



# MVP Toolkit: Virtual & Remote Engagement

Equitable, meaningful public engagement is a key component to the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program. During this time of COVID-19 and the need for social distancing, meeting the various requirements for public engagement within the MVP program requires outside of the box thinking. This is an opportunity to consider ways of involving community members who may have been unable to participate during in-person meetings and workshops. Some of the innovative virtual methods developed now may prove to be beneficial additions to in-person engagement moving forward.

While online formats can offer alternatives to in-person engagement, we also recognize that some communities have limited access to internet and that online formats may decrease the participation from Environmental Justice and other Climate Vulnerable Populations. In order to create equitable engagement in any MVP grant it is strongly recommended that engagement is a top priority that happens early and often.

This toolkit differs from the others on our website in that it provides resources and recommendations for current grantees who need to complete their MVP grants in accordance with social distancing requirements. Please share your thoughts and feedback with us as we work to improve this “living document” as a resource for Massachusetts communities. Comments can be emailed to [carolyn.meklenburg@mass.gov](mailto:carolyn.meklenburg@mass.gov).

*Special thanks to MVP Berkshires & Hilltowns Regional Coordinator Carrieanne Petrik for her work on early iterations of this toolkit, as well as the rest of the MVP RC team for sharing their experiences with virtual & remote and engagement methods during COVID-19.*

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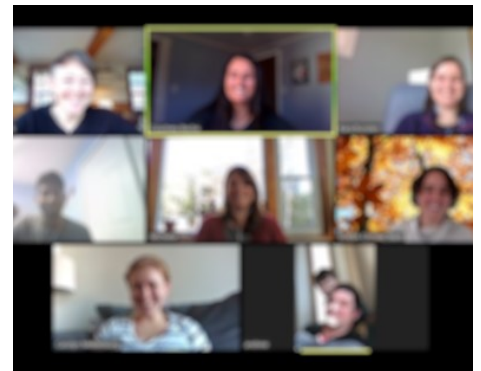
# Key Strategies for Conducting Virtual & Remote Engagement

In communities with widespread internet access, online conferencing platforms such as Zoom or OfficeSuite HD offer opportunities to bring groups of people together to “meet” in real time. There are options for just voice conferencing, as in a traditional conference call, or streaming video so participants can see each other.

For communities without enough internet coverage for some or all participants, finding substitutes for in-person meetings poses a greater challenge. Traditional conference calls via landline may be a good place to start.

## Tips for Conducting Online Meetings

- Provide a phone call-in line to online meetings in the interest of accessibility.
- Share meeting materials in advance via email.
- Consider that participants attention spans are not the same during phone and/or online meetings as during an in-person format. Studies suggest keeping remote formats to two hours. During the COVID-19 pandemic many have competing needs for their attention such as children or unwell family members. Having multiple, but shorter, remote formats allows for greater participation. Consider varying the meeting times as well—what window may work best for participants with children, or other work responsibilities?
- Set some ground rules for your virtual meeting at the very beginning, or even include some in the meeting invitation so everyone has the same expectations for “virtual meeting etiquette.” For this meeting, will it be more appropriate for everyone to have their cameras turned on or off? Should people mute themselves when they are not speaking, or will the host take care of that? Getting these logistics out of the way may help you avoid interruptions later on.
- Start your meeting with some icebreakers that invite everyone to participate. Since virtual meetings are a new experience for many participants, responding to an easy question over video chat or through a surveying tool may help ease any discomfort.





## Key Strategies for Conducting Virtual & Remote Engagement

- Use the “break-out rooms” feature in Zoom and other platforms to allow for smaller group discussions and to maximize participation. As with in-person meetings, some may feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in a smaller group setting.
- Try a collaborative tool like Google Docs or any of the resources listed in this toolkit to enhance the workshop, even if you’re unfamiliar with a particular tool or your audience members are not all technologically savvy.
  - You may want to offer a short window of time before your workshop to review the tools you’ll be using with anyone who may need a little extra help. If it works well, you may get some valuable information from using a collaborative tool, and everyone has learned something new. If it doesn’t work well, you can move on and collect information in more traditional means (via conversation, email, surveys, phone, etc.).

### Tips for Conducting Conference Calls

- While a conference call between all parties is an option, consider conference calls between specific participant groups. Within your desired participant group, who would benefit the most from speaking with each other in a smaller group?
- Follow up these calls by sharing the information generated by each group with the wider group by:
  - Circulating a physical document by mail
  - Uploading relevant documents to a project website—which may be appropriate if residents do not have internet access in their home but are driving regularly to internet locations to check email and other online matters.





# How can I use virtual & remote engagement to complete my MVP Planning Grant?



The [MVP Planning Grant](#) process consists of a series of prescribed steps, all with a heavy emphasis on community and stakeholder engagement. Traditionally, the MVP Planning Grant process includes at least three in-person group meetings: a Core Team meeting, the Community Resilience Building (CRB) Workshop, and a Public Listening Session. Possible ways to meet the goals of each step virtually are listed below.

**Communities considering virtual approaches should seek approval from their MVP Regional Coordinator before commencing with the activity. The Regional Coordinators are standing by as a resource to brainstorm ideas and make sure all activities are consistent with the terms of your contract with the program.**

## Core Team Meetings

Typical Format: In-person meeting at Town Hall with representatives from municipal departments and any other core stakeholders.

*Possible Virtual Format:*

- Meeting conducted over Skype, Zoom, or other online conference call platform.
- Use interactive collaboration tools such as the “Draw” feature on Zoom or even a simple shared Google Doc for joint brainstorming.
- Provide a phone call-in line to online meetings to increase accessibility.
- Share meeting materials in advance via email (or mail if low internet coverage).
- For communities without enough internet coverage, hold a conference call between all parties.



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### CRB Workshop

*Typical Format:* One 8-hour, or two 4-hour, in-person workshop(s) with representatives from municipal departments, local organizations, State agencies, surrounding communities, and other stakeholders.

*Possible Virtual Format:*

Like Core Team Meetings, workshops could be conducted over Skype, Zoom or other online conference platforms. **It is important that you identify a process that will meet the Community Resilience Building Workshop's four core objectives, and others that are outlined in your MVP Scope of Services.**

Here are some specific examples of virtual and remote activities that could meet the four CRB core objectives. Feel free to propose a different approach to your MVP Regional Coordinator.

#### 1. Characterize Hazards

- Meet with the Core Team (conference call or online) to select four main hazards in advance of the workshop that relate to infrastructure, societal and environmental features of the community.
- Present climate change hazards to workshop participants with a live online, video, or podcast presentation, and follow up with a survey so the group can prioritize the hazards.

### Technology Tips

PowerPoint presentations are a good tool for communicating information, but in order to keep a virtual audience engaged, consider a more dynamic, interactive tool like an ESRI StoryMap.

#### 2. Identify Community Vulnerabilities and Strengths

- Send a survey to participants by either mail or email prior to the workshop to identify vulnerabilities and strengths. Include community maps reflecting the three focus areas (infrastructure, environment and society) so participants can mark locations of particular vulnerabilities and strengths.
- Participants could identify vulnerabilities and strengths during webinars or conference calls.



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### Technology Tips

- The “Draw” feature on Zoom allows participants to mark up the same screen using their mouse. By using this tool, participants could draw on the same map just as they might during an in-person CRB workshop. This may work better for smaller groups, such as in Zoom break-out rooms.
- To find commonalities within meeting notes or across survey responses, consider generating a “Word Cloud” to visually represent what words were used the least and the most. There are a wide variety of “Word Cloud” generators available online.

### 3. Identify and Prioritize Community Actions

- Host three webinars or podcasts, each related to one of the three focus areas: infrastructure, society, and the environment. Invite workshop attendees to attend the webinar or listen to the podcast that most closely relates to their field and area of expertise.
- Conduct calls (phone, Skype, or other) with small groups of attendees, to replicate the workshop table format (no more than 8 attendees on each Skype call). Facilitate discussion related to proposed adaptation actions.
- Record and share an introductory presentation and use an interactive platform (e.g., Qualtrics) to collect input related to hazards, local features, and proposed adaptation actions that participants can interact with on their own time over a designated period.

### 4. Determine the Overall Priority Actions

- Host a meeting to debrief on features and actions identified in the steps above and vote on priority actions. This could be through a collective document, polling application, or a virtual “sticky-note” platform.
- Record a short video and post it on a town website along with a survey to prioritize actions.



# How can I use virtual & remote engagement to complete my MVP Planning Grant?

## Virtual and Remote CRB Workshop Example: Town of Rowley

The Town of Rowley received an MVP Planning Grant in February 2020 and planned their CRB workshop for the following month. When COVID-19 forced them to cancel the in-person workshop, the project team prepared a virtual version that centered around an ESRI StoryMap [webpage](#). StoryMap is an interactive platform that allows for a series of documents, external links, surveys, images, and maps to be compiled onto one page, and presented as one continuous “story” that the user can view at their own pace as they scroll down the page.

Rowley’s StoryMap includes:

- Information on the CRB process
- A detailed agenda for the workshop
- Descriptions of the climate hazards facing Rowley and its neighbors, including links to articles on specific weather events
- Opportunities for participants to vote on their main concerns in each of the three CRB focus areas (infrastructure, environment, and society)
- Information and graphics on examples of MVP Action Grants

The Town’s consultant used the StoryMap to guide the virtual workshop held via Zoom. Once the workshop was complete, the results of the workshop were added to the StoryMap in order to be presented to the public for the public listening session. This included a link to a survey for residents to provide feedback on their own time both during and after the virtual listening session. Public feedback was later incorporated into the StoryMap so the website can now serve as an interactive “Summary of Findings” report.

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interactive features of the StoryMap platform engaged participants differently than a traditional slideshow presentation.</li> <li>• The combination of the virtual meeting and the comprehensive StoryMap allowed participants to interact and converse in real time during the workshop, while also providing them with the opportunity to explore workshop content on their own time.</li> <li>• All workshop materials are kept on one publicly accessible web platform.</li> <li>• The website was continually updated so it could be used for the other stages of the MVP planning process beyond the CRB workshop.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This process offered no alternatives for residents with limited internet access.</li> <li>• Users must pay for an ESRI ArcGIS subscription in order to create a StoryMap (but not to view a StoryMap).</li> </ul>





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## Virtual and Remote CRB Workshop Example: Town of Plymouth

The Town of Plymouth received an MVP Planning Grant in FY19 with an expanded scope to focus on the public health impacts of climate change and to conduct additional community engagement. They were unable to hold their in-person CRB workshop planned for mid-March 2020 at Plymouth Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The project team developed a plan for a remote CRB workshop that participants could complete on their own time through a dedicated [webpage](#).

To imitate the typical in-person format of the CRB workshop, the webpage includes:

- A detailed agenda
- Several videos featuring presentations by their vendor and Town staff on climate change hazards, public health, and the three CRB focus areas (infrastructure, environment, and society)
- A series of Qualtrics surveys to collect participants’ thoughts on Plymouth’s vulnerabilities and strengths for each focus area, as well as their ideas for actions they could take to address vulnerabilities
- Time, date, and Zoom link for one session of “virtual office hours” hosted by the vendor so participants could ask any questions in real-time
- Time, date, and registration link for a virtual public forum at which participants prioritized the implementation actions they submitted via survey

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agenda gave participants a sense of the required time commitment to complete the process.</li> <li>• The workshop was designed so participants could watch the videos and complete the surveys at their own pace, possibly allowing for more participation than a “live” virtual meeting.</li> <li>• Survey responses from participants were updated and posted so they could build on and respond to other responses—fostering the collaborative brainstorming that is so important during in-person CRB workshops.</li> <li>• The “live” public forum allowed participants to review the survey results together and to prioritize collectively, serving as a productive compliment to the earlier, remote stages of the workshop.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This process offered no alternatives for residents with limited internet access.</li> <li>• The project’s expanded scope allowed for extensive in-person engagement prior to the workshop, including a public meeting and a series of focus group interviews. The virtual and remote methods used here may or may not have been effective without the important connections established between participants through this initial outreach.</li> </ul>





## How can I use virtual & remote engagement to complete my MVP Planning Grant?

### Public Listening Session

The goal of the public listening session is to present the draft report to the public and gain feedback.

*Typical Format:* Daytime or evening meeting open to all members of the public.

*Possible Virtual Formats:*

- A webinar recorded and posted on the Town Website, along with a survey shared with the public to collect feedback through an online form such as SurveyMonkey.
- Recording the typical listening session presentation for Local Access TV and seeking input through a survey or telephone hotline.
- Working with a local radio station to broadcast the information and seeking input through a survey or telephone hotline.
- Creating a podcast about the draft report and seeking input through a survey or other means.

### Technology Tips

For “live” virtual meetings, it is best if you can simply advertise or post the direct meeting link. Figuring out “sign-up” software like Eventbrite might be too much of a barrier for residents who already struggle with technology skills.

Whatever your approach, it is important to be intentional about the forms of outreach you are using to promote the virtual meeting, webinar, recording, etc. Typically, there are opportunities to promote community meetings via word of mouth in daily life. Without these natural opportunities to connect and share, it is critical to be sure the MVP draft report is circulated widely and all community voices are included.

### Virtual and Remote Public Listening Session Example: Town of Belmont

The Town of Belmont received an MVP Planning Grant in the fall of 2019 and were able to host their CRB workshop in person in early 2020. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 interrupted their plans for their public listening session. As a result, they held their listening session via Zoom. This meeting included a slideshow presentation on the results of the CRB workshop and a link to a survey through which residents could provide feedback. The listening



## How can I use virtual & remote engagement to complete my MVP Planning Grant?

session was recorded and posted on the Town of Belmont’s website, along with the survey link so residents who could not attend the meeting could access the recording and the survey on their own time. The survey had a much wider reach than they originally anticipated: over 90 residents responded to the survey!

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The combination of the virtual meeting and the online survey allowed residents to give real-time feedback during the listening session or afterwards on their own time, allowing for more residents to participate in the process.</li><li>• The survey could be created with a wide variety of free survey platforms.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This process offered no alternatives for residents with limited internet access.</li></ul>



# How can I use virtual & remote engagement in my MVP Action Grant project?

For [MVP Action Grant](#) project applications for the FY21/FY22 funding round, the MVP program requires the submission of a public involvement and community engagement plan. The guidance for developing this plan, as seen in the most recent Request for Responses, includes recommended strategies for printed, digital, and in-person engagement. Many print and digital strategies remain effective during social distancing, while some in-person strategies can evolve into virtual or remote methods.



The City of Chelsea held a community clean-up that could easily be adapted to accommodate social distancing requirements. A series of informational posters on Chelsea's FY21 MVP Action Grant project were also displayed. **Image Source:** City of Chelsea

## Print and Digital Strategies for Action Grants

Print	Digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Door-to-door fact sheet/ flyers/ survey distributed to residences and businesses within 500 feet of the location project(s)</li> <li>• Posters hung in Local Businesses, Community Centers, or other publicly accessible venues, with a minimum of 20 throughout the City or Town</li> <li>• Direct mailings to all residences and businesses within the City or Town with project information and physical address to which written comments may be submitted/and link to project website/or other mechanism for giving feedback</li> <li>• Ad or notice in Local Print Newsletters that informs residents of project(s) and resiliency its resiliency benefits</li> <li>• Sign(s) posted on site that inform residents of project(s) and resiliency benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey requesting resident feedback on projects</li> <li>• Podcast(s) that address your project and articulate community resiliency goals</li> <li>• Interactive project website + commenting function</li> <li>• Digital video streaming of presentation that addresses project content</li> <li>• Project webpage</li> <li>• Social media communication on multiple platforms</li> <li>• Project Hotline (Information &amp; Voicemail) to provide people with information about project(s) and link to resiliency</li> <li>• Email to distribution list that includes community stakeholder groups</li> <li>• Post on local blog or in digital newsletter that includes information on how to submit comments directly to project team or link to an online survey</li> </ul>



## How can I use virtual & remote engagement in my MVP Action Grant?

### Turning In-Person Engagement Into Virtual and Remote Methods

In-Person Strategy	Virtual & Remote Options
Hosting or co-hosting a community meeting or open house	Host an online community meeting via video conference platform. This could be a structured meeting with an agenda, or take on an “open house” or “office format” that allows people to drop in, ask questions, and leave at their leisure.
Series of workshops and speakers that are selected from the community who can address project and resiliency outcomes	Conduct a series of webinars led by project leaders and partners.
Drop-in hours at businesses, community center, or other venue near site(s); Staffed table at community event or festival; Presenting scope of project(s) at an established community group’s meeting	Ask any community organizations or municipal boards with upcoming virtual events if you could attend and speak for a few minutes about your project. Direct meeting attendees to a webpage or an online survey if they want more information and to provide feedback.
Demonstrations and trainings (i.e., raingarden construction or tree planting) within project area	Record a demonstration within project area, and post it on a project website or play it on local cable access. If weather and public health policies allow, host a demonstration outdoors at which attendees are appropriately socially distant and are wearing masks.
Public walking tour of the project site	Record a walking tour of the project site, and post it on a project website or play it on local cable access. If weather and public health policies allow, host a walking tour outdoors at which attendees are appropriately socially distant and are wearing masks.

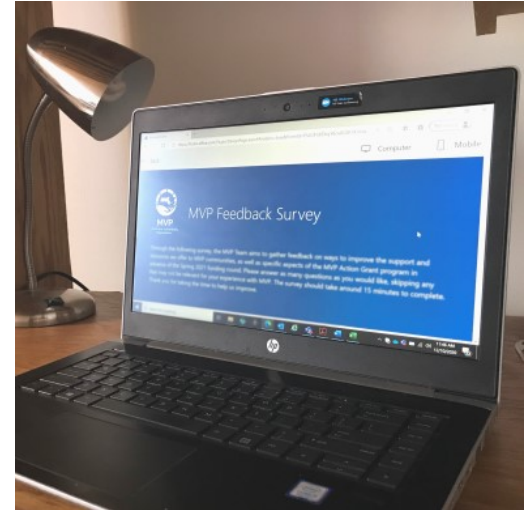
**Communities considering substituting contracted tasks with virtual approaches should seek written approval from their MVP Regional Coordinator before commencing with the activity.**



# Incorporating Community Feedback into an MVP Project

Once you have collected feedback from your community and project stakeholders, it is critical that this feedback is put to use and informs project outputs. Here are some tips for ensuring that your MVP final planning report and/or your MVP action project outcomes reflect your community's perspectives. The following strategies could be used regardless of the methods you used to conduct outreach.

- Publicly share all feedback collected on the project in regular intervals via project website, printed project newsletter, during a virtual public meeting, or another information repository that is easily accessible. This gives others a chance to react to this feedback, ensures transparency, and holds the project team accountable to the community.
- Designate time during all project team meetings to discuss any feedback the team has received to ensure it remains a priority as the project moves forward.
- Take periodic polls to ask if project stakeholders and the wider community feel that they are being heard at virtual meetings and if their feedback is being adequately integrated into the project. These polls could take place at the end of virtual meetings, or could be distributed periodically throughout the project whenever it might make sense.
- Hold a virtual meeting specifically to share results of the public involvement and community engagement process and how that feedback was incorporated into the final deliverables.
- Create a document summarizing the response to public comments received and post that document along with project deliverables to the project website and notify stakeholders.





# Ensuring Equitable Engagement

Ensuring that all community engagement conducted through the MVP program is equitably accessible by all residents will require different strategies when operating remotely. Employing the **Community Liaison Model** at this time may be particularly helpful. The Community Liaison Model is a strategy of engagement whereby community-based organizations or individual representatives from Environmental Justice Populations and Climate Vulnerable Populations are brought on board as compensated and participating members of a project team. A Liaison’s primary task is to manage public involvement and community engagement in a culturally competent and meaningful way. In this case, the Liaison may be able to offer valuable guidance regarding the methods of remote and virtual engagement that will best serve their community.



A flyer advertising a community event in the City of Medford using both English and Haitian Creole for their FY20 MVP Action Grant. **Image Source:** City of Medford

## Non-Web Based Equitable Strategies

- Work with a community-based organization or a compensated community liaison to develop non-web based engagement strategies that work well for members of their community.
- Translate any printed outreach and engagement content (flyers, direct mailings, etc.) into three (3) most prevalent languages spoken within the community.
- Work with an alternative language newspaper in your community to print MVP-related content.



## Ensuring Equitable Engagement

- Craft verbal messages in three (3) most prevalent languages spoken within your community and work with alternative language media to broadcast your MVP-related content.

### Web Based Equitable Strategies

- Work with a community-based organization or a paid community liaison to develop web based engagement strategies that work well for members of their community.
- Hold a series of virtual meetings in three (3) most prevalent languages spoken in your community so residents can RSVP for an attend the meeting conducted in their primary language.
- Check if the online meeting platform that you use has any features for providing simultaneous translation during virtual meetings.
- Provide additional call-in numbers for residents who speak alternative languages. Professional translators can provide simultaneous translation over the phone during the virtual meeting.
- Post a typed transcript of your virtual meeting on your website along with a video recording so residents who could not attend the live stream can still watch the meeting, regardless of hearing ability. This transcript could also be translated into three (3) most prevalent languages spoken in your community.
- Use closed-captioning on your chosen online meeting platform so that residents with hearing impairments can fully participate in the meeting, or work with an American Sign Language interpreter to provide simultaneous translation during the meeting.

The [Additional Resources](#) section of MAPC's virtual engagement toolkit provides guidance for providing translation on Zoom, as well as for using closed captioning.





## Other Resources

### Examples of Free Surveying Platforms for Collecting Stakeholder Feedback

- [Survey Monkey](#)
- [SoGo Survey](#)
- [Google Forms](#)
- If you have access to Microsoft Office 365, [Microsoft Forms](#) is an included survey program.

### Tips for Hosting Virtual Meetings

- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has developed a [detailed guide on using Zoom for varying meeting formats.](#)
- Inside Higher Ed: [7 Best Practices for COVID-19-Necessitated Online Meetings](#)
- Consensus Building Institute: [10 Tips for Improving Our Online Meetings](#)
- International Association for Public Participation: [COVID-19 Information and Resources for Engagement Professionals](#)
- Meridian Institute: [7 Tips for Designing Successful Virtual Meetings](#)
- Meridian Institute: [7 Takeaways for Facilitating Effective Virtual Meetings](#)

### Interactive Tools for Use During Virtual Meetings

- Collaborate by creating and sharing virtual sticky notes: [www.ideaflip.com](http://www.ideaflip.com)
- Create collaborative mind maps in real-time with your team: [www.mindmeister.com](http://www.mindmeister.com)
- Create an online “whiteboard” for team brainstorming: [www.webwhiteboard.com](http://www.webwhiteboard.com)
- Break the larger group into smaller discussion groups by using “break-out rooms” offered by some conferencing platforms like Zoom.
  - The platform Remo offers a virtual conference format that imitates the layout of a conference room, complete with “tables” where participants “sit”: [www.remo.co](http://www.remo.co)
- Use polling tools to rank preferences or collect other information: <https://www.polleverywhere.com/>
  - Some platforms offer SMS text polling services as well as web-based polling: <https://swift.excitem.com/>
- For more online tools for collaboration, see [this article](#) from the Consensus Building Institute.