



**The Center for Local
GOVERNMENT**

Guide to Virtual Public Meetings

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Section 1: Introduction

Thank you for reading the Center for Local Government Guide to Virtual Public Meetings. The purpose of this document is to provide information on how to conduct public meetings virtually using popular video conferencing tools. When analyzing tools and researching this document, we focused on providing three things: 1. the ability for officials to confer remotely with each other; 2. the ability of the public to have access to the meeting; and 3. the ability for the government to archive the meeting.

CLG is NOT endorsing any specific tool. However, most of this guide focuses on Zoom Video Conferencing. Zoom is what we use at CLG, and it has become a popular platform for virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on our benchmarking of other governments, this also appears to be the most popular platform adopted thus far for public meetings. That said, we do have a section devoted to additional online meeting tools if your government chooses *not* to use Zoom Video Conferencing. If you choose a different platform, please contact CLG Assistant Director Cody Smith (CSmith@C4LG.org) who will work with you to learn how to utilize it to the best of its capabilities.

Two final notes before we get started:

- We are not lawyers. Please check with your legal staff. Their advice takes precedence over any of our suggestions.
- This is a living document. As more government develop practices around virtual meetings, we will continually evolve this document. This document will be posted on the CLG website. During our daily COVID-19 e-mail update, we will let you know if we have uploaded a newer version.

Section 2: House Bill 197

The legal authority to conduct virtual public meetings comes from Ohio House Bill 197, passed in March of 2020 in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 12(A) pertains to virtual public meetings:

SECTION 12. (A) As used in this section:

"Hearing" means an administrative hearing, hearing as defined in section 119.01 of the Revised Code, or other hearing at which a person may present written or oral testimony on a matter before the public body.

"Public body" and "meeting" have the meanings defined in section 121.22 of the Revised Code.

(B) During the period of the emergency declared by Executive Order 2020-01D, issued on March 9, 2020, but not beyond December 1, 2020, if the period of the emergency continues beyond that date, members of a public body may hold and attend meetings and may conduct and attend hearings by means of teleconference, video conference, or any other similar electronic technology and all of the following apply:

(1) Any resolution, rule, or formal action of any kind shall have the same effect as if it had occurred during an open meeting or hearing of the public body.

(2) Notwithstanding division (C) of section 121.22 of the Revised Code, members of a public body who attend meetings or hearings by means of teleconference, video conference, or any other similar electronic technology, shall be considered present as if in person at the meeting or hearing, shall be permitted to vote, and shall be counted for purposes of determining whether a quorum is present at the meeting or hearing.

(3) Public bodies shall provide notification of meetings and hearings held under this section to the public, to the media that have requested notification of a meeting, and to the parties required to be notified of a hearing, at least twenty-four hours in advance of the meeting or hearing by reasonable methods by which any person may determine the time, location, and the manner by which the meeting or hearing will be conducted, except in the event of an emergency requiring immediate official action. In the event of an emergency, the public body shall immediately notify the news media that have requested notification or the parties required to be notified of a hearing of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting or hearing.

(4) The public body shall provide the public access to a meeting held under this section, and to any hearing held under this section that the public would otherwise be entitled to attend, commensurate with the method in which the meeting or hearing is being conducted, including, but not limited to, examples such as live-streaming by means of the internet, local radio, television, cable, or public access channels, call in information for a teleconference, or by means of any other similar electronic technology. The public body shall ensure that the public can observe and hear the discussions and deliberations of all the members of the public body, whether the member is participating in person or electronically.

(C) When members of a public body conduct a hearing by means of teleconference, video conference, or any other similar electronic technology, the public body must establish a means, through the use of electronic equipment that is widely available to the general public, to converse with witnesses, and to receive documentary testimony and physical evidence.

(D) The authority granted in this section applies notwithstanding any conflicting provision of the Revised Code. Nothing in this section shall be construed to negate any provision of section 121.22 of the Revised Code, Chapter 119. of the Revised Code, or other section of the Revised Code that is not in conflict with this section.

(E) This section is effective during the period of the emergency declared by Executive Order 2020-01D, issued on March 9, 2020, or until December 1, 2020, if the period of the emergency continues beyond that date.

Section 3: Conducting Online Meetings with Zoom

Zoom Video Conferencing has become a popular video meeting tool during the COVID-10 pandemic. This is due to its large number of potential participants, screen sharing capability, and other tools at its disposal. Indeed, as you will see in Section 6 of this document, many of the governments who have already put a plan in place for virtual meetings are doing so with Zoom. If your community chooses to use this program, the following steps outline how to set up your meeting and how to live-stream it to the general population. *(Be sure to check with your public access cable provider too (ICRC, MVCC, etc.) as they may already have solutions for this):*

- **Step 1:** Set up a Zoom account. (www.zoom.com). In order to live stream a meeting, you must use the “pro” plan. This allows unlimited meeting length and up to 100 subscribers. The cost of this plan is \$14.99 per month.
- **Step 2:** Once you have set up your Zoom account, click settings in the “personal” menu on the left side. Scroll down to “In Meeting (Advanced).” Select “Allow Live Streamed Meetings,” and then choose your platform(s). Once you are ready to host a meeting, select the “schedule a meeting” button in the upper right hand corner on the Zoom website and follow the prompts.
- **Step 3:** You cannot livestream the meeting until it begins. Have the person hosting the zoom meeting log in early and start the meeting. Once the meeting is started (meaning video is up), at the bottom of the screen there is a menu of options. Click the “more” button, and an option will appear enabling you to livestream. You will be given an option of using Facebook Live, YouTube, or any other streaming service selected in Step 2. We recommend YouTube for ease of sharing.
- **Step 4:** Once you click the “Live on YouTube” button in Step 3, it will ask you what account you want to broadcast from. Choose your community’s account. You will then see a button called “Go Live.” Press it. After a moment of buffering, it will pull your meeting up on YouTube. (There will be a 15 second delay between the livestream and the actual meeting).
- **Step 5:** On your YouTube page, you will see an option called “share.” (bottom right under video) Here, you can share it with social media, or copy the link to be pasted to your website.
 - It would be advised that you post a notice to “tune in a 7pm” or something along those lines. Have the administrator start the meeting early (even if the administrator is the only person on the call) in order to provide time to set up the live stream and paste the link in the required places.

Test this out during the day in advance of your meeting. Contact T.J. White at the Center for Local Government (TWhite@C4LG.org) or 513-325-9619 with any questions.

All of the steps above assume that your community has a YouTube account. Here are the steps to enable livestreaming on YouTube. THIS FEATURE MUST BE SET UP AT LEAST 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF YOUR FIRST LIVESTREAM:

- **Step 1:** Set up a YouTube account. Or if you have one, when you log into your YouTube account, on the left hand side of the page is a vertical menu. Scroll down to the very bottom and select “settings”
- **Step 2:** Once you select “settings,” in the middle of the screen you will see a link called “channel status and features.” Click it.
- **Step 3:** At the bottom of your screen you will see a menu. In the middle of that menu is a box called “Live Streaming.” Click “enable live streaming.” Again, it takes 24 hours to enable.

If you are advised by Counsel to record your meeting for public records purposes, that option is available in Zoom as well:

- Step 1: When you are ready to begin recording, select the “record” icon at the bottom of the video screen. This meeting host has to be the one to do this.
- Step 2: When the meeting is complete, you will be given the option of saving the meeting on your computer or the cloud. Choose the option that fits your preferences.

The meeting will also be archived on your community’s YouTube channel.

Section 4: Other Online Tools at Your Disposal

While we have primarily focused on Zoom Video Conferencing, there are other online tools at your disposal as well:

Zoom Virtual Meetings

Citizen Participation:

- Access can be provided by a citizen simply clicking on the same meeting link as your elected officials, or by Live Streaming (see above).
- For public comment periods, you can provide the same link that you give your elected officials to join the meeting. As Administrator, you can mute or unmute attendees.

Public Notice:

- Share a link to the meeting from the zoom website (for people who are participating), or you can link YouTube, Facebook Live, or potentially other streaming platforms to your community’s website or social media account for streaming.

Records Retention:

- Ability to record full meeting; paid plans include cloud storage for recordings

FreeConferenceCall

Citizen Participation

- Up to 1000 meeting participants for free
- Ability to share a “meeting code” to allow citizens to join the conference
- Ability to access meeting through web browser or free apps on mobile devices
- Can moderate “chat” feature to allow for citizen interaction

Public Notice:

- Can post meeting code to allow citizens to join via web browser or free app

Records Retention:

- Ability to record screen sharing session, primary video feed and audio conferences

Cisco Webex

Citizen Participation

- Up to 100 participants; \$17.95/mo
- “Call-in for audio” feature
- Ability to moderate chat feature for citizen participation
- Can access meeting through customized web link via a web browser, no need to download apps

Public Notice

- Can post customized web link to allow citizens to access meeting through web browser

Records Retention

- MP4 meeting recordings available

AnyMeeting

Citizen Participation

- Free Pro plan until 2021 with 30 web participants and 200 phone participants
- Ability to record and transcribe meetings
- Join meetings via the AnyMeeting desktop or mobile app
- Provides conference call phone number and pin to allow citizens to join via telephone

Public Notice

- Citizens can join via a telephone number and pin, video participants are limited to 30.

Records Retention

- Ability to record meetings and unlimited storage with free Pro plan.

GoToMeeting

Citizen Participation

- Business plan; \$16.00/mo
- Up to 250 participants
- Ability to dial-in to join
- Join meeting via web browser or mobile app

Public Notice

- Can advertise time and phone number to dial in and join

Records Retention

- Unlimited meeting recording and automatic transcription

Section 5: What other CLG Members are doing

This section will continually be updates as we receive more responses from CLG governments:

Glendale

- Glendale already partners with ICRC for cable access to broadcast public meetings. ICRC reached out to Glendale in anticipation of this and is utilizing Zoom for ICRC’s employees to host virtual meetings for governments and is using YouTube live to broadcast meetings to the public. If

public citizen wishes to actively participate in meeting, they can email ahead of the meeting and ask to be added to the Zoom to do a public presentation.

Liberty Township

- Liberty Township will be testing out Zoom Webinar's option for our Trustee meeting that will be held virtually next week. It seems to be a good option for us, and the webinar feature provides a bit more control to determine panelists vs. attendees. You can pay a monthly fee, and cancel at any time. It was \$14.99/mos for Zoom Pro and then an additional \$40/mos for the webinar add-on.

North College Hill

- At North College Hill, we are using Zoom in conjunction with ICRC.

Wyoming

- Wyoming is using Zoom and streaming on FB Live
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Section 6: Advice from Professional Organizations

Ohio Municipal League

<http://www.omloho.org/167/Coronavirus-Disease-Resource-Page>

- Links to federal guidance and assistance (CDC, FEMA)
- Information for local officials, such as guidance on HB 197 and risk assessment tools
- Links to State of Ohio resources, such as the Office of the Governor and ODH
- Example policies on HR and first responders, as well as State of Emergency Declarations

Ohio Township Association

<https://ohiotownships.org/remote-meeting-tools>

- Step-by-step overview of using Facebook Live, Zoom, Workplace for Government and YouTube for government officials
- Legislative information
- Guidance specifically on HB 197
- Resources for constituent distribution on topics such as the Stay at Home order and guidance for various businesses and government agencies

National League of Cities

<https://covid19.nlc.org/resources/>

- Access to the Bloomberg Action Tracker, a nation-wide mechanism for local government leaders to share the actions that they have taken to combat COVID-19
- Guidance on Federal resources and actions
- The CitiesSpeak Blog, which provides best-practices on a variety of different topics
- Resources from partner organizations of the NLC, such as AARP and City Health

ICMA

<https://icma.org/coronavirus-crisis-response-resources-your-community>

- Blog-style posts on holding virtual public meetings
- National-level news related to COVID-19 and local governance
- Guidance on topics such as protecting vulnerable populations, resiliency, crisis communication and many more
- Information on strategic government resources and partnerships

National Association of Counties

<https://www.naco.org/resources/county-tech-xchange-covid-19-software-guide-counties>

- Guide on various software and programs that are available to assist in the fluid landscape of COVID-19
- Information on mitigation strategies for COVID-19 transmission
- Tools from NACo partner organization
- News and information related to county-level government administration during COVID-19