Towns Fund
Delivery Partner

ENGAGING IN A DIGITAL WORLD: WEBINAR Q&A

This note provides a summary of questions and answers from the live webinar held on 26 August 2020. For more details please view the recording at townsfund.org.uk/events where a copy of the slide deck can also be downloaded.

Polling question 1 – shared at the beginning of the presentation

How confident are you using digital technologies to engage with communities?

47% of attendees were very confident in using digital technologies

53% of attendees have used before, or are comfortable using digital technologies

Webinar questions

There are so many digital platforms out there, how do we choose the right one?

- First decide on your messaging and then choose your platform that best fits your budget, your needs and what you want to achieve, such as hosting digital meetings, workshops, webinars and/or coffee mornings. Use trials to test which platform works best.

- Also look at functionality and what is needed. Types of functionality available vary – Q&A with voting, chat, emojis for posting, online polling, 'hand up' feature for asking questions, recording and playing back. You may just require a chat box or you may need a more involved platform for holding breakout sessions for large numbers of attendees.

- There are many examples of platforms but some popular ones are Teams Live, Zoom, Live Stream and our old friend – Skype.

What about communities who don't use digital and are not online. How do we get them engaged too?

- First, it's good to remind ourselves that digital enables engagement with diverse groups of stakeholders and audiences that would normally not be able to participate in conversations or access information. Second, digital engagement methods should be used as part of a broader approach along with more traditional ways of engaging.

- There is no 'one size fits all'. The best stakeholder engagement plans will incorporate a mix of face-to-face, digital, phone and postal engagement tactics to reach as wide an audience as possible. Newsletters, letters and traditional distribution methods can be highly effective in reaching people even during Covid-19.

- Consider how you can use the public estate to provide outlets for information materials on the Town Investment Plan. One town even worked with colleagues managing local markets to make use of poster sites in high footfall area to promote their consultation. Another example is where a major infrastructure project set up stands at supermarkets and service stations to promote their scheme design and gather feedback from the local communities and those that travel through the area.

- Some towns have used community groups to undertake telephone surveys of their members. One town even had the vicar ringing around to residents.

- Hyper-local media can provide a route to residents who may not engage online. While some hyper-local media is digital (including WhatsApp and Facebook groups), parish newsletters and

residents' associations provide potential routes to reach these audiences in the most relevant way.

- In a relatively cost-effective way, targeted postal distribution of materials can effectively reach communities with a high proportion of residents who may not have internet access, network coverage or who are less likely to engage online.

- Use 3rd party advocates to share information and speak to those who don't have online access or not comfortable using digital methods, or use 'old fashioned' post box letter and leaflet drops.

When will the slides from today be available please? I would like to share it with my comms team as soon as possible.

- The presentation slides are available on the Towns Fund website under events, with a download link located on the digital engagement webinar page.

Reference to interesting statistics about older people's use of social media. What are the best channels to reach older audiences? Guessing Facebook maybe as seems to be mainly older people nowadays?

- Agree that Facebook is most popular with older audiences. Don't recommend TikTok and YouTube as they are much less popular with older people.

- Also use pre-existing community networks and their online pages to help post information or their social media channels for distributing messages.

How do we find the resources and time to manage all these digital platforms?

- Don't over think it and start simple, using platform(s) that meet your needs and budget.

- Use accessible and user-friendly social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and once you begin using them, it will become easier and faster to use for future activities.

- There will be members of your team that are familiar with social media and are regular users. Take advantage of their knowledge, experience and interest to help monitor activity and post information about your Towns Fund projects and community activity.

What advice do you have to deal with any negativity experienced on social media and other digital engagement platforms.

- Firstly, don't be afraid to embark on social media due to fear of a potential backlash. It's good to remember that conversations are always happening even when you aren't online and conversations will be positive and negative. This is a chance to put your own narrative out there and get across your side of the story.

- For negative social media activity, try to respond positively, engage twice and if negativity continues to persist, then take the conversation offline.

Polling question 2 – shared at the end of the session

Following today's session do you feel more confident using digital technologies to engage with communities?

50% of attendees said 'Yes'

50% of attendees said 'No'