previous experiences</li></ul>
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask panelists to enter data online and discuss evaluations with each other. Consider messenger apps and social media</li></ul>
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit the number of people in the building</li><li>• Consider scheduling panelists one at a time (DA)</li><li>• Scatter arrivals across a wide range of times</li></ul>

<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Create activities to entertain consumers' kids—how to incorporate that into research
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	As a bonus for participating, send home an educational kit that kids can do
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Articulate the benefit to the panelist
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Special gift once you conduct so many panels—rewards system
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Be more interactive with questionnaires—may change the way questions are asked so it isn't the 'typical' way with questions that are not overall liking or need to be compared to previous studies
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Combine with a game to create interest—like a race to collect
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Each panel unlocks a ride - instructions on how to recreate splash mountain
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Have fun activities or short breaks with fun music/activity, etc. to break up the testing. incentives that are relevant to now—online services or delivery types of things
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Partner up with educational resources / celebrities as another activity to add to people's list to do while at home.
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Each descriptive panelists completes the evaluation and gets a game piece, once everyone completes the tasks, then everyone's game piece unlocks a group incentive
<b>Add Value to the Work by Managing Morale</b>	Acknowledge the situation...let people know you care
<b>Curbside Sample Pick-up or Delivery</b>	Descriptive—sample pick-up
<b>Curbside Sample Pick-up or Delivery</b>	Deliver 'sample sets' to Panel's doorsteps or have pick up site (for virtual panel), for products where it makes sense
<b>Curbside Sample Pick-up or Delivery</b>	Consumer testing drive-thru?
<b>Curbside Sample Pick-up or Delivery</b>	Text people as to when they can leave their cars and enter
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Put panelists in separate room in facility
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Maintain 6 feet of distance within the panel room
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Divide the panel among several rooms, ensuring adherence to social distancing
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	If panelists are coming to the facility - make it intuitive to maintain distance. Use colored tape on the floor to indicate which room panelists should go to.
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Careful spacing between participants (if still allowed on site)
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Divide space as necessary to maintain distance
<b>Distance Panelists in Facility</b>	Create individual waiting areas
<b>In Home Evaluations</b>	Consumer—switch to iHUT
<b>In Home Evaluations</b>	Could you send product home instead? for both consumers and descriptive panelists?
<b>In Home Evaluations</b>	Could you use employees who are all remote to sort experience the products and provide descriptors
<b>In Home Evaluations</b>	Video record assessments on products?
<b>Increased Sanitation</b>	Doggy daycare—Dogs need a place to go to feel safe. How to make the space comforting. Provide sanitation materials for independent use.
<b>Increased Sanitation</b>	Use clear panels between participants if they are coming to a facility so they aren't alone but still provided a safe area
<b>Increased Sanitation</b>	Start engaging social channels via live videos- engage consumers in how safety practices are being installed, the fun and interesting products being tested
<b>Research Alternative</b>	Reduce number of DA panelists needed for a test so you are below 10
<b>Research Alternative</b>	Consider situational testing (base on experience or usage of the product) vs. individual sample testing in front of a computer
<b>Research Alternative</b>	Social media platforms (for consumer feedback)
<b>Research Alternative</b>	Use Minecraft/gaming technology and have consumers or DA panelists meet in a space
<b>Research Alternative</b>	Gamify responses - how to make surveys fun!
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Descriptive panel at home via Zoom/Skype/Google Hangout
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Could your panel input their DA scores online through a platform on a device?
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Utilize messenger apps or online diary systems to capture feedback/scores
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Provide "helpdesk" assistance times for panelists to have a person to call while they are doing the testing remotely (thinking descriptive panelists trying to figure out a flavor attribute might benefit from talking it out)
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Meet them where they are—easy to access through a phone or tablet, what survey approaches are available through Facebook or other social media?
<b>Virtual Discussions</b>	Recruit where the people are now - engage in lots of different online / video apps
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Minimize total number of consumers at one time, with minimal staff to ensure low number of people in one small space.
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Bring consumers or panelists in specified timeslots spread out across multiple days.
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Do what stores are doing for social distancing of consumer during a test. Invite only so many at a time, then have marked off spaces 6ft apart where they stand in line when waiting.
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Limit number of people allowed in building at one time
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Call ahead—we tell you when to come pick up, based on current crowds - scheduling could also take care of this
<b>Widely Spaced Scheduling</b>	Personalize - designated times for individual panelists

# How do we make a decision when we can't run the product test?

Theme	Considerations
Alternative Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider performing smaller scale research</li></ul>
Leverage Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage sensory scientists with historical knowledge on the category to guide</li></ul>
Leverage Previously Validated Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launch a previously optimized product</li></ul>
Reassess Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study past recessions and determine if launches should stay on original timing</li><li>• Calculate what's been invested and determine possibility of delaying</li></ul>
Secondary Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leverage historical information, market trend data, POS, panel data etc to make the decision</li><li>• Lean into foundational product/category knowledge</li></ul>
Team Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss pros/cons with maintaining original timing</li><li>• Ask questions</li><li>• Go with your "informed" gut</li></ul>
Test Concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine what questions can be answered by concept testing</li></ul>
Test Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scale back launch to maintain opportunity to optimize prior to national launch</li></ul>
Use Competitive Product as Reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigate performance of similar products in marketplace</li></ul>

<b>Alternative Testing</b>	Assess if alternative testing might be available—could you still get information from 20 people to guide, even though you can't get 100+
<b>Leverage Experts</b>	Leverage experts who can be objective (e.g. sensory scientists) and their historical knowledge in the category to help guide the decisions
<b>Leverage Previously Validated Product</b>	Use a previously developed product that was not launched at the time
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	Assess whether you should launch this year or not
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	Bring up the elephant in the room - does it have to stay on the same timeline as originally planned?
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	Be conservative—what is most likely to maintain the health of the business? Launching something even if it's not perfect or not launching?
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	What are the retailers looking for now, one month from now, etc.?
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	Clarify and re-group on project objectives with the current status of state/country
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	What can we learn from the past? Previous recessions and disasters...
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	How far along are you in the project? What has already been invested vs. could be delayed?
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	Protect people first
<b>Reassess Launch</b>	In response to the superhero—be guided and make sure all decision ladder up to core company/brand values
<b>Secondary sources</b>	Lean into foundational product/category knowledge
<b>Secondary sources</b>	What secondary research is available? what do we know from previous work?
<b>Secondary sources</b>	Gather team through online approach to discuss status of project—what decision needs to be made? What do we already know? What are we comfortable doing without additional information?
<b>Secondary sources</b>	Share a summary of past work related to the project as well as other relevant data points to encourage discussion
<b>Team Decision</b>	Team food review and discussion
<b>Team Decision</b>	Look at the info you have; lean in and trust the experts
<b>Team Decision</b>	Talk with peers in other parts or divisions to see how they are approaching key decisions, are you being consistent within the company?
<b>Team Decision</b>	Ensure the level that knows the most about the product is included in the final decision
<b>Team Decision</b>	Ask your questions
<b>Team Decision</b>	Go with your informed "gut"
<b>Test Concept Instead</b>	Consider concept research to see if the product would be different from anything in the market and possible interest?
<b>Test Launch</b>	Launch at a smaller scale first and reassess
<b>Test Launch</b>	Think about mitigating the risk as much as possible—buying only a minimum packaging run, launching in test market first, etc.
<b>Test Launch</b>	Test product once it's commercialized. Improve in market if necessary.
<b>Use Competitive Product as Reference</b>	Is your product similar to a competitor—can you use competitive knowledge
<b>Use Competitive Product as Reference</b>	Investigate performance of similar products in the marketplace

## Research During a Crisis

*What do we know about research during a crisis? What have we heard that companies are doing? What types of work can be done? Shelf life? Innovation? How are they happening?*

**If we ask, “should we conduct research during a crisis”, the most common answer is “it depends.” Many considerations play into this.**

- What type of research are you conducting? Objective research such as descriptive panel and chemical evaluation may be appropriate, while some forms of consumer testing (e.g., CLTs) may not be. Quality assurance at factories may need to proceed to facilitate the supply chain.
- Should a two-week pause be taken to reset expectations about the project and give team members time to address personal business? How can we best give grace to each other? Can team meetings also serve social connection?
- What sources can you leverage to learn about the potential effects of a disaster or recession? Many suppliers publish white papers on what testing was and was not affected by previous natural disasters; these sources may be useful for informing decisions. Scientific and market research journals could also be considered. How can these tools be applied to forecasting? What effect would this situation have on digital engagement rates?
- Consumer shopping behavior has shifted drastically. Would this impact your results? Could the research be converted to an online format? If so, how could you build a personal connection with the respondents? An icebreaker?
- If research is canceled, how else could you spend the time? Standardizing documentation? Developing 1-pagers? Online trainings? Developing new methodology to gamify research? Other method development? Practice skills (moderating, improv, training, stats etc.)? Develop emotional intelligence? Building contingency plans?

# External Testing

*What should be in a protocol for external testing (outside of office)?*

**Many evaluations have moved from a central facility to in home. What are some considerations for building a protocol in this situation?**

- What are the trade-offs for the external evaluation? Should these be discussed with the team?
- Who should be tasting the product? Is there a smaller set of “critical tasters”? If consumer testing, is it necessary to over-recruit more than typical?
- Who is approved to ship or deliver the product? Do they have enhanced safety protocols in place? Should PPE be provided to prep staff or evaluators?
- If a state is under a shelter in place order, what is business critical? Is documentation that a project is business critical required?
- Is additional approval needed from Quality Assurance, Regulatory, or Legal? Are there IP or patent concerns if the product is evaluated outside the office? Even if the policy is to not take samples out of the office, should that be re-examined given most employees are working remotely? What packaging is acceptable? Generic vs finished graphics, etc. Is allergen and ingredient info needed on the label? Does the consent form need to be updated?
- What is the shelf life of the samples? How soon does the evaluation need to take place? Do the products have to be temperature controlled?
- How should samples be disposed of? Would you ask panelists to dispose of leftovers at home, or return the product via shipping?
- For descriptive evaluation and team tasting, how can you ensure consistency in sample prep? Buy materials for each person’s home (e.g., same coffeemaker for a coffee evaluation)? Collaborate to build a formal protocol? Taste together over video, phone, etc.? Does Legal have to approve the protocol?
- Should you build a standard evaluation ballot even for less formal team tastings? What is the protocol for receiving data?