

Remote-Access Open Government Meetings Survey

Thank you for taking California Common Cause's remote access public meetings survey. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your answers will be utilized to better understand the prevalence of public remote access government meetings, the preferences of cities, and the advantages and disadvantages of using public remote access and participation at open government meetings. This survey has been sent to the city clerks' offices in all cities in California. Survey responses will culminate in a published report with findings and recommendations regarding the facilitation of public participation in local government.

For purposes of this survey, the following terms are defined:

Remote Public Comment means: providing oral public comment at city council or similar government-body meetings that is NOT given in-person but in real-time via phone or video conferencing software (such as Zoom or a similar platform). Remote public comment includes comments given during remote-only or hybrid (i.e., in-person and remote) public meetings.

Hybrid Access means: allowing the public to provide oral public comment at city council or similar government-body meetings BOTH in-person AND remotely.

During the COVID Pandemic means: 2020 to 2023, particularly March 2020 to March 2023 when California was under a state of emergency per Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-29-20 (and its extensions) which suspended certain sections of the Ralph M. Brown Act to allow local governments to hold remote-only open government meetings.

* Indicates required question

1. **1.** Did your city provide remote public comment options for council meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023)? For example, allowing the public to participate by phone or video? *

NOTE: If your city has never used remote public comment options, please select "No, we did not provide remote public comment options during the pandemic," skip to the end of the survey, fill in the last question, and submit the survey.

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, we adopted remote public comment options IN RESPONSE to the pandemic.
- Yes, but we had adopted those remote public comment options even BEFORE the pandemic.
- No, we did not provide remote public comment options during the pandemic.

2. **2.** Does your city continue to use remote public comment options for city council meetings in 2023?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, but rarely
- No

3. **3.** If you answered yes to the previous question, is the option to participate via remote public comment now city policy, or is it emergency-based only (for example, renewed every 30 days or via official request as is currently allowed under state law [e.g., AB 361 (Rivas) or AB 2449 (Rubio)])?

Mark only one oval.

- It's city policy
- It's emergency-based under state law
- Other: _____

4. **4.** Does or did (if no longer using) your city have a Zoom or Granicus account (or similar audio-visual software account for public meetings)?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, we do.
- Yes, we did, but no longer.
- We never had such an account.

5. **5.** If your city does or did have an audio-visual software account for public meetings, which platform was used? (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- Zoom
- Granicus
- Webex
- Other: _____

6. **6.** Please indicate, as of TODAY, the ways that the public may provide comment at council meetings: (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- In-person
- Telephonically
- Audio-visually (via Zoom or similar platform)
- Written comments read into public record
- Written comments published in the public record

7. **7.** Please indicate, DURING THE PANDEMIC, the ways that the public could provide comment at council meetings: (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- In-person
- Telephonically
- Audio-visually (via Zoom or similar platform)
- Written comments read into the public record
- Written comments published in the public record

8. **8.** Please indicate, PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC, the ways that the public could provide comment at council meetings: (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- In-person
- Telephonically
- Audio-visually (via Zoom or similar platform)
- Written comments read into the public record
- Written comments published in the public record

9. **9.** Does your city plan to provide hybrid (meaning both in-person and remote) public comment options regularly in the foreseeable future?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

10. **10.** In your opinion, compared with solely in-person meetings, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment make it easier or harder for all members of the public to participate in council meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly easier
- Somewhat easier
- No change
- Somewhat harder
- Significantly harder
- Unsure

11. **11.** In your opinion, on the whole, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment allow people with work or childcare obligations, or who are unable to easily travel to city hall, to more easily participate in City meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, significantly easier to participate for those groups
- Yes, somewhat easier to participate for those groups
- No change in participation for those groups
- No, somewhat harder to participate for those groups
- No, significantly harder to participate for those groups
- Unsure

12. **12.** In your opinion, on the whole, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment increase the number of residents commenting at city council meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly increased the number of residents commenting
- Somewhat increased the number of residents commenting
- No change in the number of residents commenting
- Somewhat decreased the number of residents commenting
- Significantly decreased the number of residents commenting
- Unsure

13. **13.** In your opinion, taking into account that some meetings will be more contentious than others because of agenda items, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment alone generally increase or decrease the divisiveness of public meetings (where divisiveness means swearing, yelling, personal attacks, or similar behavior during public comments)?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly increased divisiveness
- Somewhat increased divisiveness
- No change in divisiveness
- Somewhat decreased divisiveness
- Significantly decreased divisiveness
- Unsure

14. **14.** In your opinion, has or did (if no longer using) your city successfully integrate remote public comment into council meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Successfully integrated
- Mostly successfully integrated
- Somewhat successfully integrated
- Not successfully integrated

15. **15.** In your opinion, remote public comment has or did (if no longer using) generally increase the length of an average council meeting by...

Mark only one oval.

- A little (0-20 minutes)
- A fair amount (20-60 minutes)
- A lot (more than 60 minutes)
- No change in length of meetings (generally)
- Meeting times have generally decreased

16. **16.** In your opinion, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment generally increase the number of public commenters commenting in a language other than English?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly increased non-English public comments
- Somewhat increased non-English public comments
- No change in the number of non-English public comments
- Somewhat decreased non-English public comments
- Significantly decreased non-English public comments

17. **17.** In your opinion, has or did (if no longer using) remote public comment generally increase the City's use of translation services for public meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly increased the use of translation services
- Somewhat increased the use of translation services
- No change in the use of translation services
- Somewhat decreased the use of translation services
- Significantly decreased the use of translation services
- N/A (translation services not offered)

18. **18.** How does the City provide translation services for remote public comment?
(Please check all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- City staff translates if possible
- Translators are employed when a member of the public requests translation services
- In-person translators translate remote comments
- Remote translators translate remote comments
- Translated captions automatically provided by the audio-visual service
- Not applicable - our city does not provide translation services
- Other: _____

19. **19.** To the extent possible, please estimate, in general terms, any costs in dollars to provide remote public comment to city council meetings.

Mark only one oval.

- No added monetary costs
- Minimal added monetary costs (e.g., software subscription)
- Moderate added monetary costs (e.g., above + staff-overtime pay)
- Significant added monetary costs (e.g., above + hired additional staff or contractors or purchased additional audio and visual equipment)
- Cost savings
- Unsure

20. **20.** To the extent possible, please estimate, in general terms, any costs in staff time to provide remote public comment to city council meetings.

Mark only one oval.

- No added staff time
- Minimal added staff time (e.g. 0-20% more staff time required than normal in-person meetings)
- Moderate added staff time (e.g. 20-60% more staff time required than normal in-person meetings)
- Significant added staff time (e.g. 60%+ more staff time required than normal in-person meetings)
- Staff time savings
- Unsure

21. **21.** What is or was (if no longer using) the greatest cost involved in using remote public comment?

Mark only one oval.

- Software/platform fees
- Extra staff
- Staff overtime
- Audio and/or visual equipment
- Other: _____

22. **22.** To the best of your knowledge, what is or was (if no longer using) the monthly software/platform cost for using remote public comment at City meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- None (we only offer[ed] telecomment)
- Less than \$50 per month
- \$51-\$100 per month
- \$101-\$200 per month
- More than \$200 per month
- Unsure

23. **23.** In general, what benefits have you observed when using remote public comment? (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- More public comment
- Greater diversity in speakers (e.g., new speakers calling in, comments on more topics, more participation by communities of color [if known])
- Greater diversity of views
- Increased civic engagement
- Little or no public benefits
- Other: _____

24. **24.** In your opinion, does or did (if no longer using) an increase in public participation and/or public convenience as a result of offering remote public comment at City meetings outweigh the costs in dollar amount and staff time?

Mark only one oval.

- Public benefits significantly outweigh(ed) the costs
- Public benefits somewhat outweigh(ed) the costs
- Public benefits match(ed) costs
- Costs somewhat outweigh(ed) the public benefits
- Costs significantly outweigh(ed) public benefits
- Unsure

25. **25.** What has or did (if no longer using) offering remote public comment entail for your council meetings? (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- Software/platform subscription
- Web cameras and web audio (i.e., PC or Mac internal or external cameras and microphones)
- Cameras and microphones other than standard web-based equipment
- Staff overtime
- Additional staff
- Other: _____

26. **26.** What challenges have or did (if no longer using) you encounter when using remote public comment? (Please select all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- Regular technical difficulties
- Generally longer meetings
- Difficulty accommodating non-English speakers
- More abusive or off-topic speakers than in-person
- Other: _____

27. **27.** Overall, in your opinion, is or was (if no longer using) remote public comment a benefit or hindrance to conducting city meetings?

Mark only one oval.

- Significantly improves/improved City meetings
- Somewhat improves/improved City meetings
- No change
- Somewhat worsens/worsened City meetings
- Significantly worsens/worsened City meetings
- Unsure

28. **28.** In response to your answer above, **why** is or was (if no longer using) remote public comment a benefit or hindrance to conducting city meetings?

29. **29.** Going forward, would you support allowing members of the public to provide public comment at council meetings by phone or streaming video (in addition to in-person options)?

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Unsure

30. **30.** In response to your answer above, **why** would you support/not support allowing members of the public to provide public comment at council meetings by phone or streaming video (in addition to in-person options)?

31. **31.** Is the office of the city clerk elected or appointed in your city?

Mark only one oval.

Elected

Appointed

32. **32.** (Optional) Please describe benefits your city has experienced with remote public comment.

33. **33.** (Optional) Please describe the challenges your city has experienced with remote public comment.

34. **34.** (Optional) Please provide any additional comments/views you would like to share with us regarding open government meetings and remote public comment.

35. **35.** Please provide your name and title.

36. **36.** How may we quote your written responses?

Mark only one oval.

You may quote me by name and city.

You may quote me anonymously.

37. **37.** Please provide your email address if we have follow-up questions and so that we can email you a copy of the final report:

38. **38.** Please provide the name of the city you work for. *

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