SOCIALLY DISTANT ENGAGEMENT IDEAS FOR EPA BROWNFIELD GRANT APPLICANTS

When face-to-face meetings or in-person interactions can't happen, consider using virtual tools alongside non-digital approaches.

Virtual Tools
- Online meeting platforms
- Social media
- QR codes
- Webpage or email updates

Non-Digital Approaches
- Phone calls or conference calls
- Flyers
- Newspaper Ads
- Local TV and radio

Which Tools and Approaches Are Right for Your Community?

Think about your specific stakeholders and how you want to engage them. Understand how this specific engagement opportunity fits into your larger project plan.

Consider Your Audience
- How do your stakeholders like to interact? What are their preferred methods of communication?
- What types of engagement have worked well in the past?
- Where do your stakeholders spend time outside of their homes?
- Where in your community may other outreach methods be needed due to limited access to technology?

Prepare Engagement Goals
- What type of feedback do you need from your stakeholders at this point in your project?
- How much interaction do you plan to have with your audience?
  - If your goal is to provide basic information and you expect little feedback from your audience, sending updates via email, flyers in the mail, or sharing information via social media are great options.
  - If you want more interaction or a two-way discussion, hosting an online meeting may be the better option.
- How will you use the stakeholder feedback to make project decisions?

Know Your Overall Project Resources and Limitations
- How can you maximize your community engagement budget throughout your project? Effective community engagement isn't free! Prioritize community engagement in your project budget.
- What virtual and non-digital approaches do you or your partners already have access to?
- How will you keep your stakeholders up-to-date on progress?
- When and how will stakeholders have another opportunity to engage with this project?

> Be sure to check out Groundwork USA's News and Resources page titled _**Remote Engagement in the Age of COVID-19**_. These easy-to-understand resources can help communities stay or become engaged despite the current limitations of meeting in person due to COVID-19.
>
> Groundwork USA developed these materials under an EPA grant to support communities using equitable development and environmental justice approaches as part of a brownfield project.

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

A Virtual Workshop in Action

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) was on a tight deadline for finalizing their reuse plan for the former Allentown State Hospital in Eastern Pennsylvania. Their EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant was set to expire soon. Typically, LVEDC would hold an in-person design workshop with key stakeholder groups to develop potential reuse options. However, COVID-19 forced them to come up with a new approach.

With the help of their contractor, LVEDC's in-person workshop was quickly converted into a virtual design workshop with breakout rooms. LVEDC found the virtual workshop to be an innovative and effective way to keep the project moving despite the difficulties raised by social distance requirements.

Nearly 50 people attended the virtual workshop, including the area's state senator and state representative. The workshop consisted of two four-hour sessions, held over two days. The workshop began with a presentation of existing site conditions followed by three interactive breakout sessions. Each breakout group worked on site design elements. Attendees then reconvened to share the three redevelopment scenarios and provide feedback on each option.

Virtual Tools Help You Exchange Information, Engage and Interact With Audiences, and Coordinate Across Distances

Online Meeting Platforms
When choosing which meeting platform to use, consider which **features** you need. Do a test run beforehand to become familiar with the features. Have a "Plan B" for technical difficulties.

> Virtual tools are good for reaching large audiences, presenting information remotely, collecting feedback, conducting community interviews remotely, and collaborating.

- **Capacity** can range from 50 – 1,000 participants.
- **Meeting recordings** to share with stakeholders who were unable to join the live meeting.
- **Closed-captioning** to reduce participation barriers.
- **Chat** is especially useful for question and answer sessions and for troubleshooting technical problems. If you have a platform without a chat feature, perhaps a free third-party app or text message option will allow participants to interact via their cell phone.
- **Breakout rooms** to facilitate smaller group discussions.
- **Screen and content sharing** allows you to share your presentation or collaborate in real time.
- **Whiteboards** for drawing and notes, often a good way to receive reactions and other feedback.
- **Call-in option** so stakeholders without internet access can still participate, and you have a backup option if technical difficulties arise.

Social Media
You can interact with your stakeholders via social media. Social media is a useful way to share videos or post updates and ask stakeholders for their general feedback and ideas. Your platform may allow you to:

- **Livestream** so followers can participate in real time.
- **Record** and store recording for future playback.
- **Share** training or informational videos, or even conduct virtual site tours.
- **Post** updates, ask questions and receive answers.

QR Codes
Scanning a QR code leads a cell phone user directly to a website or social media page, removing the hassle of remembering a web address. You can print QR Codes on flyers and post in your community.

Website and Email Updates
Starting a project website, keeping it up-to-date and sending regular email updates to stakeholders are valuable ways to create a trusted, go-to source for information about your project.

Non-Digital Approaches Help You Get the Word Out and Remind Stakeholders About Your Project
Consider these ideas:

- Phone calls and conference calls to introduce a project or talk through project ideas.
- Flyers can be mailed or posted around town (e.g., in grocery stores, parks, walking areas, on pizza boxes and other take-out).
- Transcripts or printed copies of a presentation can be mailed to participants who cannot attend a meeting online.
- Pop-up displays or temporary installations designed by local artists or students can get people to think differently about how the site can be reused.
- Local newspaper can include project press releases, updates and advertise upcoming events.
- Local TV or radio stations can advertise events and broadcast live or recorded events.