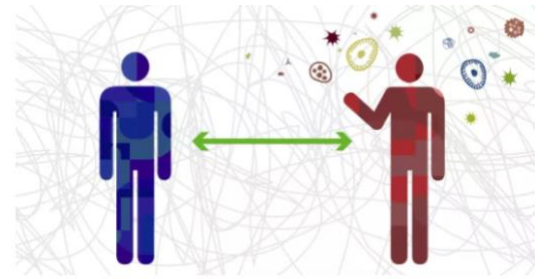


Engaging your Community in the time of Social Distancing

Community/resident/stakeholder engagement is an essential component of community and regional planning.

Here are three suggestions for how you can do your part to flatten the coronavirus curve of infections and still effectively engage your residents and stakeholders.



(Image credit: Shutterstock)

1. Continue to hold all your regularly scheduled resident/stakeholder engagement meetings—but do so using the most widely available and low cost technology that will enable people to participate from their homes.

We researched several technologies and are using [Zoom](#), because it is available for free and can be used with both video—if available—and without—as just a phone. Many people have smart phones, and Zoom is available as a smart phone App. Make sure you practice before running your first meeting. We suggest 3 Meeting ‘staff’—but 2 of them can be participants or volunteers—you just have to make sure they understand their assignments: 1) you facilitate—welcome everyone and “run the meeting”, 2) ‘chat reporter/monitor’ - make sure someone else is responsible for reading all the messages that participants might type into the ‘chat’ space, and for bringing up their content, in case people choose to write their input and do not also speak it, and 3) identify someone who is willing to help with technology problems—participants may be posting in to the chat box that they can’t hear or can’t see or... so identify someone who will address these issues, so you do not have to. You can also collect questions in the chat box and follow up after your meeting with answers to the questions you might not have time to address in the meeting. You can also ask people to post resources in the chat box, and for larger groups—there is even a break-out option for small group discussions and you can also do polls as you go from Zoom.

2. For ongoing engagement use on-line surveys, such as [Survey Gizmo](#) or [Survey Monkey](#)—or equivalent as both companies offer a free ‘membership’ as well as payment options that cost as little as \$25/month. Get in the habit of surveying your Resident Leaders group and/or your mailing list regularly. If this amount is cost prohibitive for your municipality/organization, please contact Catherine (details below) for assistance.
3. Release a monthly e-newsletter that is emailed, tweeted, etc. directly to your target constituents and that is posted for public consumption to grow your direct contact list. Include articles on the results of your Zoom meetings and your on-line surveys. This can be done in email or you can subscribe to companies such as [Constant Contact](#), a MA Based company offering discounts to munis and not for profits.

If you need assistance with any of these 3 steps, please call, text or email Catherine Ratté—Principal Planner/Manager Land Use & Environment Section: ph: 413/285-1174, text: 413/695-0074, email: cratte@pvpc.org