

Guidance for Enforcement Agencies (EAs) on Hosting Virtual Public Meetings

Enforcement Agencies (EAs) are required to conduct an informational meeting for all new and revised solid waste facilities (SWF) permit applications submitted to an EA for consideration (see Title 27, California Code of Regulations (227 CCR) Sections 21660 and 21660.2). Unforeseen circumstances may sometimes make in-person informational meeting infeasible.

EAs are encouraged to:

- Consider hosting virtual public meetings to engage with the public to comply with informational meeting requirements,
- Support the timely review of SWF permit applications. Contact their CalRecycle Point of Contact (POC) to discuss options for noticing and conducting an informational meeting.

Many government agencies are using technology-based forums, also known as virtual meetings, to engage with the public. Below are suggestions to help guide EAs on how to engage the public in an equitable, inclusive, and transparent way.

Measures for Noticing Virtual Informational Meetings

EAs should undertake measures to increase noticing and to encourage attendance at meetings by increasing public notices (see 27 CCR Section 21660.3 (b)(4)).

Challenges for public participation in virtual public informational meetings:

- Limited access to computers, smart phones, high speed Internet
- Unfamiliarity with online meeting software platforms
- Exacerbated during natural disasters, such as earthquakes, fires, floods, or a public health crisis.

Consider these challenges and seek out creative solutions to host inclusive meetings.

Recommendations for Writing Public Notices

- Public notices should be concise and easy to read.

- Provide the notification in multiple languages to serve residents who do not speak English. Please refer to OEHHA's CalEnviroScreen Indicators Map to get a better understanding of what languages are spoken in your jurisdiction.
 - Population Characteristics > Linguistic Isolation > Click on the census tracts in your jurisdiction.
- Public notices should include information on how viewers can request language translation during the meeting and for all meeting materials. Information about live captioning for the hearing impaired should also be provided.
- Provide in the public notice full details about how to participate remotely, including:
 - How to access the meeting via webcast URL or specific software platform
 - Instructions for downloading software and the webcast or meeting ID number, if required; and,
 - A phone number for a call-in option, as not everyone has a computer to access virtual meetings.
- Invite the public to submit questions and comments prior to the meeting and make a commitment that they will be included in the meeting.
- Increase the public's awareness of your meetings by partnering with a local non-profit organization, church group, radio station, neighborhood group or other outlets to post the notification on their websites, social media channels, or to announce the meeting via their email distribution lists.

Considerations for Hosting Virtual Informational Meetings

Virtual Meeting Platforms

Virtual meetings are online events that are streamed via high-speed Internet. Depending on available resources, there are multiple ways to host a virtual public meeting.

Video Conferencing and Webinars

Video conferences and webinars are online events that allow both presenters and viewers to interact in real time.

Features

- Video conferences and webinars generally allow for several presenters in multiple locations.

- Viewers can usually participate via video or audio from multiple devices (computer, tablet, smart phone, standard phone).
- Presenters can present PowerPoint presentations and videos.
- Presenters can often mute participants as needed and utilize a “raise hand” function for receiving comments and questions.
- Most video conferencing software platforms include group and private chat, screen sharing, and some allow presenters to segment the group into smaller discussion groups.

Requirements

- Presenters can often host a high-quality event without purchasing additional filming equipment, and will need a computer, audio and video capabilities, a high-speed Internet connection, and virtual meeting software to host.
- Viewers will need to download software to participate via video.

Webcast

A webcast is a media presentation distributed over the Internet using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous viewers. In other words, webcasting is “broadcasting” over the Internet. Webcasts, like CalRecycle’s monthly public meeting, are streamed from a central location.

Features

In most cases, viewers access the meeting via a webpage URL and interact with presenters by submitting questions and comments via an online form or email address.

Requirements

- Viewers are usually not required to download any special software and only need access to a smart phone or computer with high-speed Internet access. However, viewers usually cannot participate by dialing in via standard phone.
- Presenters often need professional filming equipment (cameras, microphones, streaming software) to facilitate high-quality webcasting.
- Many webcasting software solutions also provide live captions for the hearing impaired.

Recommendations for Hosting a Virtual Meeting

Meeting Preparation

- Provide a detailed agenda to viewers when the meeting details are published.

- Test the presentations, speakers, and webcam (if using) prior to the scheduled virtual meeting.
- Presenters should minimize background noise and instruct viewers to do the same.
- Assign a facilitator for the virtual meeting, especially for the Q&A portion.
- Initiate the virtual meeting five minutes before the start time.
- Ensure all participants, except presenters and facilitators, are on mute until it is time for questions.

During the Meeting

- Address language translation and captioning at the start of the meeting. Consider the following ways to provide accommodations:
 - Consider setting up a separate group with a translator or sign language interpreter.
 - After the virtual meeting, keep the record open, send out a translated record into the requested languages, and post online. Provide an email address, text box, or phone number for members of the public to provide their input.
 - Allow for extra time during this period to receive comments.
- Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation for individuals with disabilities, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act and resolving any doubt whatsoever in favor of accessibility and advertise that procedure each time notice of the meeting is given.
- If you would like to know who is in your audience, consider starting your virtual meeting with a poll to see who is in attendance from the public, a local agency, a state agency, or within the solid waste and recycling industry.
- Communicate to viewers how and where they can submit questions (e.g., chat boxes, “raise hand” function, or by email).
- Allow both computer and phone participation so participants without computers can join the meeting.
- Allow ample time in the agenda for viewer questions.
- If viewers submitted questions prior to the meeting, read them aloud during the meeting so the meeting is fully transparent, and they can be documented as part of the record.

- Provide your contact information at the end of the virtual meeting.
- If presenters did not provide documents at the start of the meeting, provide them to meeting viewers within 48 hours by posting them to your website or emailing them out on your listserv. Consider sending out an anonymous survey to seek feedback on the meeting and suggestions for future meetings.