# Virtual community engagement

Leader: Amy Rohan  
NNIP Camp session 1  
May 5, 2021

Attendance: Jessie Wang, Katie Wang, Sarah Eisele-Dyrli, Rob Pitingolo (notes)

Blog from Amy: <https://medium.com/local-data-for-equitable-recovery/how-data-chats-inform-community-conversations-about-covid-19-response-34c84d0e8b34>

Amy: ^ About the RWJ data chats that we did.

Amy: let’s do some intros. Data you can use for 1 year. This is my first NNIP meeting. It’s great to spend time with the whole group.

Jessie Wang: Based in Chicago DePaul. This is my first NNIP meeting. Excited to hear from everyone and learn what everyone is doing.

Katie Wang: Have been at Kinder for 3 years. I went to NNIP in LA and Milwaukee.

Sarah Eisele-Dyrli: Connecticut data collaborative. This is my first NNIP. I have worked here for 2.5 years. I do the data literacy training. We do publish and paid gigs where we work with orgs data in that data literacy. This is a helpful topic because I have done a little community engagement virtually but curious what others have done.

Logan Shertz: BNIA. Have been there for 3 years. I do GIS and data dissemination. We used to do a lot of community engagement. Excited to learn some strategies.

Amy: How do you define engagement. What is community engagement mean to you?

Logan: I think it means teaching people how to access and interpret data.

Amy: Does that refer to residents?

Logan: Yes, sometimes community associations. Folks who don’t have a good grasp on data.

Jessie: We are typically the “data” partner not community partner. So we partner with the people who do the on the ground work. However we do often engage with different stakeholders to hear from people and practitioners. I personally have more of a communications role. Now I think about community engagement in that way.

Sarah: I think of it from a democratic practice or participatory framework. People who are in the data have a say in what happens in the data lifecycle.

Katie: I would echo what everyone says. We are typically not working directly with residents, it’s more with entities who have contact with residents. We have a relationship with the super neighborhood alliance in Houston. We do that with lots of organizational stakeholders. That’s the level of engagement we are doing. But we have done things in the style of data walks but more often it’s collaborating with non profit organizations.

Sarah: The thread of data intermediary means partnering with organizations to have direct connection.

Amy: I will add that prior to working at Data you can Use I worked at a community organization. Transitioning was kind of a relief for me. It’s so hard to interact directly with residents. One thing we did was a data chat – similar in spirit to the data walks. We put together reports on health conditions and reactions to covid by neighborhood, then did the chats virtually. We did 2 in person when the weather was nice, but that was the exception. One thing I find interesting is the availability of internet access was different. Sometimes people called on the phone to zoom which made it hard to track who it was. I was furiously typing names instead of phone numbers. These were designed to feel friendly which is a major challenge of working virtually. We wound up having to describe what was on the slides for the audio only people. Has anyone else encountered these barriers?

Logan: Absolutely. We used to have a data day, but we did a data week last year. A lot of our staple people didn’t attend. So we’ve seen a shift in who we can reach.

Sarah: We collaborated with orgs to do virtual data walks. I thought internet would be a bigger issue. Some people called in but it was more folks who were working a job. There was an uber driver who called in. The phone people still had a good discussion. They brought some helpful issues. Having an agenda helped.

Jessie: We were a grantee for RWJ for covid recovery. We partnered with elevated Chicago. They are in the communities. Long story short we were going to convene stakeholders and needed buy in from these orgs to administer a survey. The virtual convening of these stakeholders worked well on Zoom. The digital divide wasn’t a problem there but our survey was online so adopting their methods to ask people to take the survey online was a big deal. We struggled getting responses to our online survey. Online comes with a lot of outreach challenges.

Amy: We also had a survey on SurveyMonkey. It was a follow up to an in-person survey. A lot of people have smart phones but not everyone – don’t make that assumption! The logistics and legal aspects of sending text messages to the survey was challenging. We have to add a disclaimer that if you give us your phone number you agree to texts.

Katie: We also were in RWJ covid initiative. We were doing focus groups with community groups. We found it best to partner with trusted orgs with name recognition. The partner org did the heavy lifting on communication. When we got on zoom there were technical challenges. One person was in a hospital! It’s good and bad, people can join from anywhere but that’s not always ideal. The nonprofit partner was managing the virtual interaction.

Amy: Interesting accessibility comments. Someone who is home with kids in the evening might not have made a IRL meeting but could attend. Someone who is older who couldn’t come out could attend.

Sarah: Agree re: seniors, some people don’t leave their apartments but were able to share their experience an concerns and observations safely. It’s kind of amazing that people at high risk could still tell us about what’s going on. Would not have been possible 20 years ago.

Katie: In Houston transportation is an issue. Physical travel distances are very large. We had folks from all over who joined who otherwise would not have been able to join.

Jessie: We had a youth-oriented group. Younger people were responsive over zoom so it worked well with younger people too.

Amy: I think that’s a good point about inter-generational tension. Younger people are more used to it but also more frustrated with it. I can see as time went on that zoom fatigue was happening but in different ways. Some grandparents are watching the kids now while parents are at work. Did anyone else notice zoom fatigue?

Sarah: I have seen it most in workshops. I see more names on screens. It’s tired of having to be on all the time. In certain settings more than others I would say.

Katie: What kinds of methods have you used? Breakout rooms? How do you facilitate engagement? People go into a breakout then stay quiet.

Amy: I am curious too. We just had a meeting this week trying to get feedback on data day. 13 people signed up but only 3 showed up. We had planned for breakout rooms. Things feel more optional if you aren’t going in the car to go to a meeting.

Jessie: Something I saw from another org was a very interactive format. They used [Miro](https://miro.com/). I don’t know much about it other than as a user but it was a board of sticky notes. There were some technical difficulties but if you let people know in advance to create an account it was OK. The participant can type on the sticky note, add links and pictures. The facilitator had a prompt and said OK let’s look up a news article that showcases the community in a positive and negative light. It was great to have something interactive. You got to learn about issues facing different groups. Someone showed a picture of a “perfect transit-oriented community” and asked everyone to go around and say what is missing. It started a good conversation.

Sarah: I’ve used Miro but have struggled to get people to join me. I have tried Google Jam and Zoom board. Even though people use technology I had to find the simplest thing. I use Google Docs like a Miro board. People are comfortable with a document. They know how to use it. People don’t have to get oriented to it or used to it. Miro is great if you can get people to commit.

Jessie: I can see that being more interactive because they are more familiar with it. There were definitely people struggling with Miro when I was using it. Google doc is good because you can see where people are clicked, if they are typing or not, etc.

Amy: 3 things stick out to me. Even for any meeting. The audience is important. The size of the meeting dictates what to do. It’s hard to have a large meeting virtually. And the time. We kept the data chats to 1 hour under the assumption that people don’t have a longer attention span. With a few minutes left, is there anything you might keep from this virtual world?

Sarah: are people going to expect virtual? I think in-person is easier? Are some groups going to ask for the option?

Katie: If I happened to miss something. [Katie froze then disconnected]

Sarah: Terrifying to freeze or crash when you are the organizer.

Amy: Thank you all for joining the session. Look forward to seeing you all.