

A Guide to Community Outreach and Engagement for Our New Normal

Best practices for community outreach and engagement during and post COVID-19



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Moving Forward

In 2020, amidst the emergence of COVID-19, the face of human interaction has changed. As cities lift restrictions, and public outreach meetings begin to take place both virtually and in-person, practicing social distancing has now become the new norm for societies around the globe. This will likely be the case for the foreseeable future.

This **Community Outreach and Engagement Guide** is meant to provide critical insight to practices, including preliminary, during, and post COVID-19, that may be utilized throughout the entirety of the public outreach meeting process.

First and foremost, precautionary measures, proper sanitation practices, and prioritizing the safety of all participants is crucial. With uncertainties revolving around COVID-19, meticulous planning is vital as we move towards in-person gatherings. Similarly, virtual meetings will also facilitate a different type of engagement. Adjustments suitable for both types of engagement require a holistic approach. This **Community Outreach and Engagement Guide** details various tips that will assist you throughout your community outreach journey as we navigate throughout our new normal.

Throughout this guide, there are examples of tools that can be used for outreach and engagement. Neither **Bagué Group**, **Brizaga**, or **MAGBE Consulting Services** endorse any of these tools. Please do appropriate due diligence and select the tool that is best for you.



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Remote engagement in the face of COVID-19

There has been an undeniable shift in the way human interaction may now take place. With remote engagement being at the forefront of public outreach, as well as it being a relatively modern form of communication, online meetings need thought and preparation in order to successfully provide a productive process that effectively engages the public. Online communication requires flexibility and patience. It is important to accommodate all individuals participating in virtual meetings. To achieve this, setting goal objectives prior to the meeting and creating a definitive outline will help to maintain the meeting on track and running smoothly.

Numerous factors must be taken into consideration when preparing for your virtual meeting. The distinct facets of remote engagement, when compared to in person communication, constitute different methods of development and preparedness. Whether it encompasses taking additional time to hold meetings or having a co-facilitator that works in the backend, preparation is essential. To effectively communicate and ensure that all possible scenarios have been accounted for, it is important to have personnel with specifically designated tasks. By delegating work and targeting individuals for specific tasks, you are creating a solid foundation for your meeting by having people field any unforeseen circumstances.

The following information will present you with key points that allow you to productively prepare for several possible scenarios when interacting with the public through remote engagement. This **Community Outreach and Engagement Guide** can be used as a step by step check-off process that broadly details many routes to productive and practical remote engagement.

Best Practices for Online Meetings

- **Determine the best platform for your needs**
Research different platforms that allow you to engage with the public audience through a means of interactive online communication.
- **Perform a dry run or two**
Prior to your actual meeting, attempt to perform a dry run to seek out any mishaps and to determine where additional communication may be necessary.
- **Share meeting agenda and rules for meeting**
For all personnel involved, sharing the meeting agenda and meeting rules is a must. This practice warrants all participants to be aware of the scope of the meeting. Additionally, having a visual document that individuals may use to follow the entirety of the meeting is helpful.
- **Provide phone option**
For those that are unable to watch the online meeting, it is essential to provide a dial-in phone option that individuals can use to call in. By providing this option, audiences may listen to the meeting as well as actively participate.
- **Send out reminders, text alerts, direct call in prompts**
During and prior to the meeting, it is important to set meeting reminders and/or send out text alerts for individuals to call in. By providing this option, more individuals will be notified to engage in the meeting, thus ensuring audience involvement. You can also call recipients directly and patch them into your meeting.
- **Have a moderator to field questions**
Meetings run smoothly when a moderator is in place to field incoming calls and questions from the audience. For audience members to gain the most out of the virtual meeting, having this personnel in place greatly increases audience participation and understanding of the materials provided throughout the meeting.
- **Record it**
In order to reach more individuals, record your virtual meeting for audiences that were unable to attend, as well as for optimal record documentation. This enables you to post it afterwards and alternatively reach a broader audience. (Check local, state, and federal laws regarding notice and compliance for recording.)
- **Share items and resources discussed**
It is important to follow up with participants and keep them engaged by sharing the meeting presentation slides. By doing so, audience members can reflect upon the information given to them, have the ability to engrave the materials deeper, and possibly relay the information to others as well.
- **Engagement after virtual events**
Following up with the meeting participants by sending a thank you email with sources and a second email with the link of the recording will corroborate positive feedback and continue to keep participants informed.

ADA Compliance Considerations

As we transition into a new way of life, and subsequently a new normal due to COVID-19, certain criterias must be met to inclusively serve all individuals in society. In-person and virtual public meetings must be proactive in the way in which they prepare to meet the needs of those who need additional accommodations. One of the primary methods of inclusivity includes making all pertinent information compliant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Adding visual subtitles, recording the meeting for those unable to attend, and providing any materials ahead of time will help to enhance inclusivity for all participants.

- **Closed captions**

Adding a closed caption writer to your virtual meeting will allow for people with hearing disabilities to participate during the meeting. It also has the added benefits of helping attendants focus and retain information, along with aiding those who speak English as their second language.

Meeting programs with closed captioning options:

Zoom | GoToMeeting | Microsoft Teams

Live closed captioning services:

Captioning Star | Rev

- **Screen readers**

Using a screen reader allows for blind or visually impaired users to read the text or images on computer screens.

Meeting programs with screen reader support:

Zoom | Microsoft Teams

What is ADA Compliance?

ADA compliance refers to the Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design, which states that all electronic and information technology (like websites) must be accessible to people with disabilities.

Find the links to the closed captioning services on Page 15.

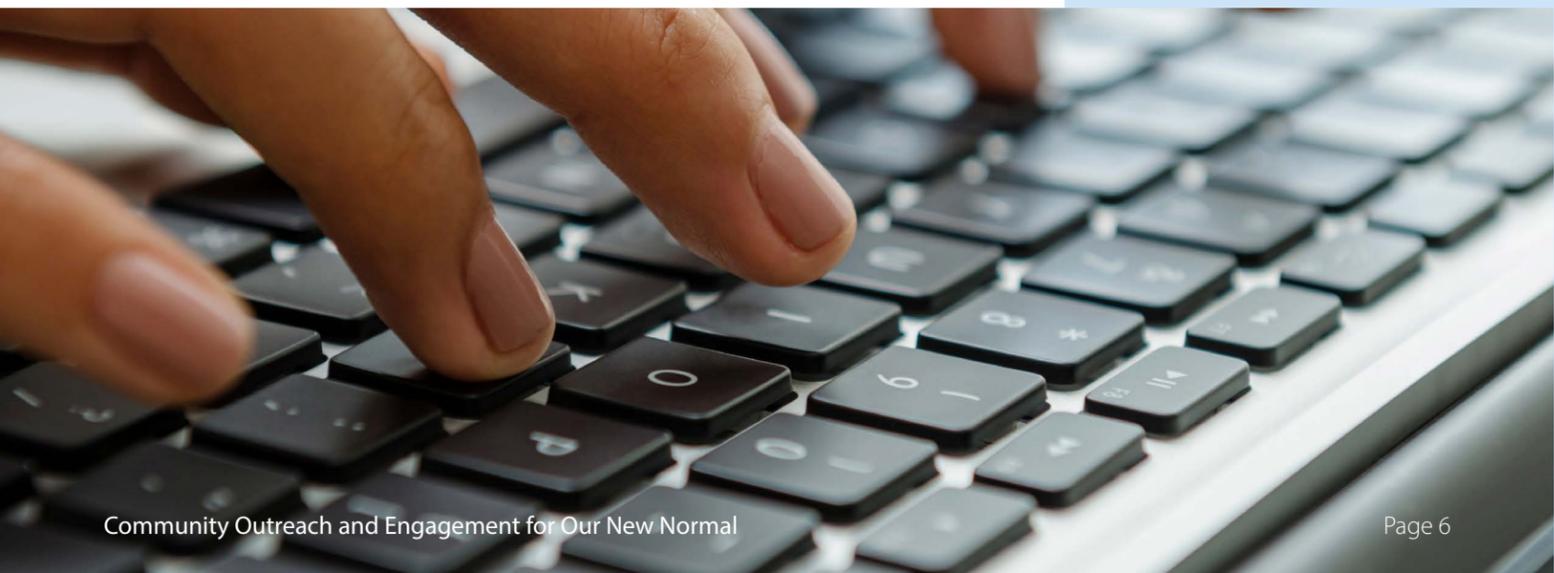
What is Florida's Sunshine Law?

The Florida Sunshine Law is a series of laws that guarantees the public transparency and disclosure to the public records (meetings, records, votes, deliberations, and other official actions) of governmental bodies in Florida.

Open Government Considerations

A benchmark of trust between people and their government is transparency. During a prolonged emergency, it can be challenging to ensure continued and open communications, but this is exactly the time when an open government is most important. Many local governments have declared a local state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and have prohibited most in-person gatherings. However, it is important to ensure that the public still feels engaged and heard, especially as governments are spending money during budget constrained times.

For meetings that include members of a governmental body, such a City Council or Commission, it is important to review existing laws, executive orders, and other guidance with a local government's attorney or counsel. It is also important to review local ordinances and guidance regarding public meetings to ensure compliance with all appropriate regulations. The digital-first approach taken during COVID-19 has brought to light the need to be flexible in how the public is engaged, and if done right, will change outreach for the better.



Best Practices for In-Person Community Outreach

Once in-person meetings are safe to convene, there will be specific consideration to ensure participants feel safe and are protected. There are valid concerns relative to holding in-person public meetings during COVID-19. This guideline takes into consideration these concerns and proposes both innovative mechanisms and critical sanitary requirements that need to be implemented in order to safely hold in-person public outreach events based on the CDC Guidelines and best practices.

- **Advertising with Safety Descriptions**

Prior to your meeting, it is critical that there is a clear and defined outline of safety requirements needed to be met. This can be accomplished by emailing or sending out a list of what personal materials each participant must bring, what materials the host of the meeting will provide, and pertinent information about sanitary precautions and preliminary preparations.

- **Masks Required**

Bringing your own mask to in-person meetings has become a safety requirement. Some companies may purchase additional masks for audience members to use. However, aim to always have a mask handy.

- **Signage and Arrows**

Along with the safety descriptions, directional signs should be used to guide participants through the proper flow of the venue. Signage reminding participants to wear a mask, avoid touching their face, sanitize their hands & personal items, and to keep a distance of 6 feet apart should be prominently displayed throughout the space.

- **Distance Markers**

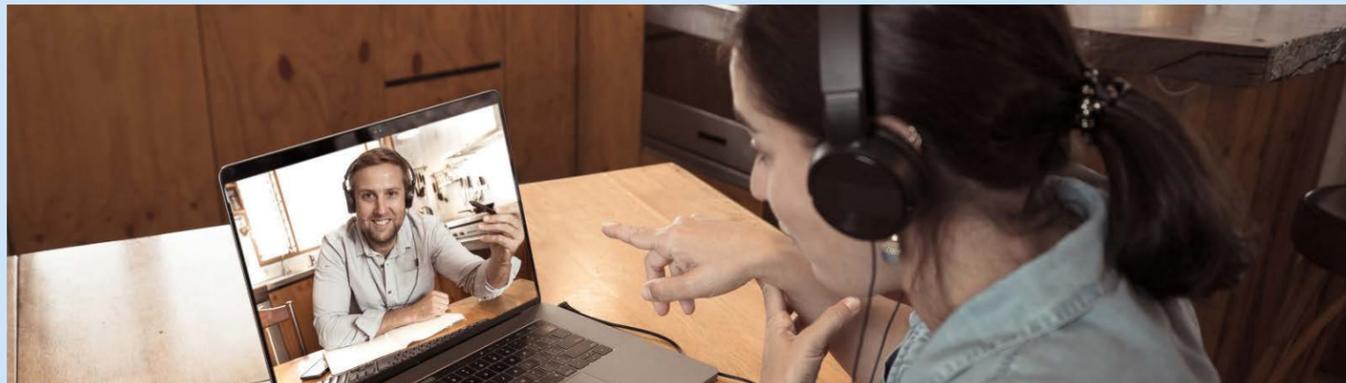
To abide by current social distancing standards, it will be required to follow distance markers and traffic flow signs when attending an in-person outreach meeting. By properly laying out distance markers, all members attending meetings may have an easy visual as to where they should be standing and the proper distance apart from one another.

- **Hand Sanitizer Usage**

It will be a requirement to use hand sanitizer at the entrance prior to entering the meeting space. This will create an additional sense of sanitary security by minimizing the chance of migrating germs.

- **Room and Sanitary Specifications**

Chairs will be set at appropriate social distance of six feet apart, gloves will be worn prior



to room setup and after, and there will be proper usage of disinfectant materials for cleaning purposes. View our Traditional Presentation Meeting Plan Layout on page 12.

- **Single Use Materials**

If a meeting requires audience members to utilize pens or other materials, there will be strict sanitary requirements such as wiping down pens after use and prohibiting the sharing of meeting materials.

- **QR Codes**

In order to minimize the potential of migrating germs, in-person meetings should promote the use of QR codes so participants may utilize their own smart phone to interact with the materials provided throughout the engagement.

- **Live stream**

For those unable to attend the in-person meeting, it is important to offer the option of live streaming your meeting. This enables a larger population to partake in the event and promotes an inclusive environment.

- **Break It Apart**

To satisfy sanitary requirements, in-person meetings should not have large clusters of people in one room. To combat this, attempt to create longer programming to reduce the number of people interacting at once. Prioritize small groups in rooms or break down the meeting into different sections and times so there is minimal contact. View our Open House Meeting Plan Layout on page 13.

- **Resource Staff Member**

It is ideal to recommend the implementation of a resource staff member at the entrance of in-person meetings. By having this staff member in place, this would ensure that proper sanitary requirements are met and abided by.

- **Use a Digital Messaging Platform**

Instead of comment cards, attempt to find digital platforms that allow collaborative communication between the audience and the host of the meeting.

- **Dedicate an Email Address or Phone Number**

You can also create a dedicated email address and provide a designated project phone line to leave comments for those who do not feel comfortable at an in person meeting.

- **Social Media Follow Up**

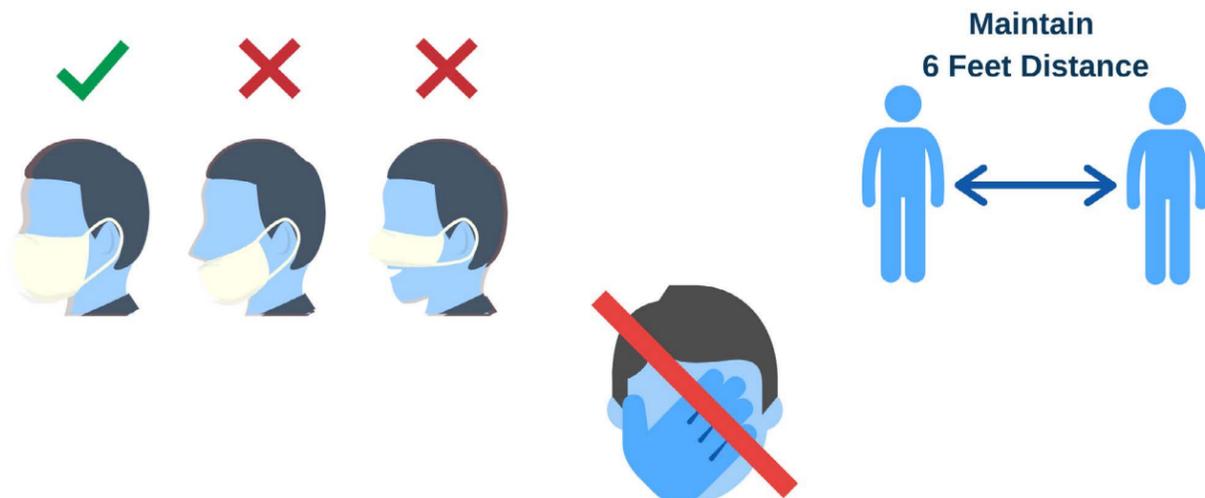
After the meeting has concluded, the video should be posted on the project website and promoted on social media so those unable to attend can still engage.

Participant Expectations for Meetings

As a participant attending a meeting or event it is important that you follow the meeting requirements while in attendance. Help protect yourself and others, do not attend a meeting if you are sick or suspect you have been exposed.

PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS WHEN ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS

- Wear a mask and make sure it is on correctly.
- Follow the verbal, visual rules and/or signs.
- Avoid touching as many items or things as possible including your face.
- If you must touch items, wash your hands or clean with sanitizer.
- Please have a device that can scan QR Codes (For example a phone or tablet with camera).
- If you have a question or concern speak with event staff.
- Do not attend if you are sick or suspect that you have been exposed to COVID-19.



Host/Staff Expectations for Meetings

Just like participants, the host and staff should hold the same standards to maintain a sanitary and safe environment for their staff. This should be shared with staff prior. During the meeting, even the staff should arrive some time prior to ensure the correct setup and sanitary conditions of the space.

HOST EXPECTATIONS WHEN CONDUCTING A PUBLIC MEETING

- Enforce meeting expectations and requirements.
- Wear the proper protective gear. If using gloves, be sure to use one per task and then discard properly after use and apply a new set of gloves.
- Set up the meeting space properly with correct spacing and supplies.
- Maintain social distance among staff.
- Provide WiFi for attendants at the meeting space, if they are required to be online to participate.
- Disinfect all items that will be touched by participants, before, during and after the meeting.
- Do not allow any staff to attend if they are sick or if they suspect that they have been exposed.



Outside the Box Community Engagement

TRADITIONAL - OLD SCHOOL

Check off these traditional marketing ideas to promote your next project

- Run an ad in the newspaper
- Create a phone number with voicemail
- Create a mail in questionnaire with return address
- Send direct mail piece
- Place an ad on a car and drive around the community
- Place flyers in open community spaces
- Pick up the phone and call
- Hire Sign Spinner
- Run a radio spot
- Place door hangers
- Run ads on local TV
- Partner with local newspaper to report on the topic
- Post in a neighborhood association newsletter

MODERN - NEW SCHOOL

Check off these modern marketing ideas to promote your next project

- Create a form online
- Create a web page or a lead page on the topic/project.
- Add a notification banner or pop up to your website
- Create video campaign
- Post on digital neighborhood boards
- Create a social media campaign (potentially boost posts)
- Create an online challenge
- Create hashtag
- Create an interactive ad with QR Codes or VR Images
- Create an educational blog series
- Run ads on social platforms related to your audience

Resources

Applications/Programs for Virtual Meetings:

Zoom - www.zoom.us

Go To Meeting - www.gotomeeting.com

Microsoft Teams - <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

Live Caption Services:

Captioning Star - www.captioningstar.com

Rev - www.rev.com

COVID-19 Virtual and In-Person Meeting Resources:

CDC Considerations for Events and Gatherings - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-events-gatherings-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf>

NOAA Virtual Meeting Engagement - <https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/virtual-meetings.html>

How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community - <https://rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/>



If you have any more tips and resources on how to help conduct a safe and sanitary meeting or event please reach out to us below:



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