Tips / Tools for Online Meetings and Public Input from Oregon's Kitchen Table

Some Tips for Getting Public / Community Input Online

- **Keep your efforts simple**. In non-crisis times, there are all kinds of interesting and new approaches that you could test or try out. Now your resources are probably strained under tight timelines.
- **What tools or resources are you already using** that can be deployed in some way to allow community members to respond?
- Whatever tool you're using, try to present ideas and questions in as **simple language** as possible and consider **what languages besides English you need to make available.**
- As many immigrant / refugee community members may not have access to a computer or experience with online tools, using a tool that has **mobile friendly options** can help to reach those families.
- A lot of public engagement is about **organizing people to actually participate**, whether that's at an in-person meeting or online. Put together a core group of people who can reach out to multiple networks to help spread the word. Recognize that in a time of crisis--especially one that involves social distancing--community members may be less interested in participating.
- The best way to get people to participate online is through a **single subject email** from one person inviting their network of friends.
- The second most effective way is through **Facebook.**
- No matter what method you use (email, Facebook, etc.), **remember three things**:
    1. Keep it short and simple.
    2. Include the link(s) that people should go to.
    3. Ask them to ask others to join them.

One Simple Way to get public input:

- **Make a short, simple (~5 minutes) video** about your proposed plan. Don't worry about how professional it looks! Give people the highlights in as plain language as you can. Let them know about a link where the whole plan (and a simple overview of the plan, bulleting the key points) is posted to see more (and put a link under the video). Tell them what you want to hear from them, where they can go to give input and by when.   Let them know how their input will be used and why it's important to hear from them. Thank them for participating with you!

- **Dedicate an email address for people to submit comments** (like an "info@" email or a staff person who is designated as the "collector" of comments). If you're posting on YouTube or Vimeo or Facebook, you can suggest people **leave comments in the comments section**.
- **Provide people with a couple of questions to help them respond.** At the end of your video, you could simply say "Do these priorities / plans fit with what you imagine? What are we missing that you would like to see?"
- **Create a simple online survey**. Maybe you already use a survey tool that you can dedicate at the moment. Or you can use Typeform, Google Forms, Qualtrics, or Survey Monkey. Keep it simple and only ask as few questions as are absolutely necessary. Time how long it takes you and others to take it (less than 10 minutes is ideal).

Some Tips for Online Meetings

There are currently many, many different pieces circulating online right now as lots of agencies, businesses, and organizations move to working remotely and using more online tools. Here are some articles or posts with tips for online meetings. We've pulled out some examples. You may need to check to see if your agency or jurisdiction needs to make any rule changes to allow for virtual meetings.

[How to be good at virtual meetings](#) suggests a number of basic tips to facilitate meetings.

- *If someone is in a place with poor wifi, use a tool that lets them dial in for audio on their phones. That way, when their video drops, they still have seamless audio.*

- *Have a dedicated meeting facilitator. This person's job essentially is to tell everyone when to mute and unmute and talk. The facilitator opens the meeting, reminds everyone what the agenda is, and when the meeting will end. The facilitator will also say to someone, "Oh Erin, it looks like you forgot to turn your video on." Or "Ken, can you mute?"*

[Online meeting etiquette](#) provides some simple dos and don'ts for making virtual connections go better.

- *Before starting an online meeting, you need to close all the irrelevant programs including the email and the messengers. It will improve the overall quality of the meeting with better sound. Besides, it will not cause an unnecessary distraction that you might have with the emails and instant messaging. You just need to open the programs that you need for the smooth running of the meeting.*

[A Comprehensive List of Tips, Tools, and Examples for Event Organizers During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#) contains both tips and tools for running virtual events that are helpful for meetings, too.

- *Plan, prep and practice. There can also be technical challenges for you, especially if attempting to stream live content. Plan out ahead of time exactly how everything will run, then do practice-runs with your speakers, partners, and anyone else involved in creating content. You can also consider pre-recording your content to ensure there are no streaming issues.*
- *Set ground rules. For group calls and discussion groups, set ground rules up front about what the format will be, when to speak, and how to contribute, so you don't get a lot of people trying to talk over each other, and everyone has a chance to contribute. You'll also want to set ground rules for any chat spaces you create about what people can or can't use those spaces for. They can quickly devolve into promotions and negativity if you don't have rules in place.*

[When meeting face-to-face is no longer an option](#) has some good checklists to run through in setting up virtual meetings.

- *If different cultures or language groups are involved, have we established standards around the use of English (e.g. avoid use of idioms and local slang), need for translation time, desire to keep responses concise and brief)?*

- *Has someone secured audio and video links and passcodes, and given needed permissions, to everyone in advance? Do we have sufficient bandwidth, ports, etc. to accommodate everyone?*

- *If presentations are to be made, how? For example, will they be sent in advance for discussion during a meeting? Or will they be presented on camera or viewed by each participant via laptop? This will affect the planning and design of the presentation as well as the agenda.*

[Remote Meetings](#) - *Slido - an online polling tool - provides some very simple suggestions on their blog*

- *Join the meeting five minutes early. Regardless of whether you're running the meeting or only attending, don't waste valuable meeting time troubleshooting or fixing microphone or video issues.*
- *Record your meeting. Don't forget to record your remote meeting for those who were unable to join live or for your attendees to replay if they've missed something.*

[Leading Groups Online](#) - *a free ebook with* top 10 principles for leading online groups interactive tools, and answers to commonly asked questions.

- *Offer people a way to get help. Whenever possible, we love to have someone designated as a tech support person. That could be a co-facilitator or a member of the group. When we don't have that luxury, we may give out our cell phone for people to text if they are having tech problems. The software you are using may also offer live help.*

- *Limit session length. If you can help it, we advise that sessions be no more than two hours of consecutive connection at a time. One and a half hours at a time is ideal when you have a lot of participants who are new to the technology. If you have to go through the day, break it up.*

Two additional tips from us:

- Consider having co-facilitators for meetings: one who trouble-shoots technical issues, watches chat boxes, electronic raised hands, etc., and another who manages the meeting, ascertains commitments, next steps, etc.

- If you feel like you need to do a round-robin of the group, do it at the end rather than the beginning so it doesn't chew up the whole meeting. Some of the topics people might raise in a round-robin will likely be covered by the agenda.

Tools for Online Meetings

Your organization may already be using one or more tools for working remotely or conducting meetings virtually. Look into whether any of those might be able to support you in holding a meeting online with participants / viewers. There are some free ones and some that have a cost. Right now some of the ones that do cost money are offering free access for a limited time.   Many of the above articles reference some of these tools, too.

- **Zoom -** https://zoom.us/
- **Google Meet -** https://gsuite.google.com/products/meet/
- **Microsoft Teams -** https://teams.microsoft.com/start
- **YouTube Livestreaming -** https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2474026?hl=en
- **Vimeo Livestreaming -** https://vimeo.com/features/livestreaming
- **Crowdcast** - https://www.crowdcast.io/

Need additional support for virtual public engagement?
Contact us to discuss

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