CTDEEP Environmental Justice Public Participation Plan
Guidance on Remote Engagement for Public Information Meetings

Context and Document Purpose

This document is intended to outline available resources and sample practices for facilitating remote public participation and community engagement due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This document refers to these forms of soliciting public participation as "remote engagement," and understands effective engagement to include not only making meetings publicly accessible, but also proactively reaching out to community members outside of face-to-face informational public meetings.

Permit applicants may use this document to inform ongoing efforts to integrate public participation into their work while conforming to the need for social distancing. The tools for remote engagement referenced here also remain relevant beyond the context of a pandemic. While there are limitations to the efficacy of remote engagement, it can ideally serve in the future as a complement to; though not substitute for, in-person mechanisms for public participation. Established processes and platforms for remote engagement may, for example, ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities that may render in-person attendance difficult, or increase awareness among people who favor online participation over other forms of engagement.

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 permit applicants to provide remote engagement in 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.	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 for the successful implementation of an online strategy. Evaluate what staffing resources are available.	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.	a. Will the tools you are considering reach the intended audiences? b. 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 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.	a. How will you get the word out to members of the public?
#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	a. How will you make sure ground rules are digitally available to everyone, even if they are newcomers to the process?

		engaging with the process at the outset of their engagement.	b. 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.	a. What are the roles of staff? b. 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.	a. How will you solicit feedback from the public? b. 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.	a. Consider whether creating financial or other incentives for participation is appropriate. Make sure to value people's time. Make decisions about incentives and outreach by developing an understanding potential obstacles to participation faced by your primary stakeholder groups. b. 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. *See, e.g.,* "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age" (exploring how

			income, educational, age, and other demographic gaps are reflected in the use of various online or other media, especially for political purposes. c. Double check: are the tools accessible for people with disabilities and people who speak languages other than English?

Tools for Remote Engagement

Consistent with the Environmental Justice Public Participation Plan Guidelines, your Environmental Justice Public Participation Plan should organize 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). https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/environmental_justice/EJGuidpdf.pdf

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 .gov 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. The public to observe and participate in webinars can also use these tools (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

Note: Please be advised that pursuant to Governor Lamont's Executive Order No. 7L, all statutory and regulatory administrative time requirements and deadlines under the Uniform Administrative Procedure Act, the Public Utility Environmental Standards Act and the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, including, but not limited to, final decision deadlines and any other time limitations for applications, petitions, Development & Management Plans, requests for tower sharing and requests for exempt modifications shall be extended for a period not to exceed 90 days.
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7M.pdf?la=en

Abbreviated Bibliography

"The Beginner's Guide to Effective Online Engagement" [Link here]
MetroQuest (a public involvement software company)
Recommendations on best practices and promoting participation, based on observations of use metrics on the back end, as well as one case study from a project it contracted with the public Hillsborough Metropolitan Planning Organization in Tampa, Florida.

"Why Choose Online Community Engagement Platforms & Software" [Link here]
OpenGov
 (A public involvement software company)
Recommendations on best practices for promoting participation using remote engagement tools.

"Broadening Public Participation Using Online Engagement Tools" [Link here]
Institute for Local Government
Provides examples of actually implemented online engagement strategies and guidance on best practices, also includes advice solicited from producers of major online engagement programs/platforms.

"Civic Engagement in the Digital Age" (2013) [Link here]
Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
Examines online and offline political engagement and "pays special attention to the role of social networking sites in people's political activities."

"Let's Get Digital! – 52 Tools for Online Public Engagement" (2015) [Link here]
PublicVoice (a consulting firm in New Zealand that works with local and central government agencies to develop engagement strategies)
Straightforward list of different tools available to facilitate remote engagement.

Ground Rules for Virtual Meetings and Conversations (2020) [Link here]

Everyday-Democracy.org A starting guide for establishing ground rules for remote engagement