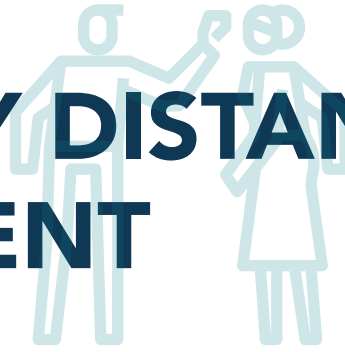MINI-GUIDE FOR

PHYSICALLY DISTANT ENGAGEMENT

Engaging with one another safely presents its own set of strategic practices for following up-to-date CDC guidance around the continuing spread of COVID-19 and beyond. Incorporating physical distancing and safety can be beneficial for engagements held during cold and flu season, with stakeholders who may be uncomfortable with sharing materials, touching others, or those who may have health conditions or be immuno-compromised. When planned thoughtfully, community engagement promotes social connection that can occur at a physical distance. Head to the Mini-Guide for Facilitation to review a variety of ways to facilitate in-person engagement safely.

7.1 PLANNING IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

After review of the Mini-Guide for Planning Engagements consider the following:

Planning your Agenda

- **Build in time for social networking.** Because of the mental and social effects that the global pandemic has had on us, time for stakeholders to safely mingle, exchange, and network will help boost energy and participation, as well as contribute to creating a safe space.

- **Do not forget to lead warm-up activities.** Just because people are sitting far apart, making time to get to know each other is still important.

Determining the Most Appropriate Engagement Size

- **Check your comfort level facilitating at a physical distance.** The first question you should ask yourself is how comfortable you are with moving forward with an engagement. And what is the maximum group size you're comfortable leading? If you are not yet comfortable with in-person engagement, that is okay, and you can always use a virtual or phone approach instead.

- **Refer to local government guidance.** With physical distancing and avoiding large group gatherings still recommended, it is essential to continue researching government guidance on mandates for social gatherings.

- **Determine a ratio.** Consider a stakeholder ratio that meets both your comfort level and team capacity. If you are the only facilitator for an engagement, consider a group size between 6 and 10 stakeholders, a ratio of 1:10. Be sure your space accommodate the size of your group.

CATALOG OF IDEAS

Looking for ways to keep stakeholders safe but engaged? The Catalog of Ideas for Physically Distant Engagement is the perfect starting point!

Secure your Engagement Space

Outdoor spaces. Outdoor spaces are in high demand and can be accessible in different ways than indoor spaces can. Working outside requires you to cultivate a space that feels centered and connected, and not every location can deliver on that. As you seek and secure the most appropriate space:

- **Find out what locations your stakeholders frequent**. There is a good chance that your stakeholders are already visiting their local parks, gardens, playgrounds, public spaces, or plazas. Learn more about, and visit, these spaces, and inquire as to the availability and necessary permissions to utilize the space.

- **Think creatively about outdoor spaces.** Plan an engagement in an atypical urban space that can inspire and spark imagination. Some amphitheaters in parks, plazas within office buildings, and backyards of community-based organizations currently sit under-utilized or vacant. These are unique and available spaces and may already have basic furniture available. **TIP**: Have a plan for a hybrid or in-person engagement and virtual engagement, especially if working outdoors and weather is a potential barrier.

Indoor spaces. Indoor settings can still support physically distanced collaboration, but you need to think creatively, especially if engagement spaces you typically frequent (such as schools, libraries, and community centers) are not currently available. Consider indoor spaces that are more frequented by your stakeholders and/or in close proximity to where they live. When securing indoor space, make sure to practice physical distancing, establish hand-washing protocols, and manage clean supplies.

TIPS FOR FINDING SPACE

The New York Times has great examples of engagements facilitated outside in shady spots, under open-sided shelters, at picnic tables, or that invite stakeholders to bring their own lawn chairs to physically distance.

Get creative with spaces for engagement. Since go-to spaces for workshops have been inaccessible, facilitators are finding alternative indoor and outdoor spaces including:

- Restaurants that are underutilized or are permitting a low capacity
- Churches with pews that are already distant
- Community gardens
- Privately-owned public spaces in commercial areas that may be under-utilized as people continue working from home.

INCORPORATING ARTS AND CULTURE INTO PHYSICALLY DISTANCED ENGAGEMENT

In-person engagement, even at a distance, allows us to continue to engage through artistic expression and cultural connection to promote relationship building and dialogue.

- Launch your engagement with an *at-a-distance icebreaker or performance* from a stakeholder or local musician.
- Organize a *walking photography tour* to map out and learn more about the local cultural assets that your stakeholders take pride in.
- Facilitate a *story circle for community building* that holds space for everyone to share a story relevant to their lived experience or identity. Stakeholders can practice their active listening skills, while building empathy for one another.

For more information on arts and culture, review the Mini-Guide for Planning Engagements.

UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY OUTDOORS

Just because you are working outside does not mean you cannot use tech in your engagement. This might include portable, battery-operated projectors and projection screens to share a slide deck or video or providing hotspots for stakeholders to engage with participatory decision-making tools on their phones.

OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF PHYSICALLY DISTANT ENGAGEMENT

OPPORTUNITIES	LIMITATIONS
• **Promotion of social engagement.** People need opportunities to connect. As many continue to experience feelings of isolation and fear, engagement helps to bring people together to spend time, share, laugh, and learn from one another.	• **Reach.** Because you can only engage a small number of stakeholders at once, you may not be reaching your target or you may need to run these events several times, which impacts your capacity.
• **Stress deactivation.** Social engagement has a direct linkage to our mental health, and community engagement activities can help lower high levels of chronic stress through group conversation.	• **Trust-building.** Relationship and trust building may be challenging in this context. People may still be weary of engaging with strangers, especially when wearing masks.
• **Improvisation and innovation.** Typical engagement spaces may not be accessible during this time, and physically distant engagement requires creativity to re-imagine and shape spaces.	• **Low energy.** As stakeholders are being stretched thin to manage home, work, and health, many may come frustrated or bothered, further impacting low energy in participation.
• **Social cues.** In-person, rather than online, you can more successfully read body language and other social cues.	• **Spaces.** Indoor spaces may be poorly ventilated and are less safe. Outdoor spaces often lose the sense of privacy and confidentiality that can be guaranteed when facilitating indoors.
• **Better relationship-building.** There is simply nothing like in-person, human contact and connection to support community dialogue.	• **Sound quality.** When facilitating in an outdoor context, the sound quality can be poor, often requiring the facilitator to remind stakeholders to utilize their "outdoor voices," and limiting accessibility for those participants who may be Hard-of-Hearing.
• **Opportunity for 1-on-1 support.** Stakeholders may feel more comfortable accessing support in-person, which is much more fluid and organic than soliciting support virtually.	

PLANNING FOR INCLUSIVE, PHYSICALLY DISTANT ENGAGEMENT

Recognizing that community engagement is highly correlated with income and formal education is critical.

To support challenges:

• Have a plan for childcare for stakeholders juggling parenting and work. Get creative with how you provide this need by partnering with local community organizations or businesses who can support childcare.

• Facilitate transportation access, or plan engagements within walking distance of the stakeholders' homes. If travel is required, reimburse for cabs or public transportation, as needed.

• Find spaces that can adapt to stakeholders with physical disabilities or mobility issues so they can participate.

• Translate all engagement documents for stakeholders into relevant languages.

• Provide image descriptions for people who are Blind and prepare to read aloud information in your facilitation.

• Provide ASL and subtitles/closed-captioning options for any presentation materials for stakeholders who are Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing.

7.2 LEADING SAFE IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

Before making the determination that you're ready to host an in-person event, be sure to check local health department and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for group gatherings, then review the Mini-Guide for Facilitation to incorporate the following practices into your approach:

Practice physical distancing, indoors and out!

- Ensure stakeholders have adequate space to maintain a 6-feet distance from one another. The facilitator must also be able to maintain physical distance from stakeholders.

- If using materials, create individual packages so that people can participate without having to share supplies.

- Follow all recommended local guidance around masking, and bring extra masks, in case anyone is in need. If your space does not allow for 6-feet physical distancing, then all stakeholders should be asked to wear masks in order to participate.

- As people might be spread out, making sure people can hear you and each other is important. Use microphones whenever possible.

Maintain cleaning protocols.
Ensure stakeholders have access to a hand-washing station or sinks with soap. If there is no sink access at your space, ensure individual hand sanitizers or a hand sanitizing station is available to everyone.

- Ensure the facilitator and stakeholders have access to cleaning wipes.

- When working indoors, keep windows open to promote air flow. **TIP**: Bring an air purifier with a HEPA filter if windows cannot open. Leave doors open, when possible.

- Provide individual packages of snacks for each stakeholder, if offering refreshments.

- Package individual supply kits for each stakeholder that includes the engagement.

7.3 CHECKLIST FOR PHYSICALLY DISTANT ENGAGEMENT

Planning in-person engagement

- ☐ Are we comfortable conducting an engagement of this type right now?
- ☐ Have we identified if our stakeholders are comfortable with meeting in-person?
- ☐ Are we planning to find an engagement space that allows us to meet stakeholders where they are?

Leading safe in-person engagement

- ☐ Are we prepared to practice physical distancing and hand-washing protocols while facilitating the agenda?
- ☐ Do our stakeholders understand the process for supply distribution?

SOURCES

Joanna Maberly. Why Play in a Time of Crisis?

OXFAM. Community Engagement during COVID-19: A Guide for Community-Facing Staff.

Safe Route Partnership. Equitable Community Engagement in the Time of Social Distancing.

TYTHEdesign provides social impact strategies that help build the capacity of government, nonprofits, and foundations to foster healthy communities and resilient cities.

Our problem-solving approach draws on human-centered design: we provide insights and services that strengthen our partners in the social sector to be equitable, responsive, and innovative. With over 10 years of experience, we have led engagements and projects that intersect with community development, library innovation, education, workforce development, affordable housing, re-entry planning, arts and culture, and more.

No matter the project, the needs of direct stakeholders are at the core of our process: we ensure that many voices and perspectives are represented in civic dialogue, depicted in social services, and are included in decision-making that impacts them most.

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