



Some Resources for Telephonic and Video Open Meetings

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As of March 16, 2020, Governor Abbott temporarily suspended certain open meetings requirements to reduce in-person meetings in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, while maintaining governmental transparency and governmental operations. Click here to view the [press release](#) from the Texas Attorney General, and a full list of the suspended laws [here](#). As a resource to our members, TAGD has compiled some information that may help GCDs navigate the process of holding telephonic or video meetings that may be potentially useful. This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide, it does not recommend any particular course of action or any virtual conferencing service, nor does this constitute legal advice for GCDs.

While not necessarily comprehensive, the Texas Attorney General's press release provides the following information regarding telephonic or video meetings:

- You must have a quorum participating in any telephonic or video meeting
- You must provide online written notice containing a public toll-free dial-in number or a free-of-charge videoconference link
- You must provide an electronic copy of any agenda packet, before conducting telephonic or video conference meetings
- You must provide the public with access and a means to participate in those meetings, preferably through two-way audio or video connections
- You must provide the public with access to a recording of those meetings

[Click here](#) for a very informative FAQ page regarding the suspension of certain open meetings requirements.

Note Regarding Conferencing Services

While telephonic and video conference services typically offer a dial-in option, those numbers may not necessarily be toll-free. Be sure to research all plans and their options for free video participation or toll-free phone participation. Also confirm the maximum meeting time, maximum number of participants, and recording capabilities. Please be aware that TAGD has not independently verified that these services provide the necessary functionality. GCDs should carefully research possible options and consult with their legal counsel, as appropriate. If your GCD is considering telephonic/video meeting services, the following are a list of some of the more well-known services.

Common Conferencing Services

- [GoToMeeting](#)
- [Zoom](#)
- [Webex](#)
- [BlueJeans](#)
- [FreeConferenceCall.com](#)



A Few Tips

- Always do a test meeting at least 48 hours before the meeting to allow for any troubleshooting. When doing so:
 - Use several devices to join to simulate all potential user experiences; and
 - Test your phone reception, microphone acoustics, webcam, and screen sharing.
- Have at least one member of staff intimately familiar with the software to run the logistics of the meeting.
 - This person should have no commitments or assigned agenda items during the meeting.
 - In the days before the meeting, consider doing a quick training/test with individual board and staff members over the phone or internet so they'll be able to join the meeting seamlessly.
- Some providers recommend scheduling your meeting outside of the top of the hour to avoid congestion on phone networks. For example, start your meeting at 10:15 or 10:45 instead of 10:00 or 10:30.
- You don't *need* video... but don't be afraid of it.
 - Videoconferencing software can be used without webcams and offers the ability to screen-share to show presentations and other meeting materials.
 - Most videoconferencing services have smartphone apps that are easy to use.
- It goes without saying that you should coordinate with your attorney throughout this process to ensure that your district maintains compliance with all applicable open meetings laws. The above tips are simply helpful hints and are not intended to replace the guidance of your legal team.