

Engaging at a distance

At the moment running a public engagement event might feel a little tricky, so this toolkit offers some practical tips and ideas for activities in light of the COVID-19 crisis. There are also checklists for running online events and socially distanced in-person activities so we can all keep safe and entertained!



The 'interactive online' approach

Some events lend themselves naturally to a fully online approach. Live streaming performances, music recitals and comedy nights is a well-established way of staging events. Quizzes, online gaming events and virtual exhibitions have all also become popular. Even relatively static online activities such as talks and readings can be made more interactive by introducing online polls, quizzes or moderated chats.

Example:

Organise an online poetry slam exploring research into the female voice in literature. Connect with communities online and have everyone vote for who wins the competition.

The 'best of both worlds' approach

Another option is to do a bit of both. Plan an online activity that takes place in addition to a socially distanced face-to-face gathering. The audience does not have to be the same for these two elements and it should help increase the reach of your event. Create online surveys or home experiments and run these alongside small in-person events that incorporate some of what has been shared online.

Example:

Crowd-source a memory-bank of people's favourite arcade games from their childhood. Combine this with a small, socially distanced face-to-face event in an arcade and have some examples for people to try.

The 'we do home deliveries' approach

You could also tailor events to those who need to stay at home or in their local areas. Plan events that are based in local communities such as balcony music recitals, back garden archaeology digs, or community artworks. Organise a letter-writing or postcard campaign, or deliver craft kits, pen-pal postcards and other items directly to people's doorsteps (taking into account GDPR considerations).

Example:

Start a creative competition for children along a particular street or block of flats that explores research on the representation of animals. Deliver creative writing packs, share stories and get them spotting the local wildlife!

The 'show must go on' approach

Finally, you might want to think about planning an event with a relatively flexible format that will allow you to move it online or run it in a socially distanced fashion if face-to-face gatherings are not allowed by November. With a bit of adaptation, such events could work just as well and will not have to be completely cancelled.

Example:

Adapt your guided walking tour about your local area's pirate past into an audio walking tour complete with a treasure map. To add an element of real-world interaction, place a treasure chest along the route where those completing the walk could post little notes.

Top tips:

Here are some things to consider when planning a socially distanced event:

- **Think about your audience** and ask yourself what approach would work best for them.
- **Ask your community partners** for advice on how to adapt events in an appropriate way.
- **Don't forget those who are not online** and think creatively about how we stay connected offline.
- **Explain how to access your virtual platform** for online events. Don't assume everyone will be familiar with the tech you are using.
- **Let people know what to expect** as some may not have attended socially distanced events before and these new forms of interaction can be worryingly unfamiliar.
- **Remember to make it interactive.** Think of ways you can have two-way conversations with attendees. Don't slip into one-way dissemination.
- **Think about what you can manage** as hosting socially distanced events can be time-consuming and involve learning new skills.



Remember, it's all about engagement!

We hope these suggestions serve as jumping off points for planning your events. We know there are no easy solutions right now and it's important that we acknowledge the limitations, as well as the potential, of online and socially distanced events.

We shouldn't forget the value of real interactions and connections, and the very unequal access to digital infrastructure across the UK.

As with all public engagement, we need to think of our audiences, asking ourselves what would realistically work best for them and make an event accessible.

Socially distanced events

Here are some ideas for keeping people safe and comfortable during your fantastic socially distanced event. This is not an exhaustive list and the situation is changing quickly so check local guidelines at the time of your event as these should always take precedent over the below.



Talk to your venue about their safety measures, e.g. do they have floor markings, pre-set one-way systems, etc. There are some [government guidelines for various workplaces](#).

Have a run through of the safety measures at the site and make sure you are happy with how it will work ahead of the event.

Give clear guidance to attendees about the event's safety measures and what they can expect to happen on the day.

Tell attendees in advance if they need to bring items with them, e.g. face coverings, their own beverage, pen and paper, etc.



Have a plan for how people will move through the space – how will you take a register? How might attendees queue safely upon entry? How will you accommodate accessibility needs? EMBED have some [accessibility guidelines](#).

Keep contact to a minimum, e.g. avoid objects that everyone needs to handle.

Think about your cleaning regime, e.g. have a hand washing station or sanitiser available for attendees upon entry. WHO have some [guidelines for cleaning](#).

Perhaps have some disposable face coverings available for anyone who arrives without one. And remember to wipe objects and surfaces that may be touched regularly.



Put people at their ease, let attendees know they don't have to participate in any activities they don't want to.

Don't put yourself in any situations you are uncomfortable with as it's important to keep everyone safe including those running the event.

Think about air flow. Being outside is great for this and even if your event is indoors having a fresh air supply is important so throw open the windows and doors!

However remember the festival is in November! Tell attendees to wrap up warm so they can focus on having a good time and not being chilly.



For up-to-date guidelines visit:

- England - www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- Scotland - www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/
- Wales - gov.wales/coronavirus
- Northern Ireland - www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19
- World Health Organisation - www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public

Online event checklist



The below checklist is a starting point to help you think about how to take your amazing event online. Remember to add to this any points that are specific to your activity and the platform you are using!

SET UP

- Pick an appropriate and accessible platform, e.g. no need for an account to join.
- Find ways for attendees to interact, e.g. chat box, break out rooms, polls, etc.
- Check your platform's capacity limit for attendees and plan accordingly.
- Follow the recommended security settings for the platform you are using.
- If your platform allows, set up a virtual waiting room so attendees can join early.
- Mute attendees upon entry to prevent background noise.
- To avoid trolls don't publish joining details online, email directly to attendees.
- Make it 'feel' like an event. Think about lighting, acoustics, a themed background, etc.

TEAM WORK

- See if your partner can host the event on their website and/or help to promote it.
- Check speakers are comfortable and have the necessary tech to participate.
- If you are speaking at the event, have someone else run the tech and monitor the chat box.
- Set up a channel of communication to stay in touch behind the scenes, e.g. text messages.
- Have a test run and practice with the tech. Get feedback from mock attendees.
- Agree a plan for if your event is disturbed by trolls or technical difficulties.
- Ask speakers to arrive early and have a quick run through in a virtual green room.

ATTENDEES

- Give clear joining instructions as attendees may not have used the platform before.
- Let attendees know what to expect, e.g. have camera on or not.
- Check attendees' accessibility needs, e.g. speech to text captioning.
- Send a reminder email the day before so it's at the top of attendees' inboxes.
- Think about how you will circulate your evaluation forms online after the event.