HESTER ST | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TIMES OF COVID-19

AUG 2020

The COVID crisis has made many tried-and-tested ways to engage communities difficult, if not impossible to deploy. At the same time, the devastating fallout of the pandemic makes centering the voices of those most impacted more critical than ever.

With the shift to quarantine living, we must resist a rush to all-online engagement. As before COVID, digital tactics alone will never sufficiently engage vulnerable populations. To be effective, we must be creative and proactive at the same time we are being safe.

This guide was created for community organizations, government agencies and other practitioners and contains a range of methods to conduct inclusive and equitable community engagement in challenging circumstances.

We welcome your feedback! info@hesterstreet.org

PRINCIPLES & APPROACH

INCLUSIVE FACILITATION

Incorporating a racial justice and equity lens to your facilitation is critical to equitable engagement. Ensure that facilitators receive adequate training and preparation time. Check out our facilitation tips and resources:

INCLUSIVE FACILITATION TIPS

PRINCIPLES

The Principles guiding your engagement strategy serve as the foundation for equitable implementation. Here are some Principles that guide our work. Consider others that are important to your organization's mission.
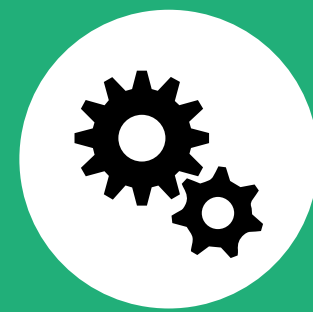
Inclusive
Elevate the voices of communities that have been systematically excluded from power and possibility.

Transparent
Clearly communicate what is being decided, how those decisions will be made and who is making them to foster trust.

Innovative
Use engagement as an opportunity to think outside the box and discover new ways to communicate with communities.

Accountable
Honor the time, wisdom and energy community members invest in the process. Follow through with any commitments you make.

APPROACH

When engaging communities, remember that a one-size-fits-all approach will not reach everyone. An inclusive approach will help shape inclusive participation. Here are some considerations to inform your work.

Research the Community
Understand who you are trying to reach, who are the trusted messengers, and which are the trusted channels. Incorporate language and other accessibility considerations.
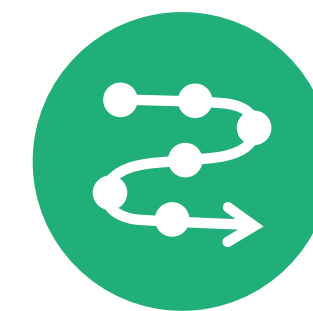
Use Multiple Outreach Tactics
Mix and match several engagement tactics to ensure wide participation and guide how a project moves forward.

Acknowledge the Digital Divide
Incorporate analog outreach and more basic digital platforms into engagement to accommodate community members with tech-barriers.
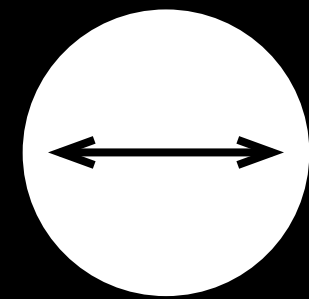
Maintain New Channels of Communication
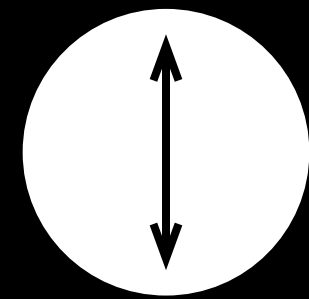Maintain relationships and new means of communication with partners and communities after engagements end.

ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

More Time + Resources

CHECK OUT TIPS ON INCLUSIVE FACILITATION PRACTICES
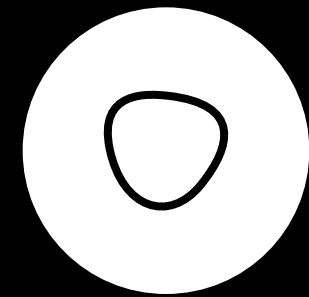
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Are You Sharing Or Collecting Information?
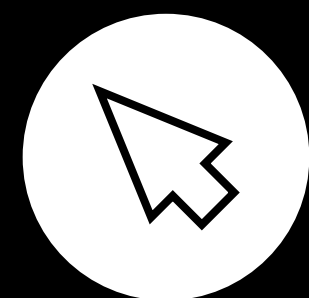use the horizontal axis to explore tactics that collect or share information

What Resources Do You Have?
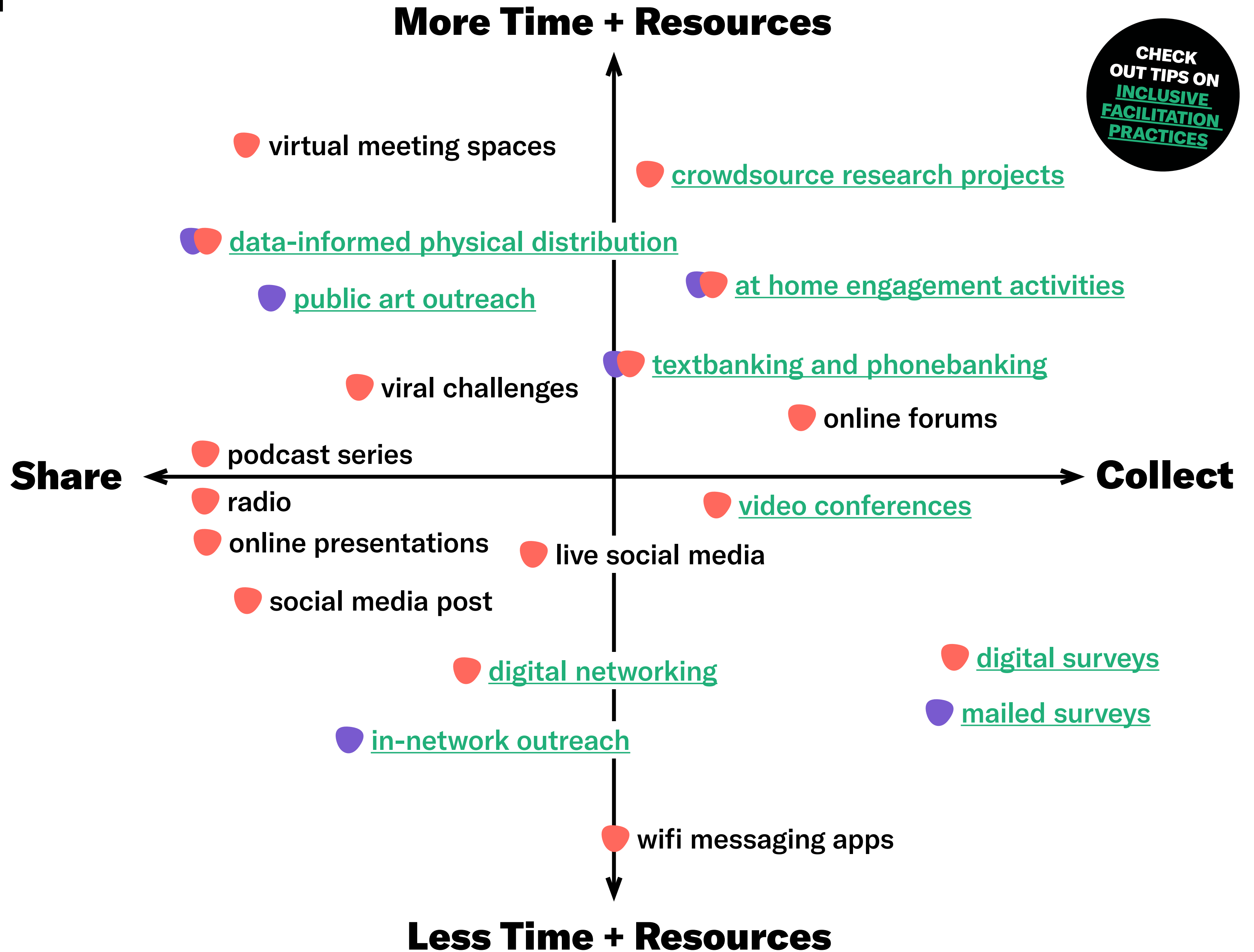the higher the tactic is on the vertical axis the more time and resources it takes to implement
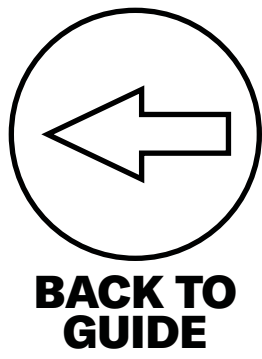
Digital or Analog Outreach?
● digital
● analog

Click For More
for more information, click on the highlighted tactics to see descriptions, examples, target audiences, and best practices

● virtual meeting spaces

● crowdsource research projects

● data-informed physical distribution

● public art outreach

● at home engagement activities

● textbanking and phonebanking

● viral challenges

● online forums

● podcast series

Share ←————————————————→ **Collect**

● radio

● video conferences

● online presentations

● live social media

● social media post

● digital surveys

● digital networking

● mailed surveys

● in-network outreach

● wifi messaging apps

Less Time + Resources

AT-HOME ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

At-home engagement activities ask participants to use objects available to them in their homes in new or imaginative ways to respond to research prompts. They allow participants to provide creative input without leaving their homes or immediate surroundings.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Set Up Time
- Material

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- All Ages
- Tech Barriers
- Mobility Restrictions

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Time and Material
- Skill Level and Comfort

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Consider Everybody's Situation What materials does your audience have at home or in their neighborhoods? It's important to consider what activities people are reasonably able to complete with what they have available to them.

2. Focus On Documentation Design activities to prioritize the easy collection of information. How will participants share the results of their activities with you? Be mindful of access to technology and provide multiple ways to respond (phone, mail, email, social media, etc.)

3. Be Creative Think outside the box when designing activities. Ask participants to rethink the objects, places, and things around them. Ask creative questions and provide room for imaginative responses.

4. Get Personal These types of activities lend themselves well to collecting and understanding a participant's personal experiences and everyday lived experiences.
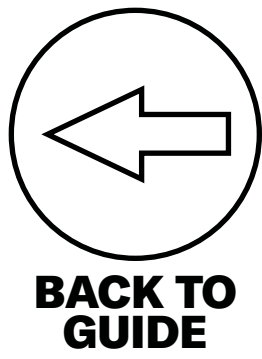

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

- SCAVENGER HUNT
- AT-HOME PROTOTYPES
- CREATIVE WRITING

TOOLS & TACTICS

CROWDSOURCE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Crowdsource research projects ask volunteers to collect data or information for (often scientific) research projects. Through this work, researchers build community and provide resident volunteers with information that can be used for public advocacy.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Set Up Time
- Internet
- Platform Fees

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- Youth
- Seniors

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Tech Access
- Limited Internet
- Specific Training

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Choose The Right Platform There are a number of platforms and applications through which you can set up your project, offering a range of paid and free features, tools, and bases of interested volunteers.

2. Prepare For Long-Term Engagement Crowdsourced research projects often last for months or years. Focus on building relationships, and be aware of the commitment you're making when you begin a project.

3. Participants As Partners Crowdsourced projects that make use of volunteer labor should ensure that volunteers are getting something from participating.

4. Design It should be as easy and intuitive to participate as possible. Research tasks should be designed so that they are quick to understand and simple to complete.
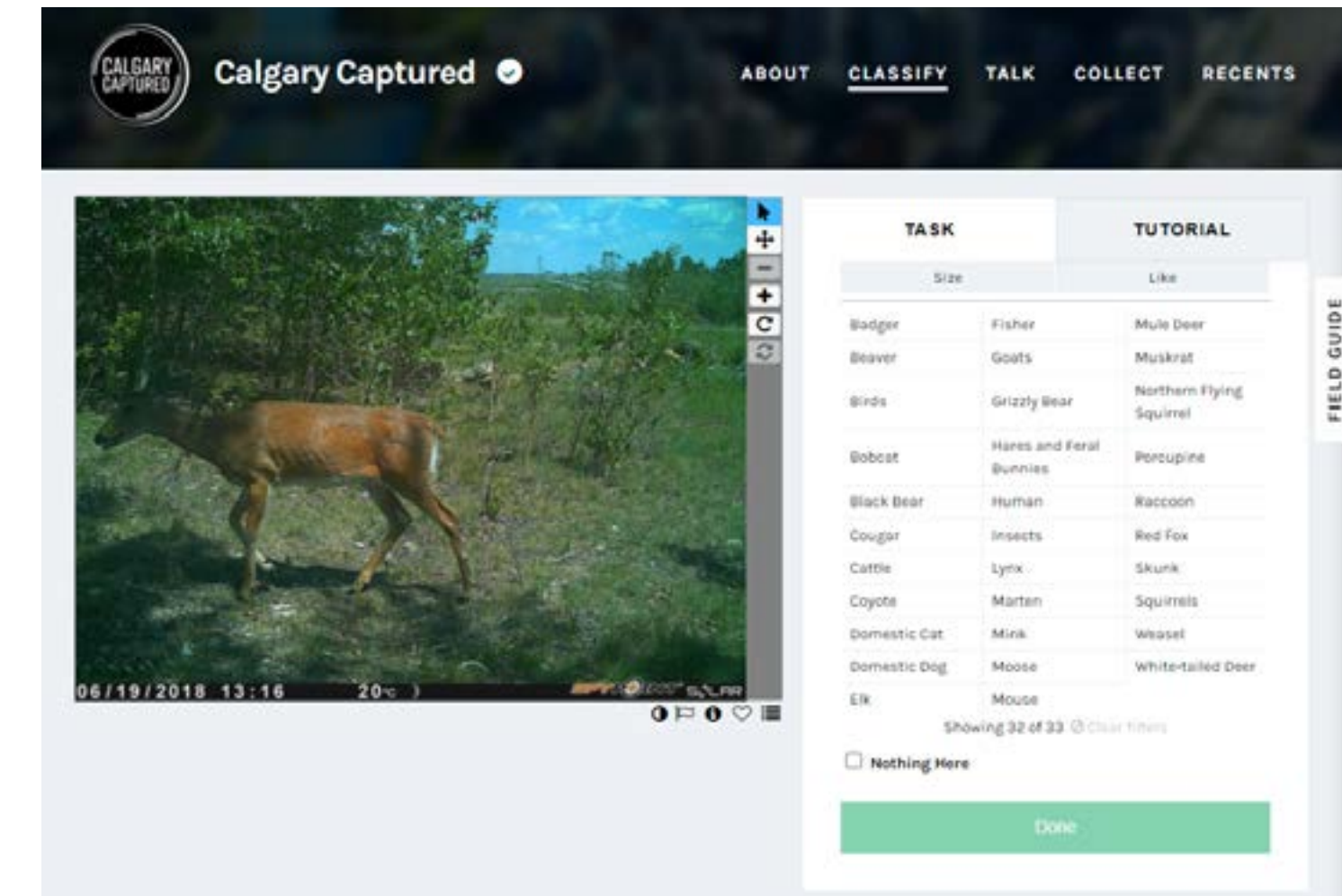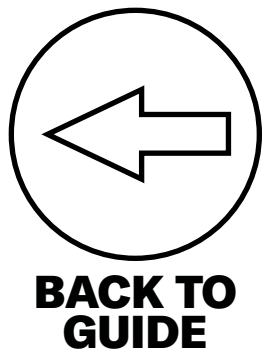
photo from zooniverse.org

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

- ZOONIVERSE
- GOWANUS CANAL CONSERVANCY
- THE AIR SENSOR TOOLBOX

DIGITAL NETWORKING

Digital networking is a strategy you can use to take advantage of your current social network to not only share, but also receive information. Some platforms you can utilize are email outreach, social media platforms, and internal programing, like virtual ESL classes or conference calls.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Internet

Contact Information / Followers

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

Local Networks

Mobility Restrictions

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

Limited Internet

Tech Literacy

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Utilize Your Fans! Often, when sharing information, the best place to start outreach is to those who already have some stake or interest in you or your organization.

2. Time Frame This strategy can be used as a one time blast of information to respond to an event or notice or as a strategy to incorporate longterm. Some examples of a longterm messaging change could be a seasonal priority like promoting voting registration or a change in the organizations mission.

3. Messaging Incorporate outreach messaging that builds on what your organization is already working on or specializes in. For example, a community health organization can promote completing the census by messaging the impact on funding for healthcare services and the community it serves who is already a captive audience.
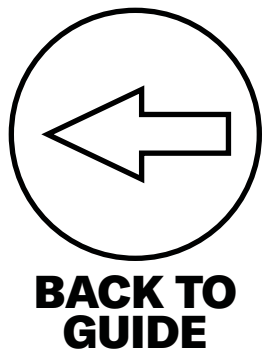

De-fund the police?

Re-imagine public safety?

Re-create public health?

Here's how.
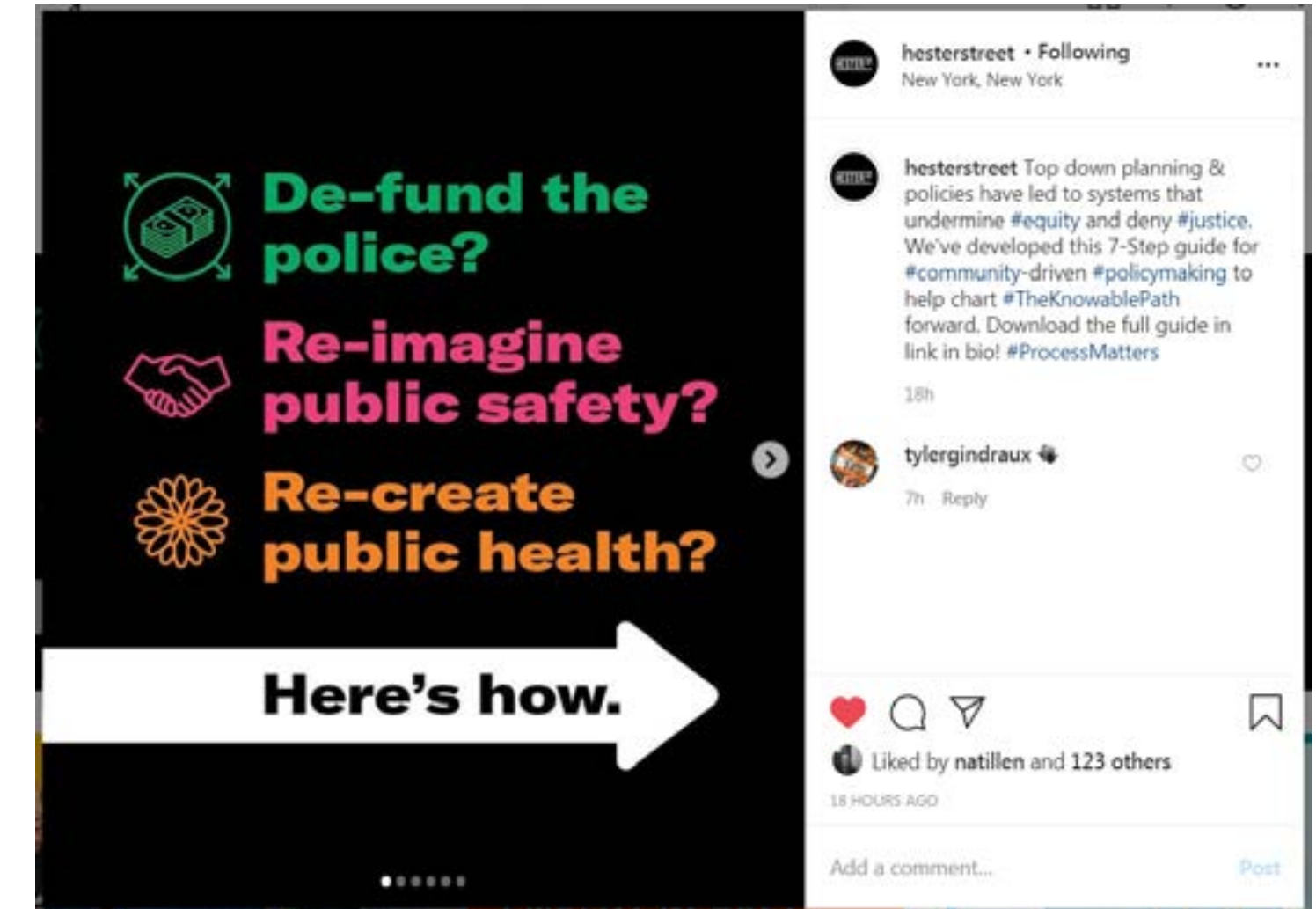
Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

TWITTER COVID RESPONSE + CENSUS

TINY LETTER MAILCHIMP

TOOLS & TACTICS

DATA-INFORMED PHYSICAL DISTRIBUTION

Data informed physical distribution is in person flyering informed by geographic data. You can use map data to assess the best locations to drop flyers and determine the most effective languages to communicate in.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Set Up Time
- Internet
- Mapping Literacy

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- All
- Limited Internet
- Seniors

## BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Lack of Exposure

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Use The Map To Find Your Audience Search on the [Hester Street Interactive Map](#) (or any map you work with) for your target population by race, geography, or access to Internet. Instructions on how to use the map and an email to contact for questions can be found in the "!" tab on the website.

2. Identify The Appropriate Language Use the map to identify the best language in which to make your print materials.

3. Design Tips Design your flyers with your audience in mind. Use bold colors, large fonts, and when composing text - less is more.

4. Drop Your Flyers Either use the outreach tab in the map to find drop off locations, or walk around the area you identified in the map to identify locations to drop off materials.
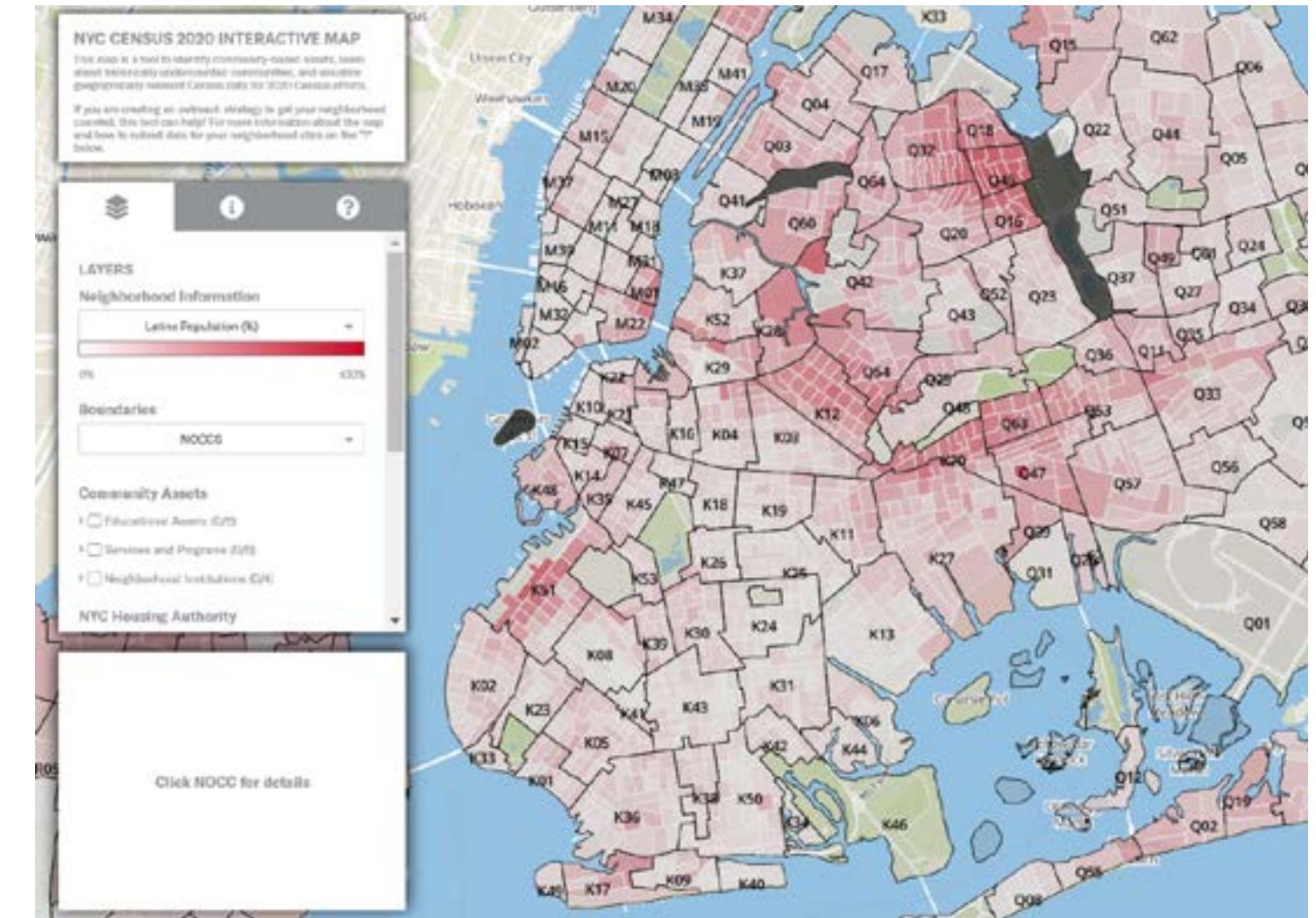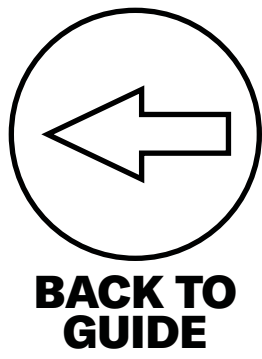

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

[MAPPING PLATFORM](#)

[PULL TAB ALLY](#)

[HOW TO NAIL FLYER DISTRIBUTION](#)

TOOLS & TACTICS

DIGITAL SURVEYS

An electronic survey where quantitative or qualitative data is collected via an electronic survey platform.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Set Up Time
- Internet
- A Survey Platform

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- All
- Multi-Lingual Groups

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Tech Literacy
- Limited Internet

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Choose The Right Platform There are multiple platforms to design and distribute your survey. Choose your platform based on your data needs and accessibility for your audience. Do you to convert data to tables or graphs? Will your audience mostly be completing the surveys on mobile devices?

2. Design Use a mix of question types, and provide room for respondents to elaborate when possible. Keep the survey short, and include images, animations and other visual elements when appropriate.

3. Part, Not Whole Digital surveys can be an important part of any engagement plan, but they work best as part of a larger strategy. They should further outreach and add data to what's being heard in other engagements.

4. Administration Digital surveys are easy to administer through a link or URL. It's best to work with partners to share the link to your survey and encourage participation.
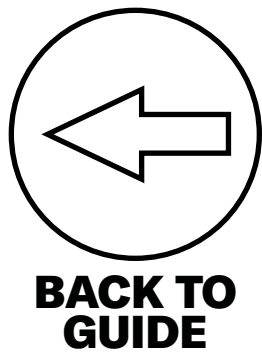
3 ➔ In **Brooklyn**, which Community District do you live in?

Type or select an option ⌄
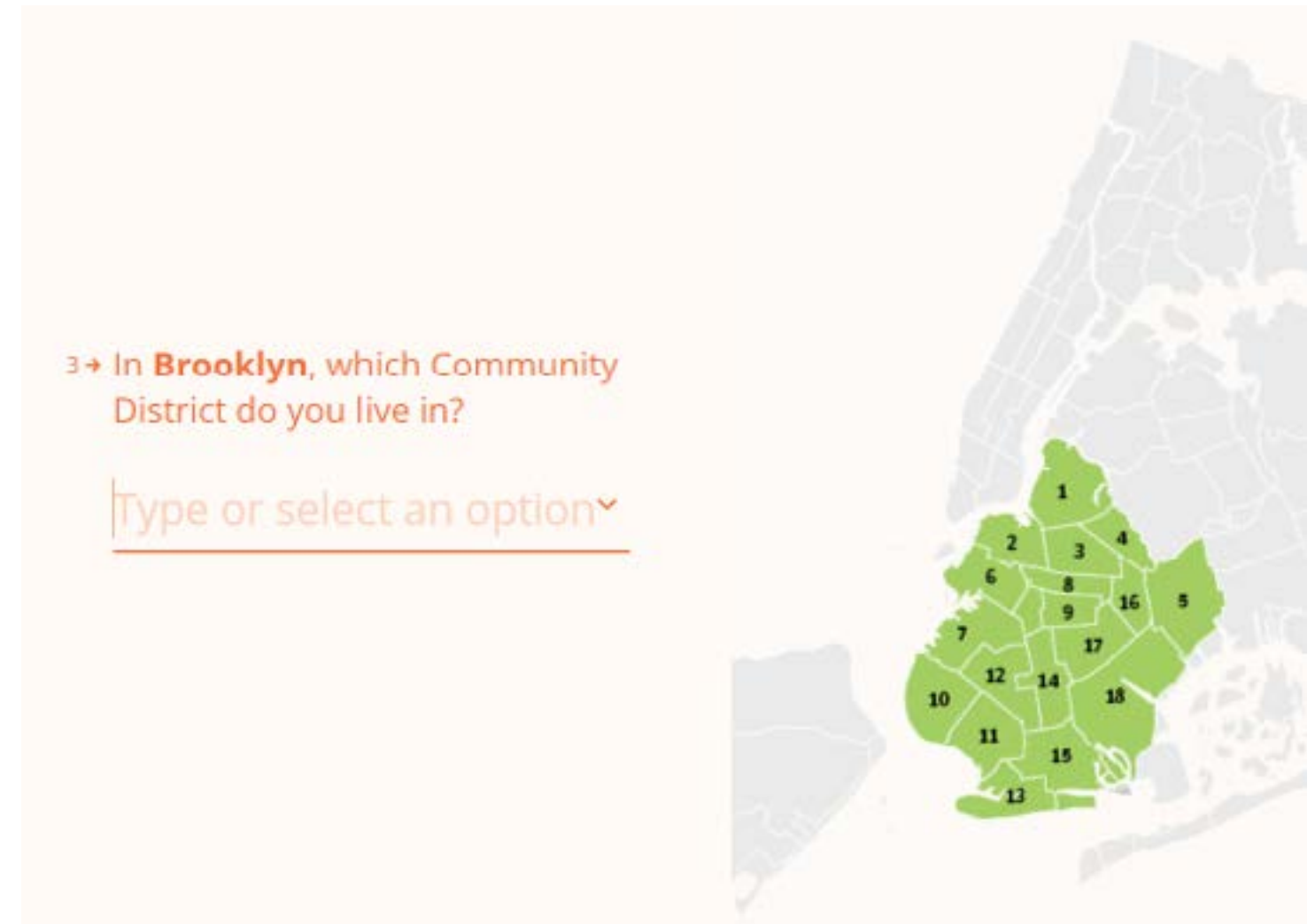
Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE DIGITAL SURVEYS

TIPS FOR GOOGLE FORMS

ONLINE SURVEY FORM COMPARISON

TOOLS & TACTICS

IN-NETWORK OUTREACH

In-network outreach is a strategy you can use to take advantage of your current social network to not only share, but also receive information. Utilize mail outreach and informal conversation, and incorporate content into internal programming like language classes or community meetings.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Contact Information
- Postage Money
- Envelope and Paper

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- Tech Challenged
- Local Networks
- Long-Term Residents

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Mobility Restrictions
- Accurate Address

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Utilize Your Fans! Often, when sharing information, the best place to start outreach is to those who already know your organization.

2. Time Frame This strategy can be used to create urgency about a one-time event, or as a longer term messaging strategy to promote seasonal priorities like voter registration.

3. Messaging Some of the strongest internal outreach messaging incorporates what your organization is working on or specializes in. For example, if you are a community health organization, you can incorporate census messaging by explaining how it would affect funding in your field or impact the communities you serve. This messaging strategy is effective because you or your organization are able to communicate in the language of your expertise to an audience who is anticipating said language.

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM

MAIL SURVEY 101

CENSUS COUNTS PLEDGE CARD

TOOLS & TACTICS

MAILED SURVEYS
A mailed survey is a quantitative data collection method where the questions are asked via mail.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Postage Money
- Envelope and Paper
- Incentives

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- Adults
- Securely Housed Individuals
- Incarcerated People

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Accurate Address

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Response Rate Expect a response rate of anywhere between 3% to 15% for mail surveys. To survey a meaningful number of people, you must carefully consider survey coverage, and plan for a low response rate.

2. Design Questions should be concise, clear and unambiguous. Test questions to ensure that they are not written in a way that is assumptive or biased.

3. Part, Not Whole Mailed surveys can be an important part of any engagement plan, but they work best as part of a larger strategy, by furthering outreach and adding data to what's being heard in other engagements.

4. Administration The hardest part of administering a mailed survey is collecting contact information. It's best to work with partners and neighborhood organizations to collect participants' addresses and decide where surveys ought to be mailed.

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

- REQUESTS FROM SOLITARY
- MAIL SURVEY 101
- MAIL SURVEY PREPARATION
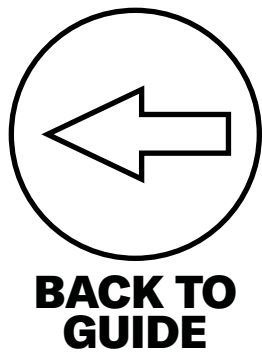
TOOLS & TACTICS

PUBLIC ART OUTREACH

Public art outreach is an effective platform to share information at a large scale to an unspecified audience. This outreach tactic is ripe for creative opportunity, but often requires equipment. Some of the most successful instances public art outreach include the use of murals or wall projections.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Equipment

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

All

Tech Challenged

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

Physical Distancing

Lack Of Access To Public Space

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Mural Painting A mural is an engagement activity that brings community together to uplift what's important about a place, a people, or a movement. Not only does the final result engage with the community, but including the community in the painting process can be a tactic within itself.

2. Wall Projections Guerrilla art wall projections are a cheap and easy way to share messages, raise awareness, and find a wider audience for your work. Videos, large-format text and high-contrast images are best suited for this medium.

3. Legality It's important to check local laws or work with a lawyer before engaging in any guerrilla art project as local ordinances vary. If engaging in any activities that might lead to contact with the criminal legal system, make sure that everyone involved is aware of the risks.
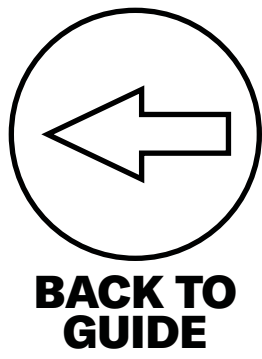

photo from theilluminator.org

Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY PROJECTION

COVID-19 PROJECTIONS FOR HOPE

MURAL LESSON GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

VIDEO CONFERENCE

Video conferencing is an accessible and affordable method to converse with the community. Most platforms do not require extensive set up for attendees and allow participants to call in, which widens inclusivity for those with limited Internet access, visual impairments or low tech-literacy.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Set Up Time
- Internet
- Paid Features (Optional)

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- All
- Multi-Lingual Groups
- Physical Impairment

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Tech Literacy
- Limited Internet

## HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Phone Users Most video conference services offer options for phone call (non-video) participation. Learn how to facilitate for phone users as well.

2. Breakout Rooms Many participants do not feel comfortable speaking up in a large group. Breakout rooms allow for smaller conversations and more opportunities for each person to speak and be heard.

3. Interpretation Channels and Live Transcriptions Search for platforms that allow for a meetings to be subtitled or verbally dubbed live in another language to ensure the inclusion of ESL attendees.

4. Registration Many platforms support registering before the meeting. This feature can be used to ask for background information on you participants so you can prepare a tailored conversation in advance.

5. Security Features Use security features to require permission to enter or before recording the meeting. These features allow you to set the tone and respect the participants in the conference.
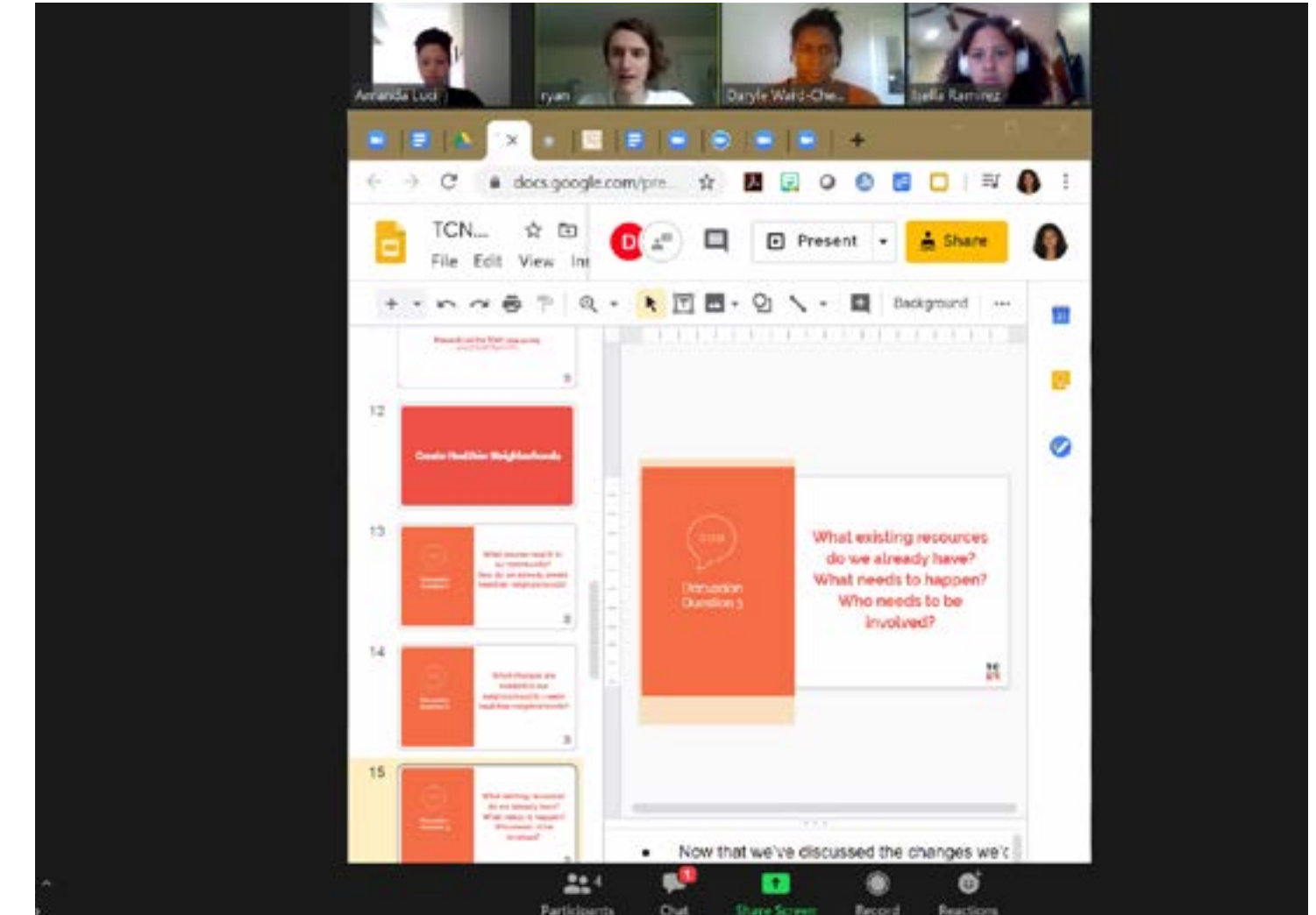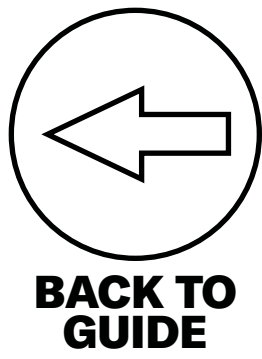
Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

ZOOM FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ZOOM LIVE INTERPRETATION
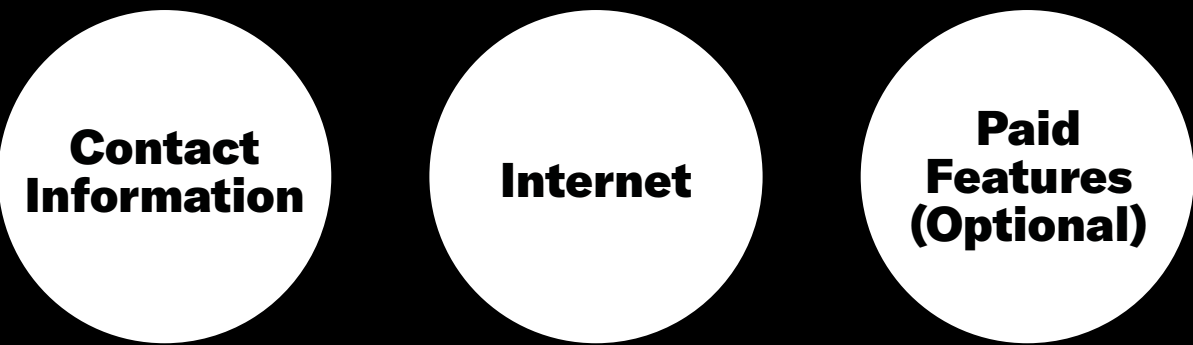
PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

TOOLS & TACTICS

TEXTBANKING AND PHONEBANKING

Textbanking and phonebanking are low-tech digital outreach strategies in which staff, volunteers, or automated bots send text messages or make phone calls to share information or collect feedback from stakeholders.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Contact Information
- Internet
- Paid Features (Optional)

BEST FOR AUDIENCE

- All
- Multi-Lingual Groups
- Tech Challenged

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING

- Lack of cell phone or landline

HOW TO BEST USE THIS TACTIC:

1. Choose The Right Platform With features suitable for everything from local to national campaigns, from free services to highly sophisticated data platforms, find the plan that's best for your needs and budget.

2. Automate Many platforms offer a number of automation options; you can utilize auto-dialers, pre-record robo-calls, and program text survey bots. Make use of all the features your platform has to offer.

3. Contact Information The hardest part of administering a mailed survey is collecting contact information. It's best to work with partners and trusted neighborhood organizations to collect participants' phone numbers.

4. Data Protection When asking staff or volunteers to text and phonebank, it's important to protect everyone's sensitive information. Protect the callers' and texters' personal phone numbers. Ensure that participants' information is collected and stored carefully and disaggregated when necessary.
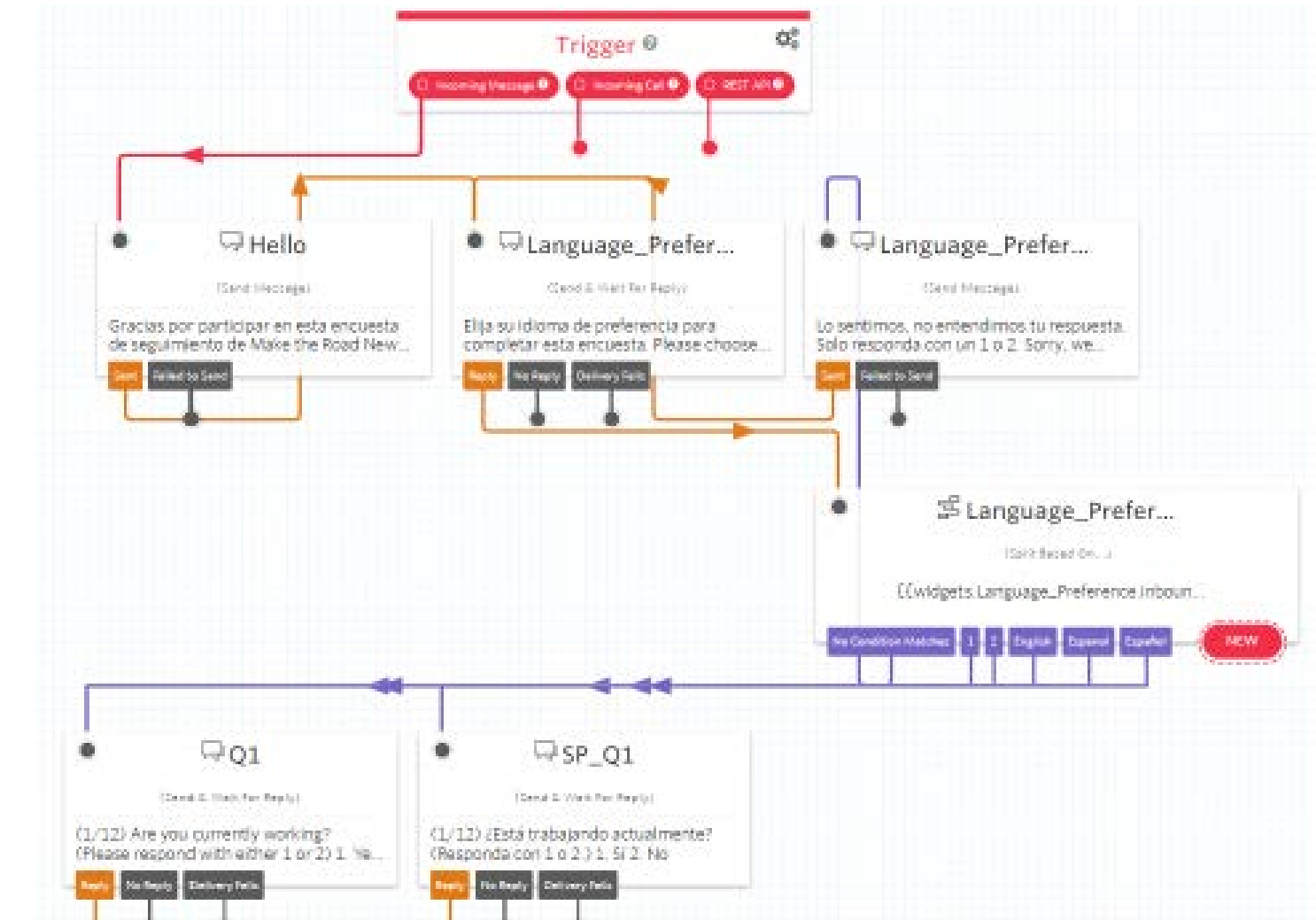
Creative Examples and "How To" Links:

HUSTLE TEXTBANKING

HOW TO MAKE AN SMS BOT

HOW TO HOST A PHONE BANK

INCLUSIVE FACILITATION

Here are some ideas for how to plan and facilitate conversations around race, equity and trauma that Hester Street has employed in our engagement approach. This is by no means an exhaustive or definitive list of practices but an open invitation to explore ways to center and engage low-income communities and communities of color to advance their own priorities.

A starting point for race and equity informed engagement:
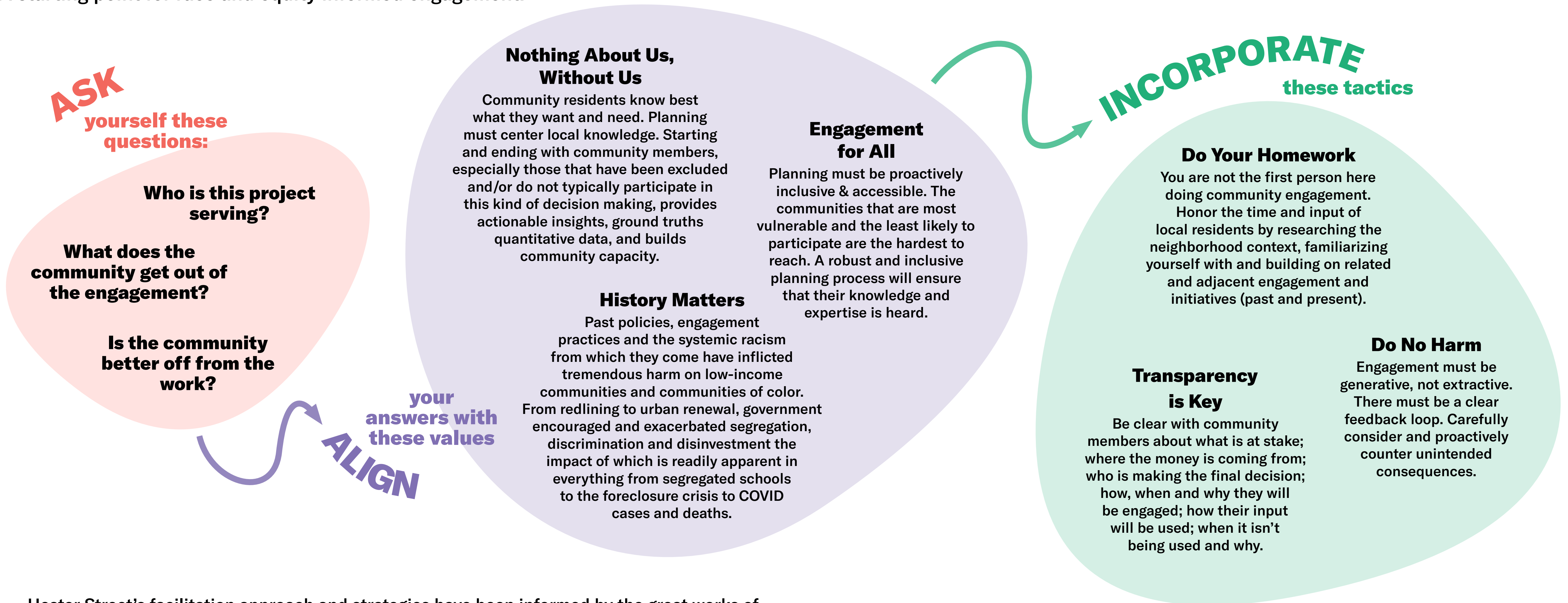
ASK yourself these questions:

Who is this project serving?

What does the community get out of the engagement?

Is the community better off from the work?

ALIGN your answers with these values

Nothing About Us, Without Us
Community residents know best what they want and need. Planning must center local knowledge. Starting and ending with community members, especially those that have been excluded and/or do not typically participate in this kind of decision making, provides actionable insights, ground truths quantitative data, and builds community capacity.

Engagement for All
Planning must be proactively inclusive & accessible. The communities that are most vulnerable and the least likely to participate are the hardest to reach. A robust and inclusive planning process will ensure that their knowledge and expertise is heard.

History Matters
Past policies, engagement practices and the systemic racism from which they come have inflicted tremendous harm on low-income communities and communities of color. From redlining to urban renewal, government encouraged and exacerbated segregation, discrimination and disinvestment the impact of which is readily apparent in everything from segregated schools to the foreclosure crisis to COVID cases and deaths.

INCORPORATE these tactics

Do Your Homework
You are not the first person here doing community engagement. Honor the time and input of local residents by researching the neighborhood context, familiarizing yourself with and building on related and adjacent engagement and initiatives (past and present).

Transparency is Key
Be clear with community members about what is at stake; where the money is coming from; who is making the final decision; how, when and why they will be engaged; how their input will be used; when it isn't being used and why.

Do No Harm
Engagement must be generative, not extractive. There must be a clear feedback loop. Carefully consider and proactively counter unintended consequences.

Hester Street's facilitation approach and strategies have been informed by the great works of IISC, Race Forward and AORTA. We encourage you to visit these resources to learn more. We strongly believe that facilitation training is an ongoing and iterative process.