## Online Public Engagement Resources - Laura Hodgson/Dave Andersen from Commerce (3/24/20)

Inquiry: I was wondering if we could contact MRSC and suggest they look into adding some additional information on public engagement.  What they have is really helpful, but I think a little more information could go a long way.  Here are some areas that would be helpful to add:

1)      Advantages/disadvantages of the various **web-based video conferencing tools** (including costs).

2)      Are there **other online engagement tools** that would be helpful?   (Mural, MindMixer, etc.?)

3)      Options for **communicating with hard to reach individuals** (i.e., without internet and/or phone)

4)      Other **non-video communication options** (online surveys or phone surveys, noticing at stores, mailings, telephone town halls, local/regional news outlets, email noticing) – are these still recommended?  Which are most effective?

RESPONSE:

## Video/Teleconferencing for Public Meetings/Other Online Engagement Tools

The platforms in the table shown on pages 3-5 can be used both for internal meetings and for public meetings. There are options like Microsoft Teams that are generally best for internal organizational use, but we focus on these platforms that will clearly work for both internal and public meetings, and do not require any other subscription for use. The Microsoft conferencing options require that your organization have Office 365 subscriptions, which include the entire [Microsoft Office suite](https://products.office.com/en-us/compare-all-microsoft-office-products?activetab=tab:primaryr2) and the conferencing application Teams.

## Options for communicating with hard-to-reach individuals (no phone or internet)

* Community newspapers and local government print newsletters.
* Utility bill inserts.
* Meet with local faith community leadership to request their assistance in delivering public health information through their communication networks.
* Post notices on bulletin boards in open stores and park areas.
* Broadcast information through your public access TV channels and news organizations
* Community reader boards may be useful for posting brief messages.
* Where facilities have been closed, be sure to post alternative contact information and instructions for accessing services at entryways.
* Meals on wheels operations can offer a way to deliver information and make regular checks on the condition of vulnerable older adults.

Other Low-tech, low-cost options for soliciting feedback from residents:

**For public meetings**

* Invite public comment via email for a fixed amount of time prior to the meeting. For example, commenting allowed from date the entire agenda packet is published until noon on the day of the meeting; your jurisdiction will want to vary this cut-off time to allow legislators time to read the comments. See this example from the [City of Olympia.](https://engage.olympiawa.gov/online-council-meetings)They are using software from EngagementHQ, but a local government can use a similar method without the software.

**Written updates**

* Establish a COVID-19 email list to send community updates to subscribers. Information that is pushed to subscribers via email is an effective way to reach them since they are more likely to open messages they chose to receive, and it saves them the effort of having to check for updates.

**Audio updates**

* Free conference calling services include [freeconference.com](https://www.freeconference.com/) and [Google Hangouts](https://hangouts.google.com/). These may be useful for delivering daily updates at set times

**FYI:**

[UrbanLeap](http://www.urbanleap.io/) is hosting virtual communities of [city and county leaders](https://get.urbanleap.io/covid-19-cm/) and [chief information officers](https://get.urbanleap.io/covid-19-cio/) to discuss the COVID-19 crisis, free of charge. These are members-only, closed group communities where you can ask questions and get answers from your peers.

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| **Video/Teleconferencing Platforms for Public Meetings** | | | |
| **Platform** | **Features** | **Additional Comments and Cost** | **Accessible Features** |
| [**Cisco WebEx**](https://www.webex.com/) | * Video * Mobile app * Audio-only call in * File Sharing   Also sells devices: wireless board, presentation screen, and videos conferencing system; room devices for video conferencing; desk devices for desktop video conferencing. | Potential barrier: requires all attendees to install a plug-in.  Free plan for up to 100 participants, but only 40 minutes in duration.  Price tiers per host per month:  Starter--$13.50  Plus--$17.95  Business--$26.95  [Complete pricing details](https://mrscenter-my.sharepoint.com/personal/lcrandall_mrsc_org/Documents/Blog%20posts/Pricing%20details:) | Low Vision Support: Windows high contrast and Chrome-only browser high contrast, zoom, browser text resizing.  Screen Reader Support: works best with latest version of JAWS.  Limited keyboard navigation.  More on [accessibility features](https://help.webex.com/en-us/cfojgdb/Webex-Web-App-Accessibility-Features)  Webex Meetings [Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates](https://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/about/accessibility/voluntary-product-accessibility-templates.html?dtid=osscdc000283#webex). |
| [**GoToMeeting**](https://www.gotomeeting.com/) | * Install not required for attendees. * Automatic meeting recording with transcription. * Simple user interface. * Mobile apps * Online presenter control * Polling and live Q&A available * Audio-only call-in * Chat * File Sharing * Installation not required for attendees. * ‘Meeting Room’ feature eliminates the need for access codes. * Option for password-protected meeting. | Disable your pop-up blocker.  Price tiers per organizer per month:  Professional--$12.00  Business--$16.00  Enterprise—call for quote  [Complete pricing details](https://www.gotomeeting.com/meeting/pricing) and features. | Low-vision support: Windows high contrast may be used Transcription  Color and font standards were passed for certain features.  Keyboard (tab) navigation.  Keyboard shortcuts.  More on [accessibility features](https://support.goto.com/meeting/help/what-accessbility-features-are-available-in-gotomeeting) |
| [**Zoom**](https://zoom.us/) | * Installation not required. * Automatic meeting recording with transcription. * [Security](https://zoom.us/security) and encryption. * Can disable record, chat, and/or notification features for one or all participants. * Claims to work with ‘any device and operating system’. * Password-protected meetings available. * One of the largest participant maximums available—Up to 1,000 participants * Screen annotation on shared screen visible to all attendees. * Polling and live Q&A. * Chat. * Filesharing. | [Zoombombing](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/20/style/zoombombing-zoom-trolling.html) is the term for when trolls hijack your meeting screen and project their own, often objectionable, content. Meetings with public links—such as a local government would issue for a public meeting—are the main targets. This is a ‘unique feature’ to zoom (and a downside!)  Price tiers per host per month:  Basic—Free  Pro-- $14.99  Business--$19.99  Enterprise--$19.99  [Complete pricing details](https://zoom.us/pricing) and features | Closed captioning.  Low-vision support: keyboard shortcuts. Product tested for keyboard-only use.  Screen reader support.  More on [accessibility here](https://zoom.us/accessibility), including VPAT documents. |

You can find additional guidance on accessible meetings from the following resources:

* [Making Meetings Accessible](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/transcripts/Making-Meetings-Accessible.pdf) from the Center for Disease Control includes guidance on accessible audio/video meetings, and onsite meeting accessibility.
* [Worksheet for communicating](https://www.capio.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/access_functional_needs_communications_worksheet.pdf?1584650414) with those that have access or functional needs. Accessibility features are noted in the overview of Platforms. From the [California Association of Public Information Officers](https://www.capio.org/member-benefits).

## Other, non-video options:

Web-based and app-based engagement platforms have the benefit of being open all hours so residents can engage when it’s convenient for them. The downside to these types of engagement is that it may make it more difficult for marginalized or underrepresented residents to engage on these platforms. They’re a good addition to a larger communication strategy for engagement and input that should include ‘old technology’ like paper surveys, charettes, etc.

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| Platforms for Public Engagement | | |
| Platform | Features | Additional Comments & Costs |
| [PublicInput.com](https://blog.publicinput.com/) | Engagement websites/surveys; text message/SMS; email; live polling; social media; paper surveys; online town halls. | Mapping capability allows for identifying underrepresented groups for engagement or targeting neighborhoods for project input.  Pricing on request. |
| [EngagementHQ](http://www.bangthetable.com) | Designed specifically for public engagement on projects; discussion forums; collect, analyze and/or solicit feedback; facilitate dialogue, discussion, and/or deliberation;  Propose and/or develop policies, ideas, and recommendations management; voting and surveys. 24/7 comment moderation provided. | Potential barrier: may require a backend interface at additional cost.  Used by City of Olympia and City of Mercer Island.  Four tiers of support: pricing on request |
| [Mind Mixer](https://www.mindmixer.com/) | Surveys; instant polls; map-based submissions; idea submission that includes text submission or ratings; photo sharing.  SMS (text) integration | Pricing on request. |
| [The Hive](https://the-hive.com.au/) | Q&A feature for public questions; quick polls; capacity for multiple discussion topics; file management; participatory budgeting; surveys. | Scalable; subscription-based; pricing on request. |
| [Mural](https://mural.co/)—included here by request. | Multi-user whiteboard with chat. Visual tool, highly specialized; designed for project management/LEAN undertakings. Intended for team collaboration, not public engagement. | $12.00 per user per month |