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



Jay Dawkins CEO PublicInput.com



Graham Stone

VP, Government Relationships *PublicInput.com* "

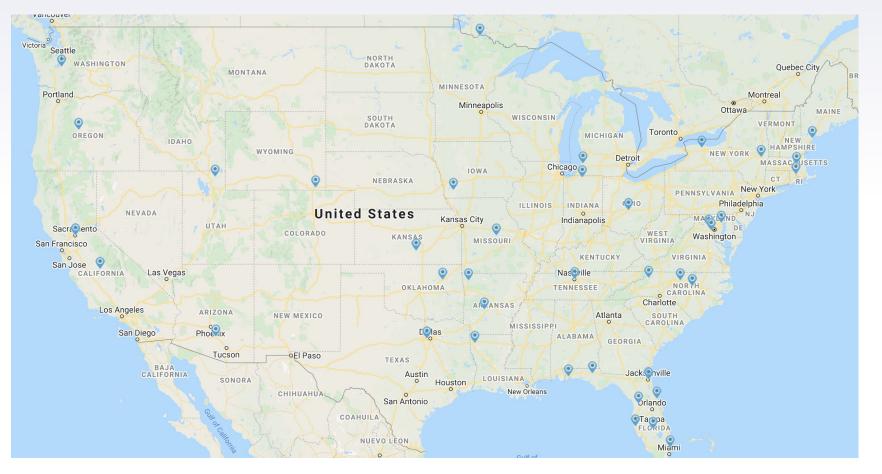
The virtual platforms and our proficiency at using them are evolving and the two month+ **mandated change in business practice has allowed us to leapfrog our technology use**.

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

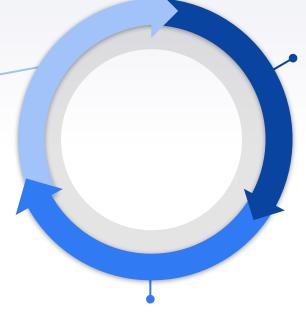


We embarked on a nationwide listening effort



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
- The effectiveness of other outreach tactics
- The future of public meetings and virtual tactics
- 5. Moving forward into the 'next normal'







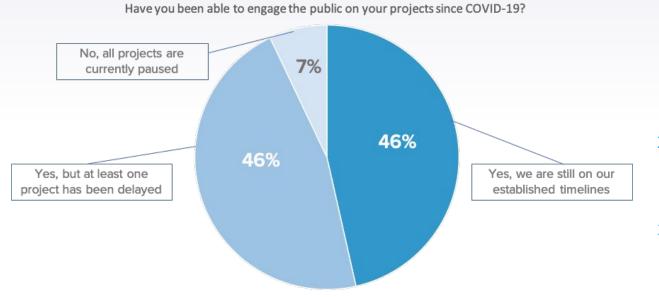


Survey Question:

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



Over half of MPOs and DOTs have seen delays

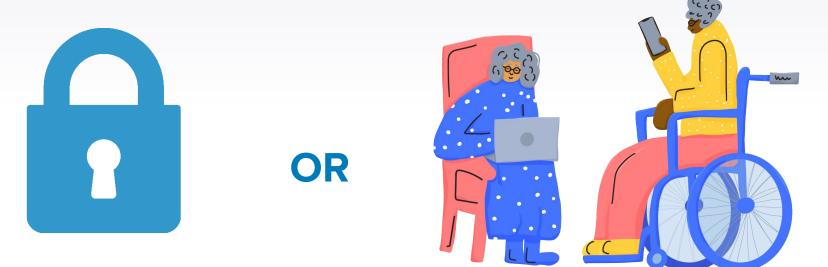


Reasons why:

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



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



Security

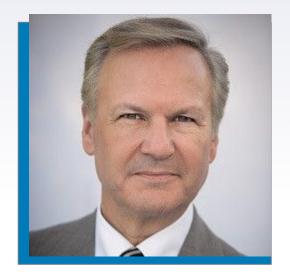
Accessibility





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.

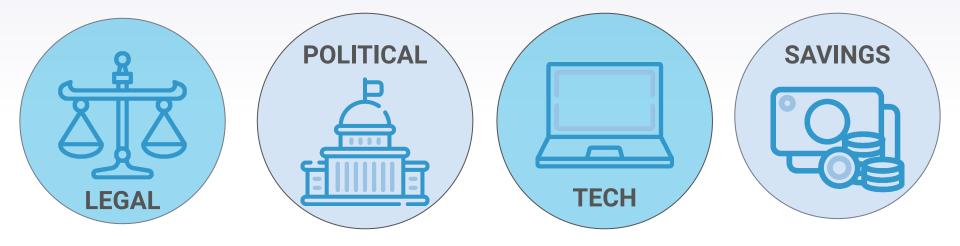


Daniel Bevarly

Executive Director, National Freedom of Information Coalition



Virtual public engagement benefits:





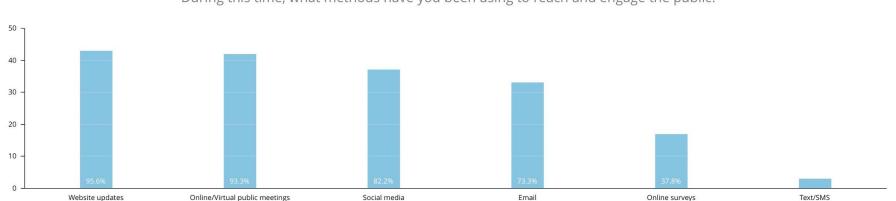


Survey Question:

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:

Position	Concern	Avg Rank
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

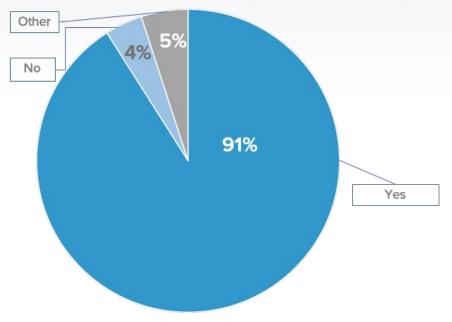


Survey Question:

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

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.



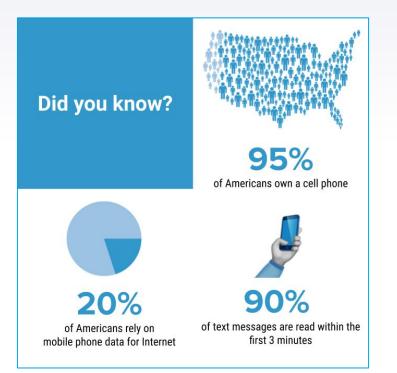
Mark Herring

Attorney General of Virginia



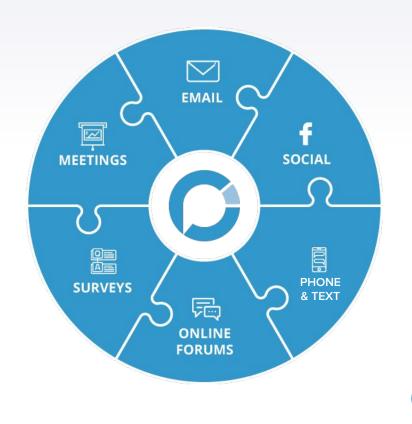
Accessibility and Equity go hand-in-hand.

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



Mixed-Mode Engagement

- 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



JUSTIN P. WILSON Comptroller

Memorandum

Date: March 20, 2020

To: Tennessee Local Government Officials, Leaders, and Legal Representatives

From: Office of the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury

Subject: Revised: COVID-19 Guidance

have been conducted virtually and essential public business is getting done.

The next step will be to preserve public access to the regular legislative process by facilitating remote public comment and participation in virtual meetings and hearings. Even under normal circumstances, public participation is one of the most unpredictable parts of local government meetings. The limitations of virtual meetings can exacerbate these challenges, but careful planning and execution can smooth the transition to virtual meetings and ensure compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

I. Guiding Principles for Public Participation in Virtual Meetings

Elrod Friedman offers these Best Practice Guidelines and the attached resources to facilitate public participation in meetings of City Councils, Village Boards, Plan Commissions, Zoning Boards of Appeals, and other public bodies during the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. Public bodies may not be able to incorporate all of the suggestions listed in these Guidelines, but we recommend that each public body follow two underlying principles as they tailor solutions to fit their needs:

 Provide the public with <u>multiple</u> and <u>redundant</u> means of access to offer comments at public meetings and participate in public hearings; and

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 General Assembly to be an emergency measure, and, upon its signing, it's 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? Yes No 24% 47% 29% Not Sure

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 Ev	ents	
	Attending a big event "will scare me for a long time"	After the CDC and local governments say it's safe to do so, I will attend fewer public events
Yes (in March)	44%	44%
Yes (in May)	60%	52%

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



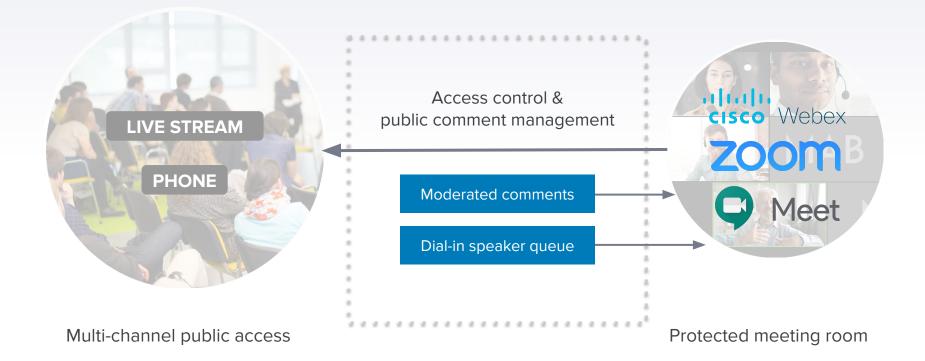


We are doing the best we can in a virtual sense to keep engagements occurring... and expectations met.

- Manager, Visual Engineering Resource Group WSDOT



"Separate rooms" to maintain access + security

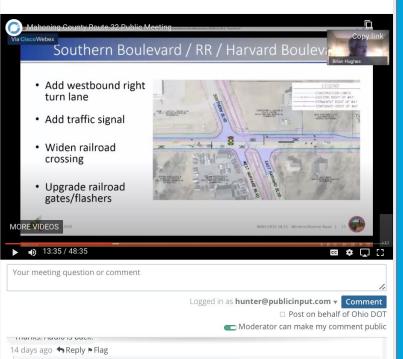




- JUN Public Involvement Meeting for MAH-CR 32-18.11/Western Reserve Road Widening (PID 11 108742)
 - 🚞 Thu, Jun 11 6:00 pm
 - Participate by phone: 855-925-2801 Meeting code: 8976
 - Email D762@PublicInput.com

In order to protect the health of all Ohio citizens, and in accordance with the executive orders issued by the Governor of the State of Ohio and the Director of the Ohio Department of Health, the Mahoning County Engineer's Office will hold a virtual public meeting for Western Reserve Road (CR 32) widening project, located in Mahoning County, Ohio. The meeting will be held virtually Thursday, June 11, 2020 from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM with a live presentation at 6:00. Live question and answer with project staff will be available the remainder of the time.

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.



CASE EXAMPLE: Ohio DOT

Caller	† ≓	Joined↓↑	Status 1
330-20		5:53 PM	Exited 6:53 PM
L 855-92		1:15 PM	Exited 6:49 PM
ATT 🔒		5:57 PM	Exited 6:05 PM
CONW.		5:53 PM	Exited 6:45 PM
AB HOFFN		5:58 PM	Exited 6:49 PM
JACQU		6:13 PM	Exited 6:13 PM
JOHNS		5:54 PM	Exited 6:49 PM
LAROC		6:57 PM	Exited 6:59 PM
A MATAY.		7:01 PM	Exited 7:08 PM
CRR C/		6:13 PM	Exited 6:17 PM
POHN/		5:30 PM	Exited 6:08 PM
		6:14 PM	Exited 6:57 PM
🖴 RYAN E		5:40 PM	Exited 6:52 PM
VACI EL		5:54 PM	Exited 6:02 PM

Managed public hearing phone line

In-Person

Average attendance:

39

Sample: 217 meetings with attendance data, pre-COVID

Virtual

Average attendance:

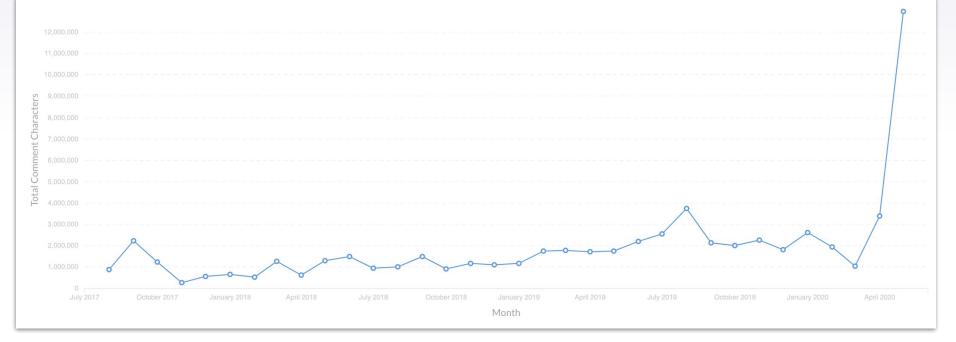
125

↑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

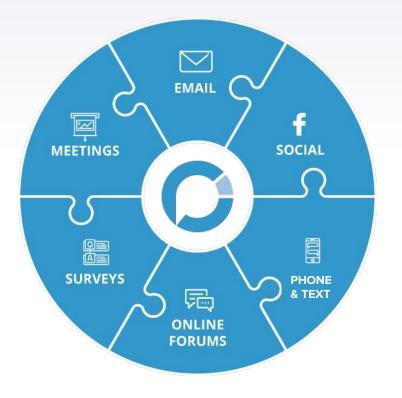


The more we conduct virtual meetings **the more we see the pros of doing virtual meetings** (much greater participation and broader reach of participants).

- Environmental Engineer, Ohio



Moving forward, together



BOOK AN INTRO CALL

