If you're looking for the June 2009 free-range PDF, it is here:

http://www.agoodmanonline.com/pdf/free_range_2009_06.pdf

free-range thinking is a monthly journal of best practices, resources, and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact.

To Enter Meeting Hell, Press

It's hard to have a good meeting. Having it via telephone, videoconference or the web makes it even harder.

When holding a meeting isn't just a matter of summoning staff to the nearest conference room, "telemeetings" - via phone, video or the web - can be an alluring option. Enter a PIN, type a passcode, and faster than you can say Skype, you've assembled colleagues from around the world for a meeting or training of just about any size or shape. And in the process, you've traded travel costs (which can add up quickly) for nominal networking fees, making the whole package a CFO's dream - particularly these days.

Photo credit: madmolecule on Flickr

Little wonder, then, that more and more organizations are meeting this way. But while dollars may be saved, do we fully understand what's being lost? Running a good meeting is difficult under the best of circumstances. What happens when you take away eye contact (among other visual cues) and introduce cameras, mute buttons, and a variety of technical hurdles?

There's no shortage of anecdotal evidence that telemeetings can be trouble, but we wanted a more complete picture. So we invited public interest professionals from across the US and Canada to evaluate their experiences. Over the course of three weeks in March and April, more than 1,200 people completed our online survey - not a rigorously

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About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.agoodmanonline.com and www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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scientific sample, but enough to suggest that even if you dial the right toll-free number and enter the correct access code, it doesn't mean you're truly connecting.

Who Took the Survey?

The online survey was publicized to public interest organizations, educational institutions and government agencies across North America. Between March 16 and April 6, the questionnaire (designed by The Goodman Center and hosted on SurveyMonkey) was completed by 1,218 people from the following sectors:

Nonprofit	58.4%	Education	6.7%
Government	13.7%	Other	8.6%
Foundation	12.6%		

Dialed In, Logged On, Flying Blind

Going into this research, we assumed telemeetings were a fact of life in most public interest organizations, and that their use would probably increase due to the economy. Both assumptions were confirmed: nearly 60% of respondents reported participating in teleconferences "frequently or very frequently," and while not as many were regularly participating in webinars (25%) or videoconferences (8%), almost everyone had some experience in these kinds of meetings.

When asked if their organizations would be scheduling *more* telemeetings in the future, approximately half of respondents said yes for all three kinds. (Admittedly, about half estimated the amount would stay the same, but only 5% thought the amount would decrease.)

Which leads to what may be the most telling finding from the entire survey. When asked, "Have you had any training on how to conduct successful meetings (or classes) when using these three technologies?" *over 70% of respondents reported no training.*

	Telecon	Videocon	Webinar
Participate frequently or very frequently	59%	8%	25%
Believe usage will increase	49%	46%	56%
Have *no* training in how to use effectively	75%	71%	72%

In short: telemeetings are integral to our daily operations, we'll probably have more of them in the months to come, but most of us have never been taught how to deal with the problems that inevitably arise. Not exactly a recipe for success.

The Report Card: Room for Improvement

Given an across-the-board lack of training, it's no surprise that respondents gave mediocre grades when asked to rate specific aspects of telemeetings:

	Telecon	Videocon	Webinar
Accomplish objective of meeting (or training)	B-	B-	B
Involve all the participants	C+	C+	B
Skill of meeting (or training)	B-	B-	B

leader

When asked the open-ended question, "What makes a teleconference a waste of your time," respondents cited poor time management (20%), noise and technical problems (16%), insufficient interaction (13%) and too much information for the allotted time (13%) as foremost among a long list of problems.

For videoconferences, the leading time-waster - by far - was technical problems (33%), followed by poor time management (12%), lack of agenda or clear objective (11%), and boring or irrelevant topics (11%).

And for webinars, the most frequently cited problems were poor leadership or facilitation (24%), noise and technical problems (20%), title not matching content (18%), and too much information for the allotted time (16%).

While there were complaints aplenty about mute buttons that didn't mute, movable cameras that never moved, and other technical glitches, many respondents were reluctant to lay all the blame on the equipment. One person who spoke for many wrote, "In general, meetings can be a waste of time whether done in person or done on a teleconference. I don't see the medium as the issue. Useless meetings are useless meetings."

Get the Whole Story

Our respondents had much more to say about teleconferences, videoconferences and webinars, and in a few weeks we'll publish the full results of our study. If you participated in the survey (and entered your email address on the final page), we'll automatically send you a copy. If not, visit either of our websites (listed under "About Us") later this month to download a free PDF of the report.

For now, though, we hope you'll share this newsletter with the people in your organization who decide what kinds of meetings you'll be having. If they're considering more telemeetings in an effort to save money, they may want to hit the pause button until an assessment of *all* the costs are in.

Share this newsletter with a colleague.

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Free Webinar - 3 Tips to Get Research Right

Join us May 8th (12n-12:30p Pacific) and make sure your next round of research gets off to a strong start.

Do you know the first question to ask when you embark on a market research project? What's the most common mistake made when using surveys? And do you know the traps many organizations fall into when conducting focus groups?

This 30-minute webinar, co-taught by Andy Goodman and research expert Donna Van De Water, will answer these questions and will also include a preview of our newest online class: Market Research: From Information to Insight to Decision.

Spaces in the webinar are free but limited, so reserve yours now. Just send an email to Lori Matsumoto (lori@agoodmanonline.com), and be sure to include your full contact information so we can send you all the information you'll need to participate on May 8th.

Calling All Presenters: Bore No More!

Learn how to give your audience what they want in this fun and fast-paced webinar starting May 22nd.

Based on unprecedented research and incorporating the advice of twenty highly regarded public-speaking experts, ***Presentations: Bore No More*** is a two-hour online class designed to help presenters at all levels, from newbies to seasoned veterans. Curriculum in this two-hour course includes:

- The five most commonly made mistakes in presenting and how to avoid them
- How to structure presentations to ensure your audience learns more
- Why PowerPoint should never be used as a presentation *and* a handout
- Techniques to help you deliver talks with greater confidence

Classes will be held on May 22nd and 29th from 9-10a Pacific each day, and tuition is $250 per student. (Group discounts are available.) To learn more and register online, click here.

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