Interim Guidance for Conducting Community-Based Planning Meetings During COVID-19

July 1, 2020

This document provides interim guidance for applicants who will be conducting community-based planning meetings for Round 4 of the Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program (SPP). **Due to COVID-19's impact on social gatherings, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) is allowing for alternatives to in-person community-based planning meetings.**

Effectiveness of In-Person Meetings

No replacement, when designing a park, is as effective in building a stronger sense of community as in-person community-based planning meetings. In-person meetings are still recommended and encouraged for SPP Round 4. The next page provides guidance for in-person meetings. However, if there is a local COVID-19 outbreak that does not allow for in-person meetings, **SPP Round 4 applicants will be allowed to conduct all five recommended meetings through webinars or phone conferences.**

> **** For SPP Round 4 only, it is the applicant's discretion to have in-person meetings, phone conferences, or webinars, based on their local health guidance.**

Meeting Alternatives

Alternatives such as phone conferences and video conferencing/webinars can still produce productive community input. However, webinars require high speed internet, equipment, and technical training, which can be a technological barrier in communities affected by poverty. Additionally, it can be hard to control the background noise of callers, participants trying to speak at the same time, and translation needs for discussions. Preparing for a webinar can involve more planning and technical support staff than meeting with residents in person. This document provides things to consider.

Community Leadership

Whether applicants decide to hold in-person meetings, or conduct phone conferences and webinars, the Department encourages applicants to continue to lead with empathy. Ensuring a welcoming community engagement process during these unprecedented times is of utmost importance. Make the park design process inclusive, interactive, and fun for the project area's residents.

Meeting Charts

Due to COVID-19, the Department created charts on the following pages which provide SPP Round 4 guidance for community-based planning meetings:

In-Person Meetings

Tips for Facilitators

- **Health Guidelines**: Check local and state health guidelines for physical distancing and plan for how to address the guidelines for in-person meetings.
    - COVID.ca.gov website: https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap-counties/
    - CA Department of Public Health: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx

- **Conduct outdoor meetings** at or near the project site in an area that allows for physical distancing and fresh air.

- **Use an RSVP process** to keep meeting numbers within local and state public health COVID-19 guidelines for the number of participants per meeting.

- **Masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes** should be provided.

- **Interactive Methods** are described in the "*Designing Parks Using Community Based Planning.*" Coming soon at www.parks.ca.gov/spp

---

Phone Conferences and Video Conferencing/Webinars

Platforms:

The following are examples of webinar platforms and tools. Remember the purpose is for residents to work together to design the park with the applicant.

Phone Conferences:

- Local telephone companies teleconference lines

Webinars:

- Google Meet: https://meet.google.com

- Microsoft Teams: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-softwar

- Skype: https://www.skype.com/en/

- Zoom: https://zoom.us/

- Bluejeans: https://www.bluejeans.com/

- Cisco Webex: https://www.webex.com/

- GoToMeeting: https://www.gotomeeting.com/
- Trendy Apps used by youth may include TikTok or Snapchat

Tools for Gathering Ideas During Webinars:

Video Conferencing/Webinars Only:

- Google Drawings
- Google Docs
- Sketchpad 5.1
- Polling, Chat box, and Hand raising - tools that are included in most video conferencing/webinar platforms.
- Microsoft Visio
- Microsoft Murals
- Sketchboard

Preparation/Presentation for Facilitators:

The following discusses how facilitators can prepare themselves for webinars and phone conference meetings to obtain park design ideas from residents.

- **Internal plan**: There are many considerations about how to achieve the three park design goals with residents. Planning is key...

- **Staff Roles**: Assign staff to specific roles, including at least one presenter/facilitator, one staff to monitor questions, one staff for capturing the residents' ideas, and one support staff for technical issues. The public should have contact information for technical issues and troubleshooting. Ensure that all staff involved in the meeting understand their roles.

- **Meeting Protocols and Ground Rules**: Decide on procedures and rules for the meeting in advance. Consider instructions such as how participants can discuss ideas, how to capture ideas, muting and unmuting participants' phones, and dealing with background noises when they are unmuted.

- **Visual Aids:** Provide visuals such as colored maps and satellite photos showing the physical space of the project site, to participants before the meeting. See the "*Designing Parks Using Community Based Planning*" document for other ideas about visual tools.

- **Packets:** Mail out, deliver, or have participants pick up packets of important meeting materials such as platform quick reference notes, agenda about the "three park design goals". site map, and any other information to assist with the design and planning prior to meetings.

- **Screen Access**: If phone conferencing is available, make sure residents who are not on the video conference/webinar have another way to access what is being shown on the screen. Without visuals and clear descriptors, residents on the phone may lose interest or feel discounted.

- **Interactive Tools**: Use an interactive resource for participants to create site plans (see video conference/webinar tools section). Consider how this can also be done during phone conferences.

- **Capturing residents' Ideas**: Consider the best possible tools to capture ideas, especially how residents can see each other's ideas and add comments.

- **Meeting Information**: Provide all necessary phone numbers, websites, pass codes, and passwords to residents who RSVP'd.

- **Language Level**: Use plain language that is understandable across multiple generations and translation resources. Speak slowly and clearly. Articulate words clearly and distinctly to translate well to other languages.

- **Make it Fun and Shareable** - if it's fun, it will be shared and talked about!

- **"Gamify" the Engagement** - make it interactive. Test web based platforms that allow for residents to work together to provide interactive park design ideas. The chat function or a poll may also be useful tools.

- **Agenda:** Develop an agenda that can be shared in advance, on screen during webinars, and on websites.

- **Presentation Rehearsal**: Practice using the chosen platform prior to the meeting and test the platform at least 30 minutes before the start of the video conference. Being comfortable using the platform is key.

Technical Assistance for Video Conferencing/Webinars:

- **Internet Connection**: Consider the bandwidth/internet speed and internet browser for each participant and speaker.

- **Browser:** Some browsers work better than others with webinar tools.

- **Platform Instructions:** Develop a short, first-time user tutorial or quick reference notes for the common tools on the platform. Direct participants to the video conference/webinar website for additional questions beyond the common tool tutorial or cheat sheet.

- **Platform Choice:** Choose a video conferencing platform that allows for the desired number of residents to participate.

- **Written Instructions:** Ensure written instructions are clear for people to learn how to use the tool.

- **Technical Support Contacts:** Participants and presenters should know how to contact someone for live technical support.

- **Call-in Alternatives:** Consider video conference/webinar solutions that allow participants to call in by phone if they do not have access to high speed internet.

- **Accounts/Application Downloads:** Notify participants if they will need to set up an account or download an application to access video conference/webinar features.

- **Provide WiFi access information:** Providing residents with information to access the internet as well as a map of WiFi hotspots within the project's half-mile radius. However, if this requires residents to be in a group, it may become an in-person meeting.

Outreach to Invite and Prepare the Residents:

- **Gathering Contacts**: Ask residents within the project area's half-mile radius to start a contact list of potential webinar/conference call participants. Their contact info is needed to schedule webinars or conference calls.

- **Canvass**: Walk the project area's half-mile radius surrounding the park to post flyers and send mailers to invite residents.

- **Partnerships**: Partner with community leaders and organizations within the project area. Reach out to local health organizations, including "public health champions" and "promotoras," community-based organizations, and local schools which may help with outreach.

- **School Class**: Consider asking a local school's teacher to set this up as a class educational special project for her/his students. Due to the pandemic, students may still have access to school provided laptops and internet access.

- **Incentivize**: Provide incentives to participants to increase turnout. Make the incentives clear in the invitations.

- **Prepare Participants**: Reach out to participants early; and send meeting preparation reading and visual materials ahead of time. Ensure that materials are available for residents who are non-English speaking.

Outreach Flyer:

An outreach flyer should specify:

- Purpose - three park design goals.

- Meeting(s) date(s) with start and end time(s).

- Choose times that allow the largest number of residents to participate (e.g., weekdays after 5pm and/or weekends).

- Request an RSVP to ensure that the meeting will not exceed the maximum number of participants.

- Give direction how residents can prepare in advance.

Give Guidance to Help Prepare the Public Participants

The following gives some ideas of what the residents should be told in advance to help prepare them for webinars and phone conference park design meetings.

- **Schedule:** Block the time in your schedule to be fully engaged in the meeting.

- **Family or Roomates:** Encourage participants to include their family members or roommates. In addition to discussing park design ideas together, someone in the home can help with technological assistance.

- **Meeting material:** Review the goals, agenda, pictures/visuals, technical guidance, and other instructions before the meeting. Have the meeting materials ready for the conference call or webinar. (make sure this also identifies the project site, and explains the "three park design goals")

Phone Conferences Only:

- **Login Confirmation**: Allow extra time before joining to ensure that the phone number and passcode are correct for the call.

- **Platform Instructions**: Read instructions on how to use the functions of the platform such as mute and unmute prior to entering the phone conference.

- **Quiet Surroundings**: Call from a quiet place to minimize background noise when you are speaking or unmuted.

Video Conferencing/Webinars Only: Guidance *to tell residents* before webinars

- **Browser Compatibility**: Make sure that your browser meets the minimum compatibility requirements to run successfully.

- **Internet connection/Bandwidth**: Consider the speed of your computer connection (from 600 kbps minimum to the best quality 1.2 Mbps). If your computer does not meet the minimum requirements, contact the local agency that is facilitating the video conference for assistance.

- **Login**: Ensure you have the correct login and password information.

- **Platform Tools:** Become familiar with all of the functions of the platform: Read instructions or view a short tutorial on how to ask questions, mute and unmute, hand raising, and other platform functions prior to entering the video conference and how to use the platform. Learn how to block or show yourself on the screen and other video and sound features.

Conclusion
The definition of "Meetings" on page 73 of the SPP Application Guide is as follows: *"Meetings" is defined as "Residents worked together as a group with the applicant or with the applicant's partnering community-based organization(s) to design the park,"* which signifies the importance of a community working together towards a common goal such as designing a neighborhood park.

Although in-person meetings are the preferred method for community engagement, COVID-19 has temporarily challenged this traditional way of conducting meetings. This document has explained alternatives, including phone conferences and video conferences/webinars. However, it is important to reiterate that no replacement is as effective as in-person park design meetings for building strong and supportive community bonds. Effective group dynamics and engagement leads to interactive group discussions and in-depth understanding of a community's true needs. Parks designed with significant community input have higher usage, better protection, encourage a safe environment, and most importantly…thrive!