

Online Engagement Resources and Strategies



Even prior to the Coronavirus pandemic there was a wide range of resources and recommendations for developing and succeeding in the world of *digital or online engagement*. In the wake of social distancing, however, the number and focus of these resources has expanded considerably – as has their importance. The list provided below is brief guide to some of the more useful and relevant resources currently available.

Before jumping in, however, there are a few important distinctions to keep in mind.

Not all communication is necessarily engagement. Tools and strategies that are primarily unidirectional – communication from provider to recipient for example – no matter how valuable or important, are not normally thought of ‘engagement’. **These are primarily tools to inform** rather than to foster two-way communication, whether they are delivered in either synchronous or asynchronous environments. Examples include public relations, advertising, live or recorded webinars, on-demand videos or instruction, guidebooks or instruction manuals or many forms of written, audio, or visual media.

Throughout the practice and research literature, ‘engagement’ focuses on those efforts that are **primarily intended to foster, to one degree or another, two-way and reciprocal interactions**. The defining difference is that the goal of true engagement is to create robust and appropriate opportunities *for an effective exchange of information, ideas, and/or decision-making*.

It’s also worth keeping in mind the difference between **organizational and community engagement**. The former refers to engagement efforts specific to those working within a particular organization, business, agency or institution. As such, the most appropriate collaborative tools and strategies are those designed to realize a specific organization’s goals, relationships, and expectations – most of which are generally not available or appropriate for external audiences. Examples include Microsoft Teams, Slack, Trello, Google docs, Go to Meeting, Zoom and many similar platforms.

In contrast, **community engagement** focuses primarily on bringing together or reaching stakeholders (i.e. ‘community’) outside an organization’s or institution’s direct or immediate relationships – to partner with, and build, the collaborative networks necessary to achieve community and stakeholder, rather than organizational goals. It is in that spirit, and toward building on effective online community engagement strategy that the following resources are presented.

Community Engagement Options and Recommendations

The University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG) has two particularly relevant and helpful resources.

- The first is their succinct and informative **Tips / Tools for Online Meetings and Public Input** – an overview that includes tips for getting public/community online; tips for online meetings; and a comprehensive list of tips, tools, and examples for event organizers during the coronavirus outbreak. <https://www.kitchentable.org/tools/tips-virtual-public-engagement>
- Somewhat more general is their **Tips and Suggestions for Virtual Meeting Facilitation**. A very good guide to remote convening; technical tips for Zoom; and alternatives to Zoom and technologies overview. <https://www.kitchentable.org/virtual-meeting-tips>

The [International Association of Public Participation](#) has an array of valuable tools, webinars, tips and guidebooks. Among the most relevant are

- **Five Keys to Digital Engagement** – a brief six-page infographic highlighting some of the most important considerations for online engagement <https://iap2content.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/marketing/Resources/COVID-19/5+Tips+for+Digital+Engagement.pdf>
- **Covid-19 Public Participation Resources – Overcoming Challenges in Crisis.** This is an extensive listing (with links and descriptions) to a wide range of social distancing resources, online public engagement tools, resources to help you stay connected and partners doing engagement work across the country. Well worth reviewing!
<https://iap2usa.org/COVID-19-P2-Resources>

The National Coalition on Dialogue and Democracy ([NCDD.org](#)) serves as a gathering place, resource clearinghouse, news source, and a facilitative leader for community engagement practitioners. While they have a wide range of engagement related resources, webinars, and information, the two documents that are most relevant to online engagement – from their partners at Bang the Table – are:

- **Using a Digital First Community Engagement Approach.** A seven-page informative PDF covering such topics as preparing your organization (including challenges and overcoming them); planning digital first engagement; planning for continuous engagement; and using digital dialogue techniques
<https://www.bangthetable.com/wp-content/uploads/Using-a-Digital-First-Community-Engagement-Approach.pdf>
- **Making Deliberative Dialogue Work Online.** A comprehensive guide to planning for and conducting online deliberative dialogue strategies. Topics include dialogue principles; design process; software selection; framing, exploring and contextualizing; participant recruitment; process management; content moderation; dialogue facilitation; and understanding behavioral modes.
<https://www.bangthetable.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/DIGITAL-Deliberative-Dialogue-Guide.pdf>

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