Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship

*Forums on Community Engaged*

*Research and Partnerships*

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Diane Doberneck, PhD

Jessica Barnes, PhD

Miles McNall, PhD

The Office for Public Engagement and Scholarship (OPES) hosted two virtual forums (April 24 and May 1) for MSU faculty, staff and students to share how their community-engaged research had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies, tools, and resources they were using to continue their work in ways that were ethical and appropriate. An important purpose of the forum was for OPES to document and share the information gathered during the forums and use it to develop additional resources and professional development opportunities to support community-engaged research. Participants engaged in two rounds of small-group discussions in Zoom breakout rooms, each guided by a set of questions. Over 70 people participated in the two forums. Below, we have summarized the main themes of the discussions and provided links to resources you may find helpful.

# **Discussion 1: Impact on your work and your partners**

## Question 1: How has the pandemic affected your work life?

* **Working from home, especially with young children, is challenging.** Many participants spoke about the challenges of working from home, particularly if they were parents of young children. Participants mentioned a lack of structure, difficulty staying “in flow,” constant interruptions, stress and exhaustion. Below are few short articles with practical tips for working effectively at home. Some of these articles directly address the challenges of working from home with children.
	+ - [Applying Flexible Work Strategies While Working Remotely](https://worklife.msu.edu/news/applying-flexible-work-strategies-while-working-remotely)
		- [5 ways to work from home more effectively](https://hbr.org/2014/10/5-ways-to-work-from-home-more-effectively)
		- [Tips for working at home with children](https://www.fastcompany.com/90478087/got-kids-try-these-tips-for-working-from-home-while-theyre-with-you)
		- [Advice for working at home with kids](https://www.themuse.com/advice/work-from-home-kids-coronavirus)
		- [How to Help Employees Work from Home With Kids](https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-to-help-employees-work-from-home-with-kids/)
		- [How Working Parents Can Support One Another](https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-working-parents-can-support-one-another)
* **Work is cancelled, postponed or otherwise disrupted.** Another prominent theme was the cancellation of conferences, trips, events and programs.
* **International work and partnerships are disrupted.** With international travel restrictions in place, international research and partnerships have been especially hard hit by the pandemic.
* **Worried about impacts on community members, students and families.** Several participants expressed concerns about the impact of the pandemic on communities, especially those that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Some were working to find ways to meet the basic needs of communities (food, housing, internet access). Others anticipated a huge increase in demand for mental health services.
* **Staying connected with partners and communities is hard.** Many participants spoke about the challenges of staying connected and maintaining relationships with community partners and community members.
* **Rapidly shifting in-person work online is challenging.** Several participants mentioned the challenges of having to rapidly shift their work lives online, with little support or training to do so. Some mentioned the fatigue associated with attending so many Zoom meetings.
	+ [Why Zoom video chats are so exhausting](https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting?ocid=ww.social.link.email)
* **Increased workload.** Some participants felt that they were working harder than ever.
* **Uncertainty.** Many were anxious about the uncertainty regarding the duration of the pandemic and when and how they would be able to return to work safely. In addition, some participants were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on research funding and how diminished productivity during the pandemic might affect their funding prospects in the future.
* **Addressing COVID-19.** A few participants were shifting their work to directly address COVID-19.
	+ Example: audio diaries of Michiganders during crisis ([mi-covid-diaries.com](http://mi-covid-diaries.com/))

## Question 2: How has the pandemic affected your community-engaged research?

* **Remote engagement is hard.** As might be expected, a major challenge of conducting community-engaged research in the context of social distancing is the difficulty of doing so remotely. Some researchers are experiencing significant challenges in maintaining the same level of engagement, collaboration, and trust with community partners in the absence of face-to-face contact, especially when community members lack broadband internet access or are unfamiliar with digital platforms. Others said that access to some communities had been completely cut off.
* **Adapting to change.** Some researchers discussed ways of restructuring projects and deciding which parts could move forward and which parts needed to be placed on pause. Many are considering changes in methods, requiring IRB approval.
	+ [MSU HRPP COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](https://hrpp.msu.edu/COVID-19/index.html)
* **Engaging digitally.** Many participants said they were using various forms of digital engagement. One particularly creative approach was the use of virtual reality to simulate the classroom environment.
	+ [Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/preview#heading=h.9n5gzs5twud3)
* **Research is postponed.** Many participants said elements of their research projects, if not entire projects, had been postponed due to the pandemic.
	+ [Essential Information for Human Subjects Research Teams Related to COVID-19 (from Johns Hopkins’ Office of Human Subjects Research)](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/institutional_review_board/news/covid19_information.html/)
	+ [Conducting Clinical Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Investigator and Participant Perspectives](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7141248/)
	+ [Conducting Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic](https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/conducting-research-covid-19)
* **International work is disrupted.** Some participants spoke of significant disruptions to their research agendas due to international travel restrictions.
	+ [Resource for Organizations Conducting Research in the Developing World Amid COVID-19 Pandemic](https://www.bassberry.com/news/organizations-conducting-research-developing-world-covid-19/)
* **Using the opportunity for reflection and planning.** Some participants were using the situation as an opportunity to reflect, plan and develop innovative plans for the resumption of research, teaching and engagement.
* **Everyone is stressed!** Several participants mentioned that the situation has put them, their community partners and community members under significant stress. Some anticipated a surge in need for mental health services.
	+ [MSU WorkLife Office Resources](https://worklife.msu.edu/)
	+ [Check-in and Warm-up Activities](https://trailstowellness.org/materials/resources/check-in-and-warm-up)
* **Experiencing challenges with funding and sponsors.** Some participants mentioned that funding for research had dried up, especially due to Michigan Department of Natural Resources stop-work orders. Others were concerned about their ability to follow through on project deliverables. Still others wondered about the implications of project disruptions for future funding prospects.

## How is the pandemic affecting your community partners?

* **Community partners are hit hard.** Many participants mentioned serious negative impacts of the pandemic on their community partners, including business/nonprofit/school closures, program cancellations, loss of funding, cancellation of fundraising events, difficulty accessing federal emergency relief funding, staff layoffs, and overall uncertainty and stress.
* **Community Partners are Adapting.** Some participants talked about ways in which community partners are creatively adapting to circumstances by moving work online.
* **Unsure how partners are affected.** Still others were unsure how community partners were affected or how they would be affected given so much uncertainty.
	+ [Questions for checking in with community partners](https://liftingbridges.weebly.com/cbl--covid-19.html)
* **Limited access to technology**. A few participants mentioned that a key challenge for their community partners and staying connected with them was a lack of broadband internet access, computers at home, or the ability to participate fully in videoconferencing.

# **Discussion 2: Resources, Strategies and Tools for Adapting Your Work**

## Question 1: How are you adjusting to the challenges you and your community partners are facing?

* **Engaging digitally.** As might be expected, the primary means for adjusting to the challenge of engaging with communities remotely was the use of information technology. However, some participants noted that the inequitable distribution of internet access and information technology creates ethical concerns. Means of digital engagement include:
	+ Social media
	+ Websites with interactive features
	+ Videoconferencing through Zoom
		- [Why Zoom video chats are so exhausting](https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting?ocid=ww.social.link.email)
	+ Online collaboration tools
		- [Mentimeter](https://www.mentimeter.com/)
		- [Aggie.io](https://aggie.io/)
		- [Social Pinpoint](https://www.socialpinpoint.com/)
		- [Konveio](https://konve.io/)
		- [Bang the Table](https://www.bangthetable.com/)
		- [76Engage](https://76engage.com/)
		- [Balancing Act](https://abalancingact.com/)
		- [Metroquest](https://metroquest.com/)
		- [PublicInput](https://publicinput.com/)
	+ Moving in-person events online
	+ Online interviews and focus groups
	+ Older technology such as phone and email
* **Checking in on community partners.** Several participants mentioned that they are checking in with community partners and looking for ways to support them. Some noted that partners are experiencing substantial trauma and grief. One participant encouraged us to “give grace to ourselves and others.”
* **Adapting to change.** Participants described several different ways they are adapting to circumstances, including:
* Adjusting projects, tasks and timelines in consultation with community partners to ensure that the research is able to continue in some form
* Seeking new forms of collaboration with community partners
* Viewing the crisis as an opportunity to get creative
* Modifying the research to incorporate COVID-19
* **Dealing with uncertainty.** Many participants spoke to the deep uncertainty of the moment. Key questions included: What does the “new normal” look like? What is MSU’s role in helping sustain partnerships and meet external partners’ needs?

## Question 2: What strategies, tools and resources are you using to adapt to this new reality?

* **Strategies for adapting to the new reality.** Participants mentioned several different ways they were adapting to the circumstances, including:
	+ Looking to other institutions for best practices
	+ Scanning the horizon for new opportunities
	+ Reconfiguring research and research questions
	+ Sustaining relationships with colleagues and community partners through regular check-ins
	+ Taking advantage of online learning opportunities
	+ Establishing working-from-home structures and routines
	+ Granting students grace, flexibility and understanding
* **Tools and resources.** Participants described using a vast array technologies to adapt. Some were using the newer technologies for the first time, with little to no training in their use.
* Broadcast media
	+ Radio stations, TV ([WKAR](https://www.wkar.org/#stream/0))
* Email and Email Lists ([LISTSERV at MSU](https://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?HOME))
* Instructional software
	+ [Google Classroom](https://tech.msu.edu/news/2014/09/google-classroom-now-available-through-msu-google-apps/) (available at MSU)
	+ [Canvas](https://www.instructure.com/canvas/)
	+ [Blackboard](https://www.blackboard.com/)
* Interactive presentation software
	+ [Mentimeter](https://www.mentimeter.com/)
	+ [Aggie.io](https://aggie.io/)
* Shared online documents and workspaces (available at MSU)
	+ [Google for Education at MSU](https://googleapps.msu.edu/) includes
		- Google Team Drive
		- Google Docs
		- Google Calendar
		- Google Sites
	+ [Spartan365](https://tech.msu.edu/technology/collaborative-tools/spartan365/)
		- One Drive
		- Teams
		- SharePoint
	+ [SLACK](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cconnordm%5CDownloads%5Cslack.com)
* Social media: Facebook and Twitter
	+ [Adobe Spark](https://spark.adobe.com/) - Makes quick and easy posters, videos, etc., suitable for social media
* Videoconferencing
	+ [Zoom](https://msu.zoom.us/)
	+ [Comparison Chart of Videoconferencing Platforms](https://videoconferencing.guide/?fbclid=IwAR2g59ZCx0CA6UaJKXluIxwWSpjaZ_tb2vWpN2KjFpWr0qWOPjQ7jrYB034)
* Video calling: WhatsApp and FaceTime
* Virtual reality: Using virtual reality as a collaborative way to engage people

## Question 3: What resources do you find yourself in greatest need of to support your community-engaged research?

* **Information Technology.** Better access to internet service and information technology was a frequently expressed need:
	+ Better home internet service for faculty, staff and students
		- [Why your Wi-Fi sucks](https://medium.com/%40jonedwardsfilm/why-your-wifi-sucks-afa719a245d3)
	+ More equitable access to the internet and information technology for students, community partners and residents in low-income or rural communities
	+ Inventory of IT available at MSU and training to use it
		- [Technology @ MSU](https://tech.msu.edu/faculty/)
		- [Technology Training @ MSU](https://tech.msu.edu/support/training/)
	+ Support for creating digital communities
	+ Attention to the impact of the overuse of IT on physical and mental health
	+ Safety guidelines for working with youth online. Being developed by Spartan Youth Programs <https://spartanyouth.msu.edu/>
* **Attention to ethics.** Several participants raised concerns about whether changes in the research process might marginalize communities that are disadvantaged with respect to internet access or increase risk to human subjects.
	+ [COVID-19 and Videoclassism: Implicit Bias, Videojudgment, and Why I’m Terrified to Have You Look Over My Shoulder](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/covid-19-videoclassism-implicit-bias-videojudgment-why-jackson/)
	+ [A Reminder of Who is Hurt by Insisting that Students Share Images of their Personal Lives](https://anygoodthing.com/2020/04/06/a-reminder-of-who-is-hurt-by-insisting-that-students-share-images-of-their-personal-lives/)
* **Tips on how to run effective virtual meetings**
	+ [7 Best Practices for COVID-19-Necessitated Online Meetings](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/7-best-practices-covid-19-necessitated-online-meetings)
	+ [How to Lead a Videoconference](https://www.methodspace.com/how-to-lead-a-videoconference/)
	+ [Presenting Data While Working Remotely: Audio, Lighting, and Speaking Tips](https://depictdatastudio.com/presenting-data-while-working-remotely-audio-lighting-and-speaking-tips/)
* **Strategies and tools for engaging with communities and conducting research remotely**
	+ [ParticipateDB, the digital engagement catalogue](http://www.participatedb.com/)
	+ [Education Research Resources from AERA](https://www.aera.net/Education-Research/Issues-and-Initiatives/Coronavirus-Pandemic)
	+ [Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/preview#heading=h.9n5gzs5twud3)
* **Answers.** Participants were seeking answers to the questions about:
	+ How funding agencies will respond to interrupted projects. Will it affect future funding?
	+ What will happen to fellowships for student research?
	+ MSU’s vision of how it will operate during this pandemic and post-pandemic
	+ Will the view of what constitutes community be changed because of this pandemic?
	+ Will a whole new research agenda emerge because of this pandemic?