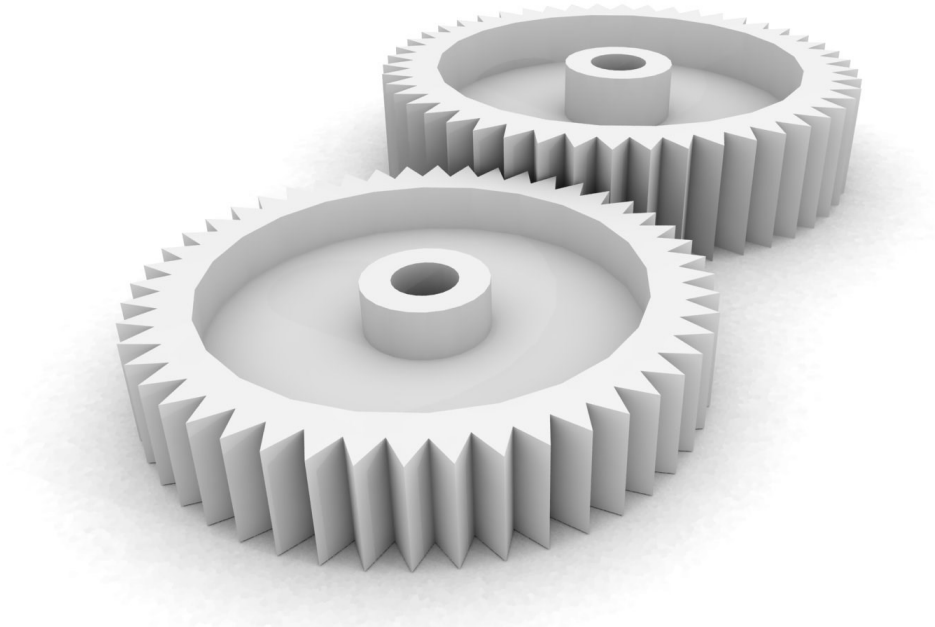# MAKING THE DECISION PROCESS VISIBLE

ILG INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT℠

TIPS

Agendas, Minutes & Staff Reports

- Think through the use of meeting management software to automate the development of materials

- Utilize electronic packets enable the use of tablets for board members vs. large paper packets

- Consider posting the full packet for every commission and governing body meeting

Video

- Index topics during the meeting so the public can jump to the desired item on the web

- Look for integrated video, meeting and document management features

- Videos of presentations at meetings or events can be pulled out to explain a proposal

- Consider short, "snackable" videos of 3-5 minutes or less to grab attention

- Options for HD video enhance the quality and interest in agency videos

- Consider developing a city or county branded channel for the internet

Webinars and Virtual Meetings

- Allows public participation from the comfort of home or office

- Includes the ability to have public comments and participation via phone and/or email

- Allows video of presenters and multiple presenter locations

Providing detailed information about a proposed project, development or program is a key aspect of public engagement. Technology can be used to provide more information including updates to the proposals, documents and reports, videos, agendas, minutes and background information.

AGENDAS, MINUTES & STAFF REPORTS

Prior to holding a commission or governing body meeting, local agencies post agendas with the meeting   topics. Meeting materials for commission and governing body members also include minutes of the actions at the prior meeting and staff reports and attachments on the items to be discussed.

In recent years, most cities and counties have been using meeting management software that allows the agency to automate the meeting agenda and staff report preparation process. This also has the benefit of making meeting packets fully electronic. Electronic packets enable commission and governing body members to get their meeting materials on a tablet or laptop vs. the prior practice of printing large stacks of paper for each meeting. Electronic packets also facilitate posting the agendas, minutes, reports and attachments.

Most agencies go further by posting the agenda, minutes, staff reports and every document and attachment for all commissions and the governing bodies on their websites to enhance public information and transparency. Some software allows members of the public to provide "ecomment" while viewing a given agenda or report.

MEETING VIDEOS & CABLECASTING

The next step forward for many agencies has been to acquire technology that lets them broadcast governing body and commission meetings live on both the City and County TV Channel and the internet. This technology typically consists of video hardware at the local agencies chambers or meeting rooms, cameras, audio equipment and software.

Video and cablecasting systems offer some interesting capabilities. These systems also can interface with the agency's meeting management and document management systems enabling a viewer on the internet to access the meeting video, agenda and meeting materials all on one screen. They allow the video to be indexed so that when it is accessed after the meeting, members of the public can jump to the agenda item of interest rather than watching the entire meeting.

Some systems also have "clipping tools" which allow agency staff to easily create small standalone 2 to 3 minute videos from the meeting or workshop for later use on the City or County TV Channel and website. These small videos are sometimes referred to as "snackable   videos" and can tell a story or catch attention much better than simply posting the entire video of a discussion or presentation.

In some cases, meeting video broadcasting – or cablecasting– is now a standard feature in many meeting management and document management systems. As a result, if a city or county is using document management and/or meeting management systems, it probably has video broadcasting capabilities as well. Orange County's "online government channel" is one example of this.

WEBINARS & VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Another area that can enhance public engagement is the use of webinars and virtual meetings. Here the goal is to tell the story and share information with the public in a program or proposed project or development without the need for interested parties to come to a traditional meeting or workshop. Instead, the agency can share the information over the telephone or internet and the public can view it. This format enables the public to participate from the comfort of their home, office or any location with internet access via electronic messages and/or verbal comments during the event.

Webinars (originally known as "web conferences") have been available for a number of years and can be set up quite easily. They allow the agency and public to communicate over a phone line. With the addition of the internet, webinars can be enhanced by presenting visuals including PowerPoint slides, maps and diagrams relevant to the topic at hand.

Along the same lines, newer technologies allow anyone to setup and host a virtual meeting. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the participants to not only hear information and view a presentations but it also provides video of the presenters to all participants. Another advantage of this approach is the ability of presenters to participate from multiple locations.

HIGH QUALITY VIDEO

In recent years, the cost of adding high definition (HD) video cameras and technology has dropped significantly. This has encouraged cities and counties to begin recording and broadcasting in HD video as well as higher quality standard definition (SD) video.

Cable TV and phone company video systems can offer viewers HD quality on commercial channels, but they do not usually make this playback quality available to cities and counties. Agencies can avoid this quality bottleneck by taking HD videos and posting them on the internet through video services. As an added bonus, these companies offer agencies the opportunity to create and brand their own video channel.

CITY AND COUNTY TV CHANNELS

In California, cities and counties have the right to program three government, education and public access channels operated by the local cable TV and phone companies. A fourth channel is also available once the first three are programmed with at least 56 hours per week of content. These channels initially were part of local cable TV franchises. Today that availability has been written into State Law as part of the State Video Franchising Law also known as DIVCA. (A summary of the provisions of AB 2987 of 2006 or DIVCA is attached to this article).

These channels initially featured live and taped broadcasts of agency meetings and presentations such as the annual State of the City or County speeches. More recently, agencies have used their government access channel to share other information about the agency.

Agencies can consider including information about proposed developments, programs and projects on these channels. This can be as simple as developing a one page slide with basic information on the proposal and upcoming workshops and meetings for the public to attend. It can also extend to short or even extensive videos on the proposal or program.

AGENCY VIDEO CHANNELS, COMPUTERS & MOBILE DEVICES

There are several advantages of considering making videos available on video services offering high quality hosting and playback over the internet. Videos at full SD and HD quality levels are much crisper and easier to watch, especially in full screen mode.

These hosted videos can also be watched on a home big screen HD TV using an internet connected TV device in full quality – or on a smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer. As more residents watch videos on these devices – instead or in addition to their TV sets, adding this option becomes very interesting. It is also worth noting that as the cost of creating and making better quality videos continues to drop, finding ways to share better quality and better looking information on agency programs it is an option to consider to better inform and engage the public. A list of agencies that have developed agency branded channels is attached to this article.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

AB 2987 – Overview of State Video Franchising in California (DIVCA)
http://www.scannatoa.org/Documents/AB%202987/AB2987-Summary.doc

Americans Believe Mobile Devices Will Replace TVs
http://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2014/01/08/53-of-americans-believe-mobile-devices-will-replace-tvs

Finding the HBO or the Netflix of the Enterprise
http://gigaom.com/2014/01/19/finding-the-hbo-or-the-netflix-of-the-enterprise-what-weve-all-been-waiting-for/

Standard Definition TV
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard-definition_television

You Tube Video
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youtube

Agency Video/TV Channels

Calabasas 3 - CTV
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLK_n_5OLuRnf_9T94Z658q9lpkB4RRvcP

Cupertino City Channel
https://www.youtube.com/user/cupertinocitychannel?feature=watch

Garden Grove TV 3
https://www.youtube.com/user/GardenGroveTV3

Peninsula TV – San Mateo County/Cities
http://vimeo.com/peninsulatv

Public Cable TV Authority – Fountain Valley, Huntington Beach, Stanton, Westminster
https://www.youtube.com/user/PCTAtv

San Diego County – County News Center
https://www.youtube.com/user/countysandiego?feature=watch

San Francisco – SF Gov TV
https://www.youtube.com/user/SFGTV

Torrance CitiCable
https://www.youtube.com/user/TorranceCitiCABLE

Walnut Creek TV
https://www.youtube.com/user/CityofWalnutCreek