



Effective engagement is possible without being face to face

March 2020

Trusted relationships take time and maintenance and are too valuable to let slip. Now more than ever, we need to work hard to connect, share and build collective action.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) will change the way we do our work, but as we still have important work to do, it can't be allowed to stop our work. It is crucial that business, government and community organisations keep engaging even during social distancing measures.

This pandemic is a dynamic problem which requires a dynamic response. RMCG prides itself on working with our clients to tailor flexible solutions to needs and the current context. We will work with you to adjust current and upcoming projects so that we can still do effective engagement and deliver outstanding outcomes.

RMCG EXPERTISE

RMCG is highly experienced and skilled in non face to face engagement. We have honed our skills by working with geographically spread regional, rural and remote communities, highly decentralised industries and national scale projects. We walk the talk, having built a business with a highly inclusive culture despite having 50 people spread across 10 offices.

The RMCG engagement style is characterised by the following: we understand communities, we understand a range of industries, we take time to understand the context, we design appropriate approaches, we build trust and adapt as needed.

Great engagement can happen without the traditional face to face events. RMCG has the technology, networks and skills to help you to engage effectively using alternative approaches

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

- 50 staff, 10 locations
- Geographically spread clients
- Remote engagement expertise
- Marketing & comms expertise
- High quality affordable video production capacity

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Alternatives to face to face engagement are not only possible, they are often preferable. In our experience, people sometimes use face to face engagement methods that do not provide real value. Designed well, virtual methods can provide better accessibility to many groups, increase geographic reach and can uncover rich data to build understanding.

We recommend that you use the following approach to design and implement alternative engagement.

1. DESIGN YOUR ENGAGEMENT

During this interruption to 'business as usual', it is crucial to develop or review your overall engagement plan. An engagement plan doesn't need to be particularly formal, it could be as simple as a table in an email or something more detailed, however it does require you to ask the following questions:

Target audience: What do they want/need? What do we know about them? Who are our priorities?

Engagement purpose: What do we want to happen/change/know/communicate through engagement?

Resources: What communication tools do we have? Who has the skills/time/credibility to do the engagement work?

2. ENGAGE THROUGH ALTERNATIVE CHANNELS

STAKEHOLDER TYPE	SUB-GROUPS	PRIORITY	DESIRED OUTCOME ¹	CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT	KEY MESSAGES	ENGAGEMENT METHOD
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Nulla id sapien	• Sit amet, consectetur • Fusce elementum sagittis • *	High	• Vitae placerat nunc sollicitudin. • Nulla id sapien sollicitudin. • Fusce bibendum ante sed odio malesuada	• Cras at ultricies ante. Fusce bibendum ante sed odio malesuada, vitae placerat nunc sollicitudin. • Nulla id sapien sollicitudin, dignissim ligula a, aliquam mauris. • Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Fusce elementum sagittis condimentum.	• Vestibulum ac odio vitae ex posuere tristique nec a neque. Vestibulum sit amet leo nulla. • Phasellus eu ultricies nisi. Morbi vitae purus lectus. • Phasellus et urna eu ligula sodales interdum.	• Online treatment demonstrations, workshops and/or information via existing groups. • Social media e.g. Facebook. • Phasellus Times.

While nothing will ever completely replace face to face engagement, there are many great alternatives that can supplement or substitute.

Switching to alternative channels may take some adjustment, but we anticipate benefits that will mean these channels will be used more in the future. For example, online options are often more accessible for people with disabilities, carers, people who are geographically remote and parents of young children. In addition, young people tend to prefer online engagement. The table on the following page contains some alternatives to face to face engagement, some notes to consider and some projects where we have used or are developing alternatives.



FACE TO FACE METHOD	ALTERNATIVE METHOD	THINGS TO NOTE	EXPERIENCE WITH ALTERNATIVES
Meetings and workshops	Video or tele meetings combined with virtual whiteboards, online audience interaction tools like surveys, interactive maps and ideation boards	There are a range of different online tools that can be used for meetings and workshops. It is important that they are tailored to the purpose. Just like real life gatherings, virtual meetings require preparation, agenda development and good facilitation.	Recycled water land capability assessment in south-west Sydney online site visit and desktop research exercise – Sydney Water and RSL Lifecare (2020) Coliban Water Corporate Planning workshops (2020) Workshop planning meetings (Wimmera CMA & Barengi Gadjin Land Council (2020) Goulburn Murray Resilience Strategy meetings (2019-20)
Community events	Targeted online engagement SMS messaging Online platforms	Targeted engagement can be done via social media channels, or bulk SMS messaging targeting particular segments of a community, particular stakeholder groups or community advocates. Projects can pay small amounts to target particular groups. Online platforms can be set up to host group conversations wither using videoconferencing or chat rooms Designed well, these methods can actually be more effective than community stands as it becomes more possible to reach the "hard to reach" demographics.	Soil Wealth and Integrated Crop Protection notification and updates to industry – Hort Innovation (2020) Loddon Campaspe Trails Network Strategy (2018) Mt Noorat Management Plan (2018-19)
Training sessions	Webinars	Training webinars are a great alternative to face to face training sessions and if designed and delivered properly, can bring together diverse groups for really effective learning outcomes. As they can be easily recorded, they also provide a long term resource.	VegNET Vegetable research and development updates – Hort Innovation (2020) Mansfield Waste Strategy (2020)
Community forums	A combination of phones, online surveys and social media	The purpose of community forums varies. Some focus on understanding community needs, some are focused on answering community concerns, some are about communities creating a vision. For example, a forum with the purpose of answering community concerns would could design an approach that begins with a widespread, opt in online survey that we can use to identify community themes and questions. Staff can then triage matters arising in the survey according to criteria including how common the concern is, its impact and relevance. Triage will sort the engagement response to phone calls, emails or social media.	Derwent Valley waste management strategy engagement – Derwent Valley Council (2020)
Interviews	Phone interviews	This is an easy exchange. We find that phone interviews lead to higher uptake, and there is good research to indicate that phones interviews lead to better data as visual cues that might limit engagement are removed.	Weed hygiene guide – Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (2020) Strategic Planning interviews with Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (2016-8)

3. GET BACK TO FACE TO FACE ENGAGEMENT ASAP

And finally, get back to face to face engagement as soon as you can. While it is not the only useful communication method, real life interaction is an incredibly powerful tool for building shared understanding and connection, precisely what we need to manage and recover from the challenges of our times.

OUR REMOTE ENGAGEMENT & COMMS EXPERTS



Claire Flanagan-Smith – Principal, B.Env.Eng. (Hons)

- **Expertise:** Strategy, policy and engagement
- **Sectors:** Specialising in the community, water and natural resource management sectors.
- **Remote engagement projects:** Water Corporation Corporate Planning, Regional Resilience planning, Program evaluation, Farm business Advisory Board, Regional Catchment Strategy engagement, Regional strategic planning, socio-economic impact studies and strategic planning for a wide range of organisations.



Carl Larsen – Associate, B.Env.Sci., B.Soc.Sci. (Env.), PG.Cert.CCPI.

- **Expertise:** Socio-environmental science, planning, delivery, stakeholder engagement and evaluation.
- **Sectors:** Agriculture and natural resource management programs, integrated water management, climate change.
- **Remote engagement projects:** Extension projects with a focus on providing research and development (R&D) via a number of traditional and e-extension channels, including social media, videos and webinars.



David Hale – Senior Consultant, B.A., MPACS

- **Expertise:** Community development, community facilitation and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Sectors:** Specialising in strategic planning, conflict, international development and youth empowerment.
- **Remote engagement projects:** Macedon Ranges' Youth Strategy (remote management), Youth and Everyday Peace in Myanmar (remote research and information collection), Netball Australia's sports for development project evaluation (surveys, online workshop), RDV's Silo art extension (remote management and community engagement).



Deborah Prentice – Senior Consultant, B.A., G.Dip.Bus., Dip.NRM

- **Expertise:** Community engagement, facilitation and strategic planning.
- **Sectors:** Public sector and corporate organisations, sustainable health, equity and diversity, CALD.
- **Remote engagement projects:** Parks Victoria regional community engagement and participation programs, World Protected Areas webinars in knowledge sharing, remote engagement on sustainable upgrades in National Parks



Dimi Kyriakou – Communications Consultant, B.Comm. (Journ.)

- **Expertise:** RMCG's first dedicated Communications Consultant with a Bachelor of Communication (Journalism) and expertise in content development, editing, website and social media curation, design and media relations.
- **Sectors:** Horticulture, building and construction, media
- **Remote communications projects:** AUSVEG Communications, Connections Magazines, 21st Century Media



Jacqui Longford – Business Services

- **Expertise:** Photography, videography, communications support, editing and quality assurance
- **Sectors:** Community, agriculture, natural resource management, media communications
- **Remote communications projects:** All RMCG communications