

A photograph of a person wearing a white helmet and a red backpack, standing next to a yellow bicycle on a city sidewalk. In the background, there are trees, parked cars, and a building with large glass windows.

How Is Public Engagement Changing? *Moving forward into the 'next normal'*



Jay Dawkins
CEO
PublicInput.com



Graham Stone
VP, Government Relationships
PublicInput.com





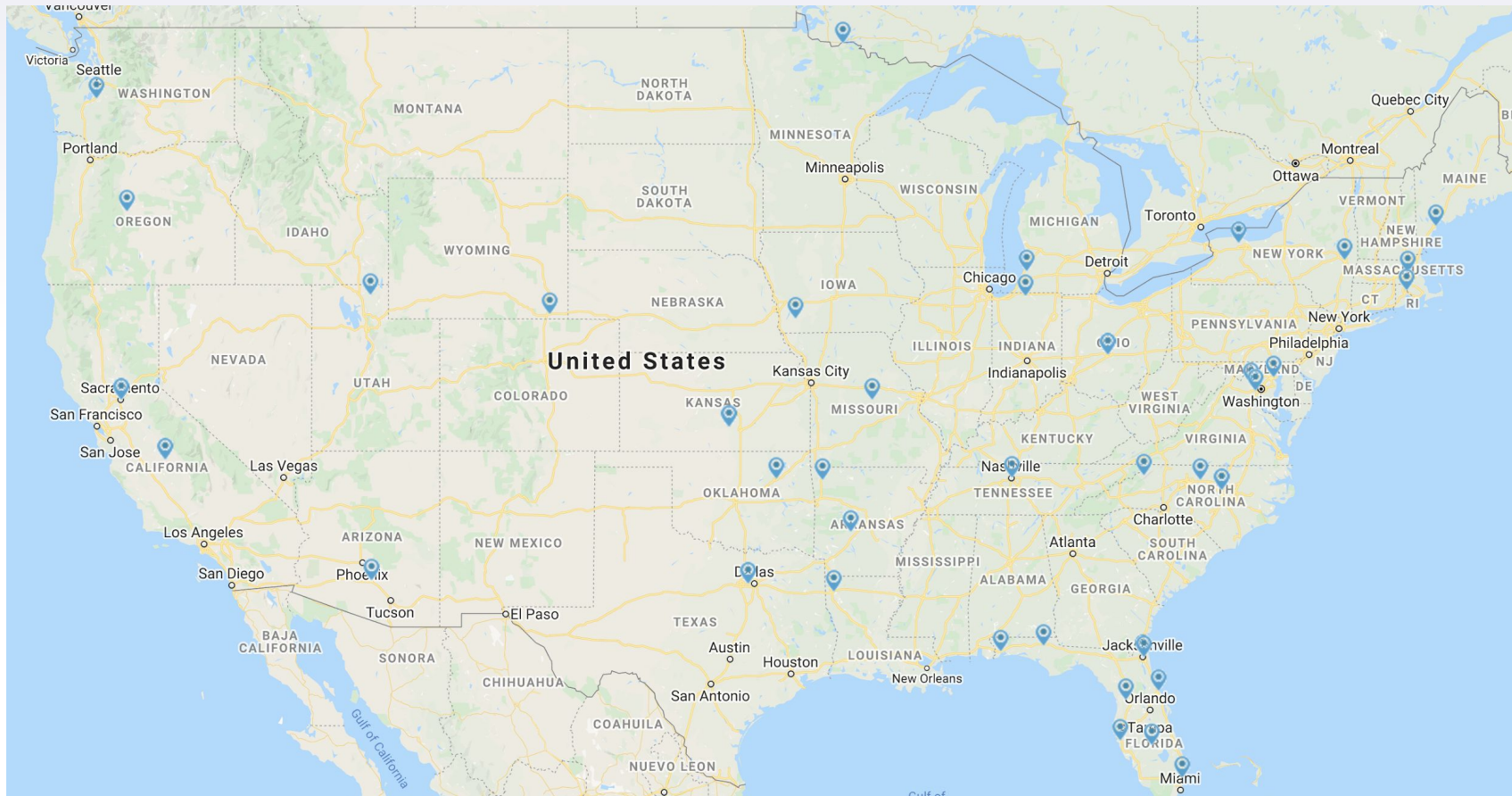
The virtual platforms and our proficiency at using them are evolving and the two month+ **mandated change in business practice has allowed us to leapfrog our technology use.**

These new technologies have the **ability to improve access for many disadvantaged groups** by expanding the time at which people can participate.

- *Transportation Program Manager*
Connecticut

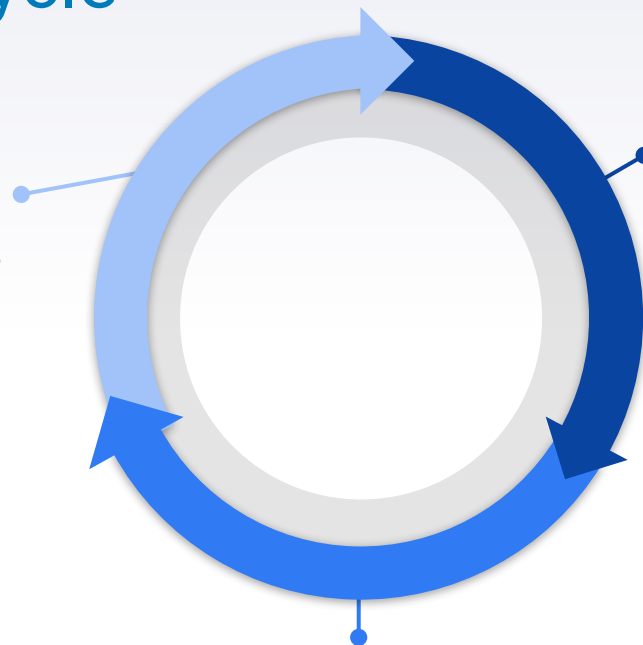


We embarked on a nationwide listening effort



The Stressor Cycle

Multiple different tactics and disconnected tools **don't deliver consistent, quality engagement**, thus restarting the cycle.



External stressors, like COVID-19, amplify the need to engage.

Governments can't use traditional, in-person methods to connect. So they search for ways to go digital.



Survey Overview - Major Themes

1. **Delayed or paused** projects
2. Ensuring **compliance** with virtual meetings
3. The effectiveness of **other outreach tactics**
4. The future of **public meetings and virtual tactics**
5. Moving forward into the '**next normal**'





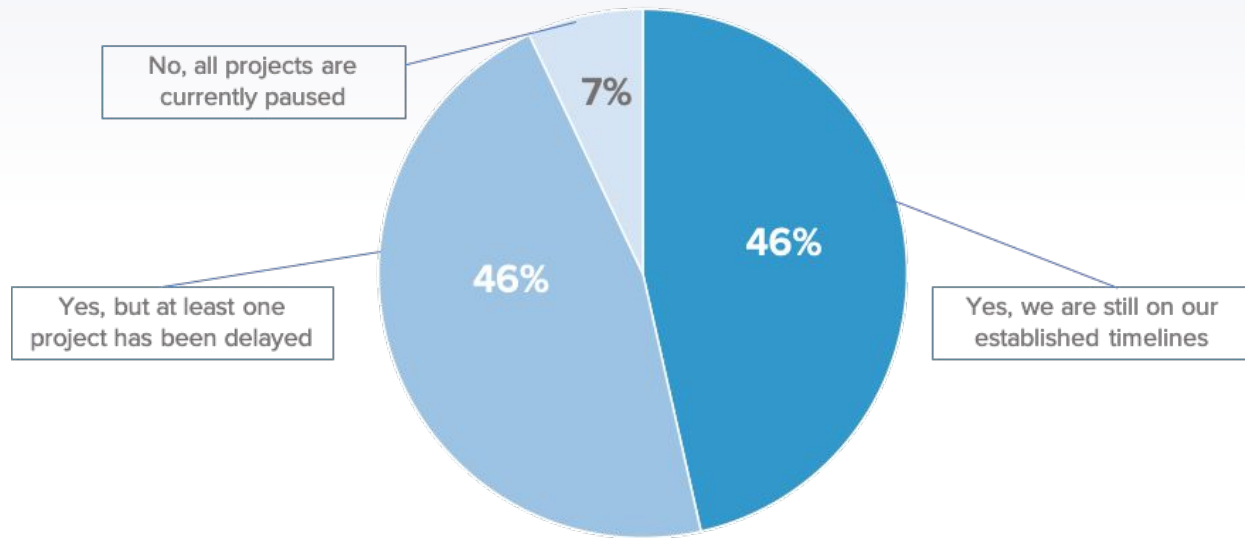
Survey Question:

Have you been able to engage the public on your projects since COVID-19?



Over half of MPOs and DOTs have seen delays

Have you been able to engage the public on your projects since COVID-19?



Reasons why:

1. Reliance on in-person public meetings
2. Adopting new technology can create new virtual hurdles
3. **Most importantly,** uncertainty about compliance with meeting and record laws

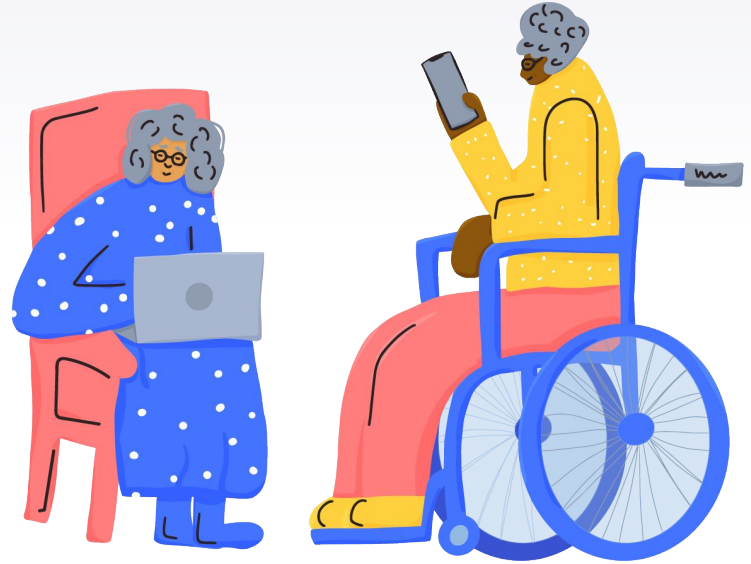


Organizations have been forced to choose between **security** and **accessibility**.



Security

OR

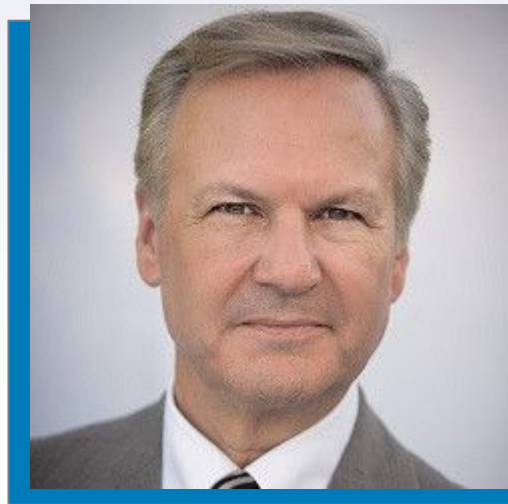


Accessibility



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Utilize technology to replicate and improve administrative processes...and
embrace a cultural change in managing public engagement (meetings) and public information (records) that meet public expectations.

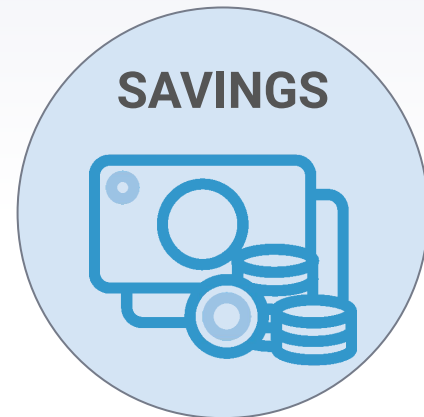


Daniel Bevarly

Executive Director,
National Freedom of
Information Coalition



Virtual public engagement benefits:





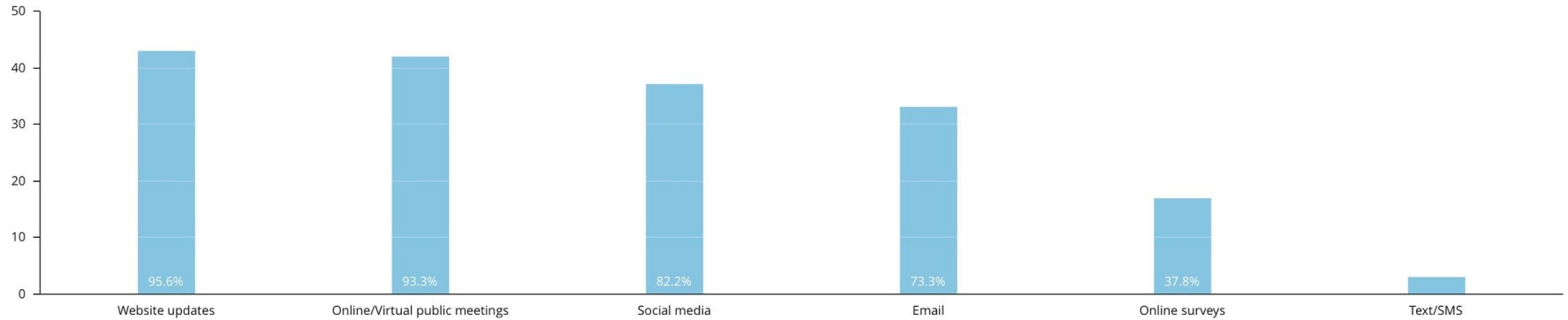
Survey Question:

What methods have you used to reach and engage the public?



Organizations were challenged with “going completely virtual”

During this time, what methods have you been using to reach and engage the public?





Survey Question:

What concerns do you have for the future of public engagement?



Exploring the highest ranked concerns

Rank the following from the **most to least concerned** in regards to public engagement moving forward:

<i>Position</i>	<i>Concern</i>	<i>Avg Rank</i>
1.	Complying with state & federal mandates (e.g. FHWA)	2.27
2.	Keeping my projects on track	2.54
3.	Ensuring representative, equitable engagement	2.60
4.	Capturing feedback and keeping it organized	3.85
5.	Maintaining/building relationships with residents	4.45
6.	Funding for current and future projects	5.19
7.	Coordinating with your regional or state peer organizations	5.38





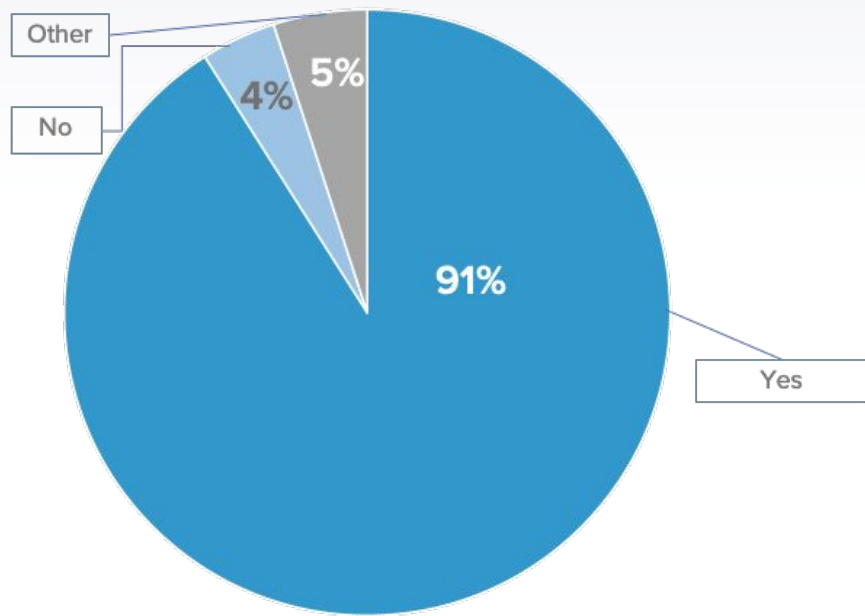
Survey Question:

Did your local or state officials temporarily amend guidelines for public meetings?



State and local governments reacted quickly with amended mandates for compliance...

Did your local or state officials temporarily amend guidelines for public meetings?



...But with **caveats**.

The suspension of various open meeting laws **does not** affect requirements for meetings:

- To be open and transparent
- To offer accessible means to participate

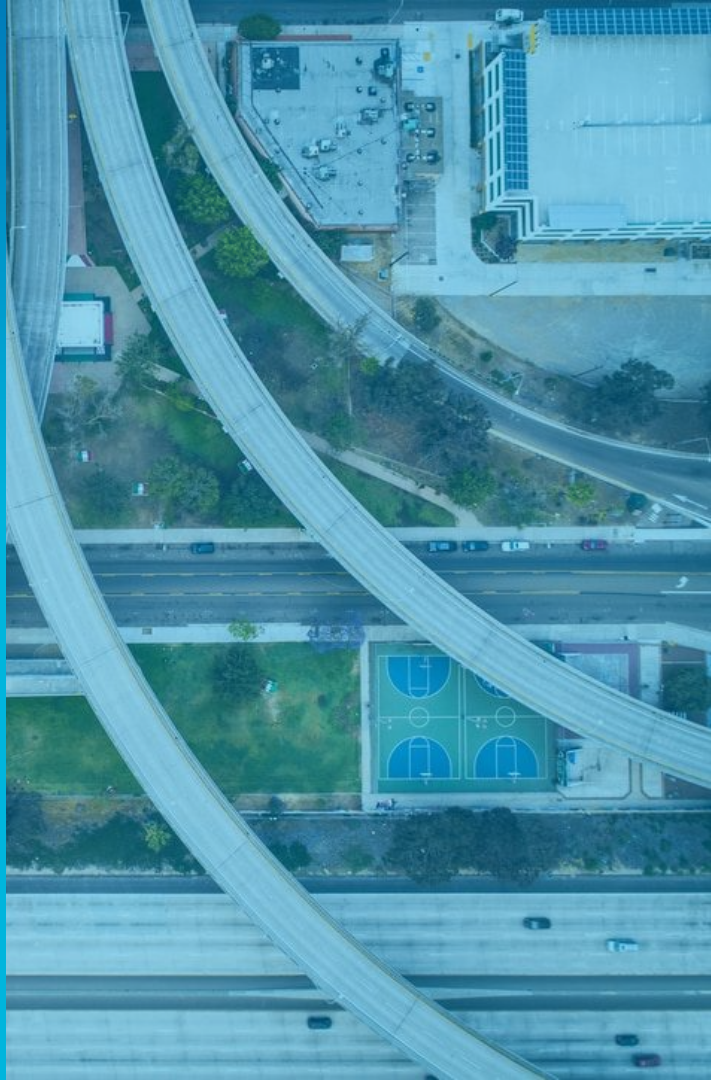


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The biggest concerns are reaching EJ and Title VI communities since they have **lower access to technology** and online tools for the most part.

There has also been vague direction from the federal government on how to proceed ...Everyone is hesitant to rely on online meetings because of **a fear they will be scrutinized and deemed insufficient**

- *Anonymous*



“

That fundamental commitment to openness must be upheld and maintained even as we consider alternative methods to conduct the operation of the government.



Mark Herring

Attorney General of Virginia



► Accessibility and Equity go hand-in-hand.

Because of a lack of broadband internet access, many residents are excluded from the public process, leading to **less equitable public engagement results.**

Did you know?



95%

of Americans own a cell phone



20%

of Americans rely on
mobile phone data for Internet



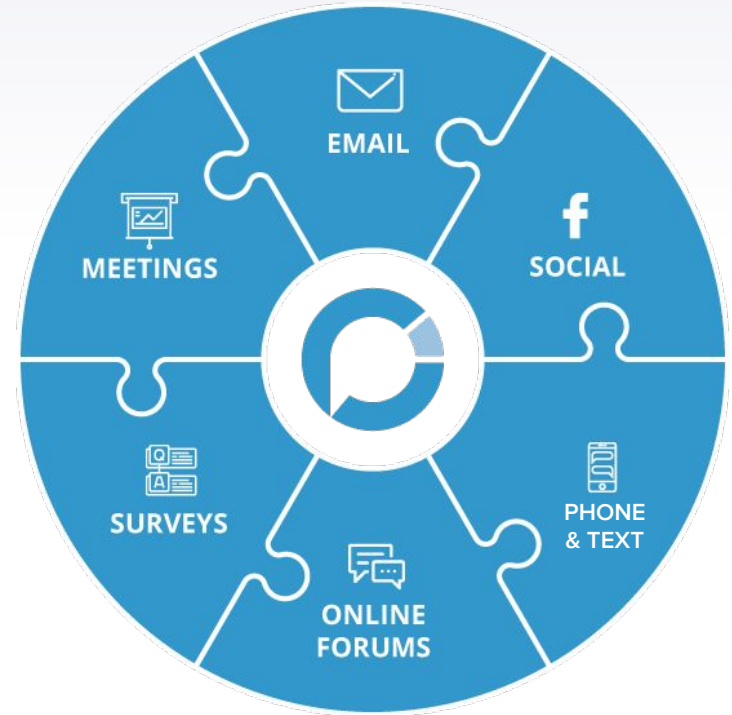
90%

of text messages are read within the
first 3 minutes

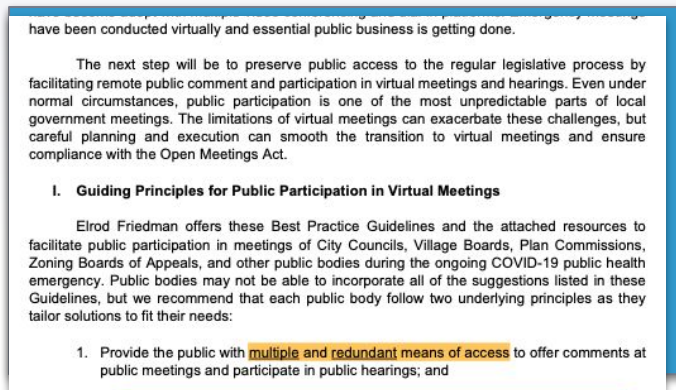
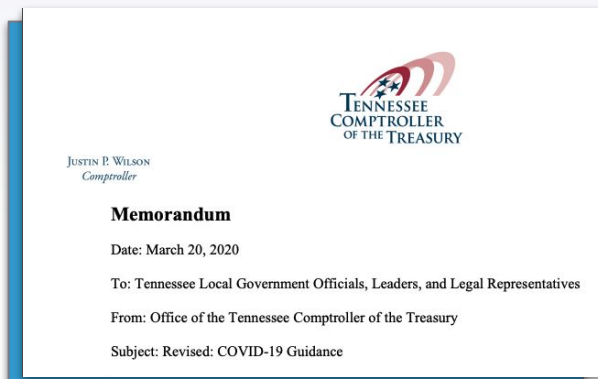


Mixed-Mode Engagement

1. Optimizes data collection and reduces survey error [1]
2. Increase participation among rural residents [2]
3. Better engage populations over the age of 50 [3]



Multiple and redundant means of access to protect decisions



General Assembly Passes Legislation Modifying Open Meetings Act as Part of COVID-19 Response

3/30/2020

On March 25, 2020, the Ohio General Assembly passed and sent to Governor Mike DeWine Amended, Substitute House Bill 197. Included in the lengthy enactment, in a portion of the Bill which appears at Pages 328 and 329, are provisions which relate to the conduct of public meetings and hearings during the period of the Covid 19 emergency. By the terms of the Bill, these changes are to be in effect during the period of the emergency which was declared by Governor DeWine under Executive Order 2020-01D issued on March 9, 2020, but not beyond December 1, 2020, if the period of the emergency extends beyond that date. On March 27, Governor DeWine signed the Bill into law. The Bill had been declared by the General Assembly to be an emergency measure, and, upon its signing, its provisions immediately became law.





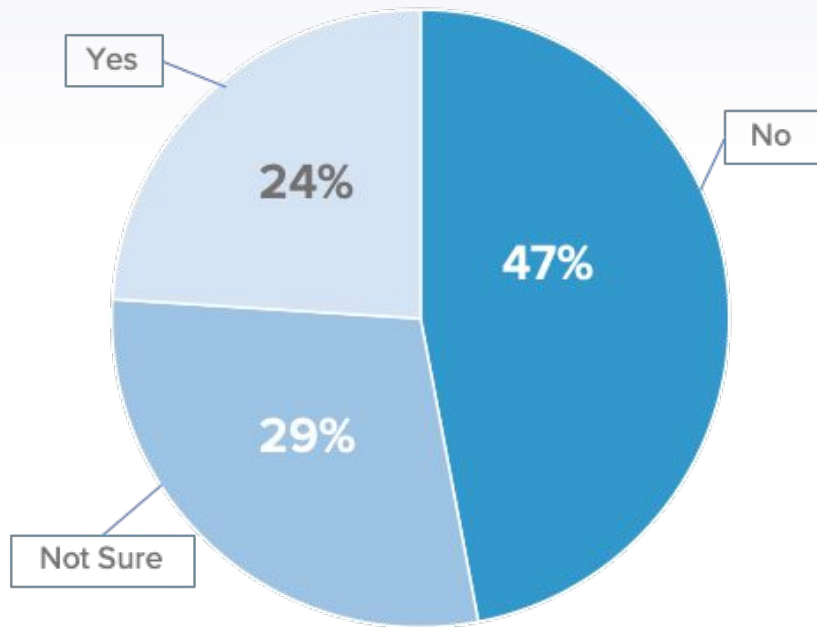
Survey Question:

Are you considering any in-person public meetings in the next two months?



There is uncertainty about the future of participation in face-to-face meetings

Are you considering any in-person meetings (i.e. townhalls) in the next two months?



Reasons why:

1. Fear of virus
2. Prefer the convenience of engaging virtually
3. "This could last a while"



People are *increasingly* less comfortable with gatherings

Public Events



SOURCE: PERFORMANCE RESEARCH & FULL CIRCLE RESEARCH CO.



“

Some bells can't be unrung. Out of necessity, government organizations are adopting more virtual tactics and are getting the opportunity to strategize with them.

Now that these options are available to community members, **they're going to expect them in the future** — to meet them where they are. There is likely no going back.

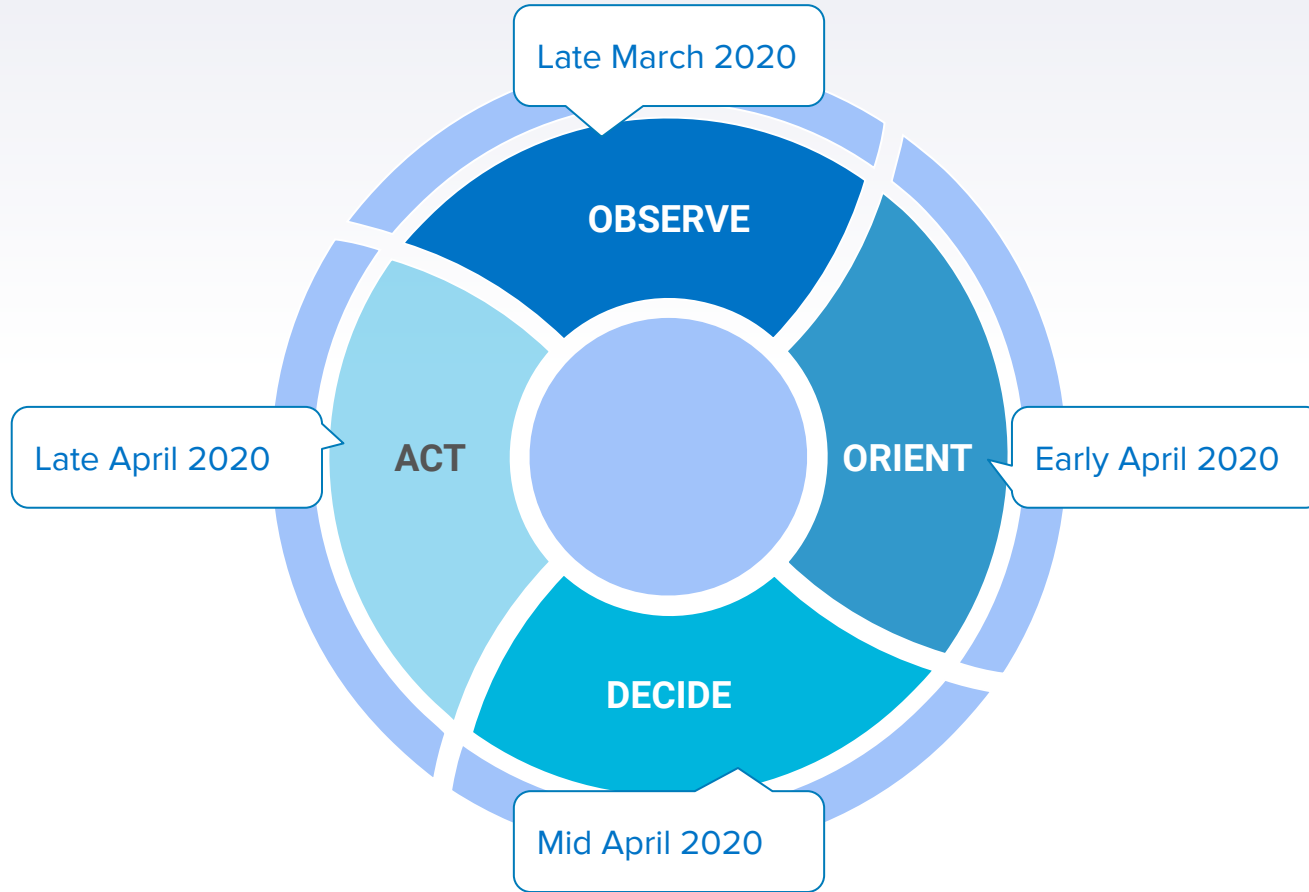


Kirsten Wyatt

Executive Director,
Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL)



OODA Loop: Adapting to Changing Environments



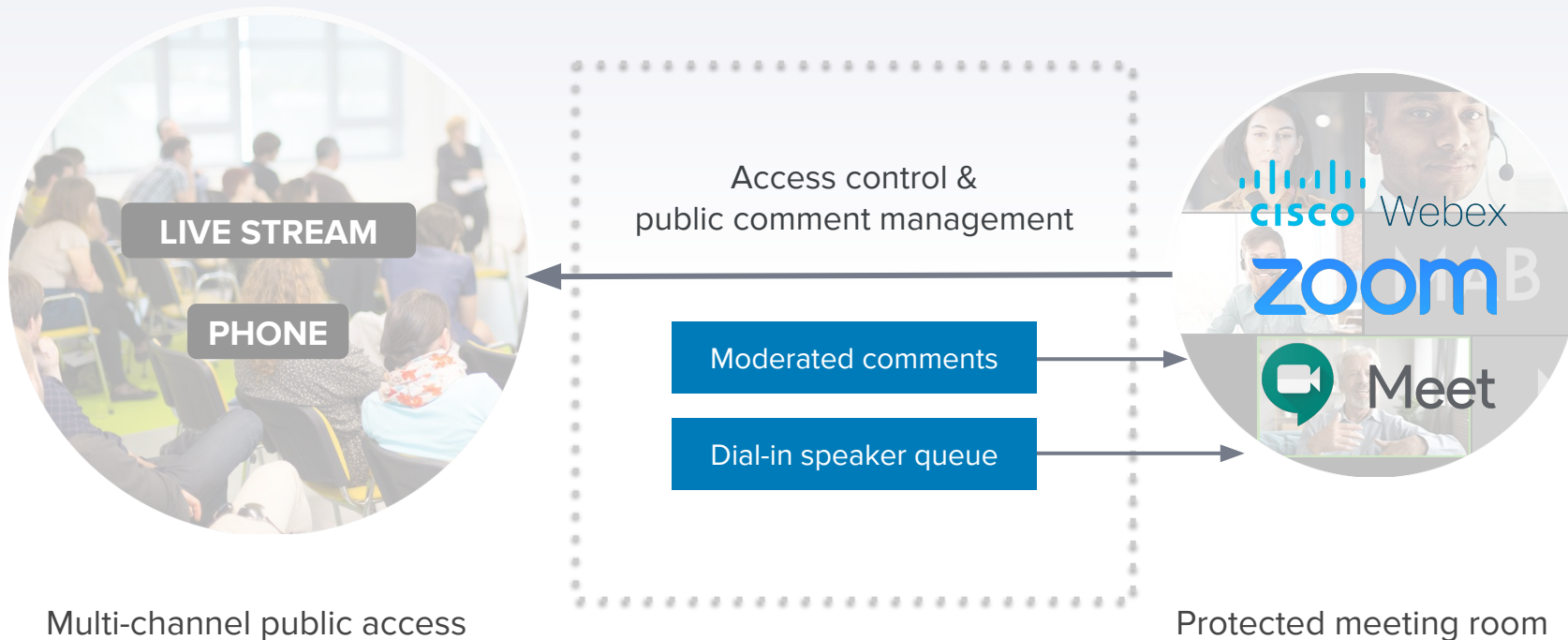
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We are doing the best we can in a virtual sense to keep engagements occurring... and expectations met.

- *Manager, Visual Engineering
Resource Group
WSDOT*

WHEN WILL YOU RETURN

“Separate rooms” to maintain access + security



Email D762@PublicInput.com

The purpose of the meeting is to explain the overall proposed project, present the preliminary roadway design and potential impacts of widening the street, receive your comments, and answer your questions.

14 days ago  Reply  Flag

Ohio DOT

Managed public hearing phone line

In-Person

Average attendance:

39

Sample: 217 meetings with attendance data, pre-COVID

Virtual

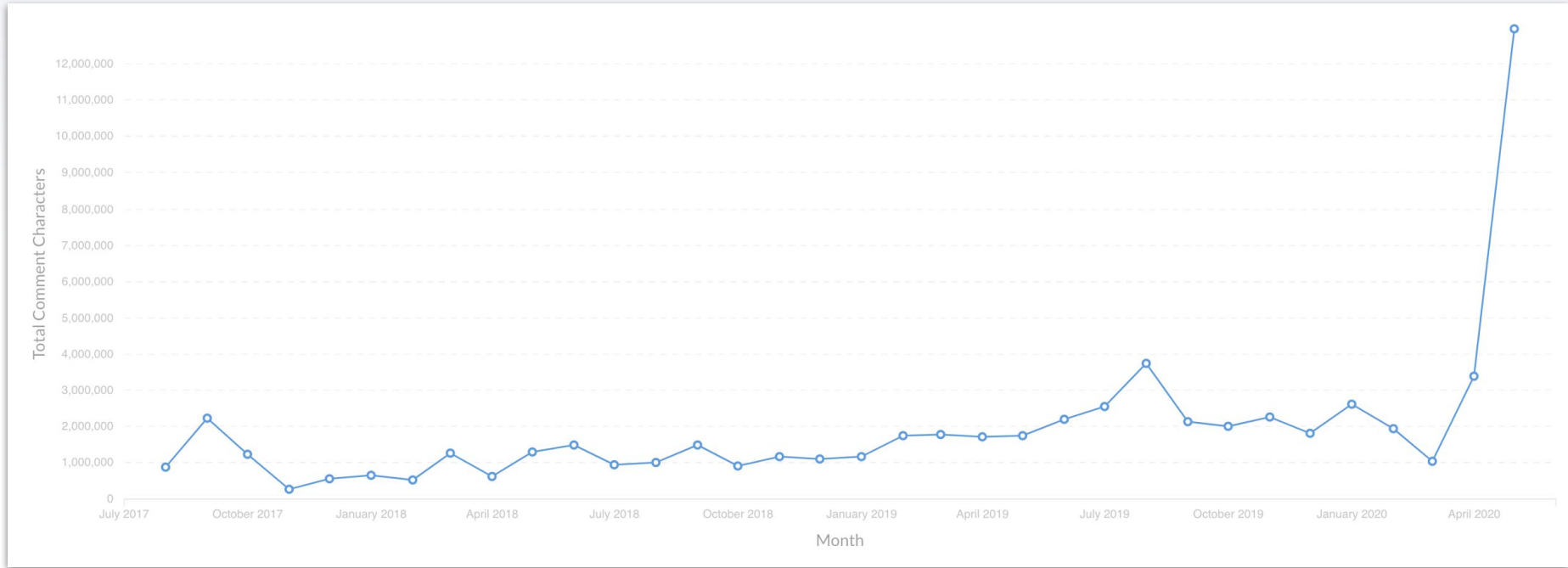
Average attendance:

125

↑240%

Sample: 95 Virtual Public Meetings April-May 2020

An unprecedented desire to be heard



Comment volume by month



What does the “next normal” look like?

- **In-person will return**, albeit as a supplement to virtual
- A focus on **mixed-mode outreach** to achieve greater equity
- Increased focus on **EJ and Title VI communities**
- Digital **relationship management**

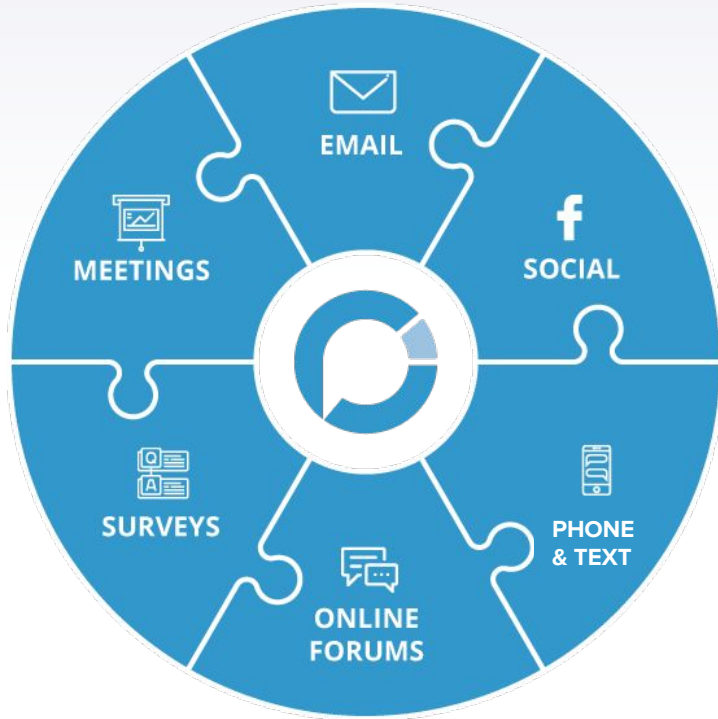
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The more we conduct virtual meetings **the more we see the pros of doing virtual meetings** (much greater participation and broader reach of participants).

- *Environmental Engineer, Ohio*



Moving forward, together



BOOK AN INTRO CALL

