



Guidance on Remote Engagement for Public Participation

The following proposed best practices for remote engagement synthesize a range of available literature on the use of Internet, telephonic, and other remote tools for public engagement. The chart below provides guidance for remote engagement by the GC3, separating the creation of a remote engagement strategy into three stages: 1) selecting tools and platforms for remote engagement, 2) implementing these tools and platforms in a strategic and transparent way, and 3) ensuring accessibility of any remote engagement mechanisms.

	PRACTICE	EXPLANATION	THINGS TO CONSIDER
SELECTING TOOLS FOR REMOTE ENGAGEMENT			
#1	Set goals.	Knowing the type and format of remote engagement sought is crucial to choosing an appropriate tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Are you seeking close-ended or open-ended input? b. Do you want the public to be able to interact with each other's input, or only send input directly to you? c. Do you want multiple tiers of options for engagement, so that some people can offer quick feedback and others can offer more in-depth thoughts? d. Do you need to collect feedback, responses, or opinions from remote participants in real time (e.g., in order to make a decision during a meeting?) e. What are quantitative goals for digital participation? Can the tool you are considering handle large groups of people participating at the same time?
#2	Evaluate capacity.	Be realistic about the amount of staff training and time needed by the GC3 or DEEP for successful implementation of an online strategy, and whether or not those staffing resources are available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consider technological capacity of participants and accessibility concerns: see points below regarding Ensuring Accessibility of online, for examples of accessibility concerns to keep in mind.
IMPLEMENTING REMOTE ENGAGEMENT			



#3	Plan in detail.	Create a detailed work plan and timeline that notes the goals for remote engagement, the periods when engagement activity will be especially critical, and which online tools should be used to meet goals at appropriate times.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Will the tools you are considering reach the intended audiences?2. What support will members of the public need to use the tools?
#4	Have a communication strategy.	Make sure that the plan for soliciting online public engagement is consistent with your overall communications strategy. Utilize existing communications resources to boost online opportunities. Make sure you are communicating transparently about how online tools will factor into decision making processes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How will you get the word out to members of the public?2. All public meetings must have an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) notice, which includes the contact information for who handles accessibility requests, and information may be provided in an alternative format upon request.
#5	Set ground rules.	Set ground rules for any online spaces in the same way you would in-person spaces, and clearly communicate these expectations with everyone engaging with the process at the outset of their engagement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How will you make sure ground rules are digitally available to everyone, even if they are newcomers to the process?2. What ground rules do you need to function (for example, during a zoom meeting, whether and how lines will be muted)?
#6	Set clear expectations for staff.	Set clear roles and expectations for staff who are responsible for implementing new online tools.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the roles of staff?2. How will you communicate those goals and expectations?
#7	Solicit and respond to feedback.	Solicit feedback not only on the outcomes of procedure but also on procedural mechanisms used, such as online platforms for submitting commentary, etc. Take timely action to respond to feedback whenever possible, and communicate these changes with stakeholders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How will you solicit feedback from the public?2. What is the process for tracking and responding to feedback?



ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY OF REMOTE ENGAGEMENT			
#8	Make decisions about incentives, standards, and accountability with respect to the accessibility of remote engagement tools.	All accessibility measures taken for in-person spaces should be duplicated for remote engagement. These include providing translation and interpretation services, keeping detailed records of public meetings by (when appropriate and consented-to) making public meeting minutes or recordings, and identifying and publicizing the identity of point people for handling questions and requests related to accessibility measures, and for implementing changes in response.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider whether creating financial or other incentives for participation is appropriate.²¹ Make sure to value people’s time. Make decisions about incentives and outreach by developing an understanding of potential obstacles to participation faced by your primary stakeholder groups. 2. A remote engagement strategy that seeks to diversify community outreach will have to account for different trends in the demographic preference for various remote tools. Different platforms for remote engagement will be frequented by, or easier to use for, different demographics. <i>See, e.g., “Civic Engagement in the Digital Age”</i> (exploring how income, educational, age, and other demographic gaps are reflected in the use of various online or other media, especially for political purposes). 3. Double check: are the tools accessible for people with disabilities and people who speak languages other than English? 4. Have someone (informally) appointed as the conversation manager to facilitate turn taking. This is extremely helpful when interpreters are present and can only interpret one thing at a time.

Tools for Remote Engagement

Consistent with the **Draft Environmental Justice Public Participation Guidance**, this document organizes forms of engagement, whether remote or in-person, into three general categories: consulting (soliciting one-way feedback), deliberating (dynamic discussion and/or decision-making), and informing (broadcasting one-way communications to the public).

The following table gives some examples of tools that can be used to pursue all three of these categories of engagement via remote means. This is not an exhaustive list, but meant to help frame and ground the discussion of remote engagement in actual examples for how remote engagement is commonly facilitated.



TOOLS & EXAMPLES	CONSULTING	DELIBERATING	INFORMING
Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and NextDoor, and attached widgets like Facebook and Twitter polls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online surveys/petitions/polls such as Google Forms, Survey Monkey, and Poll Everywhere (which allows for real-time collection of answers)	Yes	No	With limitations
Interactive government websites or blogs where the public can post comments	Yes	Yes	Yes
Programs through which the public can access public meetings by computer or by phone, such as FreeConferenceCalls.com phone lines, Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Jit.si. These tools can also be used by the public to observe and participate in webinars (informational sessions on the Internet).	With limitations	Yes	Yes
Informational videos/graphics that can be distributed on social media, public websites, etc.	No	No	Yes
Online receptacles for the public to submit photographic, voice recorded, or video feedback, such as a dedicated email address or submission form on a .gov website	Yes	No	With limitations
Collaborate with other statewide agencies/organizations that serve specific populations.			

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