

Collaborative Decision Making

When a major storm is identified, many times agencies scramble to coordinate and prepare for the storm. At the same time news outlets may disseminate storm information of varying levels of accuracy. In order to make sense of available information and make the best possible decision, agency representatives must meet to discuss. Traditionally in the National Capital Region (NCR) someone requests a conference call, which is officially scheduled and announced (usually for 3am). The call participants discuss the available information and anticipated impacts and make a decision to evacuate, shelter in place, close government, etc. This call is then repeated periodically until the storm has been resolved.

Unfortunately, this process is cumbersome and ineffective. Transportation agencies find these calls lacking in value. This is due to several major issues in the process:

1. Roll Call – With up to 300 participants, it sometimes takes 45 minutes just to get everyone to introduce themselves.
2. Repetition and Understanding – During the roll call there is little guidance on the order of introductions and people will often repeat themselves, be muted, or have other issues.
3. Notes – The official note taker must identify who said what, accurately capture the intent, and organize the information. All of this is very difficult for a single note taker.
4. Everyone's 2 Cents – Each participant may have an opinion and will want to be heard. Time is precious and not everyone is concise, which makes it difficult to effectively communicate the most important information.
5. Decision – It is difficult to understand how the final decision is made because differing opinions may not be able to be resolved in a short call, and at the end the note taker's spin on the conversation may introduce decision bias.
6. Other Issues – There are a host of other issues inherent to a conference call, including background noises, technical issues, multiple people talking at the same time, participants leaving and entering at different times, etc.

The solution is the RITIS Meeting virtual meeting platform for information sharing and decision making in a situational awareness environment. This application is web-based allowing participants to use it anytime and anywhere, on PC, laptop, or mobile device. It allows presenters to establish timelines, run polls, draw and annotate maps and documents. It eliminates the need for roll call by displaying all participants' names and affiliations. All participants see the same information at the same time, making it much easier to follow along. Participants are capable of notifying the presenter and host that they have a question making it much easier to address issues and concerns.

Finally, the system tracks all meeting actions and automatically generates a meeting log with all necessary information, attachments, and final decision. This log is then distributed to all participants immediately after the meeting, ensuring that everyone has access to the same information that lead to the objective outcome.

While this tool is useful in weather event management and has been used in that capacity in NCR for the past 12 months, it has also been successfully used in Philadelphia Papal Visit to coordinate across multiple agencies for the entire duration of the visit.