



TIPS FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

4/1/20

As seasoned public engagement practitioners, we offer these four key tips for successful engagement during COVID-19 and beyond. These recommendations reflect Shockey's experience, industry research, and advice from our innovative and resourceful clients. A resource section follows with links to additional materials.

TIP 1:

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGY

- Using **Facebook Live** to stream council meetings, public meetings/forums, and make announcements about projects. We found this technology beneficial even before the era of social distancing. Live streams can take comments during the meeting and be viewed anytime afterwards for folks who aren't able to participate when it is on live. And they are automatically advertised to Facebook users in the area, which helps to get beyond the usual suspects.
- Many municipalities already use service providers like **Granicus, PrimeGov, and CivicPlus**. Some are supplementing existing service to add remote public input during meetings.
- Some online meeting platforms, such as **Zoom**, can host virtual city council meetings and workshops (note that size of the gatherings is dependent on your plan) and take comments through the chat feature. Zoom, and others, have a feature that allows groups to break into small [breakout rooms](#) to replicate an in-person small group discussion, each with a separate assigned facilitator.

TIP 2:

KEEP EQUITY IN MIND

- **Consider who you are missing when you rely on technology.**
- Older adults, racial minorities, rural residents, and those with lower incomes and education are less likely to have broadband at home; not all have smartphones and libraries are closed, further limiting the ability to engage online.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>
- Incorporate other options as much as you can: use mail to send postcards/factsheets, send text messages, offer a call-in option for people to join virtual meetings by phone, if possible.

TIP 3:

ADD A HUMAN TOUCH TO TECH SOLUTIONS

- Accept and lean into the tech glitches – this will happen as we all wrestle with this new meeting environment – it acknowledges there is still a human element to this format
- Consider being on video earlier than the start time to welcome people as they join the digital meeting – as you would for an in-person meeting – allowing them to see your face and hear your voice as they join is helpful and more personal
- Be clear about the content you will offer to organize the experience for participants.
- Consider how long people are willing to sit for an online experience - 60 to 90 minutes is usually the max.
- Know your audience and be ready to:
 - Provide participants with written instructions for how to connect to the virtual meeting and participate in it.
 - Take time for a technology test and familiarization to ensure everyone is able to participate equally.

TIP 4:

BE REALISTIC

- Respect that people are distracted right now (including you and your staff). This is not business as usual - parents are home-schooling, people are losing jobs or worried about losing jobs, and many are struggling to get groceries. **If you engage, make it quick, easy and interactive.**
- Delay issues that can be reasonably postponed. *Consider developing criteria to use in determining what to delay and what to move forward so there is clear rationale for decision makers and the public.*

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*I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel.*
– Maya Angelou

RESOURCES

1. State Attorney General's Offices

Stay in touch with your state attorney general offices for evolving guidance regarding official requirements for public meetings. Some are already providing guidance specific to COVID-19.

State of Kansas, <https://ag.ks.gov/home/>

The Governor's office has emphasized the need to keep meetings open to the public consistent with Kansas Open Meetings Act (KOMA) and Kansas Open Records Act (KORA).

[Guidance provided by the Attorney General's office](#) on March 25th focuses on best practices for notification and observation of public meetings.

State of Illinois, <https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/>

Executive action by the governor allows elected and appointed bodies to meet remotely rather than in person. [Guidance provided by the Attorney General](#) offers best practices in facilitating public observation and comment.

State of Missouri, <https://ago.mo.gov/>

Guidance not yet available through Attorney General website as of 4/1/20.

2. Professional Organizations

[American Planning Association](#), *Planning During a Pandemic, 6 Tips for Planners*
(Recommended – lots of great advice!)

[International City/County Managers Association](#), multiple links

[National League of Cities](#), multiple links

[International Association for Public Participation](#), multiple article links