

Spring NJ STIC Meeting – May 6, 2020

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) Session – Answers for Chatpod Questions

During the NJ STIC Spring Meeting, questions were posed in a chatpod about Virtual Public Involvement topic which was the primary theme of the meeting. Some questions were unanswered at the close of the meeting. NJDOT followed up with presenters to see if answers could be provided to the unanswered questions. Below are the questions and answers provided by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority.

What considerations can be made for the hearing impaired? For examples, are there technologies that can automatically include sub titles? (We did hear some answers to this, i.e., Zoom.....does anyone have anything else to add?)

The NJTPA uses YouTube to automatically generate closed captioning for livestreamed Board meetings (the social media platform offers this for free). While the tool is not 100 percent accurate it is quite effective. After the meeting ends, the closed captions can be edited to fix any errors. NJTPA does this for videos we produce for the public (in that case we ensure the captions are accurate before publication). GoToMeeting offers transcriptions, but they are not live, they are produced after the meeting ends, but appear for anyone viewing the recording after the event.

Can the speakers give some idea about the amount of funding required to implement the various virtual platforms? Is funding an impediment in implementing any of the virtual participation tools?

Funding is not an impediment to implementing virtual public outreach. When factoring all the costs associated with in-person outreach (travel cost and time, materials, location fees, etc.), it can be more cost-effective. We have used YouTube, a free social media platform, to livestream our Board meetings for several years. We also use it to share videos we produce. Our use of GoToMeeting also predates the pandemic (it's about \$12-15/month per user account). The only tool we added as a result of the shift to virtual-only was a GoToWebinar account to accommodate larger crowds. GoToWebinar also has live polling capabilities, which our other tools did not offer. GoToWebinar is about \$200/month.

There are a number of requirements within the project delivery process regarding public involvement. Will there be a need to modify the requirements, allowing for VPI to satisfy the objectives?

The decision to modify requirements likely will depend on factors such as the length of the pandemic and whether or not group gatherings will be able to be held anytime soon. The lack of in-person involvement should not prevent projects from moving forward, as most of what is done in person can be done virtually. Display boards can be uploaded to a website and livestreamed meetings can allow for Q&A. Like in-person outreach, a critical factor is ensuring that traditionally underrepresented groups (such as low-income and limited-English populations) have access to virtual public outreach. Brief demographics surveys could be used to determine who is participating in the virtual events. If these groups are not being engaged, it may be necessary to mail project information to residents' homes, or flyer in their communities, to make them aware of the project and the phone number they can call to get additional information or provide feedback. Social media is also a great tool to get the word out. Some residents may not have access to a computer but could have a smartphone they use to check

Facebook or other apps. Community groups can also be used to engage these harder-to-reach constituents. For example, project flyers could be added to packages at food pantries, distributed by houses of worship, ESL classes or social services organizations.

How do you accommodate multiple languages at the same time, and how much time would you suggest be set aside for multiple language translations?

This hasn't been an issue for our organization. We have only needed to have a Spanish translator on our virtual public meetings based on the languages spoken in the study areas, so far. For the Main Avenue Local Concept Development Study, the City of Passaic held a Facebook live event (a tool residents are familiar with as the city uses it often) and information was presented first in English and then in Spanish. It took some time, but not so much that the meeting was too long. Here is the link if you'd like to see how this was done: <https://www.facebook.com/HCLora/videos/3167377173286340>

Organizations looking to translate multiple languages might want to explore the City of Jersey City's model. The city uses Microsoft Teams to broadcast live meetings. A press release said they can accommodate up to 10,000 people. Microsoft Teams supports live meeting translations in a number of languages.

Every tool will need a certain number of licenses, and some features are available only with specific level of licensure access. Do any of the presenters have a compilation of pros and cons of the tools, the specialized license requirements and \$\$, the maximum number of participants accommodated, and the bandwidth requirements? Additionally, will also appreciate if can get an idea of the ability to record as well.

I can only speak to the software we are using and say that it has been working well for us. I'm not sure of the bandwidth requirements for GoToMeeting, but it appears to work well even from mobile devices, as does YouTube. So far as I know, YouTube does not have a limit on the number of people that can watch our livestream, however this only allows people to comment by typing into the comment box they can't speak during the meeting if participating this way. The NJTPA has several GoToMeeting licenses that allow up to 250 people per meeting. We also have one GoToWebinar license that allows for up to 500 participants. Pricing information is available at https://www.gotomeeting.com/webinar/pricing?cid=g2w_noam_ggs_cpc_71700000060887685_58700005493863660_p50146359957&gclid=CjwKCAjwgdX4BRB_EiwAg8O8HRr6tJk6uUzSt7BBYGPJo9JrMINHuW3dkNx_svPyETm3Hlw3W5EnBoCVPkQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds

Both GoToMeeting and GoToWebinar allow us to record meetings and post the recordings afterward. YouTube livestreams are automatically added to our YouTube channel.