



The Future of Citizen Engagement:

Coronavirus,
Congress, and
Constituent Communications

Written by

Kathy Goldschmidt, Author

and

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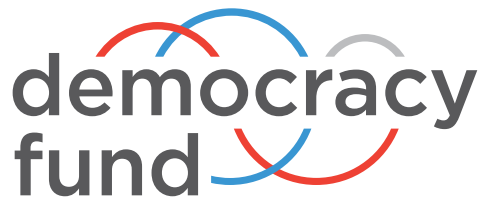
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Table of Contents

Table of Figures	4
Introduction	5
COVID-19's Impact on Member-Constituent Engagement	7
1. Senators, Representatives, and their staffs have become more comfortable using technology.	7
2. Senators and Representatives are relying on remote interactions with constituents.	9
3. Congressional offices are having more numerous and more substantive interactions with constituents.	10
4. Congressional offices' approaches to social media and grassroots advocacy campaigns remain unchanged, but personal emails and phone calls are more important.	12
5. Congressional offices expanded and diversified their constituent outreach and communications strategies.	14
6. Offices will likely continue virtual engagement with constituents in the future.	15
7. While the immediate transition to working remotely was problematic, congressional offices generally felt existing tools allowed them to effectively engage with constituents.	17
Case Studies: 21st Century Constituent Engagement	19
Facilitating virtual town hall meetings to foster trust.	19
Using bipartisan town hall meetings to change behavior during the pandemic.	21
Embracing existing technology to better serve constituents.	22
Engaging constituents through civil society innovations.	23
Conducting remote legislative proceedings.	23
Conclusion	25
Methodology & Data	26
Acknowledgements	33
About the Authors	34

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Member Technology Use & New Staff Skills	8
Figure 2 Staff & Member Impact on Offices' Ability to Engage with Constituents	8
Figure 3 Changes in Frequency of Remote Communications Practices	9
Figure 4 Increased Importance of Online and Telephone Town Halls	10
Figure 5 Increased Constituent Engagement	11
Figure 6 Frequency of Social Media & Response to Advocacy Campaigns	12
Figure 7 Importance of Mass and Individual Communications	13
Figure 8 Importance of Constituent Outreach Strategies	14
Figure 9 Anticipated Changes to Constituent Engagement in the Future	16
Figure 10 Impact of Technological Infrastructure on Constituent Engagement	18
Figure 11 About the Respondents	26
Figure 12 Change in Activity Frequency	27
Figure 13 Agree/Disagree Statements about Constituent Interactions	28
Figure 14 Possible Long-Term Impact on Office Operations	29
Figure 15 Importance for Understanding Constituents' Views and Opinions	30
Figure 16 Importance for Communicating Member's Views and Activities	31
Figure 17 Impact on Office's Ability to Engage Effectively with Constituents	32

The COVID-19 crisis is offering (or forcing) new opportunities for Congress, citizens, and the groups that represent them to consider how to build new tools and systems for democratic communication. These systems hold the promise of improving and maybe redefining the most important relationship in our republic: that between the governed and the governing.

Introduction

Throughout our nation's history, crises have transformed society and upended daily life. From wars, to terrorist attacks, to natural disasters, Americans have been forced to adapt how we travel, communicate, and work. While we do not yet know the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will surely alter many facets of life for years to come.

One of those facets—how we communicate with our elected representatives—is already changing. Throughout history, Congress, like the rest of society, has had to learn new skills and adopt new tools to adapt to crises. For example, when 9/11 and the 2001 anthrax attacks shut down the postal mail systems on Capitol Hill, communications to Congress quickly shifted to email; paper mail was digitized and faxes became obsolete almost overnight. Yet when the paper mail system was restored five months later, the tsunami of email never abated, and it now represents an estimated 80%-90% of all constituent communications to Capitol Hill. Those two crises accelerated technological trends already underway in how we communicated.

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely have a similar impact. In the last few years, Congress increasingly has been utilizing more creative, robust, and efficient ways to interact with constituents. While email campaigns are still the dominant vehicle for constituents' messages to their elected officials, its influence on our democratic dialogue is waning. The high volume of identical form email advocacy campaigns generated by associations, corporations, and nonprofits generally does not substantively contribute to public policy and it requires significant staff time to manage, process, and respond to them.¹ Moreover, these grassroots campaigns—facilitated by groups and sent by constituents—represent only a fraction of the

¹ Documented by CMF in our [Communicating with Congress research](#); Samantha McDonald in "How Congress Turns Citizens' Voices into Data Points," *The Conversation*, September 16, 2019; the OpenGov Foundation in "From Voicemails to Votes: A Human-Centered Investigation by the OpenGov Foundation into the Systems, Tools, Constraints and Human Drivers that Fuel how Congress Engages with Constituent Input," 2017; and Claire Abernathy in her PhD dissertation "Legislative Correspondence Management Practices: Congressional Offices and the Treatment of Constituent Opinion," Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, Department of Political Science, August 2015.

people in a legislator's district or state. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that when Senators and Representatives send replies, only about half are ever opened by constituents. Clearly, democracy needs something better than email for facilitating healthy discussions on weighty public policy questions affecting millions of lives.

Congress now finds itself entering at an accelerated pace a new era of constituent engagement, one that offers the opportunity to improve the democratic dialogue. COVID-19 has forced Members of Congress and staff (some of whom have been fairly resistant to or unfamiliar with modern technologies) to quickly learn how to work remotely. Just as the technology of the 1990s and 2000s allowed millions of Americans to engage Congress in a way that was previously unavailable or unaffordable, the technology of our current decade is already allowing some citizens to engage their elected officials in much more robust and substantive ways, which could become the future of constituent engagement. In this report, we document some of the ways the pandemic has forced Congress and constituents to embrace new communications methods, and we point to some bright spots in citizen engagement used by Members of Congress and others before and during the pandemic to improve Member-constituent engagement.

While we are currently in flux, the COVID-19 crisis is offering (or forcing) new opportunities for Congress, citizens, and the groups that represent them to consider how to build new tools and systems for democratic communication. These systems hold the promise of improving and maybe redefining the most important relationship in our republic: that between the governed and the governing.

“The first two weeks of shutdown was a bit of a chaotic, steep learning curve to getting everyone on staff the right technology to work remotely and to get everyone up to speed on how to use it effectively, especially district staff. But once we found our new ‘normal,’ we’ve been able to adapt and function at a high level.”

—House Chief of Staff

COVID-19’s Impact on Member-Constituent Engagement

To help us better understand the impacts COVID-19 was having on the relationship between Congress and its constituents, we conducted a survey of senior staffers in the House and Senate in May and June of 2020.² We received 126 responses, primarily from Chiefs of Staff (42%) and District/State Directors (26%), with the following demographics:

- **Chamber:** 81% House of Representatives; 19% Senate
- **Party:** 60% Democrat; 40% Republican
- **Office Location:** 69% Washington, D.C.; 31% District/State

The survey was followed by interviews with 13 of the respondents who provided their contact information to help us clarify the results and add detail. The complete results of the survey and detailed methodology are on page 26 of this report.

The key findings are that, as a result of COVID-19:

1. Senators, Representatives, and their staffs have become more comfortable using technology.

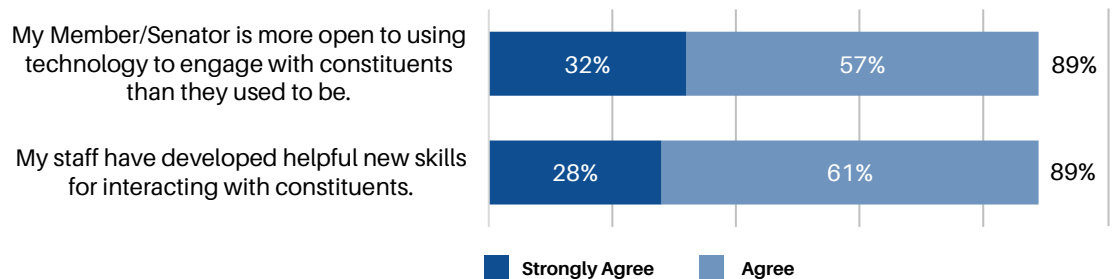
As was the case for workplaces worldwide, Congress had little time to plan or prepare for remote work before the Capitol and office buildings around the country closed. Though Members and staff often communicate at all hours, few offices had policies, practices, and technology in place for full time remote work, so many had to scramble. Members who had relied on staff to assist

² The results presented are only truly representative of the survey respondents. While we cannot statistically validate these opinions, CMF is confident in this research and findings. Our interviews and interactions with congressional staff throughout the COVID-19 crisis and media reports during this time corroborate the results published in this report. Whenever possible, we have offered commentary to illustrate the broader congressional context for our findings.

them with technology suddenly found themselves alone with the devices that were their only connections to their staffs, colleagues, and constituents. With the help and support of their families, staffers, and House and Senate institutional staff, they largely rose to the challenge and managed to continue their public service in new and innovative ways. As Figure 1 shows, most of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements “My Member/Senator is more open to using technology to engage with constituents than they used to be” and “My staff have developed helpful new skills for interacting with constituents.”

Figure 1 | Member Technology Use & New Staff Skills

In thinking about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected your interactions with constituents, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.



(n=111)

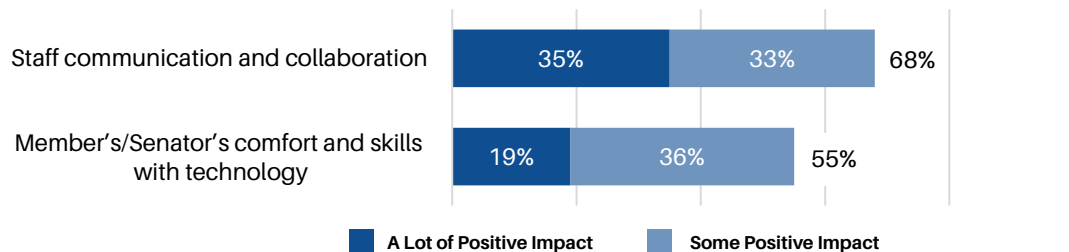
Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

However, staffers' feelings about their bosses and technology were not universally positive. While more than half of the respondents (55%) felt the Member's/Senator's comfort and skills with technology had a positive impact on constituent engagement during COVID-19 (see Figure 2), a quarter of them (25%) felt the boss' technology use had a negative impact. Our interviews explained that, like many first-time remote employees, some Members had challenges early on, but most got the hang of virtual engagement with practice.

Figure 2 | Staff & Member Impact on Offices' Ability to Engage with Constituents

In your opinion, what impact have the following had on your office's ability to engage effectively with constituents during the COVID-19 crisis?



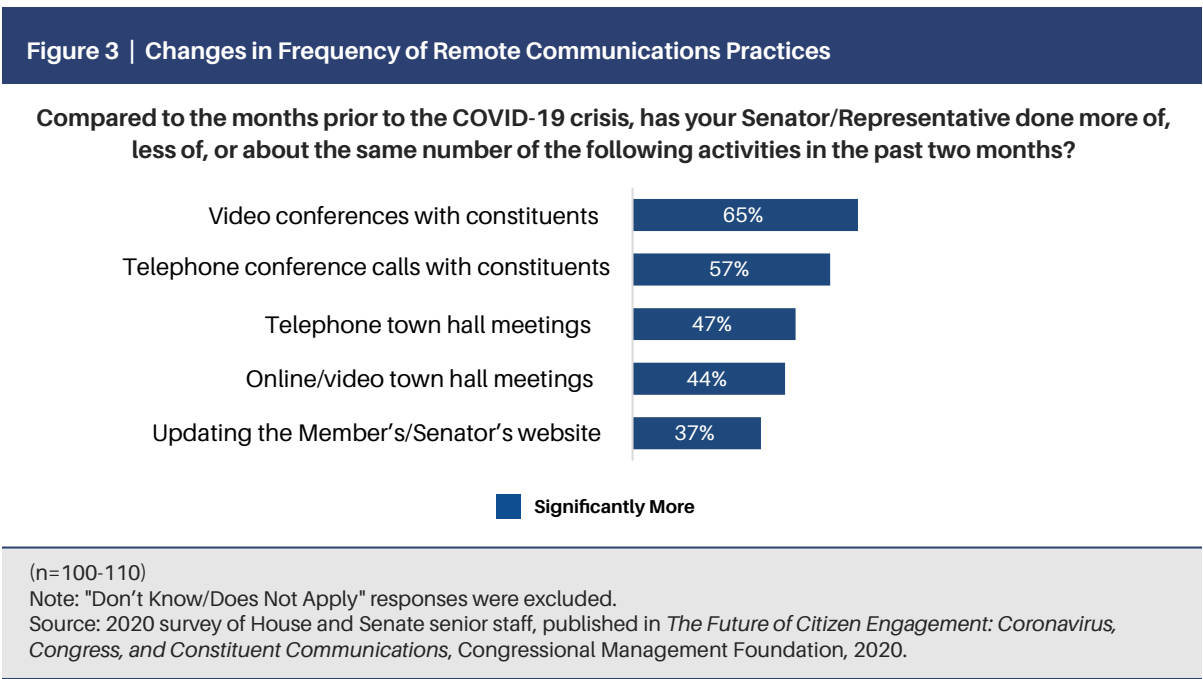
(n=85)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

2. Senators and Representatives are relying on remote interactions with constituents.

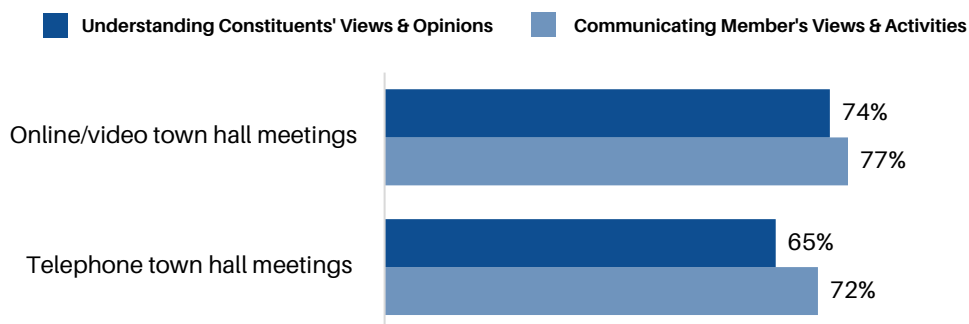
Unsurprisingly, when COVID-19 changed life as we knew it, most Members of Congress curtailed their public appearances in favor of remote interactions. Figure 3 shows they significantly increased their use of the telephone and Internet for both smaller group meetings and events, as well as town hall meetings. They also increased their website updates to keep constituents informed of fast-breaking developments. What Figure 3 does not show—though it is intuitive—is that most of the respondents indicated their offices had significantly less in-person interaction with constituents during this time. Three-quarters (75%) said they had done significantly fewer facility and site visits and 88% said they had done significantly fewer in-person meetings with constituents.



In addition, the respondents felt that online and telephone town hall meetings had become more important during the COVID-19 crisis for understanding constituents' views and opinions and for communicating the Member's views and activities to constituents (see Figure 4). Almost three-quarters said these online/video town hall meetings and telephone town hall meetings had become more or significantly more important for communicating the Senator's/Representative's views and activities, and significant majorities said these virtual forums had become more or significantly more important for understanding constituents' views and opinions. (Additional information on the value of these forums for both constituents and Members of Congress is provided later in this report).

Figure 4 | Increased Importance of Online and Telephone Town Halls

During the COVID-19 crisis, how important has each of the following been for ... ?



(n=81-84)

Note: Figure represents "More Important" and "Significantly More Important" responses combined. "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"Under normal circumstances, [telephone town halls] are good and we've done them occasionally, but the cost-benefit analysis is much clearer in this crisis as more people are joining than we've seen in the past, justifying the cost."

—Senate Administrative Director

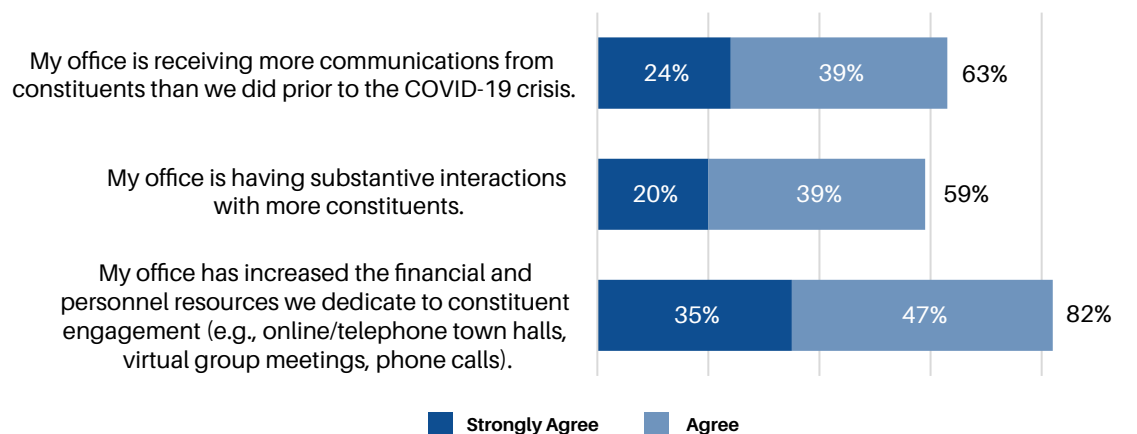
3. Congressional offices are having more numerous and more substantive interactions with constituents.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the senior staffers who responded either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My office is receiving more communications from constituents than we did prior to the COVID-19 crisis," as Figure 5 shows. They received significantly more mass form emails, constituent phone calls, and personalized emails through their websites during March and April 2020. One House Chief of Staff indicated that communications in their office had increased 700% during the first two months of COVID-19. Anecdotally, we have also heard from the organizers of grassroots advocacy campaigns in the association and nonprofit communities that they are seeing significant numbers of their members and supporters engaging with a Member of Congress for the first time remotely during COVID-19.³

³ Through our [Partnership for a More Perfect Union](#) CMF regularly engages with and trains both the organizers of grassroots advocacy campaigns and their citizen advocates to help them better understand and communicate with Senators, Representatives, and their staffs. During the COVID-19 crisis, CMF participated in and hosted dozens of virtual conversations and trainings about the impact of the crisis and the future of grassroots advocacy involving thousands of citizen advocates.

Figure 5 | Increased Constituent Engagement

In thinking about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected your interactions with constituents, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.



(n=109-110)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

A significant amount of the increase is due to requests for assistance related to different aspects of the COVID-19 crisis, including help with stimulus checks, small business loans, problems with government benefits, and unemployment. These are substantive and often emotional interactions with constituents that sometimes require significant time to resolve. As a result, as Figure 5 shows, 59% of the respondents indicated that COVID-19 had caused their offices to have substantive interactions with more constituents, and 82% indicated their offices had increased the financial and personnel resources dedicated to constituent engagement. Since the onset of COVID-19, Senators and Representatives—including some who had previously refused to use even email—have found themselves going live on their social media accounts, posting and participating in video interviews, conducting telephone and online town hall meetings, participating in remote committee proceedings, and forwarding landline phones to staffers' mobile phones to continue their work and serve their constituents even when they cannot meet with others face-to-face.

"I think the increased use of video conferencing has opened a door to many new opportunities to engage with constituents and groups that most offices had not really considered previously."

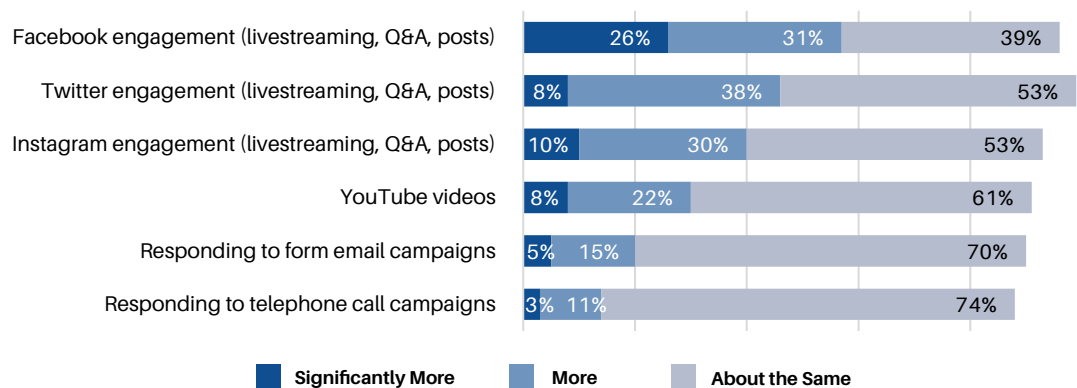
—House Deputy Chief of Staff

4. Congressional offices' approaches to social media and grassroots advocacy campaigns remain unchanged, but personal emails and phone calls are more important.

As Figure 6 shows, many offices kept their social media engagement about the same during the COVID-19 crisis, but some significantly increased their use of Facebook. Interviews explained that some offices used Facebook Live for town hall meetings with larger groups of constituents, which increased their reliance on Facebook during this time. Figure 6 also shows that most offices maintained their efforts to respond to email and telephone advocacy campaigns, which is impressive given the increase in volume and the administrative challenges that came with distributed staffs and remote work.

Figure 6 | Frequency of Social Media & Response to Advocacy Campaigns

Compared to the months prior to the COVID-19 crisis, has your Senator/Representative done more of, less of, or about the same number of the following activities in the past two months?



(n=83-109)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"I have personally called constituents at their homes more since telework began than during any other time in this office. And I know other coworkers are doing the same. I think the more direct contact we provide to people, the more they feel heard."

—House Legislative Director

Though most respondents said their offices did not change the frequency of their social media engagement, significant percentages felt social media became more important during COVID-19 for understanding constituents' views and opinions (see Figure 7). About a quarter of the respondents also indicated that identical form communications (advocacy campaigns) became less important during COVID-19 for understanding constituents' views and opinions. Contrast that with the 63% who indicated that personalized/individual email messages from constituents became more (37%) or significantly more (26%) important. According to the respondents, phone calls from constituents also became more (33%) or significantly more (32%) important for understanding constituents' views and opinions.

Figure 7 Importance of Mass and Individual Communications		
	More Important During Crisis for Understanding Constituents' Views & Opinions	More Important During Crisis for Communicating Member's Views & Activities
Facebook	41%	69%
Twitter	31%	53%
YouTube	24%	27%
Instagram	12%	30%
Advocacy Campaigns	7%	N/A
Individual Emails	63%	N/A
Phone Calls	65%	N/A
(n=70-92) Note: Figure represents "More Important" and "Significantly More Important" responses combined. "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded. Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in <i>The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications</i> , Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.		

"The volume in March/April/May was 2-3x our weekly intake . . . and we deprioritized mail campaigns to deal with the volume, and it has made us question whether we should go back to responding to them."

—House Chief of Staff

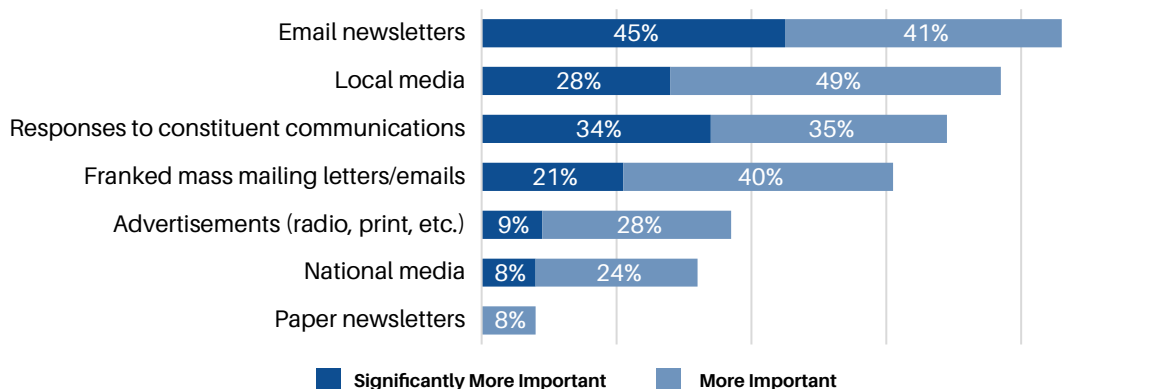
5. Congressional offices expanded and diversified their constituent outreach and communications strategies.

Members of Congress consider staying in touch with constituents as being the job aspect most critical to their effectiveness.⁴ Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, many Senators and Representatives relied heavily on in-person interactions with constituents. When in-person meetings became impossible, they had to adjust. As discussed above, virtual meetings were important, but they also had to figure out how to communicate important legislative actions and federal program changes to constituents. As a result, certain communications channels became more important during COVID-19.

As Figure 8 shows, email newsletters became much more important for communicating the Senator's/Representative's views and activities, with almost half (45%) of the respondents indicating they were significantly more important, and another 41% saying they were more important. Interviews with senior staffers indicated that some offices increased the frequency of their email newsletters, sometimes sending daily updates. They also found their email updates

Figure 8 | Importance of Constituent Outreach Strategies

During the COVID-19 crisis, how important has each of the following been for communicating the Senator's/Representative's views and activities to constituents?



(n=59-91)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"The rise of video is something we would never have been able to accommodate in the schedule pre-COVID, but I hope it becomes a more routinely used medium for connection."

—Senate Administrative Director

⁴ "Life in Congress: The Member Perspective," a Joint Research Report by CMF and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 2013.

during COVID-19 were more likely to be forwarded and to generate new subscribers than their previous efforts.

Offices depended on their responses to constituent communications during this time, as well. More than two-thirds (69%) of the respondents indicated these had become more important during COVID-19. A sizable majority (61%) also said franked mass mailings became more important. These are form emails or letters sent to constituents after an official review to ensure they conform to strict rules to prevent them from being too political or personal.

However, due to limitations on how their offices can compile and use constituent contact information, no Senator or Representative is able to reach all of their constituents directly. This can be a significant problem during a national emergency when they are the primary local conduit between the federal government and their constituents. Local media—and to a lesser degree, national media, and advertisements—are among the venues to expand their reach, which is why these communications strategies became more important during COVID-19. Local media became especially valuable, with more than three-quarters (77%) saying it had become more important.

“The more [the Member] engages on social media and through virtual meetings, the more people feel engaged.”

—House Legislative Director

6. Offices will likely continue virtual engagement with constituents in the future.

Figure 9 shows that many of the respondents expect their offices to increase the time and resources they devote to remote engagement with individual constituents (77%) and online town hall meetings (60%) in the future. Almost half (46%) expect their offices to increase time and resources on telephone town hall meetings. Many also expect to *decrease* resources for in-person meetings in Washington, D.C. (67%) and back home (53%). The lobbyist and public affairs community also expects these changes. In a May 2020 study by the Public Affairs Council, almost three-quarters (71%) of government affairs executives surveyed somewhat (48%) or strongly (23%) agreed that the difficulty in meeting federal policymakers in person will continue after the pandemic is over.⁵

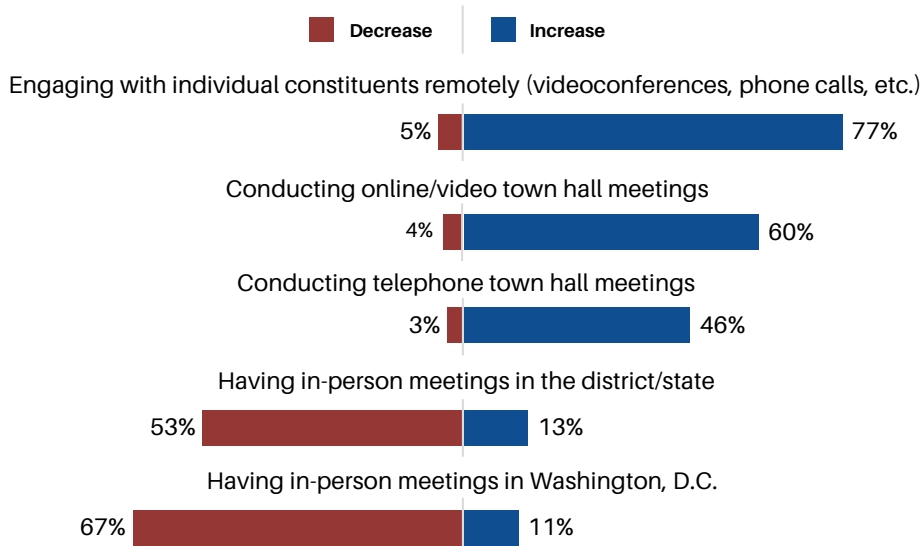
Historically, remote interactions between Members of Congress and their constituents have been decried by critics as means to screen or avoid constituents in ways that cannot happen in person.⁶ However, extensive research on online and telephone town hall meetings by CMF and a team of academics indicates that when conducted effectively these virtual forums can be more satisfying for both Members and constituents, more accessible to constituents who cannot or

⁵ [“Government Affairs Executives Expect Pandemic to Cause Long-Term Decline in Face-to-Face Lobbying,”](#) Public Affairs Council, May 2020.

⁶ [“Tele-Town Halls Help Members of Congress Screen their Constituents,”](#) Charles Bethea, *The New Yorker*, July 18, 2017.

Figure 9 | Anticipated Changes to Constituent Engagement in the Future

Looking to the future and the long-term impact the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have on your office operations, please indicate whether you expect to increase, decrease, or keep the same amount of time and resources dedicated to the following.



(n=81-97)

Note: "Don't Know/Not Sure" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

will not attend in person, and can attract constituents who are not normally engaged in public policy discussions.⁷ Removing the necessity for travel also makes it easier for both Members and constituents to engage, saving time for everyone.

Not included in Figure 9 is that, in addition, significant percentages of the respondents also expect to increase the time and resources their office will dedicate to constituent services (37%) and franked mass mailings (28%).

"I worry about not reaching those who need it the most—those who have no Internet and who rely on in-person interactions to receive help."

—House District Director

⁷ [Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy](#), Michael A. Neblo, Kevin M. Esterling, and David M. J. Lazer, Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology, 2019 and the 2009 CMF guide for Congress ["Online Town Hall Meetings: Exploring Democracy in the 21st Century."](#)

7. While the immediate transition to working remotely was problematic, congressional offices generally felt existing tools allowed them to effectively engage with constituents.

Congress is often criticized for not keeping technological pace with society. During COVID-19, this became especially glaring as Congress struggled to perform its legislative functions, including conducting committee proceedings, voting, and drafting legislation.⁸ However, as Figure 10 shows, we found that senior staffers felt the technological infrastructure was generally up to the task for constituent engagement.

Most felt the usability of virtual meeting resources had some (31%) or a lot (53%) of positive impact on their office's ability to engage effectively with constituents during COVID-19. They were also generally positive about the technology available to their staff. Most of them said staff technology had some (36%) or a lot (44%) of positive impact on constituent engagement. A majority felt staff access to House and Senate resources (61%), remote access to their constituent databases (60%), and the usability of video and telephone town hall platforms (60%) had positive impact on constituent engagement.

However, there were also significant number of respondents who felt *negative* impacts of some of these factors on their ability to engage with constituents, as Figure 10 shows. In particular, there were two aspects of the technological infrastructure where those who felt negatively outnumbered those who felt positively. Half of the respondents felt the cost of video/telephone town hall platforms had some (41%) or a lot (9%) of negative impact on their ability to engage effectively, and many felt that Internet/broadband/cell phone coverage had some (34%) or a lot (9%) of negative impact.

It is important to note that neither of these factors is under the control of the House or Senate. Independent vendors provide the ability to host video and telephone town hall meetings with features that free and inexpensive platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, and Facebook do not provide, including automatic phone dialing out to constituents, the ability to host tens of thousands of people, and integration with offices' constituent databases. These come at a significant cost.

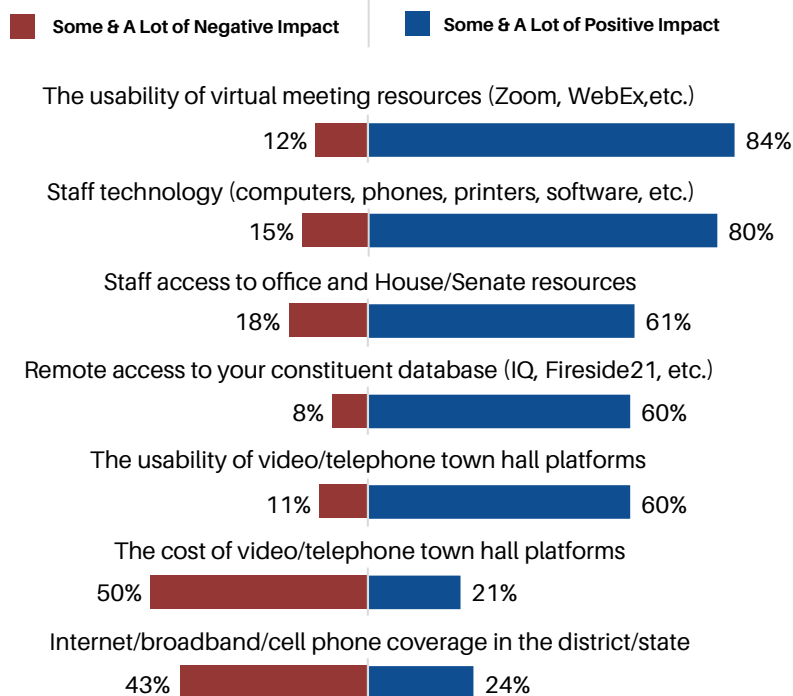
"COVID shone a light on the systems that desperately need to be updated."

—Senate State Director

⁸ The challenges are laid out in a March 13, 2020 op-ed in *The Atlantic*, "[Congress Desperately Needs a Contingency Plan](#)," by Norm Ornstein, Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, who participated in a failed effort to focus Congress on continuity of its operations after 9/11 and the 2001 anthrax attacks. A [continuously-updated resource guide on continuity of Congress](#) collected by the First Branch Forecast team at Demand Progress also provides critical information on the legislative challenges Congress faces when it cannot meet in person in the Capitol.

Figure 10 | Impact of Technological Infrastructure on Constituent Engagement

In your opinion, what impact have the following had on your office's ability to engage effectively with constituents during the COVID-19 crisis?



(n=75-85)

Note: "Don't Know/Not Sure" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

Senators and Representatives also cannot influence Internet connectivity in their districts and states, except perhaps legislatively. Some found it very difficult to reach constituents who did not have access to sufficient Internet, broadband, and cell phone coverage to participate in remote meetings. Others found that some staffers—including in the Washington, D.C. metro region—had difficulty with their personal coverage and connectivity from home, which complicated their work.

"I was surprised at how little has changed and at the ability of staff to continue to do their jobs well while working remotely."

—Senate Chief of Staff

"The use of social media and virtual meetings may increase, especially with the boss. It means she can be in DC and connect with groups in the district live. I don't see us doing less of those. Just differently."

—House Legislative Director

Case Studies: 21st Century Constituent Engagement

COVID-19 has compelled congressional offices to fulfill their legislative duties in creative ways. The crisis accelerated technological trends that were already underway, such as virtual town halls and remote constituent meetings, while simultaneously venturing into the uncharted territory of legislative adaptations, such as proxy voting and virtual congressional hearings. Following are several examples from the House and Senate, state and international legislatures, and civil society that could serve as models for Senators, Representatives, and the institution of Congress as they consider how to better use technology for constituent engagement.

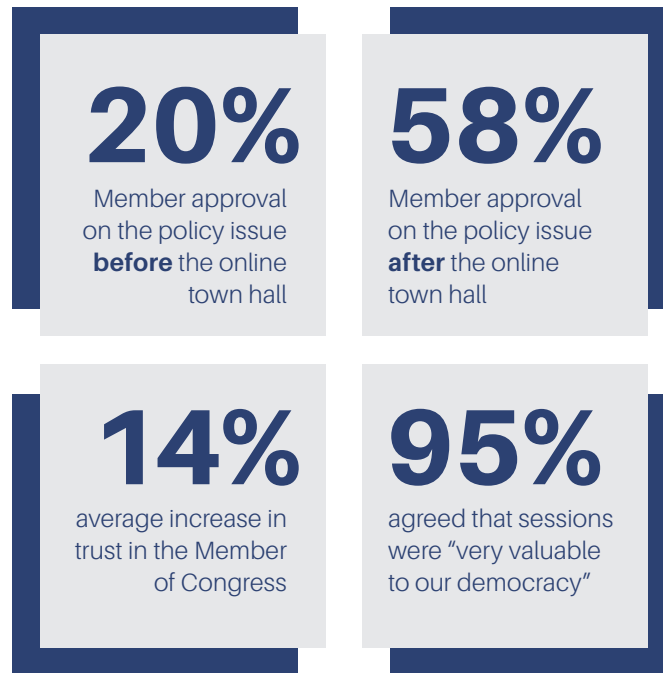
Technology could be better integrated into the public policy process in many ways to serve and hear from the American people and craft better public policy. These examples are illustrative, and not intended to be a comprehensive review of the practices legislators and legislatures are using to facilitate modern public engagement. There are many more innovations both on and off Capitol Hill than we could highlight here, and more being developed all the time, especially now that legislatures throughout the country and around the world are trying to function under the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Facilitating virtual town hall meetings to foster trust.**

Though critics decry online and telephone town hall meetings as means for Senators and Representatives to avoid the public, as noted earlier, CMF research shows they can be engaging, informative, and satisfying to both constituents and Members if they are done effectively.

For more than a decade CMF has been working with political scientists at The Ohio State University's Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability (IDEA) and other universities to conduct Deliberative Town Hall meetings with Senators and Representatives with dramatic and positive results. In randomized control studies of 21 online town hall meetings between Members of Congress and their constituents, we found that trust in the

Member all/most of the time increased by an average of 14%. Participants' approval of the way the Member was handling the issue under discussion nearly tripled from 20% approval before the meeting to 58% after. And 95% of participants agreed that such sessions were "very valuable to our democracy" and would be interested in engaging in similar sessions in the future.⁹



We found comparable results through similar research on telephone town hall meetings with Members. Moreover, 93% of participating constituents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be informed of future telephone town halls with the Member.¹⁰

The key differences between typical congressional online and telephone town hall meetings and those our team hosts are:

- **A representative group of constituents was recruited.** Typically, constituents who support the legislator's views are most likely to participate.
- **A neutral moderator facilitated.** Members of Congress usually serve as their own moderators.
- **Focus was on a single topic.** Members of Congress generally field all questions, regardless of topic.
- **A short, nonpartisan issue brief was distributed to participants ahead of time.** This is rarely provided in typical remote congressional town hall meetings.

⁹ Published in the 2018 book *Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy* by Michael Neblo, Kevin Esterling, and David Lazer and in a 2009 CMF guide for Congress "[Online Town Hall Meetings: Exploring Democracy in the 21st Century](#)." CMF and our academic collaborators have continued to conduct research on effective online and telephone town hall meetings which reinforces our original findings and provides additional insight into what does and does not work, though results of that work are not yet published.

¹⁰ Included on CMF's website in the "[Improve Town Hall Meetings: Following Up After a Telephone Town Hall](#)" section.

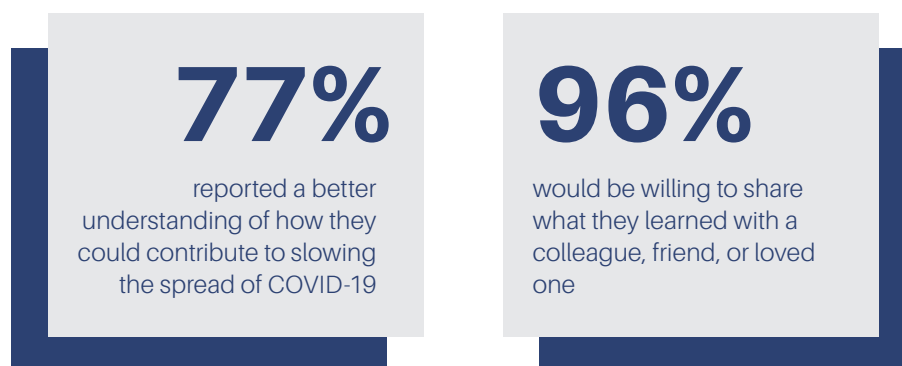
We have found these types of sessions have the power to engage constituents who are not normally engaged, reassure constituents about their Senators' and Representatives' performance, increase trust in the legislator, increase knowledge about the issue, and cause people to feel heard. Members of Congress also report that these sessions are more satisfying to them than their typical remote town hall meetings.

- **Using bipartisan town hall meetings to change behavior during the pandemic.**

In March 2020, as COVID-19 was spreading, CMF and IDEA teamed up to help Senators and Representatives slow the spread of the coronavirus by disseminating reliable public health information in a bipartisan way. Having collaborated in the past on innovative online town hall meetings, we knew constituents learned a lot through these events, which changed people's attitudes toward Members and policy, as well as their voting behavior.

We recruited Members of Congress to participate and, at the time of this report, have facilitated two bipartisan Deliberative Town Hall meetings on COVID-19, with elected officials and public health experts, including one with a Senator and Representative, and another with a Representative and local mayor.¹¹

These online town halls are designed to provide crucial and reliable information to reassure the public, slow the spread of disease, and improve trust in government. We have found them to be effective at bringing together constituents who align with both political parties, as well as less-engaged citizens who typically avoid purely partisan events. Moreover, these events tended to be persuasive, both for changing opinion on policy and perception of how Members are handling the issue of COVID-19. And constituents found them extremely useful, as well. More than three-quarters (77%) of the participants in the two sessions said they had a better understanding of how they can contribute to slowing the spread of COVID-19 after the session, and 96% said they would be willing to share what they learned with a colleague, friend, or loved one.¹²



¹¹ The first was held on April 13, 2020 with Rep. Kendra Horn (D-OK) and Mayor David Holt (R-Oklahoma City), joined by Dr. Patrick McGough, Executive Director of the Oklahoma City-County Health Department. The second was held on April 23 with Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Rep. John Katko (R-NY), joined by Dr. Robert Corona, CEO of SUNY Upstate Medical University. <https://thefulcrum.us/big-picture/congress-town-hall-meetings>

¹² Unpublished data from more than 550 constituent participants collected by the Institute for Democratic Engagement and Accountability (IDEA) at The Ohio State University, Dr. Michael Neblo, Principal Investigator, 2020.

- **Embracing existing technology to better serve constituents.**

COVID-19 has compelled Congress to embrace technology in ways it was previously unfamiliar with or reluctant to do. Offices equipped staff with the technology they needed to effectively conduct work from home. They began communicating via videoconferences, messaging apps, and collaboration platforms like Microsoft Teams and Slack. They almost entirely stopped reviewing paper files and relied on online tools to enhance efficiency, including track changes and shared documents. And they forwarded office phones to staffer cell phones to ensure as many calls as possible could be answered live.¹³

In follow-up interviews with survey respondents, we learned how essential technology was to continuity of operations and communication with constituents. For example, Rep. Mike Kelly's (R-PA) office kick-started a new texting platform that allows them to move more quickly and efficiently through constituent requests. Rep. Donna Shalala's (D-FL) office conducted town halls—both telephone and virtual—with much more frequency, initially hosting them every week, and joined by special guests such as an epidemiologist from the University of Miami, experts on small business loans, and local government officials. Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) compiled a COVID-specific website FAQ¹⁴ that his office updates periodically as new information becomes available.

Even before COVID-19, Members of Congress were using existing technology to connect with constituents. Through e-newsletters, text messaging, social media, and remote meetings, Senators and Representatives were reaching their constituents in ways the Founding Fathers could never have comprehended. For example, for several years Rep. Rick Crawford (R-AR) has been using a texting platform, rather than email or social media, to enable his constituents to connect with him.¹⁵ Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) has long been known for her candid Instagram stories offering a behind-the-scenes look at legislating and for her monthly live-streams on Facebook. Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) has been sending biannual satisfaction surveys to constituents who have interacted with the office since 2015 to gauge how he and his staff are doing and adjust accordingly. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA) records and posts frequent videos explaining his votes and conducts Facebook Live Town Hall meetings.

"We have been much more proactive in reaching out to state and local government leaders, civic leaders, and business leaders in scheduling and holding virtual meetings to ensure a flow of information, especially about federal mitigation efforts related to COVID-19. We have become much more of a conduit to accessing information about federal assistance."

—House District Director

¹³ To help offices manage some of the administrative aspects of working from home the Modernization Staff Association released a "[Staff Assistant and Legislative Correspondent Capitol Hill Working from Home Guide](#)" in July 2020.

¹⁴ Available at the red banner on his website at <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/>.

¹⁵ Rep. Crawford's example and others are included in the 2019 report "[Modernizing Congress: Bringing Democracy into the 21st Century](#)" by Lorelei Kelly of the Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation at Georgetown University.

- **Engaging constituents through civil society innovations.**

Congress is historically reluctant to embrace new technology and new ways of operating. To pave the way for modernization, civil society occasionally steps in to help model innovative techniques Congress could use to improve its public engagement. For example, Voice of the People develops nonpartisan online policymaking simulations which present the key points and trade-offs of an issue. Participants decide among the trade-offs, and their decisions are aggregated with others' decisions. The results routinely demonstrate that informed constituents often agree on solutions to policy challenges, even when they are at far opposite ends of the political spectrum.¹⁶ The Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation at Georgetown University has been hosting "SIDE events" that engage stakeholders and individuals, and collect data and evidence, from a district or state to contribute to the civic knowledge that informs Congress.¹⁷ The National Issues Forum's Common Ground for Action platform conducts moderated online issue forums for the public to discuss and deliberate on policy issues and devise solutions.¹⁸ And The Governance Lab at New York University recently completed a Playbook for how Members of Congress can use technology to better engage with constituents, written with case studies from international legislatures.¹⁹

To pave the way for modernization, civil society occasionally steps in to help model innovative techniques Congress could use to improve its public engagement.

- **Conducting remote legislative proceedings.**

Legislatures are the primary venue for citizen input into public policy, and if they are not operating the public can be left out of national decisions. This is especially problematic during a crisis like that caused by COVID-19, which simultaneously impacts all aspects of society and makes in-person interactions dangerous. Legislatures throughout the world have had to grapple with how to continue their operations and ensure the public can communicate with their elected leaders and participate in the democratic process.

Some legislatures already had innovative initiatives in place, including Brazil's e-Democracia, France's Parlement & Citoyens, and Taiwan's vTaiwan, which are all platforms for public engagement in lawmaking. Others had to adapt quickly. Brazil was also one of the first legislatures in the world to allow fully remote work in the wake of the pandemic.

The United Kingdom's House of Commons allowed lawmakers to meet and vote virtually for the first time in the legislative body's more than 750-year history. In Argentina, both chambers

¹⁶ <http://vop.org/>

¹⁷ A working draft of a guide describing SIDE events is provided as "[Civic Voice and Congressional COVID-19 Response: How Members of Congress can Lead SIDE Hearings in their Districts](#)," Lorelei Kelly, Beeck Center for Social Impact and Innovation, Georgetown University, 2020.

¹⁸ <https://www.nifi.org/en/cga-online-forums>

¹⁹ https://congress.crowd.law/files/crowdlaw_playbook_2020_web.pdf

of the National Congress have held virtual committee hearings, and the Chamber of Deputies has instituted a temporary allowance of mixed participation (in-person and virtual). In Ecuador, 129 out of 137 Members attended a virtual session on first responders on April 9 (which is more than have attended in-person hearings). In Chile, Members have expressed interest in continued use of technology post-pandemic due to the distance Members travel.²⁰

In the U.S. Congress, mixed participation and proxy voting was the contentious solution to facilitate floor proceedings and voting. Civil society also helped prove the concept of remote committee proceedings through mock hearings with former Members of Congress,²¹ after which a number of congressional committees began holding remote hearings and meetings for themselves.²²

Legislatures are the primary venue for citizen input into public policy, and if they are not operating the public can be left out of national decisions.

²⁰ These are several of the examples highlighted by Beth Noveck in a [Virtual Discussion about continuity of committee work with the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress](#), May 7, 2020.

²¹ [“Second ‘Mock’ Hearing Convenes Experts to Discuss Remote Proceedings: Retired General David Petraeus, Former Members of Congress, UK MP Chi Onwurah, and Others Discuss How Congress can Keep Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic,”](#) Marci Harris on Medium, April 18, 2020.

²² [“Remote Proceeding Pioneers: Meet the Congressional Committees that are Going First \(and the Staffers Making it Possible\),”](#) Marci Harris on Medium, May 9, 2020.

Conclusion

When we spoke to respondents to our survey—Chiefs of Staff, District and State Directors, Legislative Directors, and Communications Directors—a strong common thread throughout each interview was their office’s unwavering dedication to serving their constituents. CMF knows how hard most House and Senate offices work every day to reach and serve those they represent but... this was different.

This is a long-term national emergency unlike the world has seen in generations. Offices reassigned staffers who normally focus on legislative work to assist the caseworkers who were becoming overwhelmed by constituents’ requests to help them understand and access federal information and benefits. They conducted all manner of virtual meetings with as many constituents as they could reach. They forwarded their office phones to staffers’ mobile phones so few calls would go unanswered. They cobbled together government and personal hardware systems to create functioning remote offices, and linked them together through collaborative software. They sent out e-newsletters, sometimes daily, to get as much information as possible into constituents’ hands. They coordinated with state and federal agencies on their constituents’ behalf. They continue to work tirelessly to help people get through the pandemic.²³ One Chief of Staff mentioned that one of the biggest challenges they faced during this time was something you don’t normally hear about government employees: How to get their team to stop working.

A strong common thread throughout each interview was their office’s unwavering dedication to serving their constituents. CMF knows how hard most House and Senate offices work every day to reach and serve those they represent but...this was different.

While no one can predict COVID-19’s long-term effects on Member-constituent engagement, congressional offices do have thoughts about what changes may be incorporated permanently into their constituent engagement practices and systems. In follow-up interviews with senior staffers who participated in our survey, many indicated that while virtual meetings and telework do not quite replicate the value of in-person interactions and collaboration, Members and staff were going to be more likely to take virtual meetings with constituents in the future, as well as incorporate telework in their daily routines. They are seeing the benefits of being able to reach constituents who are more likely to participate in virtual meetings than in-person ones, and they recognize that the time savings of not having to travel helps everyone, especially in large, rural districts and states. And a staff working remotely can help relieve pressure on overcrowded Washington offices designed for early-20th-century work.

While these are seemingly small changes in a modern workplace, they could have significant impact on how constituent engagement and legislative business are conducted in the future. Though Congress is an institution often reluctant to change, COVID-19 has forced it to change rapidly, and in some respects, for the better. Ironically, these changes might just result in a Congress that creatively explores and adopts new ways to be responsive to their constituents and builds greater trust in our democratic institutions.

²³ [“Slam of Pleas for Help Forces Congressional Staff to Adjust,”](#) Nancy Ognanovich, *Bloomberg Government*, June 4, 2020.

Methodology & Data

Survey: Between May 26 and June 19, 2020, CMF collected data from senior staffers in House and Senate personal offices to better understand and quantify the changes COVID-19 had caused to their operations and constituent engagement. More than 2,200 employees were contacted to participate in an online CMF survey. Email invitations were sent to staff in the following positions: Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, Administrative Director, Legislative Director, Communications Director/Press Secretary, and District/State Director. A total of 128 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 6%. Participants who responded that they served as “Other” staff positions were excluded from this report, bringing the total number of responses to 126 with a 6% response rate. Demographics for these respondents are shown in Figure 11, while data from the rest of the survey are shown in Figures 12-17.

Figure 11 About the Respondents	
Chamber (n=126)	
House of Representatives	81%
Senate	19%
Party (n=125)	
Democratic	60%
Republican	40%
Office Location (n=125)	
Washington, D.C. office	69%
District/state office	31%
Position/Role (n=125)	
Chief of Staff	42%
Deputy Chief of Staff/Administrative Director	5%
Legislative Director	19%
Communications Director/Press Secretary	6%
District/State Director	26%
Note: Survey was in the field May 26 – June 19, 2020.	
Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in <i>The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications</i> , Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.	

Interviews: Between June 11 and July 23, CMF conducted 13 follow-up interviews with survey respondents who indicated they were willing to speak to their office’s communications and management operations during COVID-19. Eight of these interviews were with House senior staffers, and five were with senior Senate staffers. Seven were from Republican offices and six were from Democratic offices. We used the materials from these interviews to supplement our findings, and in a few cases, we cited offices directly where applicable and when we had permission to do so.

Figures: The number of respondents (indicated by “n” in figures) varies from figure to figure because some respondents did not answer all of the questions. Unless otherwise noted in a specific figure, the following are applicable to data depicted throughout this report:

- Percentages for a question may not total 100% due to rounding.
- Percentages for a question may not total 100% if some answers are excluded.

Generalization of results: As with all research, it is important to note that the results presented are only truly representative of the survey respondents, and readers should exercise caution when generalizing results. While we cannot statistically validate these opinions, CMF is confident in this research and findings. Our interviews and interactions with congressional staff throughout the COVID-19 crisis and media reports during this time corroborate the results published in this report. Whenever possible, we have offered commentary to illustrate the broader congressional context for our findings.

Figure 12 Change in Activity Frequency					
Compared to the months prior to the COVID-19 crisis, has your Senator/Representative done more of, less of, or about the same number of the following activities in the past two months?					
	Significantly More	More	About the Same	Less	Significantly Less
Video conferences with constituents	65%	24%	10%	0%	2%
Telephone conference calls with constituents	57%	28%	15%	1%	0%
Telephone town hall meetings	47%	26%	23%	3%	1%
Updating the Member's/Senator's website	37%	39%	24%	1%	0%
Facebook engagement (livestreaming, Q&A, posts)	26%	31%	39%	3%	1%
Local media coverage (television, print media, radio)	13%	46%	38%	4%	0%
Online/video town hall meetings	44%	26%	29%	1%	0%
Twitter engagement (livestreaming, Q&A, posts)	8%	38%	53%	1%	0%
Instagram engagement (livestreaming, Q&A, posts)	10%	30%	53%	6%	1%
YouTube videos	8%	22%	61%	7%	1%
Responding to form email campaigns	5%	15%	70%	8%	3%
Responding to telephone call campaigns	3%	11%	74%	10%	3%
Facility/site visits in the district/state	0%	2%	5%	18%	75%
In-person meetings with constituents	0%	1%	2%	9%	88%
(n=83-110)					
Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.					
Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in <i>The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications</i> , Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.					

Figure 13 | Agree/Disagree Statements about Constituent Interactions

In thinking about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected your interactions with constituents, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My office has increased the financial and personnel resources we dedicate to constituent engagement (e.g., online/telephone town halls, virtual group meetings, phone calls).	35%	47%	14%	4%	1%
I am satisfied with the tools available to my office for communicating with constituents.	16%	51%	17%	15%	1%
My staff have developed helpful new skills for interacting with constituents.	28%	61%	11%	0%	0%
My office is having substantive interactions with more constituents.	20%	39%	31%	9%	0%
My Member/Senator is more open to using technology to engage with constituents than they used to be.	32%	57%	10%	1%	1%
My office is receiving more communications from constituents than we did prior to the COVID-19 crisis.	24%	39%	28%	8%	1%

(n=109-111)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"We host a videoconference daily. We use Zoom to manage panels of professionals and stream to [Facebook]."

—House Chief of Staff

Figure 14 | Possible Long-Term Impact on Office Operations

Looking to the future and the long-term impact the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have on your office operations, please indicate whether you expect to increase, decrease, or keep the same amount of time and resources dedicated to the following.

	Increase	Keep the Same	Decrease
Engaging with individual constituents remotely (videoconferences, phone calls, etc.)	77%	18%	5%
Conducting online/video town hall meetings	60%	35%	4%
Preparing for rapid response to future crises	54%	46%	0%
Conducting telephone town hall meetings	46%	51%	3%
Crafting and implementing a communications strategy	37%	62%	1%
Providing constituent services (casework, outreach, field work, etc.)	37%	60%	3%
Sending franked mass mailing letters/emails	28%	68%	4%
Having in-person meetings in the district/state	13%	34%	53%
Having in-person meetings in Washington, D.C.	11%	22%	67%
Conducting legislative duties (drafting bills, hearings, etc.)	8%	85%	8%
Responding to form messages from grassroots advocacy campaigns	4%	89%	7%

(n=81-98)

Note: "Don't Know/Not Sure" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"It seems like we will do more outreach via virtual and phone than we ever used to. Press conferences and roundtable meetings that don't need to be done in person, probably won't be. And I don't think any of our staff will be required to attend large events, conferences, meetings on behalf of the Senator in person we used to do."

—Senate State Director

Figure 15 | Importance for Understanding Constituents' Views and Opinions

During the COVID-19 crisis, how important has each of the following been for understanding constituents' views and opinions?

	Significantly More Important	More Important	About the Same Importance	Less Important	Significantly Less Important
Online/video town hall meetings	35%	39%	26%	0%	0%
Livestreaming in-person events	26%	41%	27%	1%	5%
Telephone town hall meetings	27%	38%	33%	1%	0%
Phone calls from constituents	32%	33%	34%	1%	1%
Personalized/individual email messages from constituents	26%	37%	36%	1%	0%
Facebook	13%	28%	56%	0%	2%
Twitter	8%	23%	63%	5%	1%
YouTube	6%	18%	71%	4%	1%
District/state office hours	6%	8%	35%	23%	29%
Instagram	5%	7%	80%	4%	4%
In-person town hall meetings	6%	6%	21%	20%	48%
Attending events in the district/state	1%	7%	28%	29%	34%
Identical form communications (advocacy campaigns)	2%	5%	68%	21%	5%

(n=68-92)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"We are a rural state and some constituents can't do video based platforms due to bandwidth but for the most part, phones have been enough."

—Senate State Director

Figure 16 | Importance for Communicating Member's Views and Activities

During the COVID-19 crisis, how important has each of the following been for communicating the Senator's/Representative's views and activities to constituents?

	Significantly More Important	More Important	About the Same Importance	Less Important	Significantly Less Important
Attending virtual events in the district/state	44%	48%	5%	0%	3%
Email newsletters	45%	41%	14%	0%	0%
Member's/Senator's official website	32%	48%	20%	0%	0%
Local media	28%	49%	23%	0%	0%
Telephone town hall meetings	33%	39%	26%	0%	1%
Online/video town hall meetings	42%	35%	22%	0%	1%
Facebook	22%	47%	31%	0%	0%
Responses to constituent communications	34%	35%	29%	2%	0%
Franked mass mailing letters/emails	21%	40%	32%	6%	1%
Twitter	13%	40%	45%	1%	1%
Advertisements (radio, print, etc.)	9%	28%	49%	5%	9%
National media	8%	24%	53%	13%	1%
Instagram	9%	21%	62%	5%	3%
YouTube	3%	24%	69%	3%	1%
District/state office hours	4%	10%	22%	29%	35%
Paper newsletters	0%	8%	59%	19%	14%
In-person town hall meetings	3%	4%	13%	24%	57%
Attending in-person events in the district/state	1%	6%	11%	38%	44%

(n=70-91)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

Figure 17 | Impact on Office's Ability to Engage Effectively with Constituents

In your opinion, what impact have the following had on your office's ability to engage effectively with constituents during the COVID-19 crisis?

	A Lot of Positive Impact	Some Positive Impact	No Impact	Some Negative Impact	A Lot of Negative Impact
The usability of virtual meeting resources (Zoom, WebEx, etc.)	53%	31%	5%	8%	4%
Staff technology (computers, phones, printers, software, etc.)	44%	36%	5%	14%	1%
Staff communication and collaboration	35%	33%	13%	19%	0%
Staff access to office and House/Senate resources	24%	37%	20%	16%	2%
Remote access to your constituent database (IQ, Fireside21, etc.)	29%	31%	31%	8%	0%
The usability of video/telephone town hall platforms	34%	26%	29%	10%	1%
Operating remotely	33%	27%	10%	30%	0%
Member's/Senator's comfort and skills with technology	19%	36%	20%	19%	6%
The cost of video/telephone town hall platforms	9%	12%	28%	41%	9%
Security concerns with online communications	2%	9%	46%	42%	1%
Internet/broadband/cell phone coverage in the district/state	7%	17%	33%	34%	9%
Your office's resources (staff size, office capacity, budget, etc.)	9%	17%	34%	34%	6%
Staff turnover	0%	7%	73%	17%	3%

(n=71-85)

Note: "Don't Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.

Source: 2020 survey of House and Senate senior staff, published in *The Future of Citizen Engagement: Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2020.

"No way to reach most [constituents] that does not cost money. We lack reliable media markets and in order to get out your message, you need to spend money to do that."

—House Chief of Staff

Acknowledgements

The survey and interviews we used to collect the data for this report were conducted during one of the most difficult times for congressional staffers—and the country—we’ve seen in modern times. Pandemic, economic disaster, and civil unrest were the backdrop for this research, so we must first profusely thank the senior staffers in the House and Senate who took the time to provide their insight. There were many other claims on your attention, and we deeply respect and appreciate your contributions.

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This report builds on research and knowledge that has been integral to CMF’s mission for nearly our entire history, so we must finally acknowledge the many CMF employees and research assistants who have contributed to our [Communicating with Congress](#) work over the years.

Kathy Goldschmidt & Bradley Joseph Sinkaus

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Director of Strategic Initiatives

Kathy is a strategic thinker who has been engaged in plotting the Congressional Management Foundation's course for more than 20 years. She joined CMF in 1997 after working in the House of Representatives. She has been involved in much of CMF's research during her tenure, and her focus has been on legislative capacity, strengthening and technology use. She has been integral to seminal CMF projects, including the [Resilient Democracy Coalition](#) and the [Congress 3.0 project](#), which considered different aspects of congressional capacity-building and modernization. She was co-creator and lead researcher for the Congress Online Project—through which CMF developed the [Gold Mouse Awards](#) for congressional websites and social media practices—and the National Science Foundation-funded Connecting to Congress project. She was also instrumental in envisioning and planning for the [Partnership for a More Perfect Union](#).

Kathy has led a number of contracts with the Congress to develop strategies for legislative information and communications technologies. One of these was an intensive, two-year project to develop a 10-year vision and strategy for technology in the House of Representatives, on which she testified before the Committee on House Administration.

Kathy also co-created the [Communicating with Congress](#) project and has authored or contributed to dozens of research reports, publications and articles on Congress, including: [Job Description for a Member of Congress](#); [State of the Congress: Staff Perspectives on Institutional Capacity in the House and Senate](#); [Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement](#); [Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators](#); [#SocialCongress 2015](#); [113th Congress Gold Mouse Awards: Best Practices in Online Communications on Capitol Hill](#); and [Life in Congress: Job Satisfaction and Engagement of House and Senate Staff](#).

Bradley Joseph Sinkaus

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Bradley plays an instrumental role in [improving congressional operations](#) by performing research and analysis, developing content, and providing writing and editing support for CMF reports, publications, and projects. He project manages and leads communications efforts for the [Democracy Awards](#), CMF's honors program for Members of Congress and their staff, and manages and participates in the production and development of content for CMF website and social media presences, including drafting posts, tweets, releases, and blogs. He also assists in planning and content preparation for congressional staff training programs and oversees CMF's research assistant program. He is the co-author of the [Job Description for a Member of Congress](#).

Previously, Brad interned on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources as a key component of his graduate studies. Through research and communication efforts, he is proud to have supported the Senate's 2016 passage of the first comprehensive, bipartisan energy

bill in nine years. Before attaining his master's degree, Brad spent two years at Nexight Group, where he assisted the National Infrastructure Advisory Council in examining the resilience of the nation's transportation infrastructure to both manmade and natural threats. Brad also interned in the Australian Parliament in Canberra and the Australian Embassy here in Washington, gaining valuable, firsthand experience in comparative politics. Additionally, Brad has worked as a research supervisor at a local startup company and interned in the Mayor of Philadelphia's communications office.

Brad earned his B.A. in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania and his M.A. in American Government from Georgetown University. While at Georgetown, he presented his paper, "The Vice Presidency and Foreign Policy: A Balance of Institutional Evolution and Personal Experience" at the New England Political Science Association's annual conference. A native of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Brad resides in D.C.'s renowned Dupont Circle neighborhood and enjoys exploring the many restaurants, museums, and coffee shops the city has to offer.

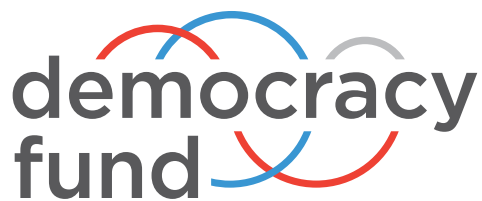


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