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Using Virtual Platforms for Community Engagement

**Virtual Engagement** involves using various forms of the internet and social media to engage with the community as opposed to in-person. There are pros and cons to using a virtual platform and some important things to keep in mind when doing community engagement virtually.

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| **Virtual Engagement Pros and Cons** |
| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| * Allows people to participate without spending as much time as physically going to a meeting
* Allows people to participate when it’s convenient for them
* Removes the need to find someone to care for your child/loved one in order to go to participate
* Does not require a mode of transportation
* Some feel more comfortable joining online vs. in person
* Can potentially reach a wider variety of participants including those who don’t usually participate
* Reduces travel time for staff/presenters/facilitators
* Recorded presentations can be viewed later by those who missed the event
 | * Interpersonal communication is more difficult
* Access to technology and internet is limited to some people and some areas
* Not all the people we need to reach are able to use technology without assistance
* Unable to draw people in by offering food, etc.
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**Suggestions**

* Make it easy to get to the online meetings; create “one-click access.”
* Keep meetings interactive by using polling questions and other ways to engage with the speakers.
* Ensure virtual platforms are Title VI and ADA compliant.
	+ Zoom has a closed captioning option
* Make sure there is someone to moderate chat window.
* Remember that many people have not done a virtual meeting.
* Provide a “technical trial” before the event so participants can practice using the platform.
* Provide simple “user instructions” for participants prior to the event. Some examples:
	+ [**Zoom Technology Guide**](https://sdc.promotelocal.com/help/) - provided to the Self Determination Conference attendees
		- *Use as example when using other platforms*
	+ **Generations Online**
		- [*Instructions*](https://generationsonline.org/gol4kindle/zoom/260zoom002020b.html) *for getting on a Zoom meeting*
		- [*FAQs about Zoom*](https://generationsonline.org/gol4kindle/zoom/901Help_001.html)
		- [Basic instructions](https://www.generationsonline.org/apps/welcome.html) on how to use an iPhone, iPad, Android phone or tablet and Amazon fire
		- [Google Meet Quick Start Guide](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cjmahoney%5CDownloads%5CHangouts%20Meet%20Quick%20Start.pdf)
		- [GoToMeeting Attendee Quick Reference Guide](https://sacme.org/Resources/Documents/Virtual%20Journal%20Club/GoToMeeting_Attendee_QuickRef_Guide.pdf)
		- [How to join a meeting on MS Teams](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/join-a-teams-meeting-078e9868-f1aa-4414-8bb9-ee88e9236ee4)

**Social Media Tools – Facebook and YouTube**

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| **Social Media Pros and Cons** |
| **PROS** | **CONS** |
| * **Familiarity**. Unlike teleconferencing tools, these platforms are familiar and easy-to-use for people of all ages and backgrounds.
* **Unlimited participants**. Reaches a large number of people with a large amount of information
* **Low cost.** Inexpensive way to distribute all types of documents and media.
* **Real time outreach tool.**
 | * **Limited to one presenter**. These formats are built to take one continuous stream of video from a single device. If you need to host multiple participants remotely, this is a deal breaker.
* **Limited control of public comments.** Comments are unstructured and mostly unmoderated which could potentially lead to vocal participants creating a toxic environment. Since users can edit and delete comments, you may not be able to save them all as a public record.
* **Barriers for people without broadband**. Unlike conferencing tools, these services don’t provide a way for residents to listen along over the phone in cases of limited Internet access.
* **Can’t track by person who is viewing information.** There is no way to track attendance/participation by person.
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**Want to Learn more? Additional Resources:**

* [Using Facebook to Engage Citizens in Your Community](https://www.civicplus.com/blog/ce/using-facebook-to-engage-citizens-in-your-community)
* [Virtual Resources for Older Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic](https://www.geripal.org/2020/09/Virtual-Resources-for-Older-Adults-COVID19.html) (GeriPal Blog)
* [Virtual Classes for Older Adults: Here to Stay](https://www.ncoa.org/blog/virtual-classes-for-older-adults-here-to-stay/) (NCOA Blog)
* [Community Engagement Toolkit](https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/community-engagement) (New Zealand)