

Entry Category: Disaster/Emergency Response & Management (services developed in response to COVID-19 Pandemic Stay home orders)
Population: Urban

Virtual Meeting and Remote Public Hearing Platform Capabilities for the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, developed by the Los Angeles County Internal Services Department (ISD)

Overview - In March 2020, LA County implemented fully-remote Board of Supervisors meetings, allowing the Board to conduct virtual meetings with access and participation by County constituents.

Challenge - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the “Stay at Home” and “Safer at Home” orders, the LA County Board of Supervisors (Board) could no longer hold their public meetings inside the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration. Under the Brown Act, the Board is required to provide public meetings to guarantee the public's right to attend and participate in its meetings. This necessitated a virtual platform.

Solution - In a week's time, ISD and the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors developed a solution to deliver and receive communications to and from a large volume of citizens. Capabilities include the ability for the Board and their staff to listen, interact, take questions, and respond. A fully functional, virtual experience for their constituents was created. By incorporating Cisco Webex Room Kits and integrating these devices into our video matrix switcher and audio DSPs to broadcast the board meeting to Cisco Webex, ISD provided the Board of Supervisors a seamless way to join the meeting from socially-distanced locations while sending high quality voice and video to participants.

Results - This Public Hearing platform allows the Board to address the public's concerns and utilizes audio conferencing services to enable constituents to verbally participate. Multi-language translators simultaneously broadcast in Mandarin, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and American Sign Language (ASL), in addition to closed captioning. The Board's Public Comment tool, audio conferencing services, and vendor support staff provide the County with an effective method for two-way voice communications with its citizens in a virtual environment while maintaining social distancing to enhance public safety.

The multi-language options and functions for the vision- and hearing-impaired are another way that remote Board meetings have become more accessible than ever. Constituents can now stream or listen to the Board Meetings in real time on desktop/laptop computers, tablets, or mobile phones. This is in addition to the various existing social media platforms that allow them to re-watch or stream the meetings later. <https://twitter.com/LACountyBOS/status/1295375441771950081?s=20>

Innovation - LA County was the first Southern California municipality to host fully operational virtual Board Meetings in the wake of COVID-19 (others such as LA City and Orange County adopted similar platforms in the following months). During one July 2020 Board meeting, approximately 17,000 written questions or comments were received and heard by the Board of Supervisors. The public can submit questions which are compiled by Board Office staff and posted online as public record. Board Offices can run reports which identify who submitted and how many comments are received through the Application Program Interface (API)-based Public Comment tool. The County can communicate with and receive feedback from constituents and the media during live events through AT&T's "Question and Answers" and pre-conference support sessions, facilitated by professional moderators.

Replicability – ISD is confident that other agencies can replicate the efforts that have been put in place for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. We have developed these capabilities at both the Department of Public Health and the Department of Mental Health, both of which have a high volume of time-sensitive COVID-19 updates and meetings.

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