



Organizing Remotely, Part 2-July Edition

Below is a summary of the issues/topics discussed by over 16 participants on River Network's Organizing Remotely Part 2 Roundtable on July 29, 2020.

What did you/have you learned about organizing remotely-either since we met in April or since the beginning of the pandemic?

- People prefer being asked how they want to engage, rather than organizations making assumptions. Especially given the limitations, volunteers have varying degrees of interest in “volunteering remotely or virtually.”
- Ongoing concern around whether or not funders will provide flexibility in meeting grant outcomes. We encourage organizations to reach out to their funders individually to discuss flexibility around the COVID limitations
- Organizations are using social media platforms such as Facebook Live as an outreach tool, but drawbacks are “reporting” data in engagement.
- Great Lakes Action Agenda had good engagement through their [webinar series](#)
- Some organizations have moved their “programming/education” staff to social media which has resulted in additional visibility for the organization

How was your community responded to your outreach/organizing efforts during COVID-19?

- Volunteers have questions about monitoring and other volunteer related activities
- It's been difficult to get feedback from members/volunteers about how they want to engage- members are not completing surveys or returning phone calls/emails
- Water Utilities that want to promote assistance programs have found luck distributing materials at food distribution sites or farmers markets.
- Organizations have also investigated having tables at farmers markets or other outdoor tabling spaces to continue to engage the community.
- For those organizations that have conducted one on one outreach, the results from the community were pretty positive. Some organizations reported that their volunteers, donors, members appreciated the outreach while some organizations are just beginning to implement this practice
- Overall virtual events have received anticipated results with a few doing much better than expected.

What resources, technology, etc. have you found to be useful for virtual outreach and organizing?

Volunteer Monitoring:

- <http://volunteermonitoring.org/covid>;
- <https://www.citizenscience.org/covid-19/>

Connecting with Staff:

- [Slack](#): Slack works well for immediate responses and we have different groups to maintain all of our different areas individually and keep focus on task
- [Airtable](#): Planning and Coordination of Work
- A [video clip](#) from Virtual River Rally around making meetings more productive

Connecting and engaging with the community:

- Youtube
- Facebook Live
- [Eventbrite](#)
- [Remo](#)
- [Crowdcast](#)

Organizing Remotely, Part I-April Edition

Below is a summary of the issues/topics discussed by over 36 participants from 31 organizations on River Network's Organizing Remotely Roundtable.

How are you changing up how you talk about your issues or pivot to justice/equity COVID-related water issues?

Key Takeaways from Groups:

- Hired an Environmental Justice Coordinator to help raise awareness around how COVID-19 is impacting disadvantaged communities
- Answering questions around what is allowed on the rivers
- Tying environment and health together, finding intersections to address communities being resilient to pandemic
- Make broad connections between COVID-19 and environmental issues - how we rely on science, need to monitor for risks, needing strong public systems to protect people, etc.
- Heard a lot about clean water advocacy, especially in relation to the emphasis on hand washing; drinking water systems-both public and private wells.
- Make links to watershed health and public/personal/mental health benefits of nature, while also being aware of risks to parks/preserves
- Connect to local issues (Eastern Shore - MD COVID-19 cases and their connection to poultry farms). Success - working with organizations to move to virtual platforms. Some groups waiting for dust to settle before reaching out again. Concerns over reaching out to the people we serve for feedback while being sensitive to their needs at this time.

How are you focusing on building relationships, instead of asking your volunteers/donors to do anything?

Key Takeaways from Groups:

- Conducting individual outreach to volunteers/community members just to check in and see how they are doing
- Providing online resources and ways for folks to engage with their local waterways (virtual tours, online training programs around buffers, citizen science reporting, etc.)
- Highlighting previously released online tools-watershed maps, at home tips to protecting water quality, etc.
- Surveying volunteers to see if they would be interested in volunteering their time to work on a project right now rather than putting a cold ask out there.
- Changing fundraising “asks” to more general requests
- Hosting virtual happy hours for volunteers/community members with fun interactive activities such as trivia
- Hosting virtual “meetings” and “webinars.”
- Using social media to communicate about services and resources that are available - disseminating info about what's "open/closed" to communities right now; what rent/mortgage offsets are available, etc.
- Providing online programming specifically for teachers to use in their virtual classrooms (targeting the teachers rather than the students-may be reaching more students than when hosting school groups in person)
- Educating elected officials on why environmental work is more critical than ever as more funds are being reallocated to COVID-19.
- Connecting with organizational partners has been a priority
- Using existing relationships with businesses and others that rely on our waterways to highlight “their story” and provide virtual access to the waterways
- Sending letters or making personal calls
- Focusing more internally on policies and procedures that allow the organization to continue the great work-organizational bylaws, learning to use new technology, etc.
- Collecting photo data instead of chemical data
- Promoting the Census
- Sharing COVID-19 related information even if it doesn't fit with mission

Outstanding Questions/Concerns Raised:

- E-mail/video chat fatigue
- Challenges with people having access to internet and public spaces
- What is the right balance of reaching out to people and talking about the pandemic?
- Outreach to aging populations that may be less likely to engage in online meetings but are also considered high risk to speak to in person
- Outdoor spaces being more heavily impacted because it is the one thing people are able and encouraged to do-get outside!
- How to conduct water quality testing services when beaches and other waterways are closed or your organization is considered non-essential
- Translation issues for online resources
- Funding being appropriated to COVID-19 response
- Government agencies being banned from using virtual technology such as Zoom

Resources Shared:

- PA Buffers Online How To: <https://extension.psu.edu/growing-great-buffers>
- Trivia Night Examples: https://www.freshwateralliance.ca/freshwater_trivia_night_0408
- Earth Day Campaign: <https://sandiegoriver.org/earthdayisntcancelled.html>
- Translation Resources <https://coolassociatesllc.com/>
- Water Monster that “eats” photos: <https://gassy.swimdrinkfish.ca/>
- Art-a-thon for kids: <https://www.facebook.com/events/219915162591576/>
- Leadership Learning Community: <http://leadershiplearning.org/>
- Earth Day Anywhere Calendar of Activities:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ipc/pages/2934/attachments/original/1585833635/Earth_Day_Anyway_2020-4-1.pdf?1585833635
- Kahoot Quiz: <https://kahoot.com/>
- COVID Resources: <https://education.gsu.edu/research-outreach/alrc/adult-literacy-coronavirus-resource-links/>

River Network Resources:

- Please Evaluate today’s session!: <https://www.rivernetwork.org/webinar-survey/>
- Virtual River Rally: <https://www.rivernetwork.org/connect-learn/river-rally/>
- Cyber Security During COVID-19 Roundtable Discussion Registration:
<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwocuuoqzMqbr0x2eZSgpBjsNzQSmrDWg>
- [River Network’s Pandemic Community Organizing Resources:](https://www.rivernetwork.org/resource/pandemic-resources-for-nonprofits/#communities-organizing)
<https://www.rivernetwork.org/resource/pandemic-resources-for-nonprofits/#communities-organizing>

Miscellaneous Community Organizing Ideas (not discussed during Roundtable but compiled from online resources)

- Phone Banking-
 - Typically you do phone banking to get people to do something, vote for people, etc. But did you know you can do phone banking to just check on people and see how they are doing?
- E-mail-
 - Serving as a resource to your community and providing information and resources related to what people can do when they are home, resources that are available for COVID-19 and communities, etc.
- Social Media-
 - Hosting social media events (storybook readings)
 - Posting videos or pictures that relate to your mission and how people can help the environment/your cause while home
- Updating online literature
 - Drinking Water Guides
 - Community Resource Guides
- Updating internal policies

- Are you prepared for a pandemic to impact your activities?
- How are you going to conduct events?

- Learn a new technology you've wanted to try but haven't had time to figure out, like doing a Facebook or Instagram Live; recording a short Vlog, i.e. a video blog; launch a campaign to ask for your contacts' phone numbers so you can start a new text alert system
- Create virtual lessons for kids on policy-making and advocacy (great for adults too ;)
- Community organizing house-keeping chores – i.e., update and clean-up your lists, update your policy/procedures, update/freshen your online content, resources, etc.
- Send out reminders to complete the Census and why it matters to your work
- Crowd-source positive stories from your community and share them out
- General updates on what is going on with policy-making at the state/local level with analysis of what you see happening next