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As Public Meetings Resume in Person, BGR Urges Government Entities to Continue Online Access

[The Bureau of Governmental Research \(BGR\) released a report](#) today calling on more government entities in Louisiana to livestream and archive video recordings of their meetings online, so citizens can continue to enjoy the benefits of remote access as pandemic restrictions ease and in-person meetings resume.

Many public entities received temporary state authorization to host meetings by video or teleconference during the pandemic as an alternative to in-person meetings. This practice has enabled more citizens to view or listen to the meetings, especially when the governments record and archive the meetings so citizens can access them anytime. Increased access online and on demand is important because most public bodies hold meetings during normal business hours when it is inconvenient or impossible for many citizens to attend.

As in-person public meetings resume, government entities can preserve the benefits of remote access with low-cost technology to livestream their meetings and provide an archive of video recordings online. BGR's recommendation extends to committee meetings, where many public policy issues receive in-depth discussion and analysis.

Some government entities in the New Orleans area already had these capabilities in place before the pandemic. They include, among others, the New Orleans City Council, the Jefferson Parish Council, the St. Tammany Parish Council, the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East, and school boards in Orleans, Jefferson and St. Tammany parishes.

But many other entities that make decisions with significant implications for residents and taxpayers did not provide livestreaming or online meeting recordings before the pandemic. These include four non-elected boards that levied a combined \$230 million in local taxes in 2019: the Regional Transit Authority, the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the Louisiana Stadium and Exposition District, and the Southeast Louisiana

Flood Protection Authority-West. All four are subject to a 2013 Louisiana law requiring taxing entities with appointed boards to “video or audio record, film or broadcast live all proceedings in a public meeting.” All four entities told BGR they satisfied this requirement before the pandemic by making audio recordings of their meetings available to the public upon request. However, they did not post the recordings online.

During the pandemic, all four entities held meetings by video or teleconference. Once in-person meetings resume, Convention Center and RTA administrators told BGR they plan to broadcast their meetings live. Stadium District administrators said they have not decided what to do after the pandemic. Officials with the Flood Protection Authority-West said they are not set up to do livestreaming but would do so if required.

BGR urges these entities, and other public bodies not subject to the 2013 law, to enhance transparency and accessibility by continuing live remote access when in-person meetings resume. Doing so would embrace the spirit of an existing provision in Louisiana open meetings laws that allows government entities to video record and broadcast their meetings.

As an assurance, BGR also calls on the Louisiana Legislature, which livestreams and archives videos of its own meetings live, to expand open meetings laws to require online access to government meetings of all public entities. Entities with substantial responsibilities and public funding should livestream and archive video of their meetings, while an online archive of video recordings may be sufficient for entities with lesser responsibilities.

BGR views online meeting access as an important piece of improving public transparency and accountability post-pandemic. Other recommendations include giving citizens more than the minimum 24-hour notice of meetings and providing online access to board information packets and meeting minutes. “Government entities should conduct the people’s business in public to the greatest extent possible,” said Rebecca Mowbray, BGR’s president and CEO. “With technology for livestreamed meetings and online video recording archives now readily available, Louisiana should modernize citizen access to government meetings.”

Click to read the full report: [Public Entities Should Continue Providing Online Access to Meetings after the Pandemic.](#)

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BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policy-making and the effective use of public resources in the Greater New Orleans area. For more information, call (504) 525-4152 or visit BGR’s website, www.bgr.org.