



# **ASLA Parks & Recreation Professional Practice Network (PPN) Community Outreach Survey Summary**

Survey created by Kalle Maggio, ASLA

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As we were all affected by the pandemic, many industries, including the design professions and public practice, shifted from in-person community meetings to the plethora of virtual platforms available for community outreach initiatives. The ASLA Parks & Recreation Professional Practice Network (PPN) decided to conduct a survey that asked ASLA members to describe their experience facilitating virtual community outreach.

The majority of those who provided feedback on this survey used computers and phones for these meetings, and the virtual meeting platforms that were used the most were Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Zoom was the most utilized and described as intuitive, recognizable, and yielded higher participation rates than other platforms. Microsoft Teams has the upper hand for its scheduling capabilities and links with the Microsoft Outlook email platform.

However, there are those who stated that community meetings all have different requirements and engagement should be customized to meet the community's needs on a case-by-case basis.

The consensus is that though in-person meetings cannot be replaced completely, there is a growing acceptance of virtual meetings due to their convenience and efficiency. People are able to join virtual meetings for the arranged time slot rather than having to spend time traveling to and from a physical meeting site. Some survey participants stated that it allows meeting facilitators to maintain better order, which is necessary for any productive meeting. There is also the ability to record meetings, which provides better review and documentation. Overall, the pandemic has made an impact on the way we continue to conduct business and interact with one another both physically and virtually.



## Survey Findings Snapshot

The online survey garnered 61 responses, representing practitioners in private consulting practice (60%) and public agency practice (30%), with other respondents representing students, academic institutions, and non-profits.

Overall, responses show that the pivot to online meetings is still a learning process, though respondents expect online outreach to remain a key part of the community engagement toolkit even after the pandemic.

Some key findings from the results:

On a scale of 1 (disappointing) to 5 (exceptional), 72% of respondents rated their experience with the community outreach phase of their projects during COVID somewhat positively as a “3” or a “4.”

*During the community outreach phase of your project(s), how has your experience been this past year?*

Weighted average	Exceptional (5)	4	3	2	Disappointing (1)	Total number of responses
3.26	8.2%	36.07%	36.07%	13.11%	6.56%	
	5	22	22	8	4	61

Similarly, over 81% of respondents indicated that virtual platforms provided an equal or better public engagement experience compared to pre-pandemic community engagement.

*Has the virtual platform provided a better or worse public engagement and experience, compared to pre-pandemic?*

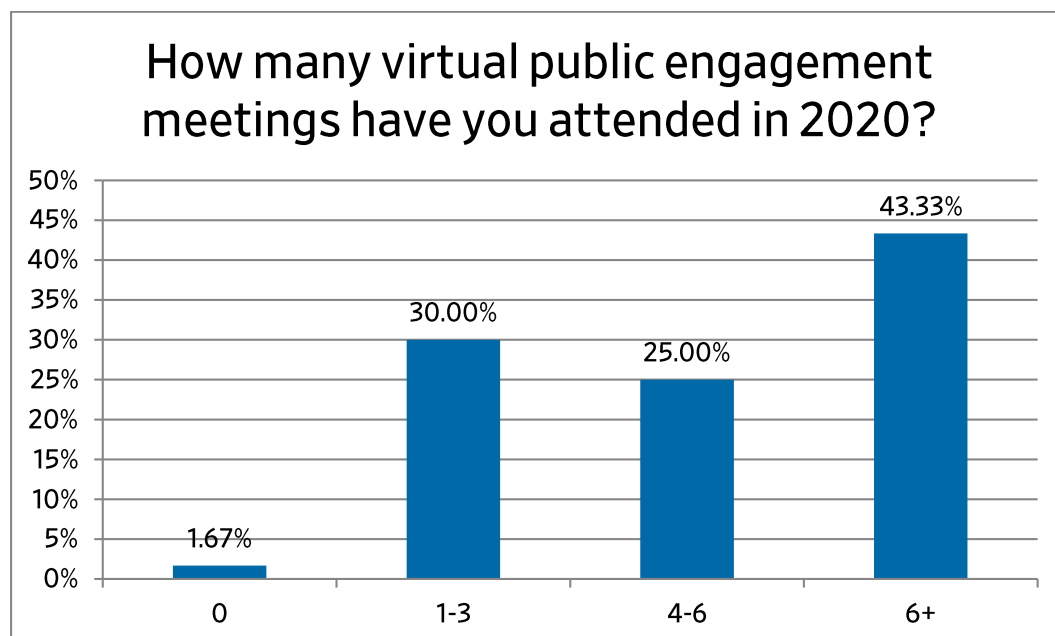
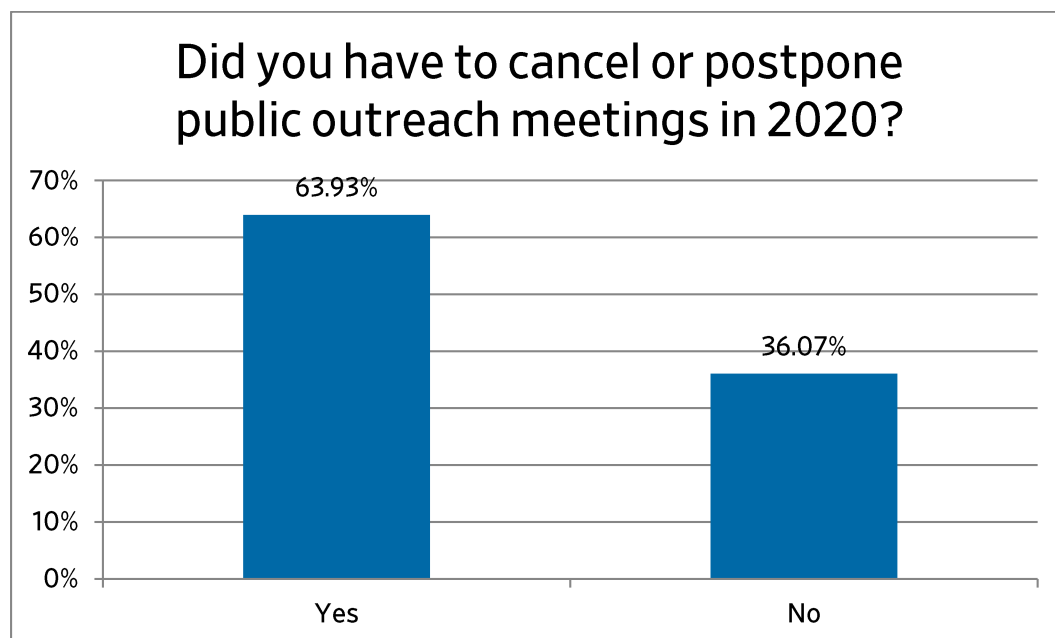
Weighted average	Exceptional (5)	4	3	2	Disappointing (1)	Total number of responses
<b>3.25</b>	6.56%	31.15%	44.26%	16.39%	1.64%	
	4	19	27	10	1	61

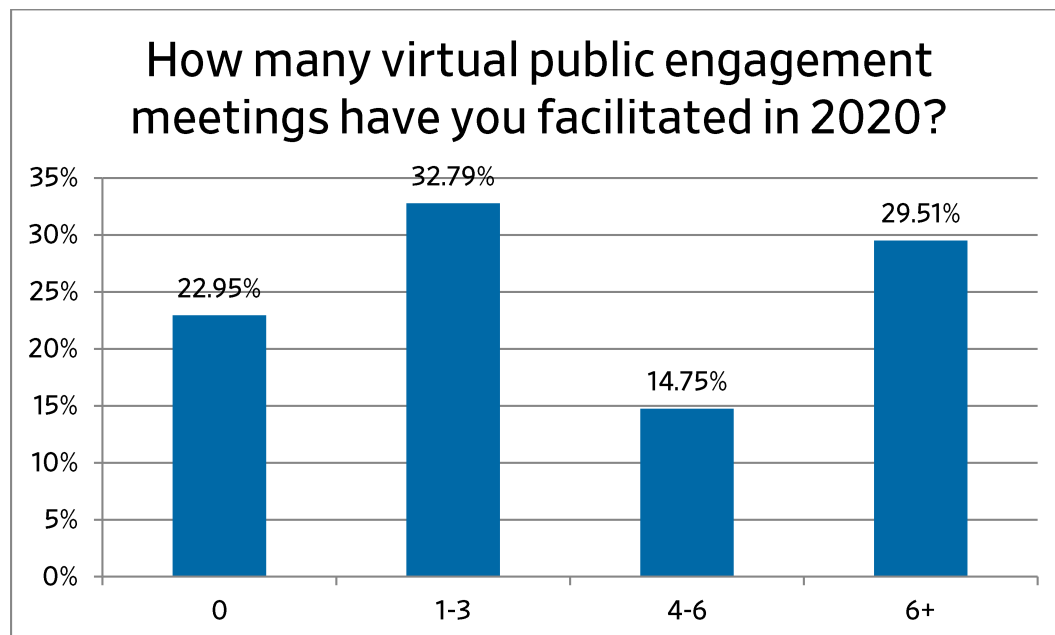
Of the five virtual platforms listed, Zoom was ranked the highest (79% of respondents rated it a “4” or “5”), followed by Teams (49% rated it a “4” or “5”).

Platform	Weighted Average (1 - Disappointing to 5 - Exceptional)
Go To Meeting	3.14
Google Hangouts	2.41
Microsoft Teams	3.58
Skype	3.00
Zoom	4.07
Other	3.44

Other platforms used included: Webex (Cisco), Miro, Mural, Jamboard (Google), Amazon Chime, Adobe Connect, PublicInput.com, Hopin, Pigeonhole Live, Social Pinpoint, FaceTime (Apple), Google forms for surveys, Padlet, Poll Everywhere, and Eventbrite.

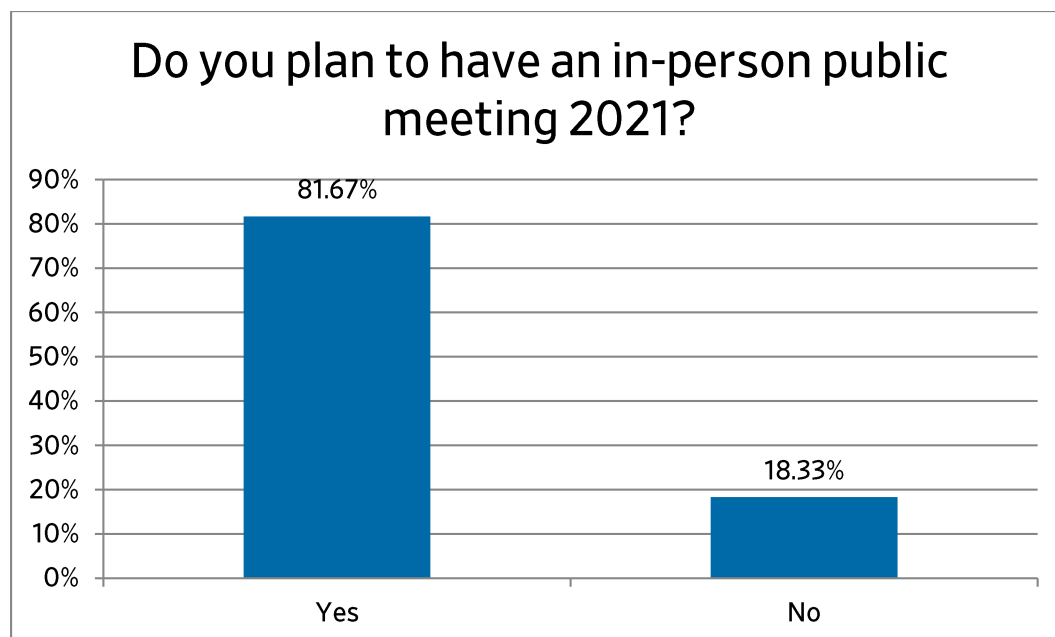
68% of the respondents had attended at least four virtual public engagement meetings in 2020, and 43% had attended six or more.



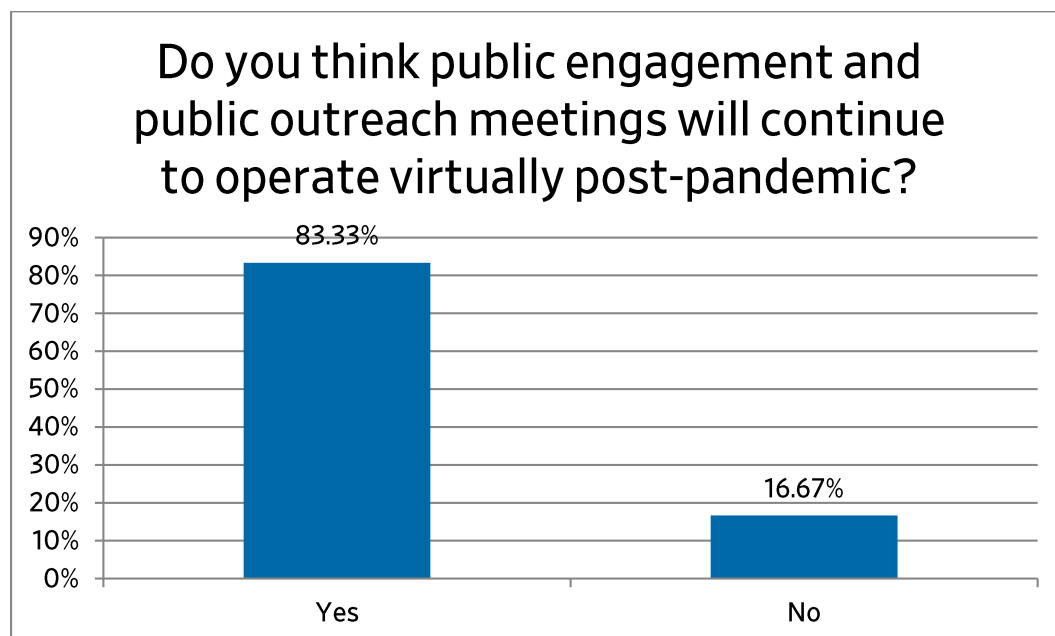


95% of respondents indicated that Zoom works best with computers or laptops, followed by Microsoft Teams (64%). Zoom was also rated best for tablets (65%), followed by Teams (41%). Zoom and Teams were ranked about the same for cell phones, at 66% and 61% respectively.

Almost 82% of respondents planned to have an in-person public meeting in 2021.



Over 83% think public engagement and public outreach meetings will continue to operate virtually post-pandemic.



Suggestions for improving virtual public outreach meetings included:

- Ensure that end users have the technology (such as Wi-Fi access) needed to participate.

- Include online versions of public meetings, either simulcast or in addition to in-person meetings, to get more input from the broader community.
- Test and practice presentations on virtual platforms prior to the meeting
- Offer to follow up on questions or items that didn't get covered in the main meeting.
- Include engagement and interactive features like a digital sticky-note board, white board, polls, or survey.
- Require people to login and share their email to continue to build email base.
- Provide material or presentation files for review prior to the presentation.
- Use break-out rooms for small groups.

Additional comments from the survey respondents on their experiences with community engagement:

- “Empowering virtual public outreach is possible; it takes patience, creativity and a willingness to use the virtual platform as a real tool.”
- “Virtual needs to be a uniquely curated experience, welcoming participants, highly interactive, and easily facilitated for even those without tech skills.”
- “Zoom seems to have the most flexibility as far as control (sound, chat, etc.), creating channels for translations.”
- “Multiple platforms have multiple pros and cons. No single platform is best for everyone.”
- “We really need the ability to have the community be able to whiteboard their ideas, but virtual meetings are also so unequal when it comes to issues of equity and justice that I don't recommend them.”
- “In many ways it's solved other underlying issues such as engaging with people in far-reaching communities, as well as those with mobility issues, or those who may have felt constrained by time and family conditions and not able to participate in person.”
- “Saves time and travel (more sustainable). Easier to get more people to attend more meetings due to convenience and reduction of scheduling conflicts.”



- “I think we will see more hybrid options where you may be able to attend in person (I actually think people are itching to have in-person interactions again) but also have a virtual component for those not comfortable being in-person.”
- “Our community response didn't like them and we get better results with door to door.”
- “People want to be able to feel heard in person and get to know the public and the designers.”
- “Incorporating surveys really improves engagement and helps people feel that their voices are heard. Zoom has an option for surveys, but Poll Everywhere is another option. Miro boards can also be used, where visual boards and maps can be uploaded and the public can place virtual sticky notes, draw, and comment.”
- “Office hours to follow up on questions or items that didn't get covered in a main meeting. And it opens up more availability.”
- “I think ASLA should advocate for making broadband available to all US residents in their homes as an infrastructure necessity. The ability to participate fully in public input processes is critical to individuals being able to express their opinions and critical to the success of public projects.”
- “I hope that all future public meetings / conferences continue to have virtual options. Many working families have kids to care for, but would be able to join virtually as opposed to travel to an off-site location. Also, virtual options support better inclusivity for people with disabilities (people who have trouble travelling, people with sensory challenges don't do well in large conference settings, etc.). And better for the environment.”

*Survey responses were collected May-July 2021. A special thank you to Kalle Maggio, ASLA, for developing the survey.*