



FIELD NOTES | Moving Programs and Practices online



CONTEXT

During the pandemic organizations are having to rethink how they implement programs and activities. Are face to face meetings, activities and events important to the outcomes? Are there ways that we can move what we do online and still have quality results? A group of 25 people came together to discuss how they have moved their engagement efforts online and shared resources and tools.



INSIGHTS

Taking your programs and activities to the online world requires planning, research and learning new skills. Being a facilitator in person is different than being one online. There is more work and intentional thinking that needs to happen when planning online meetings.

Red Tape

Many organizations have policies and procedures when it comes to the use of technology. Several organizations have been struggling to move programs and activities online and use different platforms that are not in the policies. *“How to use technology when your organization is risk adverse?”*

Knowing your Audience

Thinking about who will be on the call and their comfort level and then matching up with the correct platform. If they are not computer savvy then try doing conference calls or match them up with a person who can help them during the call. *“Participants are interest in connecting online, they are patient and forgiving as we get used to these new technologies”*

Building Trust

Community engagement work is about building trust and relationships and usually done face to face. Using technology to build relationships takes longer because you need to get over the barrier of the platform and get comfortable speaking and sharing through your devices. *“How do you build that trust with community that you would normally build in person? How do you build trust virtually?”*

Cost

There are a lot of great platforms that can assist groups to engage community online. There are simple ones that are no or low cost to really elaborate, expensive ones that cost lots of money. Think about what you are going to need and how you need the technology to support your work and then look at what is available *“Platforms can be costly”*



ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Learn the platforms

All the platforms come with so many features that can make engagement easy and fun. Take the time to have play sessions with coworkers to try out all the features and have some fun.

Host a Prepare session

Thinking about your participants comfort level with technology - plan a prep session to go over the basic tools of the platform. And have a plan B (ie: calling in)

Have a troubleshoot Plan

Think about the “what if” all that could go wrong and then figure out how to solve the problems. If someone is talking while the presenter is speaking- how do you mute them? How to go from using your computer to moving meeting to phone? Thinking about the problems will help you to be prepared.

Having two people to facilitate

Its nice to know that you have a back up incase your own technology goes down. Also, it is great to have someone who can deal with technology issues while the other is doing the facilitation.

Be Inclusive

Moving your programs to the online world means that your target will have to have access to devices and internet. Offer to help participants by lending out laptops, funding for internet, having meeting at times that are good for participants or host several sessions. Another great idea is to take notes or record the session so that you can send it to those who can not attend.



TOOLS

Connecting Platforms	Engagement Platforms	Collaboration Platforms
Microsoft Teams	Get Involved- online engagement platform dedicated to citizens who want to get involved in their city	Trello - helps groups to work collaboratively together (free and paid versions)
Zoom	Kahout -engaging online games and learning opportunities (Free)	Miro - online collaborative whiteboard platform to bring teams together, anytime, anywhere. (free and paid versions)
Whatsapp	Wordpress- create your own website	Slack -Bring the right people and information together in channels. Share ideas, make decisions and move work forward with a common purpose and place. (free and paid versions)
Jitsi-alternative to Zoom	Bang the Table - community engagement platform (Cost Money) but has free resources	Google Jamboard- is an interactive whiteboard developed by Google. Can be found in Google Apps
Remind- mass texting	Quizlet create your own flashcards, games and learning tools (Free)	Stormz - no need for everyone to be in the same room to facilitate sophisticated

		collaborative sessions. In real-time or asynchronously.
Poll Everywhere	Ethelo Virtual Town Halls - a new collaboration to address the challenges of public engagement during physical distancing	PlaceSpeak - public consultations and building stronger neighborhoods, PlaceSpeak empowers you to make a meaningful impact on the communities where you live, work, and play.
Google Hangout		Groupmap - GroupMap captures individual thinking first, then revealing the group perspective, all in real-time. Now that's true collaborative decision making. (There is a fee)
Nextdoor - best way to stay informed about what's going on in your neighbourhood		

Others: Socrative, thinkific, heads up, plickers, Answergarden, Get involved