



Doing Engagement from Home

A Toolbox for Municipal Staff

Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Community Engagement Division
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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Engagement Department of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted extensive research on digital engagement tools and methods. This document includes many tools that municipal staff can use to engage the public remotely. This document is intended as a resource and does not constitute endorsement of any of these tools. MAPC does not use every tool in this list—for questions about individual tools, reach out to the tool’s Help or Support staff.

MAPC’s Community Engagement Department specializes in equity-centered, people-focused engagement during municipal plans and projects. In addition to offering direct support to cities and towns, the team offers trainings, workshops, and toolkits like this one to help staff improve their own community engagement practices. Learn more at the MAPC Community Engagement [website](#).

Digital Collaboration Tools

These digital tools allow remote team members to collaborate together on a single platform.

Miro

This is an online collaborative whiteboard platform you can use to bring teams together for brainstorming and creative thinking. It's a great way to explore projects using digital sticky notes and boards.

Padlet

Create online collaborative boards on Padlet, with sticky notes that other participants can like/dislike and comment on. It may be useful for online discussion and dialogue during a public meeting or collaboration during a team meeting.

Stormboard

This is a remote collaboration platform and whiteboard, like Miro in many ways. It has more offerings on its free version and has a function that allows users to comment on sticky notes, which Miro does not have.

Mural

A remote collaboration platform and whiteboard that has many of the same functions as Miro, Stormboard, and Conceptboard. It seems to offer many more templates for collaboration than the others.

Conceptboard

Remote collaboration tool and whiteboard

Google Jamboard

A remote collaboration tool with whiteboard, sticky note, and drawing options, Jamboard is much more basic than some of the other tools above, similar to Padlet.

MAPC uses Jamboard often in internal and external meetings.

Lucid Chart

Surveying Tools

The following tools can be used to poll and survey participants during meetings or asynchronously.

Qualtrics

Qualtrics, a comprehensive surveying tool, includes a variety of different question types, qualitative and quantitative analysis functions, and built-in visualizations. Qualtrics is priced based on the number of survey responses.

Qualtrics is MAPC's chosen survey tool.

Survey Monkey

Similarly to Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey provides tools to create, send, and analyze surveys. SurveyMonkey is priced per user.

Google Forms

A free basic survey tool without many question options or any analysis functions, Google Forms is best used for simple data collection, such as meeting feedback or attendee information forms.

Poll Everywhere

MAPC often uses this in-meeting polling tool.

Slido

In-meeting polling tool

Mentimeter

In-meeting polling tool

Survey 123

This tool works with ArcGIS but otherwise is not the most functional tool.

Digital Engagement Platforms

These engagement tools allow participants to provide comments and inputs on a digital platform. For MAPC staff, please work with the Communications and Data Services Departments to contract with these providers.

PlaceSpeak

An online place-based interactive engagement platform, PlaceSpeak has a variety of tools, including interactive/participatory mapping, a noticeboard, polls, and a document folder. Participants must verify that they are a resident of their community.

Also, the code is open source and the organization conforms to Privacy by Design standards for protecting data and privacy. The engagement model they use is the 5-level IAP2 model that the MAPC Community Engagement Department also uses: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower. Note that the CEO and founder of PlaceSpeak is a city councilor for Vancouver, British Columbia.

Overview presentation [here](#).

CoUrbanize

Very similar to PlaceSpeak, CoUrbanize is an online place-based interactive engagement platform based in Boston. It can host surveys, forums, participatory mapping, file sharing, etc.

Example: South Lincoln Revitalization Project that MAPC worked on [here](#)

Bang The Table

Like CoUrbanize and Placespeak, Bang the Table is an online engagement suite that has tools for forums, virtual post-it dashboard, participatory mapping, blogging/storytelling, polling, and surveying.

Bang the Table is a Australian-based digital engagement company.

Example: The City of Lynn's current [planning engagement website](#).

MetroQuest

An online survey tool, MetroQuest provides similar features as PlaceSpeak and CoUrbanize.

Public Input

A platform for online civic engagement.

Example: The Salem Bridge Street Neck Zoning Overlay [here](#) and the City of Revere's engagement hub [here](#)

Konve.io

An online platform for digital content engagement, Konve.io makes your PDFs interactive. You can add videos, notes, polls (including spatial questions), etc. Participants can leave comments on the PDF.

Public Coordinate

Public Coordinate is primarily map-based online platform for digital engagement provided by Kimley Horn Associates. Description [here](#).

Social Pinpoint

Community Remarks

Location/Place Visualization Tools

For gathering location-based input, use the following mapping tools and platforms.

Google Earth

Create virtual tours of locations. You can pair these with information about particular areas or places.

Example: Virtual tour of Somerville, MA [here](#)

Sheetmapper

Create a live updating map based on information collected from a form into a spreadsheet.

Maphub

Create interactive maps with custom labels on Maphub. You can't collect feedback; the interaction is one-way.

Plan Together

Online mapping tools that can collect feedback.

Canvis

Create interactive crowdsourced web-based maps.

StoryMap, Storyline, Timeline, Juxtapose

A group of online tools from KnighLab at Northwestern

- *Storymap* lets you create an interactive guided tour of a particular community or a map-based story. You can include images and video in the tour. It's nicer looking but less robust than Google Earth.
- *Storyline* lets you create an interactive and annotated line chart.
- *Timeline* lets you create an interactive and annotated timeline.
- *Juxtapose* allows you to show changes over time by overlaying two images of the same thing (one new, one old) and then including a sliding bar to show the top image.

HistoryPin

This website allows users to drop pins on a map and include historic notes about that neighborhood, institution, building, etc.

Other Digital Engagement Tools

The following platforms are useful for gathering input on various subjects and formats.

Live Question Tool

This is a free tool produced and owned by Harvard that allows users to post questions to a channel (called an “instance”) and/or upvote other people’s questions. This allows for the facilitator to better understand what the group’s common questions are. Individuals can post questions anonymously if they would like.

Dot Plot

This is a quick free way of visualizing data for projects. It would be very useful for showing information in an interactive way if we’re using a digital engagement platform.

Quizlet

This tool allows you to create various quiz questions such as true/false, multiple choice, matching, open ended and flash cards.

Otter.ai

Live closed captioning tool; works well with Zoom

Rev

Live closed captioning tool, which MAPC uses.

Loom

A free resource to record narrative over your screen, you can use this tool to visually annotate a tutorial, add a video note to a document, show people how to do something, etc.

Example: Tutorial on how to use Loom [here](#)

Screencastify

Like Loom, Screencastify can record narrative over a screen.

Balancing Act

Balancing Act is an online budget simulation, which shows residents a model of the budget, collects their input on it, and then lets them estimate taxes paid to see where the money goes.

Virtual Meeting Tools

The following tools can help you convene participants for a virtual meeting.

Online Open House

Use Qualtrics to set up and run a virtual open house.

Crowdcast

This is a tool that makes large online gatherings easy. It's an alternative to Zoom, WebEx, and Microsoft Teams. It might be great for onboarding new folks to a project and is a great springboard platform.

Remo

Like Crowdcast, Remo organizes meetings around "tables" that attendees can move between on their own (like breakout rooms that you can go between!)

LinkedIn's Slideshare

Allows presenters to easily upload slides and supporting material.

Prezi

A presentation tool like PowerPoint but more dynamic and fun!

Owl Labs

Somerville, MA-based company, Owl Labs creates cameras that can facilitate remote meetings with multiple people on both sides (i.e., two groups of people attending one conference from different locations).

Calendly

Digital scheduling tool Calendly can be used to schedule one-on-one conversations with constituents. Calendly integrates with Outlook calendar.

Slides

Slides is like Powerpoint and Prezi, but allows you to update slides while the presentation is live.

Decision Making Tools

Coordinate and deliberate on decisions with virtual participants using the following tools.

[Consider.it](#)

Consider.it is an online platform where participants can interact with and respond to other comments and visualizes the responses in real time.

Example: Seattle, WA Comprehensive Plan [here](#)

[Loomio](#)

Online interactive decision-making tool that can be used asynchronously

[Citizen's Foundation](#)

Icelandic public/collaborative decision-making tool that is very similar to Consider.it.

Design Tools

Create graphics and animations easily using the following tools.

[Noun Project](#)

Find icons for your project graphics.

MAPC staff can log on using the organization-wide account.

[Canva](#)

Canva is an online tool that allows you to design posters, Facebook headers, cards, flyers, and much more.

The MAPC Communications Department maintains a professional account for these purposes.

[WAVE tool](#)

This tool quickly evaluates the accessibility of your website, but isn't a substitute for a website manager with training in accessibility.

[PiktoChart](#)

Online graphics and design creation tool, specifically for presentations and infographics.

[GraphicSprings](#)

Create your own graphic designs using this online tool.

[PixTeller](#)

Make animated views and images online.

[Snappa](#)

Create graphics using this tool.

Vectr

This is an online graphics software used to easily create vector graphics. (Vectors are easier to scale up and down than pixels—they don't get blurry!) Cost is free!

Pablo

This is online image editing tool. Cost is free!

Crelllo

An online graphics and animation tool.

Datawrapper

This online tool helps you create simple interactive graphs and charts that can be embedded into webpages.

More Tools, Tips, and Tricks

A non-comprehensive list of strategies and tools that MAPC finds helpful.

Information Station

This is an information exhibit that is set up in one or more locations throughout a community (think: library, town hall, etc.). People can interact with it passively (coming upon it unintentionally while they are out) or they can actively seek it out. The station could involve feedback if you feel comfortable collecting information from people without any facilitation or being able to answer questions.

Planner Office Hours/Municipal Office House

Use any form of online communication you feel comfortable with to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to reach you to ask questions about a plan or a project. This would be effective when coupled with an existing information access opportunity, like an online open house. Schedule a three-hour period where people can reach you via Twitter, Livestream (FB, Instagram), Phone, Webex, etc. The idea here is to allow questions to be answered as publicly as possible about the information that you are providing.

Google Voice Mail Box

Set up a phone number for your project, where people can leave their comments and input as voice mails.

Poster Campaigns

Turn your digital engagement graphics into a physical poster campaign to reach community members you may have missed online.

One-on-Ones

Schedule one-on-one conversations with people who are important to your project. Write your questions down before hand, identify who among your stakeholders are priority contacts, and reach out to them.

Curated YouTube Playlist

Create a collection of videos that can be shared with others. Videos are linked together and play one after the other. This can be used either to share recordings on meetings in a series or to curate a playlits of videos or music to play at the start of a meeting.

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