****

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.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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. |

**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:\Users\jmahoney\Downloads\Hangouts%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**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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. |

**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)