

# Transportation Research Synthesis

TRS 2103

June 2021

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OTHER DISRUPTIVE EVENTS

*Prepared by CTC & Associates LLC*

**Effective public engagement is essential to** MnDOT's commitment to offer opportunities for meaningful input and to advance equity in transportation. Disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic that limit or cut off in-person engagement present challenges to MnDOT's efforts to continue its commitment to public engagement.



The COVID-19 pandemic prompted MnDOT to explore new ways to engage with the public through virtual meeting platforms and other means. This Transportation Research Synthesis is a part of an information-gathering effort that seeks to identify best practices from a wide range of local, state and national public agencies and private organizations that are committed to continued engagement with the public during periods of disruption. The results of a survey, literature search and consultations with selected experts described in this report are expected to inform MnDOT's efforts to communicate and engage effectively during the current pandemic and prepare for the next disruptive event.

## Table of Contents

<b>Technical Advisory Panel</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Detailed Findings</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Introduction .....	8
Survey of Practice .....	8
Survey Background .....	8
Survey Respondents .....	9
Virtual Meeting Platforms .....	11
Conducting Meetings Online .....	14
Other Engagement Channels and Platforms .....	15
Encouraging Diverse Participation.....	19
Meeting National Environmental Policy Act Requirements .....	23
Conducting In-Person Meetings .....	25
Policy and Practice .....	26
Assessment .....	27
Related Resources.....	31
Literature Search.....	41
Background .....	41
Best Practices .....	43
COVID-19 Information Clearinghouses and General Resources.....	44
Cybersecurity .....	48
Research Needs .....	48
Rural Engagement.....	48
Stakeholder Participation .....	49
Virtual Public Engagement Tools .....	52
Virtual Public Meetings.....	55
Expert Consultation .....	56
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.....	56
<b>Appendix A: Survey Questions</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix B: Rating Literature Search Results</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Appendix C: Kentucky Transportation Cabinet</b> .....	<b>75</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1. Use of Virtual Meeting Platforms .....	11
Table 2. Preferred Platforms .....	12
Table 3. Methods or Practices to Notify Virtual Meeting Participants .....	14
Table 4. Use of Outreach Tools .....	16

## Technical Advisory Panel

**Jeanne Aamodt**, Technical Liaison  
MnDOT Office of Communications and Public Engagement

**Renee Raduenz**, Technical Liaison  
MnDOT Office of Communications and Public Engagement

**Christine Kline**, Principal Investigator  
CTC & Associates LLC

**Marcus Bekele**, Project Coordinator  
MnDOT Office of Research & Innovation

**Allie Berndt**, Panelist  
Washington County

**Trinity Ek**, Panelist  
MnDOT Office of Transportation System Management

**Bryan Christensen**, Panelist  
MnDOT District 4

**Cassandra Isackson**, Panelist  
MnDOT Office of Aeronautics Services

**Sulmaan M. Khan**, Panelist  
MnDOT State Aid for Local Transportation

**Mary Kloos**, Panelist  
MnDOT District 7

**Leslie Seitz**, Panelist  
MnDOT District 2

**Nissa Tupper**, Panelist  
MnDOT Office of Sustainability and Public Health

**Hally Turner**, Panelist  
MnDOT Office of Transportation System Management

**Kjensmo Walker**, Panelist  
MnDOT Office of Communications and Public Engagement

**Maren Webb**, Panelist  
MnDOT District 1

*The purpose of this TRS is to serve as a synthesis of pertinent completed research to be used for further study and evaluation by MnDOT. This TRS does not represent the conclusions of either the authors or MnDOT.*

# Public Engagement Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Other Disruptive Events

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Effective public engagement is essential to MnDOT's commitment to offer opportunities for meaningful input and to advance equity in transportation. MnDOT encourages the public to:

- Engage early and often.
- Assist in identifying transportation challenges and solutions.
- Participate in decision-making processes.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted MnDOT public engagement coordinators and planners to investigate a variety of online tools to stay connected with the public and begin exploring new ways of engaging with the public and agency stakeholders through virtual meeting platforms and by other means. This Transportation Research Synthesis (TRS) sought to supplement these investigative efforts and inform the development of agency best practices by surveying state, regional and local governments and private organizations, examining resources provided or recommended by organizations that consider public engagement an integral part of their organizing mission and normal operation, and consulting with selected experts.

### Summary of Findings

This Transportation Research Synthesis is divided into three sections:

- Survey of Practice.
- Literature Search.
- Expert Consultation.

### Survey of Practice

An online survey was distributed to a pool of more than 150 potential respondents from state, regional and local agencies within Minnesota (including MnDOT's districts and functional areas), state departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) outside Minnesota, selected Canadian transportation agencies and private organizations expected to have experience with public engagement practices. The survey received 39 complete or mostly complete survey responses. Below are highlights of survey results in the following topic areas:

- Virtual meeting platforms.
- Conducting meetings online.
- Other engagement channels and platforms.
- Encouraging diverse participation.
- Meeting National Environmental Policy Act requirements.

- Conducting in-person meetings.
- Policy and practice.
- Assessment.
- Related resources.

### **Virtual Meeting Platforms**

Respondents reported using a variety of popular commercial virtual meeting platforms, with almost two-thirds using Zoom, the most frequently used platform, and more than half using Microsoft Teams. Respondents are least likely to use Google Hangouts and Adobe Connect.

Most respondents have used more than one platform. Skype and GovDelivery are popular among MnDOT districts and local and regional organizations, while state DOTs are more likely to use Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were most likely to be rated as a respondent's preferred platform, followed by Cisco Webex and GoToWebinar. Respondents provided a variety of reasons for preferring one platform over another; see **Detailed Findings** to learn more. More than half of respondents conduct training for their virtual meeting facilitators.

Not all agencies are using commercial platforms. Iowa DOT's custom platform—Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA)—includes tools for managing online meetings and public websites. Iowa DOT owns the PIMA tool and makes it available through memoranda of understanding to other state DOTs.

### **Conducting Meetings Online**

Almost all respondents use more than one method or practice to notify the public when a virtual meeting is scheduled, and they are most likely to post a notice on a project or agency website or on social media, or notify via email or agency e-newsletter. Creative approaches include using breakout rooms, a chat box, and interactive mapping and polling during virtual meetings, and engaging local leaders.

Slightly less than one-third of respondents have identified what they consider to be creative ways to incentivize or encourage members of the public to attend virtual meetings. In addition to widely advertising meetings and providing multiple meeting opportunities, a few respondents reported on other approaches such as inviting advocate groups, municipal officials and elected leaders to virtual meetings, and using gift cards to encourage participation.

### **Other Engagement Channels and Platforms**

Almost half of respondents reported changes in their agency's use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events. Most of these respondents reported greater use of social media. Less than one-quarter of respondents reported a change in their agency's use of U.S. mail for public engagement during the pandemic, and most of these agencies reported greater use.

Respondents also pointed to a variety of nonvirtual engagement practices that have proved to be effective in safely engaging with members of the public with low or no technology during the pandemic. In addition to direct mail, various forms of print media, phone calls and a phone-in option for virtual meetings, respondents also partner with community-based organizations and other groups.

## **Encouraging Diverse Participation**

Forty-one percent of respondents reported on new practices to engage with underrepresented or harder-to-reach (e.g., low-income, racially/ethnically diverse, Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), disability community) populations during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events. Most described how they engaged community leaders and networks, while others used newsletters and websites to encourage engagement.

Respondents are most often using demographic analysis, community leader engagement, interpreters, language services and translated materials to ensure that limited English proficiency individuals are appropriately served during disruptive events. Almost half of respondents have attempted to survey meeting participants before, during or after a virtual meeting using comment forms, demographic surveys and polling to understand the demographics of participants.

## **Meeting National Environmental Policy Act Requirements**

Twenty-nine survey respondents indicated that their agencies are subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) meeting requirements related to public hearings and public comments. Of these, nine continued to offer in-person public hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some agencies electing to use a hybrid meeting model that gave the public a choice to attend in person or online.

Respondents were most likely to address questions related to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of the final EIS (77% of those responding), and were most likely to address questions during a virtual public meeting. Respondents were least likely to accept comments during an in-person meeting, which could be related to the limited use of in-person meetings during the pandemic.

## **Conducting In-Person Meetings**

The nine respondents identifying their agencies as not subject to NEPA requirements were provided a separate set of questions about holding in-person meetings. Only three of these respondents—City of Norwood Young America, Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO and Center for Neighborhood Technology—indicated that they have held in-person meetings during the pandemic. None appears to be making significant use of in-person meetings.

## **Policy and Practice**

Nearly all agencies have made changes in how they communicate with the public and stakeholders during the pandemic. The most common steps agencies have taken include expanding social media use, and virtual options, and introducing a variety of tools to encourage engagement. Only three agencies—Nevada and North Carolina DOTs and the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario—reported little or no change in their communication practices.

Some engagement techniques initiated during the pandemic are expected to become standard practice post-pandemic. These include virtual meetings, a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings, and the use of robust online tools.

## **Assessment**

### ***Successful Tools and Practices***

Social media, virtual meetings and electronic communication dominated the tools and practices that agencies use to successfully engage the public during the pandemic or other disruptive events. Most respondents use a

variety of online tools in addition to social media and virtual meetings, including project websites, online surveys, interactive polling, online open houses, videos and prerecorded presentations, StoryMaps, e-blasts and e-newsletters.

### ***Challenges Posed by Disruptive Events***

Respondents described five key factors that have inhibited efforts to engage the public:

- Lack of access to high-speed internet.
- Reaching underserved populations.
- Competing events.
- Missed benefits of in-person meetings.
- Limited technical knowledge, both within the agency and in members of the public.

### ***Recommendations for Other Agencies***

A range of recommendations for agencies seeking to establish effective practices for public engagement when in-person events are limited or not possible most often centered around technology, outreach and virtual meetings. Respondents also highlighted the importance of planning and training for agency staff.

### **Related Resources**

This section of the report provides information about virtual communication products, policies and other resources mentioned by survey respondents. Among the topics discussed are virtual meeting platforms, online and regular mail engagement tools and regulatory issues. Supplementing this information is guidance from state and regional agencies about public engagement policies and practices.

### **Literature Search**

Seeking information from established organizations with experience and expertise in public engagement issues and challenges, investigators selected a group of organizations that counted public engagement as an integral part of their organizing mission and normal operation. These groups included:

- American Planning Association (APA).
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- National Civic League.
- National cooperative research programs.
- National League of Cities.
- State departments of natural resources (DNRs).
- Urban Institute.

Below are highlights from the publications and other resources sourced through the literature search. [Appendix B](#) provides the Technical Advisory Panel's ranking of these resources using the rating scale of 1 to 5 (1 = least helpful resource and 5 = most helpful resource).

### **Federal Guidance**

FEMA and FHWA both offer extensive information and resources to facilitate public engagement during times of widespread disruption of normal communication methods and venues. Although FEMA is most known for its rapid response after natural disasters that disrupt physical infrastructure, it quickly offered COVID-19 resources that included robust tools and guides for alternative methods of public communication and engagement. Among the FEMA publications cited in this report are guides and tools for identifying at-risk populations, such as those with economic, language and literacy, medical/physical, or geographic disadvantages.

Like FEMA, FHWA had many existing tools that could be employed with little or no modification to address COVID-19 communications challenges. FHWA had developed guidance for virtual public involvement (VPI) before COVID-19 emerged. FHWA's website offers a short video describing use of VPI and eight fact sheets that present various digital VPI tools with examples of their use in agencies across the country.

Two national cooperative research programs—National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) and Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)—are sponsoring anticipated and pending research that will assess the degree to which VPI affects community engagement during project development, and identify best practices in selecting VPI tools and integrating virtual and in-person public involvement.

### **National Organizations' Focus on Communities**

APA, National Civic League, National League of Cities and Urban Institute all focus their efforts on the needs, problems of and solutions for communities. These communities range in size from small villages to huge metropolitan areas. These organizations developed COVID-19 resource lists, some with extensive educational materials, for their constituencies. Through digital tools, new strategies and other resources promoted through these organizations, communities could continue with their required meetings and public engagement work despite pandemic restrictions.

Among the resources are APA podcasts that describe lessons learned from shifting from in-person to virtual meetings early in the pandemic. Resources highlighted by the National Civic League direct local, state and federal government agencies to information about digital engagement platforms, conversation tools and resources for seniors, including Bang the Table, a digital platform for communication engagement, and Conversation Café cards, a resource that can be used to build connection when community members cannot meet in person.

### **State Agency Practices**

State DNRs in Minnesota and Wisconsin used digital resources to promote and facilitate essential public engagement during pandemic restrictions. Minnesota DNR's community engagement platform allows users to register for open engagement opportunities; a Wisconsin DNR public input page connects Wisconsin residents to a central calendar for public hearings and meetings that were presented via Zoom, with phone participation available.



## Expert Consultation

Randolph Briley, special assistant to the Minnesota DNR commissioner, responded to investigators' questions about agency public engagement practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and other disruptive events. Among his observations:

**Virtual platforms.** At the onset of the pandemic, the agency scaled back engagement and used existing virtual platforms, including Skype and Webex. A few months into the pandemic, the agency added a new platform: Bang the Table. Briley noted that “[i]t was a bit of a learning curve to shift what was largely traditional in-person engagement to digital, however, our teams were quite adaptable and we will continue to leverage both modes to their fullest extent into the future.”

**Effective strategies.** Minnesota DNR has used strategies for promotion of digital engagement that are similar to those used to promote in-person engagement—placement of notices in outdoor-oriented publications, social media messages and the DNR website.

**Lessons learned.** Briley advised users of new platforms to ensure that proper protocols and guidance documents are available to increase consistency and quality across the enterprise.

## Next Steps

Going forward, MnDOT may wish to consider:

- Reviewing specific respondent practices and tools to identify those with the potential to enhance MnDOT's current public engagement practices during disruptive events.
- Examining in greater detail the publications and other resources identified in the literature search, focusing on the Technical Advisory Panel's more highly rated resources (ratings of 4 or 5) that appear in [Appendix B](#).
- Contacting selected agencies to learn more about specific practices. These contacts might include:
  - Iowa DOT, to learn more about the PIMA online portal.
  - Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, to learn more about agency efforts to engage with the Amish community (“Public Meeting in a Box”).
  - Center for Neighborhood Technology and North Carolina DOT, to discuss agency practices to encourage engagement by community-based organizations.

## Detailed Findings

### Introduction

Disruptive events—including pandemics, natural disasters, periods of social unrest and other disruptions that limit or cut off in-person engagement—present challenges to MnDOT’s efforts to continue its commitment to public engagement. Effective public engagement is essential to MnDOT’s commitment to offer opportunities for meaningful input and to advance equity in transportation. MnDOT encourages the public to:

- Engage early and often.
- Assist in identifying transportation challenges and solutions.
- Participate in decision-making processes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted MnDOT staff to begin exploring new ways of engaging with the public and agency stakeholders through virtual meeting platforms and by other means. Public engagement coordinators and planners have investigated a variety of online tools to stay connected with the public, such as Skype, Webex (for meetings, events and trainings), Facebook Live and Premiere, and live streaming to ensure that engagement continues to be both accessible and relevant. Other tools that may be used include online surveys, videos, mailings and a GovDelivery texting program. (Guidance has been distributed within MnDOT for the GovDelivery texting program, now available statewide after being piloted by District 6.)

This Transportation Research Synthesis (TRS) project gathered information using a survey of state, regional and local governments and organizations, and an examination of the resources made available by national and state organizations expected to have experience with public engagement during disruptive events. Investigators sought to identify the best practices used by other agencies that are creatively meeting the current challenges presented by COVID-19, social unrest and other disruptive events that adversely impact an agency’s ability to communicate and engage with the public. These best practices are expected to inform MnDOT’s efforts to communicate and engage effectively during the current pandemic and prepare for the next disruptive event.

Findings from these information-gathering efforts are described in the following in three topic areas:

- Survey of practice.
- Literature search.
- Expert consultation.

### Survey of Practice

#### **Survey Background**

Investigators distributed a 25-question online survey to a potential pool of respondents that included state, regional and local transportation, government and nonprofit agencies in the United States and selected Canadian transportation agencies. Below is a brief summary of the topic areas addressed in the survey.

**Virtual Meeting Platforms.** Respondents identified the platforms they used most frequently, ranked the most important system features, and described the pros and cons of their preferred platforms.

**Conducting Virtual Meetings.** Respondents described their practices for notifying the public of meetings and creative ways to incentivize participation.

**Other Engagement Channels and Platforms.** Respondents described their use of outreach tools other than virtual meetings and identified those they found to be most useful.

**Encouraging Diverse Participation.** Respondents described their practices to engage with low-income and/or racially/ethnically diverse populations or the Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) population and members of the public with limited English proficiency (LEP), and their attempts to identify how participation by underrepresented or underserved communities has been impacted during COVID-19.

**Meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Requirements.** Respondents whose agencies are subject to public outreach requirements associated with NEPA indicated if they continued to hold in-person meetings during the pandemic and how their agencies handled NEPA-related public comments.

**Conducting In-Person Public Meetings.** Respondents from agencies not subject to NEPA requirements indicated whether their agencies continued to hold in-person meetings and described their handling of public questions and comments during the pandemic.

**Policy and Practice.** Respondents described changes their agencies made in how they communicate with the public during the pandemic and the engagement techniques initiated during the pandemic that they expect will become standard practice after the pandemic.

**Assessment.** After describing the most successful tools to engage the public during the pandemic, respondents identified their most significant challenges and offered recommendations for other agencies seeking to establish effective practices for public engagement when in-person events are limited or not possible.

Survey questions are provided in [Appendix A](#).

## Survey Respondents

More than 150 potential respondents from the agency types listed below were contacted to complete the survey:

- State departments of transportation (DOTs)
- MnDOT's eight districts
- MnDOT functional areas
- Minnesota's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional development commissions (RDCs)
- Selected MPOs in rural and urban areas outside Minnesota
- Selected Minnesota counties and municipalities
- Canadian transportation agencies
- Other organizations

The survey received 39 complete or mostly complete responses:

### State DOTs (18)

Arizona  
Florida  
Iowa

Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Michigan  
Montana  
Nebraska  
Nevada  
New Jersey  
New York (partial response)  
North Carolina  
Oklahoma  
Pennsylvania  
Tennessee (partial response)  
Utah\*  
Wisconsin  
Wyoming

**MnDOT Districts (8)**

District 1  
District 2  
District 3  
District 6  
District 8  
Metro District (3 responses; 2 partial)

**Minnesota Cities and Counties (3)**

City of Norwood Young America (partial response)  
City of Rosemount  
Dakota County

**Minnesota MPOs and RDCs (4)**

Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO  
Headwaters RDC (partial response)  
La Crosse Area Planning Committee\*\*  
West Central Initiative

**MPOs Outside Minnesota (3)**

Denver Regional Council of Governments (COG)  
North Central Texas COG  
Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (RPC)

**Canadian Transportation Agencies (1)**

Ministry of Transportation of Ontario, Canada

**Other Organizations (2)**

Center for Neighborhood Technology (Chicago) (2 responses)

\* Utah DOT's public involvement oversight is decentralized and relies heavily on consultants. Each region has a communications manager that oversees project public involvement; an external communications manager oversees public outreach from the agency's central office. The respondent wrote guidance for the department about adjustments to consider during the pandemic (see **Related Resources**, page 30).

\*\* The respondent noted that La Crosse Area Planning Committee is a small MPO and was fortunate that it has not had as many public input intensive projects during the pandemic.

## Virtual Meeting Platforms

### Platform Use

Respondents reported using a variety of popular virtual meeting platforms. Almost two-thirds use Zoom, the most frequently used platform, and more than half use Microsoft Teams. Respondents are least likely to use Google Hangouts and Adobe Connect. Kentucky Transportation Cabinet uses BlueJeans videoconferencing platform, which was not included as a survey response option. No respondents reported using Facebook Premiere or RingCentral. Table 1 summarizes survey responses.

**Table 1. Use of Virtual Meeting Platforms**

Platform	Number of Users
Zoom	25
Microsoft Teams	23
Cisco Webex	19
GoToMeeting	10
Skype	10
GoToWebinar	9
YouTube	9
Facebook Live	8
GovDelivery	8
Google Hangouts	3
Adobe Connect	1

Most respondents have used more than one platform. Skype and GovDelivery are popular among MnDOT districts and local and regional organizations, while state DOTs are more likely to use Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Iowa DOT is using a custom platform, Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA). Large-scale development of this centralized public portal began in 2015; the platform includes tools for managing online meetings and public websites. Iowa DOT owns the PIMA tool and makes it available through memoranda of understanding to other state DOTs. (Georgia, Kansas and Massachusetts DOTs have all used the PIMA tool. In 2019, Massachusetts DOT was reported to be developing native Apple and Android smartphone apps for the tool.) The consultant responsible for PIMA development estimates that 150 to 200 hours are needed to set up the PIMA tool for another state's use. More information about PIMA appears on page 21.

### Preferred Platforms

Zoom and Microsoft Teams were most likely to be rated as a respondent's preferred platform, followed by Cisco Webex and GoToWebinar. Table 2 presents survey responses.

**Table 2. Preferred Platforms**

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Agency</b>
<b>Zoom (14)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MnDOT District 3, District 8 and Metro District</li> <li>• City of Norwood Young America</li> <li>• City of Rosemount</li> <li>• Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO</li> <li>• Headwaters RDC (for external meetings)</li> <li>• West Central Initiative</li> <li>• Denver Regional COG</li> <li>• Center for Neighborhood Technology</li> <li>• Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), and Montana and Tennessee DOTs</li> </ul>
<b>Microsoft Teams (11)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MnDOT District 2, District 3 and Metro District</li> <li>• City of Rosemount</li> <li>• Headwaters RDC (for internal meetings)</li> <li>• La Crosse Area Planning Committee</li> <li>• North Central Texas COG</li> <li>• Oklahoma, New Jersey and Pennsylvania DOTs</li> <li>• Ministry of Transportation of Ontario, Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Cisco Webex (5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MnDOT District 1, District 6 and Metro District</li> <li>• Arizona and Nebraska DOTs</li> </ul>
<b>GoToWebinar (3)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southeastern Wisconsin RPC</li> <li>• Florida and North Carolina DOTs</li> </ul>
<b>Facebook Live</b>	Center for Neighborhood Technology
<b>Google Meet</b>	Utah DOT (The agency uses Google Meet for meeting participants and speakers, and streams to YouTube for easy access for the general public.)
<b>GoToMeeting</b>	Massachusetts DOT
<b>PIMA</b>	Iowa DOT
<b>YouTube</b>	Wisconsin DOT

Respondents provided a variety of reasons for preferring one platform over another:

**Zoom**

Respondents most often cited ease of use, public familiarity and the platform’s ubiquity. Other benefits of the platform:

- Best camera
- Chat resources
- Easy to administer

- Recording options/easy to record
- Sharing content, including video
- Varying configurations for public meetings

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet respondent recommended that users “make sure the correct Zoom license is used to set up meetings; consultants typically have several. Use the biggest one.”

### **Microsoft Teams**

Respondents favoring Teams were most likely to cite its ease of use, particularly for smaller groups, ready availability and integration with other tools. Other benefits include live captions, document and screen sharing, and minimizing memory usage.

### **Cisco Webex**

Several respondents noted that this was the only platform they’ve been authorized to use. Others cited better controls for participants in large-scale meetings, and the ability to record a session and post it for those unable to attend the live session. Another respondent highlighted the polling option as “a great add[ition] to presentations with discussion touchpoints throughout.”

### **GoToWebinar**

One respondent noted that this platform meets all state and federal accessibility requirements. Others highlighted the platform’s analytics, ease of use, and ability to provide documents and videos for download by participants.

### **PIMA (custom platform developed for Iowa DOT)**

All comments and questions come through PIMA and responses go back out through PIMA. All of the agency’s stakeholders are reflected in the PIMA platform, and platform managers can find anyone by simply entering the person’s name.

### **Training for Virtual Facilitators**

More than half of respondents conduct training for their virtual meeting facilitators. Highlighted below are a few examples of agency practices:

- Florida DOT created online videos and PowerPoint presentations that offer guidance in conducting hybrid public hearings and meetings and supplemented them with one-on-one technical assistance. The agency provides an extensive list of resources for the practitioner and the public on its website (<https://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/publicinvolvement/index>). Selected resources are highlighted in **Related Resources** beginning on page 31.
- Two staff members manage public engagement for the state of Iowa using PIMA. They have practice sessions before virtual meetings, but the respondent noted that “everything is done by us.”
- Nebraska DOT has a limited number of facilitators who have received training on platform use and troubleshooting. The agency created a quick reference guide and is creating a Q&A reference guide.
- The Center for Neighborhood Technology provides facilitation scripts and instructions on the use of web tools to partnering community-based organizations.

## Conducting Meetings Online

### Notifying Participants

Respondents use a range of methods or practices to notify the public when a virtual meeting is scheduled, and almost all use more than one method. Respondents are most likely to post a notice on a project or agency website or on social media, or notify via email or agency e-newsletter. Table 3 summarizes survey responses.

**Table 3. Methods or Practices to Notify Virtual Meeting Participants**

Method or Practice	Number of Respondents
Post on a project and/or agency website	36
Post on agency social media (Facebook, Twitter)	33
Send notification through an email or agency e-newsletter	33
Notify through a news release	29
Distribute through partner channels	27
<i>Total number of respondents = 39</i>	

In addition to the outreach methods identified in the survey, respondents also use print mailings (postcards or direct mailings) and newspaper notices. Other notable practices:

- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has found success in rural areas using variable message boards directing motorists to call the district office for meeting information.
- MnDOT District 6 seeks out individuals in communities who are influencers or trusted information sources and encourages them to pass meeting information on to their networks.

### Engaging Participants

Respondents described creative approaches to encourage public participation during a virtual meeting, including:

- *Breakout rooms.* Ministry of Transportation of Ontario uses breakout rooms and whiteboards, particularly in training sessions. While the Center for Neighborhood Technology uses breakout rooms, the respondent noted that it hasn't encouraged participation.
- *Chat box.*
  - North Carolina DOT only accepts comments through the chat box and responds to as many as possible during a live meeting. Any issues or questions that are not addressed during the live meeting are handled through the agency's formal post-hearing/meeting process (the agency follows up with an email or mailed response, if appropriate).
  - Utah DOT's team of presenters responds in real time to questions in the chat box as a project presentation is underway. The agency has also used the chat box to facilitate a live Q&A session rather than taking questions verbally (all participants are kept muted).
- *Local leaders.* West Central Initiative has had success partnering with local chambers of commerce.



- *Interactive mapping.* Arizona DOT and Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO use mapping during virtual meetings.
- *Interactive polling.*
  - MnDOT District 6 uses Mentimeter, a commercial suite of tools offering live polls, quizzes, word clouds, Q&As and more, to get real-time input during online presentations and meetings.
  - Kentucky Transportation Cabinet uses polls and questions at regular intervals during a meeting.
  - Nebraska DOT has used polling, paused discussion points and Q&A with specific questions and visuals to help guide conversation.
  - Utah DOT is interested in using real-time polling and surveys during the agency’s project-related virtual meetings.
- *Meeting timing.* Montana DOT schedules its meetings at two different times of the day.
- *Meeting websites.* New Jersey DOT creates a website for each Public information Center meeting that is available for two weeks after the scheduled meeting date. These websites contain presentations, interactive maps and project-specific renderings.
- *Whiteboards.* Southeastern Wisconsin RPC uses whiteboards for a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis; MnDOT District 6 uses Miro to track participant feedback in real time.

Slightly less than one-third of respondents have identified what they consider to be creative ways to incentivize or encourage members of the public to attend virtual meetings. In addition to widely advertising meetings and providing multiple meeting opportunities, below are a few notable examples of other approaches:

- *Advocates.* Massachusetts DOT issues invitations to its virtual meetings to many advocate groups, municipal officials and elected leaders. Kentucky Transportation Cabinet also leverages community resources to spread the word about virtual meetings.
- *Gift cards.* Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO and the Center for Neighborhood Technology have both used gift cards to encourage participation. (The Center for Neighborhood Technology has also provided checks to pay participants.)
  - West Central Initiative has encouraged early registration by offering an incentive. In one case, for an early-morning legislative breakfast, the agency shipped locally made coffee to early registrants.

## Other Engagement Channels and Platforms

Almost half of respondents reported changes in their agency’s use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events. Most of these respondents reported greater use of social media, though the La Crosse Area Planning Committee respondent noted that his agency is not using social media at this time due to information technology security concerns. Highlighted below are other respondent practices:

- *City of Rosemount.* Rosemount’s communication coordinator has been working with Instagram and Facebook to assist businesses with publicity.
- *Iowa DOT.* PIMA, the agency’s custom virtual meeting platform, was already in use before the pandemic. Changes involved switching to prerecorded PowerPoint presentations or StoryMaps that stakeholders

can watch at any time. (ArcGIS StoryMaps allow users to “[c]reate inspiring, immersive stories by combining text, interactive maps and other multimedia content” to publish and share online. More information about StoryMaps appears on page 22.)

- *New Jersey DOT.* The agency uses its social media accounts to retweet and report COVID-19 messaging from other state agencies.
- *West Central Initiative.* The agency’s social media engagement has increased since COVID-19. The respondent noted that “[w]e’ve always posted timely, relevant data to a captive audience. However, our audience is now hyperaware of our services and programs, leading to an increase in social media followers and engagement.”
- *Wyoming DOT.* The agency has relied more on social media to give the public almost real-time information. Social media has always been used in this way, but it has become more important during events like COVID-19.

### **Outreach Tools**

Of the outreach tools that could be used to supplement traditional public engagement practices during the pandemic, respondents are most likely to use visualization to illustrate proposed projects (almost two-thirds use this tool), and 62% prepare brief, low-budget videos. Printed flyers and postcards are the next most often cited outreach tools. Only one respondent reported use of a mobile app, and just two simulcast virtual meetings on local radio. Table 4 summarizes responses.

**Table 4. Use of Outreach Tools**

<b>Outreach Tool</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Visualization (illustrate proposed projects)	25
Video (brief, low-budget production)	24
Printed flyer/postcard	23
Online newsletter or brochure	20
Online mapping tool	17
Real-time polling tool	13
Crowdsourcing survey tool	9
StoryMap	9
Online whiteboard or collaboration/brainstorm tool (such as Miro or Jamboard)	8
Telephone town hall	7
Local radio simulcast of virtual meeting	2
Mobile app	1
<i>Total number of respondents = 39</i>	

Respondents from Louisiana DOTD and Tennessee and Utah DOTs noted that these outreach tools had already been part of their public engagement effort, and their use hasn’t changed during the pandemic. Two respondents provided other examples of outreach:

- MnDOT District 2 is using a drone for virtual on-site walkthroughs. Participants watch the live drone feed and can tell the pilot where to go, loiter, or zoom in and out.
- Wyoming DOT uses YouTube to livestream events to reach more of the public.

### **Change in Use of U.S. Mail**

Less than one-quarter of respondents reported a change in their agency’s use of U.S. mail for public engagement during the pandemic. Most of those reporting a change reported greater use, including the City of Norwood Young America, which moved its newsletter from a quarterly distribution to monthly. MnDOT Districts 1 and 2 send more postcard mailings; MnDOT District 6 also sends more regular mail, particularly in more rural areas where internet connections are not as reliable or access is limited.

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet makes greater use of U.S. Postal Service Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) postcards. (The EDDM Online Tool can map ZIP codes and neighborhoods, and filter by age, income or household size using U.S. Census data.) The Oklahoma DOT respondent also noted that use of the Postal Service’s direct mail has “increased tremendously” as a replacement to door flyers to reach the public.

Three agencies—Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO, Southeastern Wisconsin RPC and Ministry of Transportation of Ontario—reported a decrease in printed mailings.

### **Effective Nonvirtual Engagement Channels or Platforms**

Respondents pointed to a variety of nonvirtual engagement practices that have proved to be effective in safely engaging with members of the public with low or no technology during the pandemic. In addition to direct mail, various forms of print media, phone calls and a phone-in option for virtual meetings, respondents also described the following practices:

#### **In-Person Meetings**

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) required Arizona DOT to hold an in-person public hearing in connection with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The agency successfully held this meeting by appointment only, scheduling eight in-person appointments. A follow-up virtual engagement event had more than 100 participants.
- City of Rosemount has held on-site meetings with masking and physical distancing.
- Dakota County has held small group outdoor meetings.
- Nebraska DOT offered in-person meetings with social distancing. Presentations were prerecorded to not “create a crowd.”
- North Central Texas COG elected to hold in-person meetings with social distancing to reduce the risk of Title VI or environmental justice (EJ) lawsuits.

---

**Note:** Several respondents referred to Title VI in their responses. This reference is to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based upon race, color and national origin. FHWA Division Offices are responsible for ensuring that all state transportation agencies have an approved Title VI plan and submit annual reports, and that these agencies are implementing an effective monitoring program for their funding partner agencies.

Perspective on the EJ lawsuits mentioned by the North Central Texas COG respondent is provided by an April 2015 FHWA guidance document, which includes this general description of EJ:

EJ at FHWA means identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse effects of the agency's programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low-income populations to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.

See page 34 for more information about Title VI and EJ.

---

### **Partnering**

- Representatives from the Center for Neighborhood Technology attend meetings at facilities in impacted stakeholder communities (schools, churches, health centers) and work in partnership with local community-based nonprofit organizations.
  - Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO is partnering with advocates for members of the public with low or no technology and includes these members of the public in relevant studies.
  - MnDOT's Metro District has found that establishing partnerships with local community groups is effective in reaching diverse audiences.
  - Nevada DOT partnered with a local library to ensure low-income families have access to the internet for some meetings.
  - North Carolina DOT has found that working with local area resource contacts (LARCs) is an effective way to engage EJ and LEP communities. A LARC could be a community leader, organizer, business owner or pastor/reverend.
- 

**Note:** Jamille Robbins, Public Involvement, Community Studies and Visualization Group Leader for North Carolina DOT, responded to follow-up questions about North Carolina DOT's experience with community-based organizations (CBOs) and the people serving in them. (Robbins mentioned LARCs in survey responses, which could be representatives from CBOs.) Summarized below is Robbins' feedback.

**CBO engagement.** Typically, representatives from CBOs serve as unpaid volunteers to support engagement efforts by:

- Distributing project information and updates using their communication channels.
- Serving on stakeholder working groups and providing feedback on the project/plan development process.

CBOs are identified using existing relationships and community research conducted project staff during public involvement plan development. North Carolina DOT does not contract directly or indirectly with the CBO.

Robbins noted that CBOs "are valuable partners in the project development process and their involvement can lead to successful public outreach efforts, regardless of the degree of their role. In past efforts they have provided insights on community needs, concerns and appropriate outreach methods that informed the engagement process, assisted the project team in establishing and

building trust with BIPOC communities, and distributed project information to hard-to-reach communities.”

**Paid neighborhood ambassadors** have been used for previous projects to help with outreach efforts. These individuals were recruited through CBOs, which included religious institutions and neighborhood associations, but were paid directly by the project.

**Recommendations.** Robbins encourages agencies seeking to partner with CBOs to make CBO engagement and partnership a standard component of an agency’s engagement process. Look for ways to develop relationships with CBOs that are not solely based on a transitional need for input or project outreach support.

---

### Other Practices

- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet provides a “Public Meeting in a Box” to Amish community members that includes hard copies of all meeting materials and a hard copy survey, with envelopes to return any completed documents.
- Louisiana DOTD is converting voice-over PowerPoint presentations to video, posting them on the agency’s website and sending notices of availability. The agency also provides multiple means of accepting comments over a given time frame.
- New Jersey DOT uses U.S. mail to engage with members of the public who have low or no technology access; these efforts exceed Title VI requirements.
- North Carolina DOT worked with PublicInput.com, a community engagement software vendor serving government clients, to develop a project hotline number for every project. The hotlines allow those who do not have broadband access and/or smartphones to call in and their comments are automatically transcribed into an agency database. The DOT can follow up with these people and send hard copies of materials if requested or needed.
- Wyoming DOT continues to rely on emails from the public. In the respondent’s experience, most of the agency’s stakeholders have access to an email account, and with COVID-19, they’ve found that people are emailing the DOT more frequently with questions and concerns.

## Encouraging Diverse Participation

### Underrepresented Communities

Forty-one percent of respondents reported on new practices to engage with underrepresented or harder-to-reach (e.g., low-income, racially/ethnically diverse, BIPOC, disability community) populations during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events. Highlights from their responses appear below.

#### **Engaging Community Leaders and Networks**

- The Center for Neighborhood Technology has hired community members to conduct community engagement.
- Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO includes community advocates as members of study steering committees.

- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet places more focus on engaging community leaders that “aren’t just someone’s council representative.”
- MnDOT District 6 has been developing a list of key leaders or community connections within specific communities to provide assurance that the district is “reaching as far as we can. We’re also providing periodic transportation updates to our participants in our Equity in Transportation study.”
- North Carolina DOT’s standard practice is to engage with LARCs, and that hasn’t changed during the pandemic.
- West Central Initiative is taking extra steps to ensure the agency is communicating with harder-to-reach populations by using community networks to identify communication channels used by these groups.

#### **Newsletters and Websites**

- City of Norwood Young America is producing more frequent newsletters.
- Florida DOT continues to provide project updates through newsletters and websites.

#### **Posting Information in New Locations**

- North Central Texas COG is posting materials at community centers, providing them to church pastors and preparing materials in different languages.

#### **Serving Limited English Proficiency Communities**

A range of practices are used to ensure LEP individuals are appropriately served when engaging virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most commonly reported practices are highlighted below.

#### **Demographic Analysis**

- Florida DOT uses mapping, census tools, physical visitation of the project area and public involvement to identify where LEP populations might be prevalent and conduct outreach if they are.
- North Carolina DOT’s Community Studies Group pulls demographic data on every project to guide the initial public involvement plan. If data meets a threshold, the agency automatically translates all “vital” materials along with online engagement platforms.
- Utah DOT conducts a local context demographic/stakeholder analysis.

#### **Engaging Community Leaders and Networks**

- New Jersey DOT works directly with community groups and grassroots organizations to reach non-English speaking populations.
- West Central Initiative uses its community networks to identify communication channels used by these groups, and also offers surveys, videos, web content and more in additional languages.

## Four Factor Analysis

- Arizona DOT completes the LEP Four Factor Analysis to ensure that the appropriate languages are identified and provides custom outreach to those communities (business walks, booths at community gatherings, door hangers).
- 

**Note:** FHWA describes the Four Factor Analysis as balancing the following four factors:

- The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee.
- The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program.
- The nature and importance of the program, activity or service provided by the program to people's lives.
- The resources available to the grantee/recipient or agency, and costs.

More information about the Four Factor Analysis is available on page 34.

---

## Interpreters

Many respondents use interpreters. Two respondents offered more details of their practices:

- Nebraska DOT offers interpreters and makes all materials available in a different language. Prerecorded presentations have translated subtitles.
- Southeastern Wisconsin RPC offers Spanish interpreters and a separate virtual meeting in Spanish for studies in areas with a high LEP population.

## Language Services

- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet provides a phone number for additional language assistance on all printed and web-based materials.
- MnDOT District 2 offers a language hotline. MnDOT District 6 provides information about how to connect to its language services in all communications.
- North Carolina DOT's Right to Language Access (RTLA) number, prepared in seven different languages, is on all notifications. The agency also has a list of on-call LEP specialists to bring in on any project as needed.

## Translated Materials

Many respondents translate materials into a variety of languages, most commonly Spanish. Listed below are selected survey responses:

- Iowa DOT's PIMA virtual meeting platform has the option to switch languages.
- La Crosse Area Planning Committee follows its public participation plan and has updated its website to offer translation services.

- MnDOT District 1 offers translation for all materials.
- Nevada DOT has translated all of its written materials in Spanish and offers versions of its website in Spanish. A special email address is offered if members of the public require additional assistance.
- North Carolina DOT advertises every project in Spanish media.
- Oklahoma DOT completed a Spanish translation of its project package delivered through direct mail for LEP areas.
- Ministry of Transportation of Ontario provides notices in other languages (primarily French and English).

### **Demographics of Virtual Meeting Participants**

Almost half of respondents (45%) have attempted to survey meeting participants before, during or after a virtual meeting to understand the demographics of participants. Below are highlights of survey responses.

#### **Comment Forms**

- Oklahoma DOT requests demographic information in the comment forms participants submit.

#### **Demographic Surveys**

- The Arizona DOT respondent noted that the “response rate is low, especially when asking for race self-identification.”
- The Center for Neighborhood Technology surveys participants before the engagement.
- MnDOT District 6 sends a demographic survey to all virtual meeting participants and has surveyed people on projects where there was “significant communications.”
- Residents participating in New Jersey DOT’s virtual Public Information Center meetings are asked to provide demographic data via an optional survey.
- Utah DOT includes optional demographic questions as part of its standard public meeting sign-in sheet; online meetings use the same sign-in process.
- Wyoming DOT worked with a company to gather basic demographic information from participants in online Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan public meetings.

#### **MetroQuest Surveys**

MnDOT District 3 and Kentucky Transportation Cabinet use MetroQuest surveys to pose demographic questions to virtual meeting participants. This commercial vendor provides online public engagement planning tools and surveying for urban and transportation planning professionals.

#### **Polling**

MnDOT districts use polling at various points in the engagement process:

- District 8 gathers demographic information using online polling during a virtual meeting.
- Metro District uses quick polls and requires demographic information as part of the registration process.



## Meeting National Environmental Policy Act Requirements

The survey sought information about how the agencies subject to NEPA were meeting requirements related to public hearings and public comments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, agencies held in-person public hearings to allow the public to make formal public comments on a draft EIS. The survey sought information about respondents' current use of in-person NEPA-related public hearings and how they gather public comments on draft EISs during the pandemic.

Twenty-nine survey respondents indicated that their agencies are subject to NEPA requirements. Their practices for managing NEPA-related public comments are summarized below.

### In-Person Meetings

Nine respondents continue to offer in-person public hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic to allow the public to make formal comments on a draft EIS. Below are highlights of survey responses.

#### **Hybrid Meeting Model**

- In Dakota County, the public may attend in person if preferred. The agency supplements the in-person meeting with a virtual meeting held at the same time.
- Florida DOT offers a hybrid format, which gives the public a choice of whether to attend in person or online. The agency started offering this format in October 2020 and requires it for all NEPA hearings. The virtual meeting may be held before, during or after the in-person public hearing.
- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has approved guidance for public hearings with a virtual component (see page 27 for this guidance); however, one has not been held yet due to safety concerns.
- The North Central Texas COG respondent noted that “meetings with TxDOT [Texas DOT] have opportunity [for in-person engagement] through open houses.” The in-person meeting may be held before, during or after the virtual meeting, but within “the same time period.” Public meetings have both phone and internet citizen access, with both systems running concurrently.
- Oklahoma DOT offers an opportunity for an in-person public hearing in conjunction with a virtual public hearing in the packages mailed to the public.

#### **Limited In-Person Meetings**

- Arizona DOT has held just one in-person public hearing that was appointment-only and garnered only eight participants. An online component two days later had more than 100 participants.
- The Louisiana DOTD respondent noted that FHWA requires an in-person component. The agency has conducted only one NEPA-related hearing to date, which included in-person and virtual components that occurred simultaneously. The virtual materials remained available online throughout the comment period. (The agency amended its procedures to “specifically address FHWA’s concerns regarding [the] in-person component of public hearings and to specifically call out that virtual public involvement and innovative techniques can be used for emergencies.”)
- Utah DOT offers in-person hearings on a case-by-case basis. Project teams are encouraged to know local health regulations and look at current case trends for the community in which the

project/meeting takes place. While the respondent did not know if the agency has held a NEPA-related in-person hearing during the pandemic, she described the process that would have applied:

- Public notification materials include an RSVP process to sign up for a specific time and to limit the number of people in the room at any given time, allowing some space for walk-ups.
- The in-person meeting was livestreamed and formatted with the same information shared in two duplicate online meetings.
- The in-person meeting option was advertised as for people with limited internet access, and people were encouraged to participate online if they could.

For the meeting known to the respondent, people largely respected the recommended guidelines, with fewer than five attending the in-person meeting and more than 200 participating online.

Several respondents noted that there were no projects requiring NEPA-related meetings so far during the pandemic (MnDOT Districts 3 and 6; City of Rosemount; Nebraska and Wyoming DOTs). Iowa DOT has not held a NEPA-related hearing yet but is working toward holding one in the near future. MnDOT's Metro District has held virtual meetings in place of in-person meetings during the pandemic. MnDOT District 1 has held virtual meetings with the hopes of holding an in-person meeting this fall if possible.

Nevada DOT holds virtual-only public engagement for NEPA-related projects; Wisconsin DOT supplements an in-person public hearing with a virtual meeting conducted concurrently with the in-person session.

### **Environmental Impact Statement Related Questions**

When asked how they handle EIS-related questions, several respondents noted again that their agencies had not had to address NEPA-related project requirements during the pandemic. All those who did respond indicated that they address questions in more than one manner, and are most likely to address EIS-related questions as part of the final EIS (77% of those responding). Seventy-three percent will address questions during a virtual public meeting; 59% respond to questions during an in-person public meeting; and the smallest percentage of respondents—50%—indicated that EIS questions are transcribed by a court reporter or other professional.

North Carolina DOT has a formal post-hearing/meeting process to handle comments. All comments are discussed, summarized and responded to in the meeting minutes and made available to the public. The agency often emails or mails the minutes to those submitting comments. It is becoming more commonplace to post the meeting minutes on the project webpage.

### **Public Comments**

All respondents describing how their agencies accept public comments related to an EIS will accept them via email. All but one—Pennsylvania—accepts comments via U.S. mail during the comment period, and all but two accept comments using a virtual meeting platform that accepts and records comments and by private online comment (comment box, form, email).

Respondents were least likely to accept comments during an in-person meeting, which could be related to the limited use of in-person meetings during the pandemic. (Though the least commonly used approach, still almost 70% of respondents accept comments during an in-person meeting.) A few respondents offered further details of their agencies' handling of public comments:

- Louisiana DOTD gathers facsimile comments in writing at the event and verbally at a public meeting/hearing (recorded electronically or by a court reporter). The agency has used all of these comment options to some degree depending on the project.
- North Carolina DOT's online engagement platforms to gather public comments include PublicInput.com and MetroQuest.
- Oklahoma DOT sends prepaid self-addressed envelopes and comment forms with its information package.
- Utah DOT's policy for formal and informal comments treats social media and chat box interaction as informal comments. Discussion forums help stakeholders submit informed formal comments. The respondent noted that the agency "carefully outline[s] how formal comments are to be submitted; typically this includes an online comment form, email, U.S. postal mail and sometimes phone."

Some respondents have found it necessary to extend the NEPA public comment period during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- At times, Florida DOT has extended the comment period to 15 days or longer.
- Louisiana DOTD extended a comment period that occurred just as a stay-at-home order was issued but has not extended any others since then.
- Massachusetts DOT extends comment periods in selected instances.
- Oklahoma DOT extended a virtual meeting as well as the comment period as a result of public requests.
- The North Carolina DOT respondent noted that comment period extensions have happened both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Utah DOT has extended comment periods to allow for additional time that may be required to raise awareness of the opportunity to comment and learn about the project. The respondent is uncertain if this extension is related to EIS-related questions or for comments associated with project scoping and alternatives.

## Conducting In-Person Meetings

The nine respondents identifying their agencies as not subject to NEPA requirements were provided a separate set of questions about holding in-person meetings. Only three of these respondents—City of Norwood Young America, Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO and Center for Neighborhood Technology—indicated that they have held in-person meetings during the pandemic.

None of the respondents appears to be making significant use of in-person meetings. The City of Norwood Young America has provided in-person meetings for community members who do not have access to virtual meetings. The in-person meeting is complemented by a virtual meeting, and comments are accepted in both meeting environments. Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO has continued to hold its monthly board meetings in person, and the Center for Neighborhood Technology held an in-person meeting for park redevelopment voting.

## Policy and Practice

### Changes in Practice

To address the impacts of COVID-19, nearly all agencies have made changes in how they communicate with the public and stakeholders. The most common steps agencies have taken are highlighted below:

#### **Expand Social Media Use**

Arizona, Nebraska and Oklahoma DOTs and Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO have become much more reliant on social media.

#### **Expand Virtual Options**

- Oklahoma DOT and MnDOT Metro District host all or nearly all meetings virtually.
- Southeastern Wisconsin RPC and Louisiana DOTD have increased their use of virtual meetings and have placed an emphasis on electronic communications.
- Utah DOT advised that the skills needed to host online meetings differ from those needed for traditional in-person meetings, and the amount of preparation to help meetings run smoothly is “tremendous.” Everyone’s role in the meeting must be clear, team members must be prepared with an approved answer, and staff must be skilled in managing time as well as behind-the-scenes activities such as a chat or Q&A.
- New Jersey DOT has begun using individual project websites and has also updated its website.

#### **Introduce a Variety of Tools**

- MnDOT Metro District and District 3 have replaced in-person public meetings with other methods of communication such as mailings, virtual meetings and communication, and surveys.
- North Central Texas COG uses technology to reach its audience in addition to offering “old-fashioned access” for Title VI and EJ needs.
- Dakota County provides more robust online information, while MnDOT District 2 has added language to its websites, emails and news releases.

Nevada and North Carolina DOTs and the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario reported little or no change in their communication practices.

### Adopting New Engagement Techniques as Standard Practice

Some engagement techniques initiated during the pandemic, such as virtual meetings or a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings, are expected to become standard practice post-pandemic. Below are highlights of survey responses.

#### **Virtual Meetings**

Eighteen respondents plan to continue hosting virtual meetings in the future, citing the public demand for this convenient and accessible practice:

- Arizona DOT acknowledges that virtual meetings are “here to stay,” in part because of public demand but also from the expanded participation from the public, including hard-to-reach communities.
- Massachusetts DOT also cited the success of virtual public meetings because it is easier for more members of the public to watch and participate.
- MnDOT District 6 will continue to host virtual meetings or provide a virtual presentation available on demand through a project website.

### **Hybrid Model (Virtual and In-Person Meetings)**

Six respondents anticipate supporting a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings, in part because of increased engagement. Oklahoma DOT has received more feedback—both positive and negative—by using a virtual platform. The agency has also been able to reach more of the traveling public instead of only local property owners.

### **Robust Online Tools**

- Dakota County, Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO and North Carolina DOT will provide video presentations.
- Dakota County and Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO will also offer interactive maps and mapping tools.
- In addition to virtual meetings, Denver Regional COG and Nevada DOT plan to rely on web-based tools.

### **Other Practices**

- District 2 plans to conduct virtual site visits using a drone.
- New Jersey DOT expects to continue using extended public comment periods to increase public participation.
- The Center for Neighborhood Technology will continue cold calling and providing stipends.

## **Assessment**

Respondents identified both successes and challenges engaging the public during the COVID-19 pandemic or during disruptive events. They also offered recommendations for agencies seeking to establish effective public engagement practices when in-person events are limited or not possible. Below are highlights of survey responses.

### **Successful Tools and Practices**

Social media, virtual meetings and electronic communication dominated the tools and practices that agencies use to successfully engage the public during the pandemic or other disruptive events:

- Utah DOT considers social media as the best tool for real-time information. During an earthquake in March 2020, social media and the agency’s traffic app were the best sources of information for the public.

- North Carolina DOT used geo-targeting and geofencing as standard practice before the pandemic. Both tools have been extremely beneficial during the pandemic. Also of value are prerecorded videos that deliver project information. These videos allow the agency to control its message by providing access to accurate information 24/7. Community members can easily share videos with neighbors, friends or family across a variety of media and then provide input. Videos also allow North Carolina DOT to capture and inform commuters.

Most respondents use a variety of online tools in addition to social media and virtual meetings, including project websites, online surveys, interactive polling, online open houses, videos and prerecorded presentations, StoryMaps, e-blasts and e-newsletters. The respondent from the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario added that response times are quicker, there is a greater level of communication, and managing the volume of input is enhanced.

Existing and trusted community communication practices, such as print mailings, are also beneficial but used with less frequency. Nevada DOT uses courier mail delivery services within tribal communities to distribute project updates, which allows the agency to keep affected communities updated on project events and impacts while limiting the need for in-person interaction.

### **Challenges Posed by Disruptive Events**

Respondents described five key factors that have inhibited efforts to engage the public:

#### **Lack of High-Speed Internet Access**

- MnDOT District 6 faced challenges bridging the communication gap with community members who either don't have the technology or don't have reliable technology.
- City of Rosemount also cited "solid, stable internet connections." Inadequate speed and reliability led to dropped connections and poor quality for some community members.
- Massachusetts DOT noted the ongoing challenge of engaging community members who have no computer or wireless access.
- North Central Texas COG reiterated the issue of access by all citizens.

#### **Reaching Underserved Populations**

- MnDOT District 8 and Arizona DOT reported challenges engaging with hard-to-reach communities, specifically underserved and LEP populations in District 8.
- MnDOT District 3 acknowledged difficulties reaching underserved populations, adding that reaching these communities is difficult anytime.
- North Carolina DOT cited issues with reaching community members in rural areas.

#### **Competing Events**

Nevada DOT, Grand Forks/East Grand Forks MPO and the Center for Neighborhood Technology all noted the challenge with many events occurring at or near the same time. With a news and social media cycle that is focused on health and safety news, coverage of Nevada DOT outreach activities through these traditional media outlets is potentially diminished.

## **Missed Benefits of In-Person Meetings**

MnDOT District 1, MnDOT District 2, Dakota County, West Central Initiative and Montana DOT all noted that face-to-face meetings offer a more meaningful engagement experience that is difficult to provide virtually. For example, some construction projects in District 2 can be “very controversial for a community” and require relationship building. In-person meetings offer the best way to generate that trust. During one project in a small rural community, after losing the support of community leaders, district staff met with the leaders in person (with social distancing and mitigation measures), which improved the relationship and turned the project around.

## **Limited Technical Knowledge**

- La Crosse Area Planning Committee reported that learning the new technology was challenging, especially for committee members.
- Florida DOT and Kentucky Transportation Cabinet noted a need for agency training.
- Massachusetts DOT noted that virtual meetings and virtual work have “gone great for people comfortable on computers,” adding that more training and help are needed for people with less experience with computers.
- Wyoming DOT cited issues reaching the “older demographic, who may not be too tech-savvy.”

## **Recommendations for Other Agencies**

The pandemic has impacted the ways in which many agencies engage with the public. The respondent from West Central Initiative reported that the pandemic has made virtual communication “a priority for everyone” and that when used effectively, it is “a powerful tool,” adding that many virtual practices may continue post-pandemic because of the savings in time and resources. The respondent from New Jersey DOT reported that the agency is continually refining its strategies and expanding efforts to communicate with constituents.

Below are recommendations for agencies seeking to establish effective practices for public engagement when in-person events are limited or not possible:

### **Technology (19)**

- Use social media and other online tools to engage with the public (multiple agencies), even if it costs more (North Central Texas COG).
- Identify information technology personnel, information technology resources and other subject matter experts required to support virtual engagement (New Jersey DOT).
- Assign some staff member(s) to a particular platform or to serve as an overall virtual public involvement guru (North Carolina DOT).
- Ensure the organization’s technology connections are well-established so that staff members may continue to communicate effectively and regularly even if they are moved off-site (MnDOT District 6).
- Encourage dialogue through online channels such as social media (Wyoming DOT).
- Offer different ways to receive feedback from the public, such as virtual meetings, interactive mapping and email (Dakota County, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet).

### **Outreach (14)**

- Focus on communication and calls to action (Denver Regional COG).
- Communicate with the public through a variety of mediums (email, social media, print mailings), stakeholders and interested groups (multiple agencies).
- Be open to phone calls, emails and more presentations to groups (North Central Texas COG).
- Ask community members how they want to participate (MnDOT District 8).
- Identify demographic groups who have no access to technology and determine how to reach them. Work with councils on aging and other neighborhood-based groups for ideas about how to reach residents without access to computers (Massachusetts DOT).

### **Virtual Meetings (12)**

- Understand and have experience with the agency's meeting platforms (La Crosse Area Planning Committee, Nebraska DOT, Wyoming DOT).
- Use a streaming platform that is easy to access with as few barriers as possible (Utah DOT).
- Be open to using new or additional platforms (Wyoming DOT, MnDOT District 8).
- Select a well-known platform (West Central Initiative).
- Make virtual meetings interactive. Use whiteboards, polls, chat conversations and other interactive features (Southeastern Wisconsin RPC).
- Showcase a project and its impacts in a way that's easy to understand. Use drone video, graphics and mapping to get the message across (Nevada DOT).

### **Planning (8)**

- Get the word out early (MnDOT District 3).
- Provide topics lists in advance. Seek input in advance (Ministry of Transportation of Ontario).
- Have a clear plan, and practice, practice, practice the "run of show" for the live online event (Utah DOT).
- Always have a backup plan should technical issues arise (Nebraska DOT).
- Educate the audience about expectations (Louisiana DOTD).
- Ensure that flexibility in methods is part of the agency culture, so the communication team can pivot and provide solid advice and direction to leaders in how to communicate, but also so the organization is able to communicate and connect with the public without missing much of a beat (MnDOT District 6).
- Review the experiences of other states (Florida DOT).
- Work closely with the FHWA Division to approve the new processes (Florida DOT).



## Training (8)

- Choose a platform that is supported by the agency's information technology department, and develop training materials for all agency and consultant staff (Florida DOT).
- Train staff in the use of online tools and the process for connections (such as recordings, videos) (City of Rosemount).
- Inform and educate staff about virtual public involvement resources (North Carolina DOT).
- Establish a common practice for advertising the event, starting and ending a meeting, hosting a Q&A and related activities (Nebraska DOT).
- Train facilitators to effectively get people to participate during virtual roundtable discussions to prevent meetings from being overrun by outspoken participants (MnDOT District 2).
- Practice, practice, practice before an online meeting (Iowa DOT).

Additional recommendations include allow some in-person engagement; communicate often through social media, the media and online; post a recording of meetings to the project web pages and provide links on social media; and follow up with action items to ensure topics are addressed before the next meeting.

## Related Resources

Below is information about virtual communication products, policies and other resources discussed in this report. Supplementing this information is guidance from state and regional agencies about public engagement policies and practices.

### Virtual Meeting Platforms

**BlueJeans Video Conferencing**, Verizon, 2021.

<https://www.bluejeans.com/products>

*From the website:* BlueJeans is the meetings platform for the modern workplace. We bring audio, web and videoconferencing together with the tools people use every day.

- Schedule, join and host one-touch meetings in just [6] seconds from anywhere, on any device or room system. Experience HD video and stunningly clear audio powered by Dolby Voice in an intuitive, intelligent interface.
- Drive meeting productivity within the digital workplace through seamless integration with your favorite scheduling, messaging and productivity tools. Leverage AI [artificial intelligence] and voice recognition to make your meetings intelligent.
- Manage and troubleshoot meetings, events and rooms in real-time with an enterprise-grade platform that meets the most demanding management, security and scalability requirements.

**Virtual Public Involvement: PIMA and Public Portal**, Brad Hofer, Iowa Department of Transportation, undated.

[https://iowadot.gov/systems\\_planning/pdf/12-18-19%20Virtual%20Public%20Involvement%20and%20Portal.pdf](https://iowadot.gov/systems_planning/pdf/12-18-19%20Virtual%20Public%20Involvement%20and%20Portal.pdf)

This presentation provides a high-level overview of the PIMA application and its four primary components: response management, stakeholder management, event management and analytics. *From the presentation:*

What is PIMA? A virtual platform that allows better management and coordination of public involvement throughout Iowa DOT.

Goals:

1. Better analyze and adjust our PI [public involvement] effort based on real data.
2. Improve the ease in providing public feedback.
3. Provid[e] transparency and accountability for what we say.
4. Allow management of the PI program with decreasing staffing.
5. [Allow] a [seamless] transition of public involvement through the development and construction processes.
6. Position the [d]epartment to transition to an online “hearing before your peers.”

*Related Resource:*

**“Iowa Creates Virtual Public Involvement Tool,”** Federal Highway Administration, *Innovator*, Vol. 15, Issue 80, September/October 2020.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/innovator/issue80/page\\_05.html](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/innovator/issue80/page_05.html)

*From the article:* The Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) developed a virtual public involvement platform to manage its stakeholder outreach and improve project decision making and is now making the tool available to other highway agencies.

As mobile phone, internet and social media use grows, agencies are turning to virtual public involvement—the use of digital technology to engage people or visualize projects—to supplement in-person public involvement strategies during planning and project development.

The Iowa DOT created its Public Involvement Management Application (PIMA) to expand citizen input on transportation projects, reduce manual processes, and improve consistency of data collection for public meetings. “PIMA allows us to manage and coordinate our public involvement effort across our organization,” said Brad Hofer, director of the Iowa DOT Right-of-Way Bureau.

### **Online Engagement Tools**

**ArcGIS StoryMaps**, ESRI, undated.

<https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/arcgis-storymaps/overview>

*From the website:* ArcGIS StoryMaps helps you tell remarkable stories with custom maps that inform and inspire. A story can effect change, influence opinion, and create awareness—and maps are an integral part of storytelling. ArcGIS StoryMaps can give your narrative a stronger sense of place, illustrate spatial relationships, and add visual appeal and credibility to your ideas. Use our simple map maker to create custom maps to enhance your digital storytelling. Or add text, photos, and videos to your existing ArcGIS web maps and web scenes to create an interactive narrative that’s easy to publish and share.

**MetroQuest**, MetroQuest, undated.

<https://metroquest.com/>

*From the website:* Exceptional public involvement starts with a best-in-class solution. Local governments, transportation agencies, and consulting firms trust MetroQuest to create visual engaging online experiences that both educate the public about planning alternatives and collect informed input from [thousands] of residents. The resulting actionable insights build support for the adoption of great urban and transportation plans.

**PublicInput.com**, Cityzen Solutions Inc., 2021.

<https://publicinput.com/>

*From the website:* PublicInput brings together industry-leading technology and shared best practices—all in one comprehensive platform:

- Engagement Hub—The industry’s most comprehensive toolkit with over 30 flexible formats for surveys, meetings, and interactive mapping.
- Resident Database—A fully-integrated CRM [customer relationship management tool] to manage your contacts, groups, and relationships across projects and teams.
- Communications Cloud—Two-way email, SMS [short message service], and social media communications tools purpose-built for government.

### **Whiteboards**

**Miro**, Miro, 2021.

<https://miro.com/online-meetings/>

*From the website:* Our online meeting platform is more than just powerful and versatile—it’s also easy to use. From planning your presentation to keeping your team engaged to the end, we keep things streamlined and simple for you at every step.

- Get a board set up. You can build a board from scratch or start with one of our ready-made templates. (Need inspiration? Explore Miroverse to see what our community is creating.) Then use frames, stickies, shapes, colors, and flourishes to personalize your presentation or meeting agenda.
- Take video to its very heights. Forget the quaint old way to videoconference. With video chat built directly onto your collaborative whiteboard[,] Miro makes remote meetings engaging, effective, and altogether new.
- Pick who attends and keep their attention. Our permission settings let you safely and easily choose who’s invited. Then, use live cursor tracking to see and interact with teammates, and the Bring Everyone to Me feature to grab their attention and keep them following along.
- Create presentations that steal the show. Use our frames feature to create your presentation, then hit “presentation mode.” No need to switch back and forth between your Miro board and a deck.
- Make the meeting more interactive. Keep them excitedly ideating, spitballing, and chiming in while you facilitate. Miro inspires interactivity with features like sticky notes, emoji reactions, and voting.
- Bring your favorite tools to your meetings, too. With our 70+ integrations, you can keep using your favorite tools to track tasks, document work, access files, video chat, and more.

## ***Polling***

**Mentimeter**, Mentimeter, undated.

<https://www.mentimeter.com/>

*From the website:*

- *Prepare.* Build interactive presentations with the easy-to-use online editor. Add questions, polls, quizzes, slides, images, gifs and more to your presentation to create fun and engaging presentations.
- *Engage.* Your audience uses their smartphones to connect to the presentation where they can answer questions. Visualize their responses in real-time to create a fun and interactive experience.
- *Follow-up.* Once your Mentimeter presentation is over, share and export your results for further analysis and even compare data over time to measure the progress of your audience.

## **Other Engagement Tools**

**Using Every Door Direct Mail**, U.S. Postal Service, 2021.

<https://www.usps.com/business/every-door-direct-mail.htm>

*From the website:* Use Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM) services to promote your small business in your local community. If you're having a sale, opening a new location, or offering coupons, EDDM can help you send postcards, menus, and flyers to the right customers. Use the EDDM Online Tool to map ZIP [c]ode(s) and neighborhoods—even filter by age, income or household size using U.S. Census data.

## **Regulatory Issues**

**LEP Four Factor Analysis**, Federal Highway Administration, April 2019.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/title\\_vi/lep\\_fourfactor.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/title_vi/lep_fourfactor.cfm)

*From the website:* Recipients are required to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by LEP persons. While designed to be a flexible and fact-dependent standard, the starting point is an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors:

- The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee;
- [T]he frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program;
- [T]he nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives; and
- [T]he resources available to the grantee/recipient or agency, and costs.

**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Additional Nondiscrimination Requirements**, Federal Highway Administration, April 2019.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/title\\_vi/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/title_vi/)

*From the website:* FHWA Division Offices are responsible for ensuring that all Recipients (State Transportation Agencies) have an approved Title VI Plan and submit Annual Update Reports. Additionally, the Division Offices are responsible for ensuring that the State Transportation Agencies are implementing an effective Monitoring Program of their Subrecipients' efforts to effectively implement Title VI. FHWA's National Title VI/Nondiscrimination Program Manager is responsible for coordinating the effectiveness of FHWA's monitoring activities and will partner with other Federal Program Offices and USDOT Modal Agencies (as appropriate) to address opportunities for improved implementation of the Title VI/Nondiscrimination Program.

**Federal Highway Administration Environmental Justice Reference Guide**, Federal Highway Administration, April 2015.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/publications/reference\\_guide\\_2015/fhwahep15035..pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/publications/reference_guide_2015/fhwahep15035..pdf)

*From the executive summary:*

This Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Environmental Justice (EJ) Reference Guide is a resource for FHWA staff to help them ensure compliance with EJ requirements. EJ at FHWA means identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse effects of the agency’s programs, policies, and activities on minority\* populations and low-income populations to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. This also includes the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.

\* The FHWA Order and USDOT Order define a “minority” individual as a person who identifies with one or more of the following categories: (1) Black: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa; (2) Hispanic or Latino: a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race; (3) Asian American: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent; (4) American Indian and Alaskan Native: a person having origins in any of the original people of North America, South America (including Central America), and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition; or (5) Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Public involvement is discussed beginning on page 32 of the guide (page 36 of the PDF) and includes the following recommendations:

- Identify populations.
- Develop and implement a public participation plan and gather feedback.
- Document and incorporate input in analyses and decisions.

Key questions to consider and additional resources are provided.

### **State Practices**

#### ***Multiple States***

**Virtual Public Involvement Technical Assistance Workshop Summary Report: California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Virtual Workshop**, Erica Simmons, Federal Highway Administration, August 2020.

[https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/50737/dot\\_50737\\_DS1.pdf?](https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/50737/dot_50737_DS1.pdf?)

*From the abstract:* This report summarizes the presentations, activities and discussions that took place during the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) Workshop hosted virtually by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) on April 21, 2020. The purpose of the workshop was to provide Caltrans, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs), and transportation consultants who work in California with information about, and examples of, VPI tools—specifically virtual town halls and crowdsourcing tools.

## **Colorado**

**“Virtual Public Involvement: CDOT Innovators Use Technology to Engage the Public,”** Kailyn Haskovec, Colorado Department of Transportation, March 31, 2020.

<https://www.codot.gov/business/process-improvement/assets/virtual-public-involvement-cdot-innovators-use-technology-to-engage-the-public>

*From the article:* We know that public engagement is necessary, but reaching everybody is not always an easy task. In the age of technology, the public sector is embracing innovative ways to involve the community in planning initiatives. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is optimizing public input by utilizing both virtual and traditional engagement methods regarding the statewide transportation plan.

## **Connecticut**

**Draft CTDOT Public Involvement Plan 2020,** Connecticut Department of Transportation, 2020.

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOT/documents/dplans/PIPpdf.pdf>

*From the preface:*

The Public Involvement Procedures (PIP) is a public document used by the CTDOT [Connecticut DOT] to help plan active and inclusive public involvement activities. The PIP describes the process and techniques that will be used to ensure that affected communities have the opportunity to effectively influence transportation decision-making.

The PIP document supports the [m]ission, [v]ision and [v]alues of the [d]epartment which include involving the public, stakeholders as well as federal, state and local agencies in transportation decision-making to ensure that transportation decisions and investments reflect community interests and values.

Chapter 8 of the plan (page 45 of the document, page 50 of the PDF) provides tools, strategies and techniques for ensuring inclusive and meaningful public involvement.

## **Florida**

**Public Involvement,** Office of Policy Planning, Florida Department of Transportation, 2021.

<https://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/publicinvolvement/index>

*From the website:*

Public involvement is changing during this new era. With a strong commitment to delivering responsive transportation solutions informed by residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders, we are thinking outside the box. We hope you will use this page for guidance as we move forward with innovative solutions to public involvement.

Links to numerous resources are included on this web page, including virtual resources, public involvement resources for the practitioner and for the public, and public involvement research projects. Below are examples from the virtual resources section:

**FDOT Public Engagement Hybrid Meeting/Hearing Process,** Florida Department of Transportation, May 2021.

[https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/planning/policy/public-involvement/guidance\\_hybrid\\_public\\_meeting\\_final.pdf?sfvrsn=6c6f9913\\_4](https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/planning/policy/public-involvement/guidance_hybrid_public_meeting_final.pdf?sfvrsn=6c6f9913_4)

*From the document:* The Florida Department of Transportation has updated its process for conducting public engagement activities. To provide multiple opportunities for the public to receive information and provide input, the Department will use a hybrid model for all public meetings and hearings going forward. This

approach uses both a face-to-face and a virtual component. Public engagement activities should use appropriate approaches evaluated on a project-by-project basis, making sure that strategies are inclusive of all affected stakeholders.

**How to Set Up and Host a Virtual Public Meeting Using GoToWebinar**, Florida Department of Transportation, May 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5BMrTsimc8>

This is a technical training video on how to set up and host a virtual public meeting using GoToWebinar.

**Sample Slides and Scripts: Hybrid and Virtual Public Meetings and Hearings**, Florida Department of Transportation, May 2020.

[https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/planning/policy/public-involvement/sample\\_slides\\_script\\_vpm\\_opp\\_2020\\_0522\\_fdot\\_presentationtemplateoption1.pptx?sfvrsn=5fd15463\\_8](https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/planning/policy/public-involvement/sample_slides_script_vpm_opp_2020_0522_fdot_presentationtemplateoption1.pptx?sfvrsn=5fd15463_8)

The following topics are discussed in this presentation:

- Attendee orientation
- Speaker introductions
- Public meeting/hearing agenda
- How to submit comments and questions
- Public comment period—public meeting
- Public comment period—public hearing
- Exit survey and post-meeting comments
- Technical issues

### ***Kentucky***

**Kentucky Public Hearing Guidance With a Virtual Component or at Other Times in Which the Public is Best Served**, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, August 2020.

<https://transportation.ky.gov/EnvironmentalAnalysis/Environmental%20Resources/KYTC%20Virtual%20Meeting%20Guidance%2009.09.2020.pdf>

This publication describes interim virtual public involvement guidance for project-level public hearings “during specific cases where virtual options to supplement public involvement requirements may be considered.” The guidance is preceded by a letter from FHWA–Kentucky Division.

**KYTC Virtual Public Meeting Guidance**, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, undated.

See [Appendix C](#).

This document was developed by the agency to describe its virtual public engagement practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Michigan**

**Inclusion of Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) in Michigan Department of Transportation's Public Involvement Procedures**, Michigan Department of Transportation, undated.

[https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Guidance\\_on\\_Inclusion\\_of\\_Virtual\\_Public\\_Involvement\\_704413\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Guidance_on_Inclusion_of_Virtual_Public_Involvement_704413_7.pdf)

Michigan DOT's guidance for incorporating virtual public involvement into the project development process includes information about facilitating virtual meetings and online public comments; a comparison of common tools, including selection criteria and cost; and strategies for reaching underserved communities.

## **Minnesota**

**Virtual Meetings Resource Guide**, Minnesota Department of Transportation, undated.

[https://edocs-public.dot.state.mn.us/edocs\\_public/DMResultSet/download?docId=12204602](https://edocs-public.dot.state.mn.us/edocs_public/DMResultSet/download?docId=12204602)

This guide addresses questions about inviting external partners to a virtual meeting, setting up a good angle for a webcam and understating what's needed to present an accessible Word document. Some links in the document are only accessible to MnDOT users connected to the MnDOT network.

**Public Participation**, Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2021.

[http://eastgrandforksmetro.hosted.civiclive.com/public\\_participation](http://eastgrandforksmetro.hosted.civiclive.com/public_participation)

This web page provides access to the MPO's:

- Public Participation Plan (PPP)
- Environmental Justice Program Manual
- Limited English Proficiency Plan
- Title VI/Nondiscrimination and ADA Program Implementation Plan FY2020
- Private Sector Procedure Plan
- Title VI Forms/Instructions

## **Advancing Transportation Equity**

The publication below describes a MnDOT project that “identified and evaluated existing programs and initiatives addressing transportation equity. The objective of the Research Roadmap project was to understand the current state of practice and form recommendations for future transportation strategies that will meaningfully reduce disparities and identify areas where additional research is needed.”

**Advancing Transportation Equity: Research and Practice**, Yingling Fan, Andrew Guthrie, Leoma Van Dort and Gina Baas, Minnesota Department of Transportation, February 2019.

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/program/advancing-transportation-equity/pdf/CTS%2019-08.pdf>

Chapter 4, Stakeholder Engagement (beginning on page 31 of the report, page 40 of the PDF), describes researchers' efforts to formulate recommendations that advance transportation equity, identify future research directions and define “transportation equity” through meetings with a project advisory group composed of public sector agencies, university researchers and other external community partners; focus group discussions with transportation users and equity stakeholders; and a community event with members of the public who were surveyed about their transportation challenges. Results of these engagement activities are summarized.



Chapter 5 provides recommendations and action steps categorized in six themes. The first theme (beginning on page 37 of the report, page 46 of the PDF) addresses incorporating inclusive and culturally sensitive engagement practices, and includes the following recommendations:

*Recommendation 1.1* Incorporate inclusive and culturally sensitive community engagement practices in decision-making processes.

- Facilitate outreach and engagement in places where communities already gather, including cultural events, farmers markets, community centers, and places of worship.
- Prior to public engagement, learn and understand the histories and experiences of underrepresented communities, including how transportation policies and practices have disproportionately impacted communities of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and older adults.
- Provide accommodations and/or alternatives for single parent households, older adults, people who work non-traditional hours, and people with disabilities to participate in meetings and provide input on projects.
- Identify opportunities for education around the relationship between transportation and the economy, environment, and health as well as strategies for preventing and managing conflict.
- Allocate resources within project budgets to compensate community partners for their time and expertise as well as to provide incentives that will encourage community participation.
- Diversify agency workforce at every level to ensure that the workforce and leadership are representative of the communities that they serve.

*Recommendation 1.2* Conduct multilingual outreach and engagement with limited English populations, particularly with immigrant communities.

- Provide translations of informational material, including websites, brochures, flyers, and posters that are written in plain language.
- Work with communities to identify the best locations for making informational material available, including places of worship, community centers, and senior centers.
- Recruit interpreters from the community to facilitate discussions.
- Provide multilingual phone lines during outreach and engagement efforts.
- Expand outreach via media blogs and radio stations popular among limited English populations.
- Collaborate with cultural organizations, social service entities, faith-based organizations, and other community-based organizations to develop effective outreach and engagement strategies.

*Recommendation 1.3* Work in close partnership with community members to build trust over time and maintain effective relationships that go beyond project deadlines.

- Leverage already established relationships with communities by partnering with nonprofit organizations, community development corporations, neighborhood associations, community advocacy groups, and other organizations and individuals to help connect the state with the community, improve communication, and build relationships.

- Effectively communicate how community input is being incorporated into project decision-making processes throughout the project.

Chapter 6, Research Road Map (beginning on page 44 of the report, page 53 of the PDF), includes a prioritized list of under-researched areas, draft research problem statements for high-priority areas and a list of potential research programs to consider for funding future research.

### ***Pennsylvania***

**“PennDOT’s Virtual Public Involvement Efforts Highlighted by AASHTO,”** Jan Huzvar, *PennDOT Way*, October 22, 2020.

<https://www.penndot.gov/PennDOTWay/Pages/Article.aspx?post=360>

Pennsylvania DOT was one of several state transportation agencies that presented practices and lessons learned about public involvement during an AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence peer exchange. Links to the following resources are included in this blog post:

- **Public Participation Plan** (<https://www.penndot.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/Public-Participation-Plan.aspx>), which “outlines PennDOT’s [Pennsylvania DOT’s ] methods for providing inclusive and accessible opportunities for meaningful public participation in the preparation of the LRTP [Long-Range Transportation Plan], TYP [12-Year Plan], STIP [Statewide Transportation Improvement Program], and in the complete update of this public information resource.”
- **PennDOT Connects** (<https://www.penndot.gov/ProjectAndPrograms/Planning/Pages/PennDOT-Connects.aspx>), the agency’s “innovative planning approach [that] consider[s] community needs at the beginning of the planning process to ensure the best allocation of our resources.”

### ***Utah***

**Public Meeting Guidance and COVID-19 Health Plan: Guide to Executing Public Meetings and Hearings,** Utah Department of Transportation, August 2020.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vbgb-MvvJsziHQ8-18QiYJEyPKHSby38/view>

Specific guidance is provided for conducting public meetings safely during the COVID-19 pandemic “while meeting UDOT’s [Utah DOT’s] expectations for effective public involvement.” General guidelines for public involvement include:

#### **Public Meetings**

- Place emphasis on the public comment period associated with the public meeting. Be clear that information is available and the opportunity to comment can occur without attending a meeting.
- Place emphasis on the virtual public involvement opportunities as primary with the in-person meeting as secondary. The purpose of the in-person meeting is to provide opportunity for people with limited internet access to participate.
- Provide a minimum of 15 days advance notice for virtual and in-person public meetings. A second notice should be published 5 to 10 days before the meeting.
- Provide opportunity for interaction with project representatives outside of a virtual or in-person meeting. Supplement public meetings with individual or small group stakeholder interactions via videoconference, web comment form, chat room, phone, text, email, social media, and/or mail.

## Public Hearings

- Depending on the level of complexity and public interest, consider offering more than one virtual live meeting opportunity. For more complex studies or studies with high level of public interest, provide more than one virtual live opportunit[y] during the comment period to accommodate stakeholder schedules. “Live” is defined as having project representatives to respond to questions in real time in a format where others can observe the interactions. For example, this could be accomplished by a live chat room or video streaming.
- Record both virtual and in-person meetings so they can be heard or viewed by stakeholders who could not attend live. Livestream in-person meetings if possible. If voice or video recording is not available, provide a transcript or another form of meeting summary to document the meeting.
- Clarify comment status. Communicate which comment methods are used to receive formal comments (i.e., web comment form, email, mail) and which are informal (i.e., social media).
- Provide a meeting and/or comment summary document or video within 7 days for people who may not want to listen to the entire recording or read an entire transcript. Make this available while your comment period is still open.

## Literature Search

### Background

To supplement results of a survey of state, regional and local governments and private organizations, investigators sought information from a small group of national and state organizations expected to have experience communicating with public stakeholders during disruptive events such as COVID-19 and periods of social unrest.

Examining the public engagement strategies of these organizations took two forms: an investigation of the organizations’ online presence, particularly of COVID-19-specific resources, and, to the extent possible, consultation with representatives. (See page 56 for a summary of the only expert responding to requests for consultation.)

Investigators examined the websites of two federal agencies with broad national missions, two national research organizations, four national groups focused on a wide range of concerns of municipalities, and two state-centered groups. Below is a list of these organizations:

- *American Planning Association (APA)*. Urban planners, also known as regional or city planners, work to identify effective ways communities can use their land and other resources to meet infrastructure and growth demands. A large portion of their work involves communicating with the public and analyzing data.  
  
The COVID-19 pandemic has affected planners’ work profoundly. As the national professional member organization representing urban planning in the United States, the APA’s extensive website presents strategies and methods that allow planners to continue to conduct their essential work under COVID-19 restrictions, including public engagement through virtual and other means. Some of the COVID-19 resources available on APA’s website are available to members only.
- *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*. FEMA’s “mission is helping people before, during and after disasters. Our core values and guiding principles help us achieve it. ... We leverage a tremendous capacity to coordinate within the federal government to make sure America is equipped to prepare for

and respond to disasters.” FEMA offers a range of guidance for public engagement conducted before, during and after an emergency. The FEMA website provides guides, reports and tools for communities and organizations seeking methods of establishing and maintaining effective communication during disaster recovery.

- *Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)*. Multiple offices and programs within FHWA offer guidance on virtual public involvement, including the Every Day Counts initiative and Office of Planning, Environment and Realty.
- *National Civic League*. Founded in 1894, the National Civic League is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission “to advance civic engagement to create equitable, thriving communities.”
- *National cooperative research programs*. Among the resources cited below are descriptions of anticipated and pending projects associated with two national cooperative research programs:
  - **National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP)**. Launched in 1962, NCHRP was formed through a collaboration of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), FHWA and the Transportation Research Board (TRB) to serve as a state DOT based research program that would address common transportation needs. TRB administers the research program for the partner agencies.
  - **Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)**. Sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration, TCRP “serves as one of the principal means by which the public transportation industry can develop innovative near-term solutions to meet demands placed on it. The TCRP has an established reputation for providing useful reports and other tools to help public transportation practitioners solve problems and inform decision-makers.”
- *National League of Cities*. The National League of Cities website offers extensive COVID-19 information and resources for the organization’s city, town and village leader members.
- *State departments of natural resources*. A department of natural resources (DNR) or equivalent agency of each state is charged with a wide range of responsibilities that principally address the preservation and management of a state’s lands, waterways and wildlife. DNRs engage in extensive public communication concerning parks, hunting and fishing, environmental stewardship and other issues that have public impacts. Included below are publications that describe how the public engagement practices of DNRs in two states—Minnesota and Wisconsin—were modified in 2020 and continue into 2021 to adhere to state COVID-19 restrictions and allow for the continued functioning of the agencies.
- *Urban Institute*. Formed in 1968 and funded by government contracts, foundations and donors, the Urban Institute is a Washington, D.C.-based organization that conducts research on economic and social policy. Public engagement resources offered on the institute’s website address a range of COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

Presented below are a sampling of relevant publications and a summary of the limited feedback received from organization representatives in these topic areas:

- Best practices.
- COVID-19 information clearinghouses and general resources.
- Cybersecurity.

- Research needs.
- Rural engagement.
- Stakeholder participation.
- Virtual public engagement tools.
- Virtual public meetings.

## Best Practices

### **TCRP Anticipated Project J-11/Task 41: The Opportunities and Challenges Associated With Virtual Public Engagement in Transportation Decision Making**, anticipated start date: 2021.

Project description at <https://apps.trb.org/cmsfeed/TRBNetProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=5074>

*From the project description: This project has been tentatively selected and a project statement (request for proposals) is expected to be available on this website. The problem statement below will be the starting point for a panel of experts to develop the project statement.*

In the last decade, the use of virtual public involvement tools to supplement in-person outreach has grown significantly. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and public health guidelines halting in-person gatherings have pushed agencies to move the entirety of their public process to a virtual setting. Agencies such as the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Maine Department of Transportation (Maine DOT), and Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) have begun to adopt [s]tandard [o]perating [p]rocedures (SOPs) that include the use of online tools such as online comment forms, online meetings, and multimedia messaging during project development.

....

The purpose of this research is to measure the degree to which virtual public involvement affects community engagement during project development. This research will build on current TRB and transit agency efforts to identify and establish virtual public involvement best practices by using case studies to measure how virtual public processes compare to traditional in-person processes. Research findings will provide insight into how demographics have responded to virtual engagement tools (including online meetings, online polling and comment forms, and social media) and consider effective practices to more broadly engage the public and recognize potential disparities in access to virtual engagement opportunities. Findings could determine how agencies conduct their outreach in the future, even after public health guidelines allow for in-person gatherings to resume.

### **NCHRP Pending Project 08-142: Virtual Public Involvement: A Manual for Effective, Equitable and Efficient Practices for Transportation Agencies**, expected start date: May 2021; expected completion date: unknown.

Project description at <https://apps.trb.org/cmsfeed/TRBNetProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=4953>

*Note:* Proposals have been received in response to the request for proposals. The panel will meet to select a contractor to perform the work.

*From the project description:* The objectives of this research are (1) to evaluate the recent experience of transportation agencies in using virtual public involvement with a particular focus on equity; and (2) to develop a manual for selecting, creating and using virtual public involvement tools and techniques for each phase of [the] transportation decision-making process. ... At minimum, the manual will describe methods to perform the following communication processes:

- Identify and address needs and preferences of specific population groups to reduce potential disparities and promote equitable engagement;
- Select, create and use virtual public involvement tools and techniques;
- Integrate virtual and in-person public involvement;
- Identify and address staffing and other resource needs for adopting and implementing virtual public involvement tools and techniques;
- Obtain quality input from virtual public involvement; and
- Integrate input from virtual public involvement into decision-making.

**Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Best Practice Case Studies**, Federal Emergency Management Agency, February 2021.

<https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/best-practices/case-studies>

*From the website:* The following is a collection of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 pandemic operations across the country. They cover topics such as:

- Food banks.
- Government engagement with citizens.
- Considerations for people with disabilities.
- Community emergency response teams.
- Volunteer management.

The COVID-19 Best Practices are searchable by title or keyword below, and they can be filtered by FEMA’s **community lifelines** and **core capabilities**.

[Community lifelines](#) enable the continuous operation of essential government and business functions to promote public health and safety and economic security.

[Core capabilities](#) are distinct, critical elements that are necessary to achieve our [National Preparedness Goal](#).

**COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Government Engagement With Citizens**, Federal Emergency Management Agency, June 2020.

[https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema\\_covid\\_bp\\_gov-engagement-with-citizens.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_covid_bp_gov-engagement-with-citizens.pdf)

This publication is described as a “list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country.” Best practices include information hubs, online request forms, surveys and virtual town halls.

## COVID-19 Information Clearinghouses and General Resources

**Information Clearinghouses for COVID-19**, APA News, American Planning Association, 2021.

<https://www.planning.org/apanews/919859/information-clearinghouses-for-covid-19/>

*From the website:* The following curated list provides planners with a central location to easily find and access information related to the COVID-19 pandemic from government entities and allied professional organizations.

**COVID-19 Resources**, Knowledge Center, American Planning Association, 2021.

<https://www.planning.org/resources/covid-19/>

COVID-19 resources are organized into 12 categories:

- Planning methods and tools.
- Public participation.
- Economic impacts.
- Equity.
- Federal and state support.
- Housing.
- Infrastructure.
- Land use.
- Transportation.
- Multitopic resources.
- APA COVID-19 guiding principles and response.
- Most recent APA resources.

**State-Specific COVID-19 Resource Pages for Local Leaders Developed and Updated by State Municipal Leagues**, National League of Cities, 2021.

<https://covid19.nlc.org/resources/state-municipal-leagues/>

This web page provides a list of links to state-specific resource pages. A resource for Minnesota cities is cited below:

**COVID-19 and Cities: News and Resources**, League of Minnesota Cities, April 14, 2021.

<https://www.lmc.org/resources/covid-19-resources/>

This website provides city-specific updates and information to help citizens deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This extensive resource includes links to publications addressing emergency declarations and electronic meetings. *From the website:*

- [City Options for Meeting Remotely.](#)
- [Holding Public Hearings Remotely.](#)
- [Model Declaration for Electronic Meetings.](#)
- [Model Resolution Extending Public Emergency.](#)
- [Model Public Notice of Telephone or Electronic Meetings.](#)
- [Model Resolution Establishing Unfeasibility of In-Person Meetings \(no local emergency declared\).](#)

**Current Tools, Actions and Resources**, NLC Resources, National League of Cities, 2021.

<https://covid19.nlc.org/resources/nlc-resources/>

This web page offers extensive resources, including links to the blog posts below that examine communications in city operations.

**“Coronavirus Communications: Make Your Messages Hit Home,”** Hud Englehart, *CitiesSpeak Blog*, National League of Cities, March 27, 2020.

[https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/03/27/coronavirus-communication-make-your-messages-hit-home/?\\_ga=2.120718734.740197177.1615394512-959982099.1615394511](https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/03/27/coronavirus-communication-make-your-messages-hit-home/?_ga=2.120718734.740197177.1615394512-959982099.1615394511)

Five key concepts are discussed that help support good communication in the COVID-19 environment:

- Let go of partisanship.
- Separate data from facts.
- Appoint a chief skeptics officer.
- Convey calm with urgency.
- Embrace technology.

A link to the recorded webinar is also available.

**“Sharing COVID-19 Information in Multiple Languages,”** Eli Craveiro-Frankel, Rita Ossolinski, Justin Price and Alejandra Piers-Torres, *CitiesSpeak Blog*, National League of Cities, April 3, 2020.

[https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/04/03/providing-covid-19-resources-and-information-in-multiple-languages/?\\_ga=2.228449821.1436025906.1618754125-193079223.1618754124](https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/04/03/providing-covid-19-resources-and-information-in-multiple-languages/?_ga=2.228449821.1436025906.1618754125-193079223.1618754124)

This blog post describes actions taken by city leaders throughout the country to ensure that “accurate and timely information [is] made available and readily accessible in multiple languages, including ASL (American Sign Language).” Links to publications and other resources provide further details of effective practices.

**Whole Community Engagement and Public Communications Guides, Reports and Tools**, Federal Emergency Management Agency, last updated July 2020.

<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/community-recovery-management-toolkit/organization/engagement>

This site is the jumping-off point for a wide range of public engagement resources.

**COVID-19: Resources for Individuals and Governments**, National Civic League, March 30, 2020.

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/covid-19-resources-for-individuals-and-governments/>

Among the resources recommended to aid governments at the local, state and federal levels are those highlighted below. *From the website:*

### **Digital Engagement Platforms**

Due to current physical distancing measures, many are using virtual spaces to engage with each other. Below are a few platforms to hold space to engage with other people, depending on what the goal of engagement is. Here are a few that we encourage you to look into:

- **Bang the Table** (<https://www.bangthetable.com/>): [C]reated [by] EngagementHQ, a digital community engagement platform that facilitates deliberative decision-making. [See page 15 for more information about Bang the Table.]



- **MetroQuest** (<https://metroquest.com/>): [A]n online public engagement platform for urban and transportation planning.
- **BalancingAct** (<http://abalancingact.com/>): [C]reated by Engaged Public, an online tool for community members to engage on a budget process through simulation and a taxpayer receipt app.
- **Common Ground for Action** (<https://www.nifi.org/en/cga-online-forums>): [C]reated by the National Issues Forums Institute, an online platform for nonpartisan and moderated, deliberative forums which allow participants to exchange views with others about important issues facing the country.

## Conversation Tools

There are currently orders in countries throughout the world for people to “stay at home” in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, which has forced many to be socially isolated. Conversation helps us feel more connected and nourishes that very human need to thrive, whether it be via digital technology or in-person. Here are several tools to help foster dialogues with many more resources linked just below.

- [Conversation Cafe cards.](#)
- [Living Room Conversations guides.](#)
- [National Issues Forums Institute issues guides.](#)
- [Tips for hosting online conversation.](#)

Many organizations are dedicated to fostering dialogue; the following provide tools/resources for holding and hosting conversations: [Essential Partners](#), Everyday Democracy [link not operational], [Ben Franklin Circles](#), [Make America Dinner Again](#), [Civic Dinner\[s\]](#), [Jefferson Dinner](#), [Smart Conversations](#), [Weave](#), [National Conversation Project](#), [American Dialogue Project](#), [\[Braver\] Angels Red/Blue workshops](#), [Collaborative Truth-Seeking](#), [Free Listening](#), [Mismatch](#), [On Being Civil Conversations Project](#), [On the Table](#), [OpenMind Platform](#), [People’s Supper](#), [Sacred Discourse](#), [TableTalk](#).

**“Updated: A Resource Guide to Coronavirus for Government Leaders,”** Dustin Haisler, *Government Technology*, March 18, 2020.

<https://www.govtech.com/health/A-Resource-Guide-to-Coronavirus-for-Government-Leaders.html>

This web post, which is updated daily, is a compendium of useful resources for government leaders. It includes sources of COVID-19 information; federal government guidance for state and local government agencies; reopening guidance; COVID-19 information dashboards; examples of state and local government responses; and city, county and state policies.

**COVID-19 Public Participation Resources: Overcoming Challenges in Crisis**, International Association for Public Participation USA, undated.

<https://iap2usa.org/COVID-19-P2-Resources>

This website presents an extensive list of resources for diverse forms of public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Resources are categorized into the following topic areas:

- Virtual work and the “new normal.”
- Online meetings.
- Online public engagement tools.
- Resources to help you stay connected.

- Links to webinars and other presentations (Note: Some of the links are not operational).
- Resources regarding health and the pandemic.

## Cybersecurity

**“What Planners and Public Sector Agencies Need to Know About Cybersecurity,”** Joe Peña, *APA Podcast*, American Planning Association, April 2021.

<https://www.planning.org/podcast/what-planners-need-to-know-about-cybersecurity/>

Nupur Gunjan, a public sector analyst at Cisco and trained planner who transitioned to the tech world after working for the city of Austin, Texas, discusses what planners need to know about data protection and online public engagement today, and what they can do to protect their communities in the future. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.

## Research Needs

**Summary of Transportation Research Needs Related to COVID-19**, Michael Grant and Beverly Bowen, ICF Incorporated, LLC, July 2020.

<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/TransportationResearchNeedsRelatedToCOVID-19.pdf>

*From the background:* The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has proven a formidable adversary worldwide, with tremendous impact on the United States. The transportation system is an essential element of our response to this pandemic but has also been significantly impacted across all modes, both passenger and goods movement. The term “pivot” has become popular to reflect that our typical response to anticipated crises does not apply to this threat. We must be innovative and quickly adaptive to use available resources in new ways.

....

Within this summary activity, TRB is facilitating development of a high-level research agenda that can assist research funding agencies in prioritizing research activities and funding. ... Anticipated long-term changes throughout the country as a result of COVID-19 mean transportation issues are intertwined with broader societal needs, making difficult the separation of transportation needs from those of public health, emergency management, and the entire working population of the United States—most particularly, essential workers. The information that follows briefly identifies the approach used to synthesize the brainstorming information into individual problem statements with supporting information and an initial evaluation of the urgency of the research.

## Rural Engagement

**A Guide to Supporting Engagement and Resiliency in Rural Communities**, Federal Emergency Management Agency, July 2020.

[https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_rural-guide\\_jan-2021.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_rural-guide_jan-2021.pdf)

*From page 2 of the guide:*

Rural communities face a unique set of challenges given their lower population density and larger amounts of undeveloped land. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to rural communities, this guide is a step towards designing outreach and engagement activities that are authentic and right sized for a particular community to make every community more resilient.

Best Practices and Important Considerations for Virtual Meetings (beginning on page 24) presents steps to take before, during and after a virtual meeting. Other topics reviewed in the guide include planning, meeting announcements and invitations, and the use of a website for registration; the best use of PowerPoint

presentations; getting feedback for improvement; and scheduling timely breaks. After a meeting, the guide suggests sending thank-you emails, soliciting input from decision-makers and community partners, and chronicling insights to improve future meetings.

Other digital communication methods are recommended to connect with a community:

- Newsletters.
- Websites.
- Blogs.
- Social media.
- Prerecorded video.
- Podcasts.
- Public relations/news articles.
- Business chats (Skype, Google Hangouts).

Appendix 1 (beginning on page 25) offers suggested activities and timelines for taking particular actions in rural communities.

## Stakeholder Participation

**COVID-19 Response: Stay Safe MN**, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2021.

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/covid-19.html>

*From the website:* While in-person public meetings have been canceled for now, public engagement on DNR issues and projects remains a top priority. Please see our public engagement page for input and engagement opportunities.

**Public Engagement**, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2021.

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/engagement/index.html>

This web page provides information and links associated with public engagement. Selected recommended actions are highlighted below:

- Inform yourself.
  - Subscribe to a public engagement opportunities list that provides the latest feedback opportunities ([https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNDNR/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=MNDNR\\_341](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNDNR/subscriber/new?topic_id=MNDNR_341)).
  - Use the Engage With DNR website to share input on select topics through surveys and forums (<https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/>; see the citation below for more information).
  - Receive newsletters via email or text; to subscribe, see <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNDNR/subscriber/new>.
- Join online conversations.
  - Follow the DNR on social media channels to comment on projects and programs (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/social-media/index.html>).

- Review terms of use before participating in conversations on DNR social media ([https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/site\\_tools/terms\\_of\\_service.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/site_tools/terms_of_service.html)).
- Express yourself.
  - Share views in public comment and at public meetings.
  - Weigh in on an active Engage With DNR project.
  - Offer general comments. Find a nearby area or regional DNR office and share thoughts with staff by phone or email.
- Request a reasonable accommodation. Individuals with a disability who need a reasonable accommodation to participate are advised to contact the meeting organizer listed within the event details.

**“Pivoting Community Engagement During COVID-19,”** Martha Fedorowicz and Elsa Falkenburger, *Data@Urban*, Urban Institute, May 21, 2020.

<https://urban-institute.medium.com/pivoting-community-engagement-during-covid-19-4f45efe7d546>

Data@Urban, hosted on the Medium open digital publishing platform, is “a place to explore the code, data, products and processes that bring Urban Institute research to life.” *From the online post:*

Amid all the challenges presented by COVID-19, social distancing is limiting how we engage with communities and requiring innovation and creative thinking to continue to reach affected populations. As we consider what it takes to be a good partner during this time and whatever comes next, we are employing three key strategies that can also be replicated by organizations working with affected communities:

- Assess and reframe all work in the context of COVID-19.
- Employ new methods and modes of engagement.
- Develop a plan and refine as you go.

The authors examine the three key strategies in detail, and close their discussion by noting that “social distancing is pushing many researchers, policymakers and direct service providers to be creative and develop new strategies and tools to engage with people. As many of us search for effective responses to the challenges and effects of COVID-19, these innovative approaches to community engagement will help ensure the proposed solutions accurately reflect the priorities, needs and preferences of those most directly affected.”

**Engage With DNR**, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, undated.

<https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota DNR’s community engagement platform instructs users to “[c]lick on the tiles below to learn about projects, connect with staff and stay informed.”

Users register at <https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/register> to take advantage of the open engagement opportunities that are of interest to them. Comments are independently moderated by Bang the Table. (See page 15 for more information about Bang the Table.)

Information about forum etiquette and moderation is available at <https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/moderation>; the agency’s community guidelines are available at [https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/sitertools/community\\_guidelines.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/sitertools/community_guidelines.html).

**“DNR Invites Public Review, Announces Meeting on Mille Lacs Lake Fisheries Management,”** News Releases, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, March 2, 2021.

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/news/2021/03/02/dnr-invites-public-review-announces-meeting-mille-lacs-lake-fisheries-management>

This online news release is an example of the agency’s solicitation of public commentary on a specific project.

*From the news release:*

Minnesotans can learn about and comment on fisheries management goals and objectives proposed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for Mille Lacs Lake.

Public review of a five-year lake management plan is taking place now through Friday, April 2. Members of the public can comment via an online survey or during an online public meeting scheduled from 5-7 p.m., Tuesday, Mar. 23. Visit the [Mille Lacs Lake web page](#) for links to the draft management plan and meeting registration information.

....

During the March 23 public meeting, DNR staff will give a presentation summarizing the draft plan, answer questions and take written and spoken comments. Those who wish to speak can select that option when they register for the meeting. Participants who attend the meeting may also respond to the online survey.

**Public Input Opportunities,** Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, undated.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/publicinput>

This public input web page includes a central calendar for public hearings and meetings. Each month lists meeting dates with topic names, beginning times and lengths, contacts and details about the meetings. The meetings primarily occur via Zoom, with phone participation available. The page also connects people to information about proposed administrative rules, as well as opportunities for public input on new and revised rules that will go to the Wisconsin State Legislature for debate and possible implementation.

**Annual Spring Public Hearing and County Meeting,** Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, undated.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/about/wcc/springhearing>

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress holds an annual public spring hearing and county meeting to allow citizens across the state to vote on questions intended to guide the DNR in its rule changes for the next year. While these hearings are typically held in person, given COVID-19 restrictions, the April 2020 hearing was held online and garnered a record number of participants; the 2021 hearing followed the same format.

The 2021 spring hearing online input page went live on April 12 and remained open for 72 hours to allow citizens to offer feedback using a 57-question online SurveyMonkey survey. Guidance for citizens wishing to provide online feedback for the 2021 spring hearing is available at [https://widnr.widen.net/view/pdf/d2c7ufhnf7/WCC\\_SpringHearingOnlineInputFAQ\\_2021.pdf?t.download=true](https://widnr.widen.net/view/pdf/d2c7ufhnf7/WCC_SpringHearingOnlineInputFAQ_2021.pdf?t.download=true). Results from citizen feedback will be posted as soon as they are available.

**Introduction to Stakeholder Participation,** Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2015.

<https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/stakeholder-participation.pdf>

This guide introduces the most common organizing techniques, including determining when it is needed, and identifying and analyzing stakeholders. *From the introduction:*

This document briefly examines several important aspects of stakeholder participation. ... [T]his guide presents a set of procedural elements common to many effective stakeholder participation projects and programs. Additionally, the document provides guidance on identifying coastal management stakeholders, describes some of the most commonly used techniques for stakeholder participation, and discusses evaluation of stakeholder participation.

**Public Health Workbook: To Define, Locate and Reach Special, Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations in an Emergency**, Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010.

<https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=8605>

This step-by-step guide describes how to identify and reach five categories of at-risk populations in an emergency:

- Economic disadvantage.
- Language and literacy.
- Medical issues and disability (physical, mental, cognitive or sensory).
- Isolation (cultural, geographic or social).
- Age.

**Citizen's Advisory Recovery Team**, undated.

<http://joplinareacart.com/>

On May 22, 2011, Joplin, Missouri, was struck by a multiple-vortex tornado that reached wind speeds greater than 200 mph. It killed 158 people, injured 1,150 others and caused damage that totaled \$2.3 billion. Joplin's Citizen Advisory Recovery Team website serves as an example of what can be done to encourage communication and collaboration after setting up a recovery team.

## Virtual Public Engagement Tools

**Community Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations**, Martha Fedorowicz, Olivia Arena and Kimberly Burrowes, Urban Institute, September 2020.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102820/community-engagement-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-beyond.pdf>

*From the abstract:*

This guide is meant to assist community-based organizations that are interested in facilitating remote community engagement activities. Although the guide was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it can also be used by organizations looking to broaden their outreach strategy generally.

In this guide, we present a list of tools that can be used for facilitating remote community engagement activities and aim to elevate some best practices for any form of in-person or remote community engagement. In the appendices, we provide a few worksheets to help you plan your community engagement activities and a list of supplemental resources on inclusive community engagement methods.

Additional community engagement resources are provided beginning on page 28 of the guide (page 32 of the PDF). A sampling of these resources are highlighted below.

**Bang the Table, 2021.**

<https://www.bangthetable.com/>

Bang the Table was founded in Australia in 2007 to create online platforms—principally EngagementHQ—for local, state and federal governments. New corporate headquarters in Boulder, Colorado, opened in 2018. Its products are used globally. (Minnesota DNR is using Bang the Table in connection with its Engage With DNR community engagement platform; see page 13 for more information.)

*Related Resources:*

**EngagementHQ Platform**, Bang the Table, 2021.

<https://www.bangthetable.com/engagementhq-community-software>

Billed as a “complete suite of listening, information, analysis, reporting and relationship management features,” EngagementHQ offers tools for forums, ideas, places, stories, guestbooks, Q&As, polls and surveys, as well as reporting and analytics tools.

**Using a Digital-First Community Engagement Approach**, Bang the Table, undated.

<https://www.bangthetable.com/wp-content/uploads/Using-a-Digital-First-Community-Engagement-Approach.pdf>

This brief guide offers recommendations for those planning for a digital-first approach. *From page 3 of the guide (page 4 of the PDF):*

#### **COMMON CHALLENGES**

- Limited understanding of which tools to use and when.
- Time constraints for planning engagement.
- Overreliance on surveys and not knowing how to use other digital tools effectively.
- Too much risk.
- Audiences are too hard to access. Everyone is online ... [b]ut they are nowhere to be seen!

#### **STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES**

- Think about different types of input, qualitative and quantitative, and which tools allow you to collect that information.
- Take a longer view of your digital engagement process. Are there different intervals where the activities, questions and tools change?
- Plan for digital-first engagement with reporting in mind.
- Have a policy and process for how you will deal with risky situations.
- Explore digital channels and understand where different communities congregate.
- Develop messaging which reaches and appeals to different groups.

**“7 Emerging Tips for Equitable Digital Engagement,”** *Michael Podgers, Planning*, June 2020.

<https://www.planning.org/planning/2020/jun/tools-engagement/>

*This brief journal article offers “some of the ways planners and local leaders are keeping engagement efforts inclusive, even while social distancing”:*

- Make sure you're mobile compatible.
- Manage expectations.
- Overcome the in-person bias.
- Crowdsourcing solutions.
- When in doubt, go old-school (phone interviews, mailed surveys with postage-paid return envelopes, and kiosks with written feedback options located throughout neighborhoods).
- Evolve together.

**“Moving City Council Meetings Online in Response to COVID-19,”** Angelina Panettieri, *CitiesSpeak Blog*, National League of Cities, March 23, 2020.

<https://www.nlc.org/article/2020/03/23/moving-city-council-meetings-online-in-response-to-covid-19/>

This blog post provides information about how municipal governments are changing their procedures and strategies to meet the requirement of sunshine laws, accessibility laws and other concerns about public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author examines how cities in Indiana, Arizona, South Carolina, Washington and other states have employed Zoom meetings, televised meetings and commentary via email. Some cities have moved their council meetings online and take public comments virtually in writing, video or via phone message.

**Virtual Public Involvement: A Collection of Tools, Techniques and Examples**, Jacob Korn, Kevin McCoy, Tess Perrone, Erica Simmons and Chris Timmel, Office of Planning, Federal Highway Administration, December 2018.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/vpi/fact\\_sheets/vpi\\_booklet\\_final.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/vpi/fact_sheets/vpi_booklet_final.pdf)

*From the introduction:*

This booklet includes information about VPI tools and techniques, organized into eight (8) categories. Each two-page fact sheet describes what the tool is, how the tool could help an agency improve its public involvement outcomes, and how interested agencies can get started. The “Take Note” sections provide readers with quick reference about the tools. The work for numerous state, regional and local agencies is included as examples throughout in the “VPI in Practice” sections. Finally, each fact sheet includes information about how readers can contact a colleague who has knowledge of, and experience with, a particular tool or technique.

Included in the publication are fact sheets on:

- Mobile applications.
- Project visualizations.
- Do-it-yourself videos.
- Crowdsourcing tools.
- Virtual town halls.
- Mapping tools.
- All-in-one tools.
- Digital tools to enhance in-person events.



**Public Engagement in Recovery Planning: Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery Briefing Paper 1, *The Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: Next Generation Briefing Papers***, American Planning Association, June 2014.  
<https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9138839/>

This APA guidance provides four key points for guiding public engagement after a disaster event, with examples from city responses to past disasters:

- Design the public engagement process with the end in mind.
- Select tactics that invite a broad range of stakeholders to participate—what’s the approach?
- Framing and reframing—what are our shared interests?
- You’ve been heard and here are the results—what’s the status of implementation?

## Virtual Public Meetings

**“Moving Planning Commission Meetings Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Big-City Perspective,”** Joe Peña, *APA Podcast*, American Planning Association, May 2021.

<https://www.planning.org/podcast/moving-planning-commission-meetings-online-during-covid-19-big-city/>

Emily Mack of the Department of Metropolitan Development in Indianapolis explains how her team quickly developed a standard operating procedure for online meetings. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.

**“Moving Planning Commission Meetings Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mid-Sized City Perspective,”** Roberta Rewers, *APA Podcast*, American Planning Association, April 2021.

<https://www.planning.org/podcast/moving-planning-commission-meetings-online-during-covid-19-mid-sized-city/>

The planning commission in Fayetteville, Arkansas (population 85,000) held its first online meeting on March 23, 2020, using Zoom. The immediate past chair of the Fayetteville Planning Commission, Matt Hoffman, discusses that experience. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.

**Temporary Virtual Public Involvement During the COVID-19 Pandemic**, FHWA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information and Resources, Federal Highway Administration, March 2021.

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/coronavirus/virtualPI.cfm>

This online Q&A provides guidance that “is effective immediately and will remain in effect until the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Emergency Declaration pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (the “Stafford Act”) ends (<https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210121/covid-19-emergency-declaration>).” The guidance offers answers to these questions:

- Can project sponsors hold virtual public hearings to satisfy public involvement requirements during the project development process?
- Why is the FHWA issuing this guidance?
- How should VPI covered by this guidance be conducted?
- Are there any issues for special consideration when using VPI as described in this guidance?
- Do I need to change my FHWA-approved public involvement procedures before I can use the flexibilities in this guidance?

- Does this guidance apply when FHWA in-person public involvement is being used to satisfy public involvement requirements for other federal agencies?

**Virtual Public Involvement (VPI)**, ED-6: Virtual Public Involvement, Every Day Counts, Federal Highway Administration, January 2021.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc\\_6/virtual\\_public\\_involvement.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc_6/virtual_public_involvement.cfm)

This homepage for one of the Every Day Counts round 6 innovations describes the benefits of VPI for state departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations and rural transportation planning organizations. As the site notes, “[e]arly and strong public engagement has the potential to accelerate project delivery by helping identify and address public concerns early in the planning process, thereby reducing delays from previously unknown interests late in the project delivery process.”

**Virtual Public Involvement**, Office of Planning, Environment and Realty, Federal Highway Administration, July 2020.

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/vpi/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/vpi/)

This web page presents general information about the benefits and tools of VPI, and provides links to videos, fact sheets and notices of peer exchanges.

**“Online Alternatives to In-Person Public Meetings in an Emergency,”** Sean Maguire, American Planning Association, April 14, 2020.

<https://www.planning.org/blog/9199029/online-alternatives-to-in-person-public-meetings-in-an-emergency/>

This blog post seeks to answer this question: Which software product is right for your online public meetings? APA member Sean Maguire, planning director for a community in the Albany, New York, area, examines the pros and cons of three popular webinar products: GoToWebinar, Webex and Zoom.

*Note:* The podcasts below examine the transition from in-person to online public meetings early in the pandemic from the perspective of a large city—Indianapolis—and a midsized city with a population under 100,000. The final podcast addresses data protection when using online public engagement.

**“Innovation Spotlight: Virtual Public Involvement,”** Every Day Counts, Federal Highway Administration, March 7, 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFm0rjCTbDk&t=2s>

*From the video description:* Robust public engagement during transportation planning and project development can accelerate project delivery by identifying issues and concerns early in the process. Virtual public involvement techniques, such as telephone town halls and online meetings, offer convenient, efficient and low-cost methods for informing the public, encouraging their participation and receiving their input.

## **Expert Consultation**

### **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

Randolph Briley, special assistant to the commissioner of the Minnesota DNR, responded to investigators’ questions about agency public engagement practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and other disruptive events. The following summarizes Briley’s feedback:

**Pre-pandemic practices.** Before the pandemic, the agency’s modes of engagement were largely traditional—in-person events, town halls and roundtables. Briley noted that the agency used Webex on

occasion for “polarizing topics we were sure to garner increased attendance and interest. Webex is a good platform for video conference[s], however it does have a steep learning curve.”

**Practices for public engagement during the pandemic.** At the onset of the pandemic, the agency scaled back engagement and used existing virtual platforms, including Skype and Webex. A few months into the pandemic, the agency added a new platform: Bang the Table. Briley noted that “[i]t was a bit of a learning curve to shift what was largely traditional in-person engagement to digital, however, our teams were quite adaptable and we will continue to leverage both modes to their fullest extent into the future.” (See page 15 for more information about Bang the Table.)

**Effective strategies.** Minnesota DNR has used strategies for promotion of digital engagement that are similar to those used to promote in-person engagement—placement of notices in outdoor-oriented publications, social media messages and the DNR website. In addition, as the agency builds relationships with various traditionally underrepresented communities, more targeted direct outreach is conducted to inform stakeholders of various engagements the agency is hosting.

**Lessons learned.** Briley advised users of new platforms to ensure that proper protocols and guidance documents are available to increase consistency and quality across the enterprise.

**Contact:** Randolph Briley, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 651-259-5037, [randolph.briley@state.mn.us](mailto:randolph.briley@state.mn.us).

## Appendix A

### Public Engagement Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Other Disruptive Events

More than 150 potential respondents from the following agency types were contacted to complete the survey described below:

- State departments of transportation (DOTs)
- MnDOT's eight districts
- MnDOT functional areas
- Minnesota's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and regional development commissions (RDCs)
- Selected MPOs in rural and urban areas outside Minnesota
- Selected Minnesota counties and municipalities
- Canadian transportation agencies
- Other organizations

**Before you begin:** Please consider both the COVID-19 pandemic and previous disruptive events when describing impacts to your agency's public engagement practices.

#### Virtual Meeting Platforms

1. Please identify the virtual meeting platform(s) your agency uses for public engagement by selecting all that apply.
  - Adobe Connect
  - Cisco Webex
  - Facebook Live
  - Facebook Premiere
  - Google Hangouts
  - GoToMeeting
  - GoToWebinar
  - GovDelivery
  - Microsoft Teams
  - RingCentral
  - Skype
  - YouTube
  - Zoom
  - Other (Please describe.)
2. Of those you selected, which is your preferred platform?
3. What are the one to three most important reasons you selected your preferred platform?
  - Reason 1:
  - Reason 2:
  - Reason 3:
4. Does your agency conduct training for your virtual meeting facilitators?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)

## Conducting Meetings Online (Virtual Meetings)

**Virtual meetings** are real-time interactions that take place over the internet using integrated audio and video, chat tools and application sharing.

1. How does your agency notify the public when a virtual meeting is scheduled? Select all that apply.
  - Distribute through partner channels
  - News release
  - Post on a project and/or agency website
  - Post on agency social media (Facebook, Twitter)
  - Send notification through an email or agency e-newsletter
  - Other (Please describe.)
2. What are some creative ways your agency encourages public participation during online meetings? (Example: breakout rooms, whiteboards)
3. Has your agency identified creative ways to incentivize or encourage members of the public to attend virtual meetings?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)

## Other Engagement Channels and Platforms

1. Has your agency's use of social media changed during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)
2. Which of the following outreach tools has your agency **successfully** used to supplement or substitute traditional public engagement practices during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events? Select all that apply.
  - Crowdsourcing survey tool
  - Local radio simulcast of virtual meeting
  - Mobile app
  - Online mapping tool
  - Online newsletter/brochure
  - Online whiteboard or collaboration/brainstorm tool (such as Miro or Jamboard)
  - Printed flyer/postcard
  - Real-time polling tool
  - StoryMap
  - Telephone town hall
  - Video (brief, low-budget production)
  - Visualization (illustrate proposed projects)
  - Other (Please describe.)
3. During the COVID-19 pandemic, has your agency's use of U.S. mail for public engagement changed, compared to before the pandemic?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)
4. What nonvirtual engagement channels or platforms has your agency found to be most effective in safely engaging with members of the public with low or no technology access during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### Encouraging Diverse Participation

1. Has your agency developed new practices to engage with underrepresented or harder-to-reach (e.g., low-income, minority, disability community) populations during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)
2. How has your agency ensured that members of the public with limited English proficiency are appropriately served when engaging virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Has your agency surveyed meeting participants during or after a virtual meeting to understand the demographics of participants?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe which methods were most effective at getting a good response rate.)

### National Environmental Policy Act

- \* (Required) Is your agency subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements?
- No (Skips the respondent to **Meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Requirements** question set and then to **Policy and Practice**.)
  - Yes (Skips the respondent to **Conducting In-Person Public Meetings**.)

### Meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Requirements

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, has your agency continued to offer in-person **public hearings** to allow the public to make formal public comments on a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?
  1. Don't know
  2. No
  3. Yes (Please describe your process.)
2. When has your agency supplemented a public hearing with a virtual meeting option? Select all that apply.
  - A virtual public engagement session is the only NEPA-related meeting we schedule.
  - We don't schedule a companion virtual public meeting.
  - Before an in-person public hearing
  - During an in-person public hearing
  - After an in-person public hearing
  - Other (Please describe.)
3. Please describe how your agency handles EIS-related questions by selecting all that apply.
  - These questions are transcribed by a court reporter or other professional.
  - These questions are answered during an in-person public meeting.
  - These questions are answered during a virtual public meeting.
  - These questions are addressed as part of the final EIS.
  - Other (Please describe.)
4. Please describe how your agency accepts public comments by selecting all that apply.
  - During an in-person meeting
  - During a virtual meeting using a platform that accepts and records comments
  - By private online comment (comment box, form, email) during the comment period
  - By phone during the comment period
  - By email during the comment period
  - By U.S. mail during the comment period

- Other (Please describe.)
5. Has your agency found it necessary to extend the NEPA public comment period during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe the length of the extension and when it has been required.)

### Conducting In-Person Meetings

(Required) During the COVID-19 pandemic, has your agency continued to offer in-person meetings, which could be supplemented by virtual public engagement, for some or all of your public meetings?

- No (skips the respondent to **Policy and Practice**.)
  - Yes (Skips the respondent to the question set below. After responding, the respondent continues to **Policy and Practice**.)
1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for what purposes has your agency held in-person public meetings?
  2. Please describe how your agency accepts public comments by selecting all that apply.
    - During an in-person meeting
    - During a virtual meeting using a platform that accepts and records comments
    - By private online comment (comment box, form, email) during a comment period
    - By phone during a comment period
    - By email during a comment period
    - By U.S. mail during a comment period
    - Other (Please describe.)

### Policy and Practice

1. What changes has your agency made in how it communicates with the public and stakeholders to address the impacts of COVID-19?
2. Are there engagement techniques that your agency has initiated during the pandemic that you anticipate will become standard practice after the pandemic?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please describe.)
3. Has your agency documented the new public engagement practices adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - Don't know
  - No
  - Yes (Please provide links to electronic documents or send any files not available online to [chris.kline@ctcandassociates.com](mailto:chris.kline@ctcandassociates.com).)

### Assessment

1. What are the tools and practices your agency has found to be most successful in engaging the public during the COVID-19 pandemic or in other disruptive events (natural disaster, extreme weather, social/community unrest)?
2. What has your agency found to be most challenging in engaging the public during the COVID-19 pandemic or other disruptive events?
3. What are your top three recommendations for an agency seeking to establish effective practices for public engagement when in-person events are limited or not possible?

**Recommendation 1:**

**Recommendation 2:**

**Recommendation 3:**

### **Wrap-Up**

Please use this space to provide any comments or additional information about your previous responses.



## Appendix B

### Rating Literature Search Results: Public Engagement Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

#### American Planning Association (APA)

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>Information Clearinghouses for COVID-19</b> , APA News, American Planning Association, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This curated list provides planners with a central location to easily find and access information related to the COVID-19 pandemic from government entities and allied professional organizations. Each resource contains a link, source and short description. Many of the resources link to another compilation of resources.	3.5
<b>COVID-19 Resources</b> , Knowledge Center, American Planning Association, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This list of resources is organized into 12 categories. The resources include videos, podcasts, and articles. Each resource contains a link, description and source. Some include an embed of the resource (i.e., the video or podcast).	5
<b>“Online Alternatives to In-Person Public Meetings in an Emergency,”</b> Sean Maguire, American Planning Association, April 14, 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	This blog post seeks to answer: Which software product is right for your online public meetings? APA member Sean Maguire, planning director for a community in the Albany, New York, area, examines the pros and cons of three popular webinar products: GoToWebinar, Webex and Zoom.	5
<b>“7 Emerging Tips for Equitable Digital Engagement,”</b> Michael Podgers, <i>Planning</i> , June 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	This brief article offers ways for planners and local leaders to keep engagement equitable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure you’re mobile compatible.</li> <li>• Manage expectations.</li> <li>• Overcome the in-person bias.</li> <li>• Crowdsource solutions.</li> <li>• When in doubt, go old-school (phone interviews, mailed surveys with postage-paid return envelopes, and kiosks with written feedback options located throughout neighborhoods).</li> <li>• Evolve together.</li> </ul>	4
<b>Public Engagement in Recovery Planning: Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery Briefing Paper 1, <i>The Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: Next Generation Briefing Papers</i></b> , American Planning Association, June 2014. <a href="#">link</a>	This APA guidance provides four key points for guiding public engagement after a disaster event, with examples from city responses to past disasters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design the public engagement process with the end in mind.</li> <li>• Select tactics that invite a broad range of stakeholders to participate—what’s the approach?</li> <li>• Framing and reframing—what are our shared interests?</li> <li>• You’ve been heard and here are the results—what’s the status of implementation?</li> </ul>	4

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>“Moving Planning Commission Meetings Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Big-City Perspective,”</b> Joe Peña, <i>APA Podcast</i>, American Planning Association, May 2021.</p> <p><a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Emily Mack of the Department of Metropolitan Development in Indianapolis explains how her team quickly developed a standard operating procedure for online meetings. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.</p>	5
<p><b>“Moving Planning Commission Meetings Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mid-Sized City Perspective,”</b> Roberta Rewers, <i>APA Podcast</i>, American Planning Association, April 2021.</p> <p><a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>The planning commission in Fayetteville, Arkansas (population 85,000) held its first online meeting on March 23, 2020, using Zoom. The immediate past chair of the Fayetteville Planning Commission, Matt Hoffman, discusses that experience. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.</p>	4
<p><b>“What Planners and Public Sector Agencies Need to Know About Cybersecurity,”</b> Joe Peña, <i>APA Podcast</i>, American Planning Association, April 2021.</p> <p><a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Nupur Gunjan, a public sector analyst at Cisco and trained planner who transitioned to the tech world after working for the city of Austin, Texas, discusses what planners need to know about data protection and online public engagement today, and what they can do to protect their communities in the future. The website includes a link to the episode transcript.</p>	5

### Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Temporary Virtual Public Involvement During the COVID-19 Pandemic,</b> FHWA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information and Resources, Federal Highway Administration, March 2021.</p> <p><a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This online Q&amp;A provides guidance that “is effective immediately and will remain in effect until the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Emergency Declaration pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5207 (the “Stafford Act”) ends (<a href="https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210121/covid-19-emergency-declaration">https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210121/covid-19-emergency-declaration</a>).” It answers questions about conducting public involvement. Where necessary, they provide links to additional information.</p>	5

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Virtual Public Involvement (VPI),</b> ED-6: Virtual Public Involvement, Every Day Counts, Federal Highway Administration, January 2021. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This homepage for one of the Every Day Counts round 6 innovations describes the benefits of VPI for state departments of transportation (DOTs), transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations and rural transportation planning organizations. As the site notes, “[e]arly and strong public engagement has the potential to accelerate project delivery by helping identify and address public concerns early in the planning process, thereby reducing delays from previously unknown interests late in the project delivery process.”</p>	3
<p><b>Virtual Public Involvement,</b> Office of Planning, Environment and Realty, Federal Highway Administration, July 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This web page presents general information about the benefits and tools of VPI, and provides links to videos, fact sheets and notices of peer exchanges.</p>	4
<p><b>“Innovation Spotlight: Virtual Public Involvement,”</b> Every Day Counts, Federal Highway Administration, March 7, 2019. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p><i>From the video description:</i> Robust public engagement during transportation planning and project development can accelerate project delivery by identifying issues and concerns early in the process. Virtual public involvement techniques, such as telephone town halls and online meetings, offer convenient, efficient and low-cost methods for informing the public, encouraging their participation and receiving their input.  (This video is also embedded in the previous resource.)</p>	4
<p><b>Virtual Public Involvement: A Collection of Tools, Techniques and Examples,</b> Jacob Korn, Kevin McCoy, Tess Perrone, Erica Simmons and Chris Timmel, Office of Planning, Federal Highway Administration, December 2018. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p><i>From the introduction:</i> This booklet includes information about VPI tools and techniques, organized into eight (8) categories. Each two-page fact sheet describes what the tool is, how the tool could help an agency improve its public involvement outcomes, and how interested agencies can get started. The “Take Note” sections provide readers with quick reference about the tools. The work for numerous state, regional and local agencies is included as examples throughout in the “VPI in Practice” sections. Finally, each fact sheet includes information about how readers can contact a colleague who has knowledge of, and experience with, a particular tool or technique.</p>	5

## National Cooperative Research Programs

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Summary of Transportation Research Needs Related to COVID-19</b>, Michael Grant and Beverly Bowen, ICF Incorporated, LLC, July 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p><i>From the background:</i> Within this summary activity, TRB is facilitating development of a high-level research agenda that can assist research funding agencies in prioritizing research activities and funding. ... Anticipated long-term changes throughout the country as a result of COVID-19 mean transportation issues are intertwined with broader societal needs, making difficult the separation of transportation needs from those of public health, emergency management, and the entire working population of the United States—most particularly, essential workers. The information that follows briefly identifies the approach used to synthesize the brainstorming information into individual problem statements with supporting information and an initial evaluation of the urgency of the research.</p>	3
<p><b>TCRP Anticipated Project J-11/Task 41: The Opportunities and Challenges Associated With Virtual Public Engagement in Transportation Decision Making</b>, anticipated start date: 2021. <a href="#">link</a> to project description</p>	<p><i>From the project description:</i> This project has been tentatively selected and a project statement (request for proposals) is expected to be available on this website. The problem statement below will be the starting point for a panel of experts to develop the project statement.</p> <p>... The extent to which moving outreach to a virtual environment, through agency’s SOPs [standard operating procedures] and virtual public involvement best practices, affects community engagement has not been quantitatively or qualitatively measured. Research into which populations are attending online meetings and engaging with online tools, and how that compares to traditional in-person meetings and tools, will have far-reaching implications for how transit agencies conduct outreach moving forward. The purpose of this research is to measure the degree to which virtual public involvement affects community engagement during project development.</p>	4
<p><b>NCHRP Pending Project 08-142: Virtual Public Involvement: A Manual for Effective, Equitable and Efficient Practices for Transportation Agencies</b>, expected start date: May 2021; expected completion date: unknown. <a href="#">link</a> to project description</p>	<p><i>Note:</i> Proposals have been received in response to the request for proposals. The panel will meet to select a contractor to perform the work.</p> <p><i>From the project description:</i> The objectives of this research are (1) to evaluate the recent experience of transportation agencies in using virtual public involvement with a particular focus on equity; and (2) to develop a manual for selecting, creating and using virtual public involvement tools and techniques for each phase of [the] transportation decision-making process.</p>	4

## Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Whole Community Engagement and Public Communications Guides, Reports and Tools</b>, Federal Emergency Management Agency, last updated July 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This site is the jumping-off point for a wide range of public engagement resources. It provides links and short descriptions to relevant guides, reports, tools and case studies.</p>	5
<p><b>Public Health Workbook: To Define, Locate and Reach Special, Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations in an Emergency</b>, Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This step-by-step guide describes how to identify and reach five categories of at-risk populations in an emergency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic disadvantage.</li> <li>• Language and literacy.</li> <li>• Medical issues and disability (physical, mental, cognitive or sensory).</li> <li>• Isolation (cultural, geographic or social).</li> <li>• Age.</li> </ul>	5
<p><b>Introduction to Stakeholder Participation, Office for Coastal Management</b>, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2015. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This guide introduces the most common organizing techniques, including determining when it is needed, identifying and analyzing stakeholders, and evaluating participation. At the end of the document, all engagement methods and their advantages and limitations are listed in a table.</p>	5
<p><b>Citizen’s Advisory Recovery Team</b>, undated. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>On May 22, 2011, Joplin, Missouri, was struck by a multiple-vortex tornado that reached wind speeds greater than 200 mph. It killed 158 people, injured 1,150 others and caused damage that totaled \$2.3 billion. Joplin’s Citizen Advisory Recovery Team website serves as an example of what can be done to encourage communication and collaboration after setting up a recovery team.</p>	4.5

## National Civic League

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>COVID-19: Resources for Individuals and Governments</b>, National Civic League, March 30, 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Among the resources recommended to aid governments at the local, state and federal levels are those highlighted below (in the table and memo). The resources cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic duty.</li> <li>• Resources for local governments.</li> <li>• Digital engagement platforms.</li> <li>• Conversation tools.</li> <li>• Market resources from ICMA-RC.</li> <li>• Conversation tools.</li> <li>• General COVID-19 information for individuals.</li> <li>• Resources for seniors.</li> </ul>	5
<p><b>Bang the Table</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Created by EngagementHQ, Bang the Table is a digital community engagement platform that facilitates deliberative decision-making. <i>From the website:</i> EngagementHQ centralizes community engagement, making it easy to capture, analyze, and report on city-wide engagement through one single platform.</p>	5
<p><b>MetroQuest</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>An online public engagement platform for urban and transportation planning. <i>From the website:</i> Local governments, transportation agencies, and consulting firms trust MetroQuest to create visual engaging online experiences that both educate the public about planning alternatives and collect informed input from 1000s of residents.</p>	5
<p><b>BalancingAct</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Created by Engaged Public, an online tool for community members to engage on a budget process through simulation and a taxpayer receipt app. <i>From the website:</i> Balancing Act is an easy-to-use online budget simulation that engages stakeholders to help leaders make tough choices.</p>	5
<p><b>Common Ground for Action</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Created by the National Issues Forums Institute, an online platform for nonpartisan and moderated, deliberative forums which allow participants to exchange views with others about important issues facing the country.</p>	2
<p><b>Conversation Café cards</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This resource provides ways to use Conversation Café in an online format. There are links and an infographic. <i>From the website:</i> Conversation Cafe can be a useful process to building connection and collective wisdom in a time of social distancing.</p>	5
<p><b>Living Room Conversation guides</b> <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Living Room Conversations provides video conversations (scheduled meetings), toolkits, COVID-19 conversation guides and other resources.</p>	4

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>National Issues Forums Institute issues guides</b> <a href="#">link</a>	NIFI materials (issue guides, historic decision guides, local and regional guides, and other products) are available at this link. Few resources on this page are related to public engagement methods and practices.	1.5
<b>Tips for hosting online conversation</b> <a href="#">link</a>	This short article from <i>Medium</i> provides insight into online public engagement as well as resources and contacts.	5
<b>Essential Partners</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> [Essential Partners] partner with communities and organizations around the globe, equipping them to navigate the values, beliefs, and identities that are essential to them.	3
<b>Ben Franklin Circles</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> Circles meet regularly, using Ben Franklin’s classic 13 virtues to spark discussion about members’ goals and aspirations—who they want to be, and what they want to contribute to the world.	2.5
<b>Make America Dinner Again</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> There are many avenues to protest, to donate, to fight, to be heard; Make America Dinner Again is an avenue to listen. These small dinners consist of respectful conversation, guided activities, and delicious food shared among 6-10 guests who have differing political viewpoints, and our country's best interests at heart. During COVID-19, we've also been conducting conversations online with our partner Living Room Conversations.	2.5
<b>Civic Dinner[s]</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> Bring people together virtually or in person for structured conversations on the critical issues of our time.	3.5
<b>Jefferson Dinner</b> <a href="#">link</a>	This short guide explains how to host a Jefferson Dinner which is meant to spark deep conversation.	3.5
<b>Smart Conversations</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> SMART Conversations is a facilitated training that builds foundational skills in effective conversation within a safe and inclusive environment. By creating a platform for effective communication, you can build a culture of collaboration that lives and breathes the four core conditions of SMART Conversations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared Meaning – are we talking about the same thing?</li> <li>• Authenticity – are we being ‘real’ with one another?</li> <li>• Respect – can we show respect to others by listening and engaging all perspectives?</li> <li>• Trust – are we willing to extend trust to each other?</li> </ul>	4
<b>Weave</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> Weave’s mission is to invite everyone to start living like a Weaver and shift our culture from one that values achievement and individual success to one that finds value in deep relationships and community success.	1

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>National Conversation Project</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> America Talks is a powerful two-day event that invites Americans to connect one-on-one, face-to-face on video across our political divides. By doing so, we remind ourselves that the “other” is – just like us – a person with family, friends, hopes, fears, values, beliefs, and intrinsic worth.	1
<b>American Dialogue Project</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> An American Dialogue Project call is a low-risk yet high-reward opportunity to talk to someone different from you with the help of a trained dialogue expert. It will likely be the most interesting 40 minutes of your day.	1
<b>Braver Angels Red/Blue workshops</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> There are two types of Red/Blue workshops: 3-hour workshops that cover two exercises, and 6-hour plus lunch workshops that cover all four exercises. We recommend that people attend the 6-hour version if possible.	1
<b>Collaborative Truth-Seeking</b> <a href="#">link</a>	This short article provides an alternative to debating as a way of discussing differing opinions: collaborative truth-seeking. It offers techniques to practice collaborative truth-seeking and ways to continue it after a conversation.	3
<b>Free Listening</b> <a href="#">link</a>	The Urban Confessional Free Listening movement seeks to connect people through non-judgmental, compassionate listening.	1
<b>Mismatch</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> Mismatch is a matching, scheduling, and real-time video conferencing platform purpose-built for civil discourse.	1.5
<b>On Being Civil Conversations Project</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> The Civil Conversations and Social Healing team represents The On Being Project’s presence in the world as we nourish, embolden and accompany the work of social healing. Our organizational capacities to produce audio and digital resources are strengthened by programs and convenings that stitch relationships across rupture and equip for resilience and repair.	1
<b>On the Table</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> The Chicago Community Trust’s On the Table is an annual forum designed to bring people together to make good things happen. ... The results are exciting new relationships, elevated civic conversations and genuine pathways toward collaborative action—outcomes that make our communities more connected, resilient and resourceful. On the Table serves as an example for other communities.	3
<b>OpenMind Platform</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> OpenMind is a non-profit organization that builds scalable, evidence-based tools to equip people with the habits of heart and mind to engage in more constructive and empathetic dialogue across differing backgrounds, beliefs, and values.	4



Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>The People’s Supper</b> <a href="#">link</a>	The People’s Supper offers the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop resources.</li> <li>• Train &amp; equip.</li> <li>• Coach &amp; advise.</li> <li>• Co-design &amp; develop strategy.</li> </ul>	3
<b>Sacred Discourse</b> <a href="#">link</a>	Sacred Discourse is a framework to foster “relational and connected conversations between individuals, within groups, and across society.” Resources include courses, workshops and think pieces.	3
<b>TableTalk</b> <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the website:</i> TableTalk facilitators lead discussion groups about a chosen topic while participants share a meal, listen, and ask open, straightforward questions to people who are equally as passionate, yet hold different perspectives. TableTalks are meant to be nonpartisan get togethers, in which students can learn with, grow from and understand one another.	1
<b>“Updated: A Resource Guide to Coronavirus for Government Leaders,”</b> Dustin Haisler, Government Technology, March 18, 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	<i>From the guide:</i> This list of resources is meant to connect leaders with useful tools to aid in response efforts.	2

## National League of Cities

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>“Moving City Council Meetings Online in Response to COVID-19,”</b> Angelina Panettieri, CitiesSpeak Blog, National League of Cities, March 23, 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	This blog post provides information about how municipal governments are changing their procedures and strategies to meet the requirement of sunshine laws, accessibility laws and other concerns about public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author examines how cities in Indiana, Arizona, South Carolina, Washington and other states have employed Zoom meetings, televised meetings and commentary via email. Some cities have moved their council meetings online and take public comments virtually in writing, video or via phone message.	3
<b>State-Specific COVID-19 Resource Pages for Local Leaders Developed and Updated by State Municipal Leagues,</b> National League of Cities, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This web page provides a list of links to state-specific resource pages.	3.5

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>COVID-19 and Cities: News and Resources</b> , League of Minnesota Cities, April 14, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This website provides city-specific updates and information to help citizens deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This extensive resource includes links to publications addressing emergency declarations and electronic meetings.	4
<b>Current Tools, Actions and Resources</b> , NLC Resources, National League of Cities, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This web page offers extensive resources, including links to the blog posts below that examine communications in city operations. Some resources relate to public engagement.	2
<b>“Coronavirus Communications: Make Your Messages Hit Home,”</b> Hud Englehart, CitiesSpeak Blog, National League of Cities, March 27, 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	Five key concepts are discussed that help support good communication in the COVID-19 environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let go of partisanship.</li> <li>• Separate data from facts.</li> <li>• Appoint a chief skeptics officer.</li> <li>• Convey calm with urgency.</li> <li>• Embrace technology.</li> </ul> A link to the recorded webinar is also available. This information may be less relevant as vaccines are rolled out and the end of the pandemic is in sight for many.	3
<b>“Sharing COVID-19 Information in Multiple Languages,”</b> Eli Craveiro-Frankel, Rita Ossolinski, Justin Price and Alejandra Piers-Torres, CitiesSpeak Blog, National League of Cities, April 3, 2020. <a href="#">link</a>	This blog post describes actions taken by city leaders throughout the country to ensure that “accurate and timely information [is] made available and readily accessible in multiple languages, including ASL (American Sign Language).” Links to publications and other resources provide further details of effective practices.	5

## State Departments of Natural Resources

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<b>COVID-19 Response: Stay Safe MN</b> , Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This website offers recreation resources from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.	1
<b>Public Engagement</b> , Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2021. <a href="#">link</a>	This web page provides information and links associated with public engagement. It is aimed toward the general public.	5

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Engage With DNR</b>, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, undated. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>Minnesota DNR’s community engagement platform instructs users to “[c]lick on the tiles below to learn about projects, connect with staff and stay informed.”</p> <p>Users register at <a href="https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/register">https://engage.dnr.state.mn.us/register</a> to take advantage of the open engagement opportunities that are of interest to them. Comments are independently moderated by Bang the Table.</p>	5
<p><b>“DNR Invites Public Review, Announces Meeting on Mille Lacs Lake Fisheries Management,”</b> News Releases, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, March 2, 2021. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This online news release is an example of the agency’s solicitation of public commentary on a specific project.</p> <p><i>From the news release:</i> Minnesotans can learn about and comment on fisheries management goals and objectives proposed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for Mille Lacs Lake. Public review of a five-year lake management plan is taking place now through Friday, April 2. Members of the public can comment via an online survey or during an online public meeting scheduled from 5-7 p.m., Tuesday, Mar. 23. Visit the Mille Lacs Lake web page for links to the draft management plan and meeting registration information.</p>	5
<p><b>Public Input Opportunities</b>, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, undated. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This public input web page includes a central calendar for public hearings and meetings. Each month lists meeting dates with topic names, beginning times and lengths, contacts and details about the meetings. The meetings primarily occur via Zoom, with phone participation available. The page also connects people to information about proposed administrative rules, as well as opportunities for public input on new and revised rules that will go to the Wisconsin State Legislature for debate and possible implementation.</p>	5
<p><b>Annual Spring Public Hearing and County Meeting</b>, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, undated. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>The Wisconsin Conservation Congress holds an annual public spring hearing and county meeting to allow citizens across the state to vote on questions intended to guide the DNR in its rule changes for the next year. While these hearings are typically held in person, given COVID-19 restrictions, the April 2020 hearing was held online and garnered a record number of participants; the 2021 hearing followed the same format. The 2021 spring hearing online input page went live on April 12 and remained open for 72 hours to allow citizens to offer feedback using a 57-question online SurveyMonkey survey. Results from citizen feedback will be posted as soon as they are available.</p>	4

## Urban Institute

Resource	Summary	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Community Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations</b>, Martha Fedorowicz, Olivia Arena and Kimberly Burrowes, Urban Institute, September 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>This guide assists community-based organizations that are interested in facilitating remote community engagement activities. The guide can be used by organizations, such as MnDOT, who are looking to broaden their outreach strategy generally.</p> <p>The guide presents a list of tools that can be used for facilitating remote community engagement activities (e.g., crowdsourcing, ecosystem mapping and data walks), which is helpful, and provides an additional resource list of articles related to community engagement (starting on p. 32 of the PDF), which were not reviewed as part of this process.</p>	4
<p><b>Pivoting Community Engagement During COVID-19,”</b> Martha Fedorowicz and Elsa Falkenburger, <i>Data@Urban</i>, Urban Institute, May 21, 2020. <a href="#">link</a></p>	<p>The article examines three strategies they will employ while pivoting engagement strategies during COVID-19:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and reframe all work in the context of COVID-19.</li> <li>• Employ new methods and modes of engagement.</li> <li>• Develop a plan and refine as you go.</li> </ul> <p>Content duplicated from resource above.</p>	2



# KYTC Virtual Public Meeting Guidance

As part of its Every Day Counts initiative, the Federal Highway Administration has encouraged agencies to engage the public more effectively by supplementing face-to-face information sharing with technology. Government organizations have been thrust into a new era of public engagement. With dozens of new communication formats, additional outreach should be conducted, although similar challenges remain:

- Difficulty reaching an adequate representation of the public impacted by the project.
- Engagement efforts are siloed across Districts and Divisions leading to disconnected practices and tools.
- Feedback is uninformed or off-topic.

Natural outcomes of these challenges are that engagement happens less often and later in the project development process, particular demographics are sometimes under-represented, and public trust remains fragile and dependent on high-profile, successful projects. However, through the use of online engagement (including virtual public meetings), meaningful and representative feedback from the public, especially hard-to-reach groups, can be achieved.

For example, recent virtual public engagement efforts for the City of San Diego's Park Master Plan received 58,000 data points and 6,000 comments from 1,800 participants – input which cannot be replicated in a traditional public meeting setting.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) has developed the following guidance for use by state transportation officials, other agencies, and practitioners to assist in the facilitation of virtual public meetings.

The decision to hold a public, local official/stakeholder, or advisory committee meeting, virtually or in-person, is a decision to be made by the project team in consideration of a variety of factors, including:

- **Federal-aid projects** have different public engagement requirements as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Projects with an Environmental Assessment (EA) require the opportunity for a Public Hearing to be held. Categorical Exclusion (CE) projects may have public meetings depending on the nature of the project.
- **Planning studies** can have a variety of public engagement opportunities based on the nature and goals of the study, as well as the available budget. While not required by law or regulation, much of the guidance in this document will enhance the opportunity for meaningful feedback in a virtual setting.
- **Right-of-way viewings** typically include elements of public meetings; however, impacted property owners are directly contacted.

The [Division of Highway Design Guidance Manual Chapter HD 600](#) should be consulted while planning public engagement to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations.

## Holding Virtual Public Meetings

### Advertisement

Several levels of communication are available for the advertisement of a virtual public meeting. Some/all may be appropriate for a particular virtual public meeting. The Project Team will define the meeting's format, which should be included in meeting advertisements.

Required elements of media advisories and legal notices for federal-aid projects are described in this section, or can be found in the in [Division of Highway Design Guidance Manual Chapter HD-604.5](#).

- **Personal invitation** by using USPS Every Door Direct postcards or personal letters to invite specific residences or businesses to the meeting.
- **Passive invitation** by using variable message boards or other means to invite travelers to the meeting.
- **Stakeholder invitation** by engaging key stakeholders and local officials to promote the meeting.
  - Provide stakeholders with details of the meeting via email or letter and encourage attendance and to invite others. The District Public Information Officer (PIO) and Area Development District (ADD) Transportation Planner can assist in developing stakeholder lists and contact information.
- **Targeted communication** by using social media or other online advertisement to invite web users to the meeting.
  - The Office of Public Affairs and the District PIO should be the contacts for requests to post information to the statewide or District social media accounts.
  - Information about the meeting should frequently be posted on the appropriate social media channels, especially as the meeting date approaches.
- **Mass Communication** by using an advertisement or a media advisory in the local newspaper or radio station to invite readers/listeners to the meeting.
  - The media advisory must include a statement that offers the public the opportunity to request project information be mailed to them, as it cannot be assumed everyone has reliable internet service and/or access. The statement in the advisory should read "Persons with limited internet access may request project information be mailed. Please contact (contact name) at (contact phone number) or (contact e-mail address)."
- Up to two **Legal notice(s)** as required for some federal-aid projects to invite public attendees and solicit comment. All portions of the legal notice must be coordinated with the District Environmental Coordinator or the Division of Environmental Analysis (DEA) for clarification.
  - The following statement is required in the legal notice: "In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), if anyone has a disability and will require assistance, please notify (contact name) of the necessary requirements no later than (deadline date). This request does not have to be in writing. Please call (contact phone number) or mail request to (address)." The deadline date for ADA requests should allow

time to arrange any necessary accommodations and should not be on a weekend nor on a holiday.

- The notice should also contain language encouraging those interested in historic properties to apply to become Consulting Parties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

The Public Involvement Coordinator in the Division of Highway Design should be notified so the meeting can be placed on the website of scheduled public meetings statewide.

Other tools are available and should be considered on a case-by-case basis by the project team.

### Project Documents

It is essential that the public have access to the same information at a virtual public meeting that would have been available at a traditional in-person public meeting.

- Ensure project documents/maps and the environmental document (if applicable) are publicly available online one week or more prior to the scheduled meeting. Documents should be posted as a PDF. Utilize District project websites if no specific project website was scoped; contact District PIO for assistance in setup and content.
- If a presentation is included as part of the meeting, post the slides in an easily accessible format (PowerPoint or PDF).
- A copy of the environmental document may be mailed to anyone who specifically requests one; otherwise, project information to be mailed (upon request) should include a project summary, a map, a project description, and a survey/comment form if appropriate. Include a postage paid envelope to return feedback.
- The preliminary design plans/drawings/renderings (marked “Preliminary: Subject to Change” or equivalent) must be posted online.
- If a consultant is setting up a project website, ensure District staff has access to the backend of the website for use once the project phase is completed.

### Comment Period

Virtual public meetings offer a wide range of avenues and methods to gather comments, from traditional online surveys and comment forms, to map-based feedback.

- The public should be offered a minimum of 15 calendar days to submit comments beginning on the date of the meeting.
- Keep the ability to view materials and respond via comments or take part in the survey for the entirety of the comment period.
- All comments received will be considered by the project team. All comments and responses are to be documented in the project record.

- If a live meeting is held, the meeting should be recorded and the audio and video posted as soon as is practical. Questions asked and answers from the live meeting may also be posted as they are completed, if appropriate.

### Summary Notebook

- Ensure all notices, materials, and comments are captured in the Public Meeting Summary Notebook (contents described in [HD-604.7](#)), which should be submitted to the Public Involvement Coordinator in the Division of Highway Design.

## Running a Successful Meeting

### Before the Meeting

- Practice. Practice again. Practice until the transitions between presenters, maps, videos and other multi-media elements, as well as managing Q&As from participants, appear seamless. Use multiple groups of users as test subjects (using personal computers, work computers, tablets laptops, etc.). Some corporate/agency firewalls may block the meeting client.
- A good moderator is very important to screen attendee questions and keep the meeting on track.
- Explain how to submit questions and comments, and how they will be addressed. This can be done as an attachment to invitation or on the splash screen preceding the presentation slides.
- Post meeting materials (agenda, maps, videos, etc.) online at least one week or more prior to the meeting. Share links in notification materials.
- Invite participants to submit questions before the meeting. If possible, structure the presentation to include answers to those questions. Present canned questions to start discussion or fill dead time.
- Secure the meeting against hijackers by using platforms with proven security features. Follow Commonwealth Office of Technology (COT) guidance. The KYTC Office of Information Technology (OIT) can also provide guidance on appropriate platforms based on number/access of attendees and meeting features.
- Use the meeting platform to restrict attendees from audio or visual capabilities at the beginning of the meeting.

### During the Meeting

- Explain the meeting's format, how to submit questions/comments, and when questions will be addressed. Devote time for questions and answers, but consider a maximum of 30 minutes for this period.
- A brief video (less than 10 minutes) introducing the project and explaining the format of the meeting can be included, if appropriate. This video should also be made available on the project website.
- Integrate live audience response tools to gather valuable participant data (and demonstrate they are being listened to).



- Deliver the presentation, then answer questions. Read the questions aloud before answering.
- Note that the full session will be recorded and posted on the project website afterward.
- Use a platform that shows – and captures – questions asked. Monitor questions before they are posted to block foul or derogatory language or are off topic. Not all questions or comments may be addressed during the meeting. Forward off topic questions to an appropriate person for an answer.
- Ensure presenters/panel mute microphones when not speaking. Use a headset with a microphone instead of a computer or tablet, if available. This will ensure no feedback from the device’s speaker is picked up by the microphone, as well as cutting down on surrounding noise.
- Have a clear path for internal communication on a different platform if something goes wrong during the meeting. Common technical failures include sound or microphone dropping, video issues, and internet disconnections. Have a backup presenter prepared to conduct the presentation in the event of unexpected technical failure involving the speaker. The moderator or another presenter should apologize and encourage the attendees to remain connected while minor issues are ironed out.
- In the event of a complete failure of the meeting platform, the meeting may have to be rescheduled and re-advertised.

### After the Meeting

- Post meeting materials on the project website (if not already there).
- Post the session recording on the project website. Let the public know it’s there.
- Post answers to all questions asked. Consider developing brief videos with the project team answering questions received. Let the public know they are there.
- Add participant email addresses (collected either before or during the meeting) to the project database. Keep participants updated on the project’s progress. These progress milestones can be project-specific and should be determined by the project team. Ensure that attendee email addresses are not shared publicly.

### Special Considerations

- Keep the population in mind. Investigate opportunities to translate project documents, surveys, or holding the presentation in languages other than English if a significant non-English speaking population is present. Offer participants without internet access a phone number which they can use to call in and listen to the meeting.
- The public should be provided a method to offer verbal feedback, either inside the chosen meeting platform or using a separate contact number. Verbal feedback should also be accommodated following the meeting.
- Virtual meetings make it more feasible to have multiple meetings on the same day or multiple days to reach as many attendees as possible; for instance, holding both a late afternoon and an early evening meeting.

- There are a variety of platforms that can be used; however, as more features are added they become harder to use and understand. As stated previously, OIT can provide guidance on appropriate platforms. If a consultant supplies the platform, the consultant should be responsible for technical support.
- Supplement live meetings with other means of sharing information and gathering feedback, such as polling, GIS-based data gathering, interactive surveys, and story maps.
- Ask for name, email, phone number, and possibly ZIP code from attendees in order to view the live meeting or submit comments.