Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making

Updated November 2023

CONTENTS

Notice

1. FOREWORD

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) is committed to reducing inequities across our transportation systems to ensure that communities benefit from the safe, efficient, and sustainable movement of people and goods. When done right, transportation policy can help level the playing field. It can transform economies, connect people to opportunities, and empower underserved communities to build generational wealth for the future. In partnership with the traveling public, community leaders, State, Tribal and local governments, and other Federal agencies responsible for regulatory oversight, we at USDOT strive to empower communities through technical assistance resources such as this set of promising practices for meaningful public involvement.

2. INTRODUCTION

Transportation practitioners have the power and obligation to incorporate the voices of their communities in transportation decision-making. In doing so, transportation agencies show their investment in the American public and demonstrate their relevance to the communities they serve. The purpose of this document is to provide promising practices which can promote a shared understanding of meaningful public involvement. We aim to promote promising practices for transportation professionals to incorporate meaningful public involvement into each stage of the transportation decision-making process and project lifecycle, including operations and service provisions. This guide is intended to support practitioners in all modes of transportation in various roles, including those working in policy, planning, engineering, operations, civil rights, environmental justice, and public involvement. In this document, we will prompt you to consider who makes up a community and how to effectively engage a broad representation of community members. This resource should be used as an adaptable framework to ensure communities have a voice in the transportation decision-making process.

This guide contains promising practices around meaningful public involvement and participation that can help USDOT funding recipients comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and other existing requirements. *Appendix A* contains a non-exhaustive overview of existing policies and processes where public involvement is a requirement. This may help identify areas where you can take immediate action to implement meaningful public involvement. In addition, the guide can help funding recipients ensure that public participation is meaningful. The section on *Building Public Involvement Capacity* discusses how meaningful public involvement should be a core organizational competency integrated into all aspects of your work and transportation decision-making.

This guide highlights many benefits of meaningful public involvement. Meaningful public involvement early in the planning process that includes full representation from all communities affected is key to successful project delivery. Equitable access to public involvement opportunities ensures that underserved and overburdened populations are included. This is vital to informing project delivery, including NEPA's requirement to review and consider effects on communities with environmental justice concerns. Therefore, this guide highlights the value of USDOT funding recipients and project sponsors meaningfully involving communities to develop publicly supported, well thought out plans and designs for deployment at the outset.

Version 1 of this guide was released in October 2022 and made available for public comment via docket DOT-OST-2022-0115. Version 2 (current), released in November 2023, added a new *Appendix C* on *Using Federal Funds for Meaningful Public Involvement Activities* based on stakeholder feedback and questions. The Department considers the guide a living document and welcomes feedback and real-life examples of funding recipients that have been able to implement these practices. We continue to accept public comments on the guide via docket DOT-OST-2022-0115 to inform potential future updates.

3. ADDRESSING CRITICAL GAPS

Achieving meaningful public involvement requires the creation and implementation of equitable programs and plans using a diverse and inclusive range of communications and outreach tools and methods throughout the project or program lifecycle. Public involvement is not an afterthought in the decision-making process, but rather a core tenet for agencies, organizations, partners, and individuals who work on USDOT-funded projects to evaluate, plan, prioritize, design, construct, and maintain transportation improvements and investments. Engaging the public early and often can also help avoid costly re-work and delays later in the project lifecycle, including potential litigation or complaints from community members. Applying these practices will help agencies consistently deliver successful projects.

To ensure that individuals and communities have an equitable voice in transportation decision-making processes, practitioners should address barriers to meaningful public involvement, especially in historically underserved communities. Barriers include internal thought processes such as "we've always done it this way," reliance on one-size-fits-all methods, and a lack of organizational accountability.

Over the years, Congress has refined and strengthened the transportation planning process as the foundation for project decisions, emphasizing public involvement, consideration of environmental and other factors, and a Federal role that oversees the transportation planning process. In implementation, "we've always done it this way" thinking can result in the treatment of public involvement as a one-time event or a box to check in the project lifecycle, as opposed to an intentional, dynamic process that continues throughout all stages of project development. In many cases, funding recipients fail to involve community members and partners in early discussions of project and program planning or problem solving. When organizations use limited communication and outreach methods, like only advertising a single meeting in an area's largest newspaper, they often do not reach the broader audience who may not read the newspaper or who get news from other sources.

In general, a reliance on one-size-fits-all methods of community engagement is counterproductive to the goals of meaningful public involvement. In-person public meetings are a common strategy, but for some people these meetings can be inconvenient or impossible to attend. Physical meeting locations can be inaccessible for persons with disabilities for community members that might not feel comfortable attending events at government facilities, for individuals lacking transportation access to a location, or people whose work schedules do not fall within typical daytime business hours. This should be considered when creating an organization-wide plan for community participation or a project-specific public involvement or community engagement plan.

Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) has emerged to augment community outreach practices when in-person meetings are not possible. Using VPI tools enhances and broadens the reach of public engagement efforts by making participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable for greater numbers of people. Virtual tools provide increased transparency and access to transportation planning activities and project development and decision-making processes. Many virtual tools also provide information in visual and interactive formats that enhance public and stakeholder understanding of proposed projects and plans. By bringing more people to the table earlier in the process, transportation agencies can reduce project delays and lower staff time and costs per person engaged. Please see the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) *VPI Initiative* for tips on how to consider meaningful virtual outreach to stakeholders and the community to help ensure equity.

A top-down style of interacting with the public can lead to suboptimal outcomes such as projects that are unveiled late in the decision-making process, one-sided public involvement limited only to taking comments at required public hearings, not making the public aware of how their feedback was used, and other undesirable outcomes, according to the 2012 Transportation Research Board report for the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP), *Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decision-making.*

Additionally, a lack of public engagement expertise and accountability in recording, measuring, and reporting on the effectiveness of public involvement activities and programs also presents a challenge to meaningful public involvement. It can be hard to determine what was or was not effective, and quantity is often favored over quality because it is an easier metric to track. Accountability tactics, such as asking the public to rate the effectiveness of engagement activities and measuring qualitative concepts such as changed perceptions, transportation projects leading to other community enhancements, or the changes made to a program as a direct result of community input, should be incorporated into performance metrics by the funding recipient. These results should be considered in the development of the organization’s next public involvement program or plan. Public involvement strategies should involve a combination of in-person, digital, virtual, and print tools, in languages spoken by community members, along with intentional and varied outreach methods to ensure that people with disabilities and diverse needs and experiences are aware of and can participate in opportunities to have a meaningful impact on decision-making. When specific to a project or program, public involvement strategies should also be tied to the expected impacts of the project or program.

Robust engagement strategies are a worthwhile endeavor to ensure that projects are developed in a way that address community needs, especially those that include considerations for cultural differences. Addressing critical gaps is not just a matter of increasing equitable outcomes, it means building more sustainable, inclusive transportation infrastructure, programs, and services that meet the needs of all communities. Practitioners can address gaps in their public involvement strategies by using these engagement guides to define success and deploy promising practices to meaningfully involve the public every step of the way.

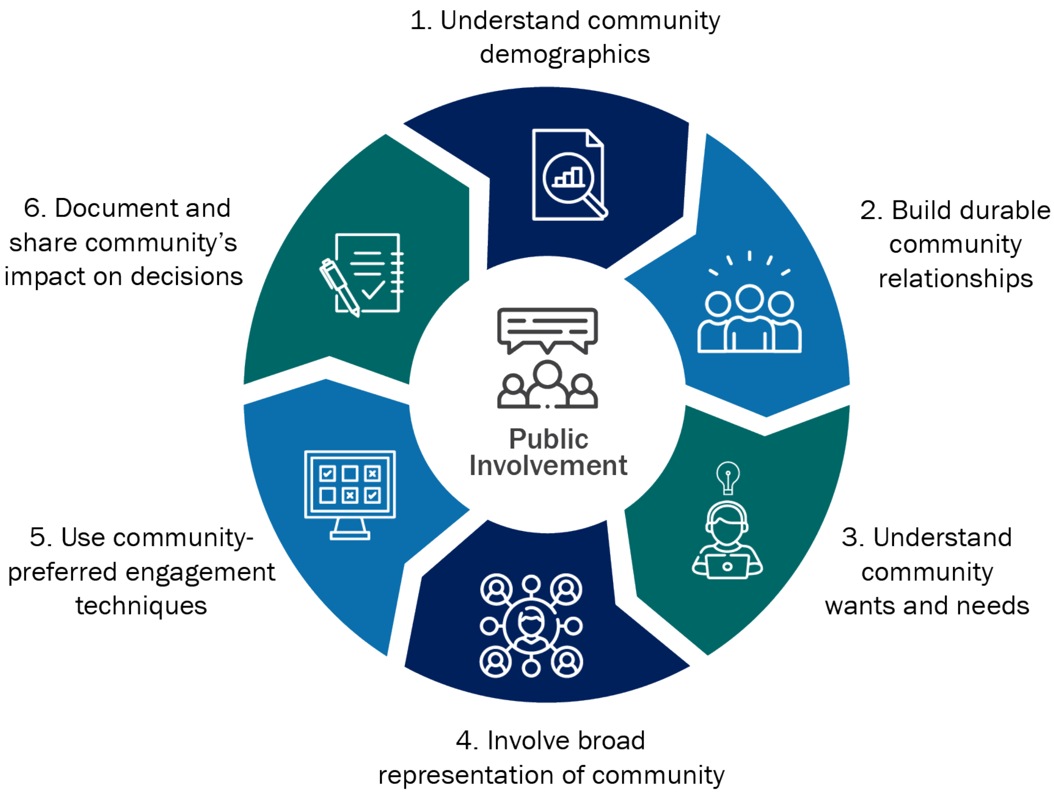
4. MEANINGFUL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING

4.1. What is Meaningful Public Involvement?

USDOT defines meaningful public involvement as a process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public comments and feedback, and incorporates that feedback into a project, program, or plan when possible. The impact of community contributions encourages early and continuous public involvement and brings diverse viewpoints and values into the transportation decision-making process. This process enables the community and agencies to make better-informed decisions through collaborative efforts and improves the decision-making process. Features of meaningful public involvement include:

- Understanding the demographics of the affected community.
- Building durable relationships with diverse community members outside of the project lifecycle to understand their transportation wants and needs.
- Proactively involving a broad representation of the community in the planning and project lifecycle.
- Using engagement techniques preferred by, and responsive to the needs of, these communities, including techniques that reach the historically underserved.
- Documenting how community input impacted the final projects, programs, or plans, and communicating with the affected communities how their input was used.

Features of meaningful public involvement



Meaningful public involvement is a process that lasts throughout the project lifecycle, not just during a single event or activity. It begins early in the planning process and includes full representation from all communities affected. Meaningful public involvement:

- Increases trust between the organization and the community.
- Increases the likelihood that projects, programs, or plans will be accepted.
- Creates more effective solutions.
- Improves a community's knowledge of the project, program, or plan.
- Empowers people from different backgrounds to become involved in transportation decision-making.
- Delivers a better project, program, or service with diverse ideas that promote equity and inclusion.
- Increases compliance with authorities such as Title VI, NEPA, and ADA that require public input and nondiscrimination.

Outreach to the full spectrum of interested or affected participants at all levels of a community should result in representation from a cross-section of the communities that an organization serves and impacts. This requires focused study and evaluation to identify community members that represent the full extent of the potential active participants in the transportation decision-making process. All people/groups will bring their agendas to the table. By practicing more effective engagement, practitioners build in checks and balances and include a range of voices and perspectives. Community members often know how best to reach and engage others in their community and can help unlock pathways to reach people who do not typically have access to or participate on traditional platforms. While it is important to identify and engage with these community representatives, it is not enough to rely solely on them to do the engagement work. They should be trusted partners that can help spread the word, make recommendations for whom to engage with, share information, and build relationships. Depending on how much work and reliance on key community representatives and organizations is needed, compensation should be considered for their time and efforts whenever possible.

Implementing a thoughtful, respectful, and culturally competent project-specific public involvement plan or a community engagement plan early in transportation planning allows staff the time to identify community partners and advocates, and ways to more meaningfully involve the community. The result is transportation decisions informed by community input that maximize benefits and mitigate the risk of harm to communities.

4.2. Who Is "the Public" in Public Involvement?

When USDOT talks about involving the public (or community—this guidance document uses community to mean both geographic area and social affiliation/shared experience) in transportation decision-making, who do we mean? The public includes anyone who resides, works, visits, has an interest in, or does business in an area potentially affected by transportation decisions. This includes traditional transportation stakeholders, such as local government agencies and organizations and advocacy groups; as well as individuals and organized groups of community members such as neighborhood, homeowner, and civic associations and community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve communities.

Full representation is based in equity. In order to ensure transportation systems reflect community needs, agencies need community representation reflective of the community's demographics during the decision-making process. The public should be involved in the decision-making process from the start—when the problem or challenge that may require a transportation solution is identified.

Public demographic information at the local, state, and Federal level such as *US Census data* and the *EPA EJ Screen* are available as tools to help identify key components to define your "public." Data for members of the public that provide input via surveys, meetings, and other methods should also be collected and analyzed to ground-truth broader data sources. Information such as education levels, home ownership, transit dependency, languages spoken at home, disability, age, and other key demographics can help identify not only who is present but who is missing from the conversation.

People are a rich source of ideas that can contribute to improving transportation systems. Community members intimately know and experience their region's transportation issues and challenges and are personally and often profoundly affected by transportation decisions, whether they played a role in those decisions or not. Therefore, when engaging the public, it is imperative to have a proactive strategy for seeking input from members of all parts of the project area, especially in underserved communities, including those who have been historically disadvantaged, marginalized, or adversely affected by persistent poverty.

4.3. Including People Who Are Traditionally Underserved

Organizations are responsible for engaging with underserved populations and providing opportunities for meaningful involvement in the transportation decision-making process. Engaging underserved groups can improve transportation for the entire community, as well as minimize or avoid potential harm from a project. This outreach requires an understanding of community needs to tailor public involvement plans that offer meaningful engagement opportunities and encourage underserved communities to participate in the transportation decision-making process.

Governments at various levels should strive to play a significant role in protecting the rights of traditionally underserved populations. Engagement guidance such as Executive Order 12898 – *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, and Executive Order 14096 *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, stresses the importance of involving traditionally underserved populations in designing and implementing transportation plans, policies, and infrastructure investments. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that recipients of Federal funding, including local and state governments, not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin in their programs, activities, or service delivery. A key aspect of demonstrating Title VI compliance is having a meaningful strategy to engage with underserved communities and populations.

Diversity of thought in how to reach traditionally underserved populations creates opportunities for developing unique outreach strategies to address cultural and economic differences within a project area. Language differences are not the only hurdle to overcome when working effectively with culturally diverse groups. Social norms, barriers for people with disabilities, and economic barriers, such as the costs of childcare or access to transportation, also hinder participation and may even reinforce historic barriers. There is also a digital divide to consider. Not all communities have the same access to reliable internet, cell phone coverage, or computer resources.

Most importantly, understanding and accommodating the ways people in culturally diverse communities interact, and empowering a range of voices, are two major elements of bringing the whole community together to work toward common goals. Thoughtful engagement with traditionally underserved populations allows agencies to identify specific barriers and find effective ways to overcome them in a culturally aware and sensitive manner.

In addition to the basic aim of inclusive outreach to traditionally underserved groups, public involvement efforts should:

- Convey issues in ways that are meaningful to various cultural groups.
- Bridge racial, cultural, and economic barriers that affect participation.
- Use communication techniques that enable people to interact with other participants
- Ensure meaningful access for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP).
- Provide reasonable modifications and accommodations needed for participation of persons with disabilities.
- Develop partnerships on a one-on-one or small group basis to build deeper trust and relationships.
- Increase participation by underserved groups.
- Gain an understanding of the experiences and results of transportation decision-making processes that were not equitable.

Increased public participation efforts are particularly useful because they can:

- Incorporate fresh perspectives.
- Provide first-hand information about community-specific issues and concerns otherwise unknown to the organization (these issues may not be transportation focused).
- Flag potential controversies.
- Generate ideas for deeper community involvement.
- Identify solutions to problems that best meet community needs and also result in an efficient use of resources.
- Seek to mitigate institutional racism, barriers to people with disabilities, and legacy issues from previous plans and projects.

These efforts foster the relationship between agencies, organizations, and the community, often widening the consensus for a plan or project. The greater the consensus among community members, the more likely a plan or project will succeed.

Funding recipients should start public involvement early during planning processes to identify issues specific to underserved groups. By hosting special forums for communities of color and other underserved groups at the outset of developing long-range, regional, or corridor plans, organizations can ensure that the entire planning process addresses their concerns. Local leadership may become more actively engaged by learning about and responding to issues that underserved groups have identified, thus increasing public trust and openness during the decision-making process.

Proactivity is perhaps the most important element in reaching people whose primary language is not English or who experience LEP. As required by Executive Order 13166 Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, programs and activities receiving Federal funding assistance must take reasonable steps to ensure that people with LEP have meaningful access. All agencies that receive Federal assistance must also comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and to do so, they must ensure access to its programs and activities to persons with LEP. This involves examining the services they provide, identifying any need for services to those with limited English proficiency, and developing and implementing a system and/or plan to provide those services so persons with LEP can have meaningful access to them. The intent is to find a balance between resources and needed depth of assessment that ensures meaningful access by LEP persons.

One way to assess meaningful access and create an effective LEP plan is to know the LEP populations in your area. For example, by using the *Language Map App*, a transportation official or administrator can determine within seconds if there are LEP individuals in their county or state and, most importantly, the languages spoken by LEP individuals.

Under Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, federally assisted programs and activities (and all public entities in the case of the ADA) must provide opportunities for engagement to people with disabilities in developing and improving public services that are equal to opportunities for engagement provided to persons who are not disabled. For example, in rail transit or other rail project planning, collaboration with people with disabilities is essential for railcar and station accessibility planning. Similarly, regular input from disability advisory committees is an effective practice for airport decisions for everything from seemingly minor airport operations issues to major facility renovations. Similar to communication with people who have LEP, steps to ensure effective communication with people who have disabilities is required. See 28 CFR § 35.160(a) and 49 CFR § 27.7(c).

Locations where public involvement takes place must be ADA compliant and accessible to people with disabilities, including restrooms. See 28 CFR §§ 35.130(b)(2), 35.150, and 35.151; 49 CFR §§ 27.7, 27.19(a), and 27.71(e). The ADA also requires information must be available to people with vision or hearing disabilities. Effective practices to ensure participation by people with disabilities include:

- Outreach—developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means to communicate with people with disabilities.
- Consultation with individuals or organizations that represent people with disabilities.
- Providing accessible formats and alternate technology that meet requirements for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

4.4. Including Community Representatives

It may be helpful for funding recipients to form ad hoc groups or committees to evaluate, discuss, and guide planning for decision-making for their projects and initiatives. Some organizations even charge ad hoc groups with the responsibility of the ultimate decision. It may also be helpful for funding recipients to engage existing, ongoing groups and committees by providing plan and project briefings and meetings, requesting members to serve as representatives of their communities, where appropriate, in transportation planning processes, or as entities to review and validate information at key milestones.

By meeting with key community leaders, stakeholder representatives, elected/appointed officials, and tribal leaders, decision-makers learn more about the community, vet the goals and scope of the program, promote transparency, increase efficiency of resources, and validate the direction of the program. Empowering these representatives and officials as partners in public involvement helps build strong relationships with communities. Leaders of organizations who are often engaged in transportation decision-making should be asked to recommend other potential participants who can share their perspectives and experiences or to recommend other groups that represent the community or specific interests. Talking with an array of interested parties will help organizations learn about previous projects or programs that may influence current interaction with community members. They can also recommend communication methods and outreach tools that are most likely to have success with the community they represent.

The following are examples of groups and committees that may aid transportation decision-making.

4.4.1. Civic Advisory Committees

A civic advisory committee (CAC) is a representative group of residents, business owners, community leaders and other interested individuals that meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While these groups are often called citizens advisory committees, the term civic is used here because citizenship is not a requirement for participation. A CAC has the following basic features:

- Representation from interest groups or individuals throughout a State or region.
- Regularly held meetings.
- Recorded comments documenting the points of view of participants.
- Consensus building, but consensus is not required.
- An important defined role in the transportation planning process.

4.4.2. Decision and Policy Boards

People who serve on Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) decision and policy boards and similar entities are drawn from many sources. They include State departments of transportation, representatives of major modes of transportation such as transit agencies, community and business leaders, leaders from special interest groups, and interested individuals. A board may also include residents, business owners, and elected or appointed officials, or be composed entirely of community members. It may be assisted by staff members assigned by elected officials or organization representatives. Care should be taken to ensure that a broad cross-section of the community is represented with a focus on underserved and disadvantaged groups. The composition of a board, and its title, will vary based on its task.

Some advisory groups are established by law, rule, or regulation, while others are set up by executive order. These committees may be temporary or permanent, and typically investigate specific topics. People are appointed to boards in a variety of ways—they may be nominated or appointed by public officials, elected by their peers, or self-identified. The ways they come to serve depend on the rules and nature of the policy body or self-identified based on proactive outreach within a neighborhood or in consultation with CBOs.

4.4.3. Collaborative Task Forces

A collaborative task force differs from a CAC and from decision and policy groups. While each of these groups focuses on similar issues, each also plays a different role contributing to the decision-making process. A collaborative task force usually helps solve a specific problem, working collaboratively toward consensus and presenting a strong and unified voice, and generally has a time limit for reaching a conclusion and resolving a difficult issue. These decisions are subject to approval by official decision-makers. Its membership usually includes a diverse array of community members and representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or the organization's executives. Collaborative task forces have been used on a project level and for resolving issues within a project. A collaborative task force has the following basic features:

- A sponsoring organization committed to the process.
- A broad range of representative interests.
- Emphasis on resolving an assigned issue through consensus.
- Detailed presentations of material and technical assistance for complete understanding of context and subject matter.
- Ongoing meetings to understand and discuss the issue.

5. BUILDING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CAPACITY

5.1. An Organization-Wide Effort

When practiced at all levels of an organization, public involvement is fundamental to the success of an organization's plans, projects, and programs. It is the responsibility of people throughout the organization to communicate with and seek feedback from all affected public parties about transportation projects, services, and decisions. Organization-wide public involvement practices are a foundation for effective collaboration, building positive community relationships, developing community capacity, and ensuring community leaders, diverse perspectives, and new voices all have the opportunity to inform the work that impacts a community. This means that public involvement is not just a paperwork exercise but is prioritized, budgeted for, and overseen by qualified staff members dedicated to carrying out the process.

USDOT defines meaningful public involvement as a process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public comments and feedback, and acts on that feedback to incorporate into a project, program, or plan.

A primary goal of a public involvement program should be to build trust between organizations and the public. When organizations work holistically to get to know the communities they work in, they can better design long-term initiatives that equitably serve and involve community members. Organizations can contribute to building capacity in communities through their outreach activities and assist the public in learning more about transportation and related topics, as well as model facilitation and team building skills that can help them collaborate to solve other community issues.

Creating an organization-wide program and culture for institutionalizing meaningful public involvement will not only elicit the participation of the public and other state, Federal and local stakeholders, but it will also help ensure that any applicable legal requirements for public involvement are met, and that stakeholder and public expectations are proactively managed. Instilling a consistent organization-wide approach to public involvement means an organization provides the resources to follow through on public involvement commitments including hiring dedicated staff with community engagement and communications expertise, providing funding to implement robust community participation plans (CPPs), approving opportunities for staff to attend training in ever-evolving public engagement methods, and offering staff access to outreach tools and resources. This can also enable effective evaluation of the efficacy of the funding recipients' public involvement activities and inform staff when additional community engagement is needed.

Organization-wide public participation programs will provide consistency throughout:

- Transportation Planning
- Strategic Communications
- Customer Service
- Planning and Investment
- Environmental Services
- Capital Projects

Since structure varies widely state to state and region to region, it is up to each organization to construct a centralized organization-wide program that works within the structure and the demographic makeup of the service area to provide consistency of practice.

Some recommendations include:

- Create a dedicated staff position for a public involvement professional who is responsible for providing resources to or assisting project staff with their outreach needs and who will be active and involved in the area/community.
- In addition to Federal, State, and agency public involvement guidance and procedures, organizations should support public involvement training and certification from a variety of institutions and professional organizations for staff such as the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2); the *International Association of Facilitators* (IAF), the *Public Relations Society of America* (PRSA), the *National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution* (NCECR), the *National Transit Institute* (NTI); the *National Highway Institute* (NHI); and various universities, institutions, and other organizations.
- Include a budget for internal staff or a professional public involvement consultant, including resources to support demographic analysis and development and tracking of metrics. For staff, ensure resources for their continuing training in related requirements and best practices.
- Embed public involvement professionals as part of the decision-making process and consider their involvement in general programs and initiatives.
- Provide public involvement opportunities at all stages of a program or project lifecycle.
- Include a budget line item for public involvement in every project, use previous projects of similar size and scope to determine a baseline amount, and be prepared to adjust based on specific project/program or community needs.

By committing to an organization-wide program with dedicated staff and resources, organizations can more successfully build relationships in communities; more effectively design and implement public involvement activities; design and construct projects that meet the needs of communities; and contribute to building community capacity.

5.2. Developing a Community Participation Plan

Across the transportation sector, several terms are used to describe plans for public involvement based on different laws, regulations, and local practices. Terms include Community Participation Plans, Public Participation Plans, Public Involvement Plans, and Community Engagement Plans. Such documents also range in purpose and scope, from governing how your organization approaches public involvement overall to how you will approach public involvement for a specific project. For the purpose of this section, we use the term CPP as a catch-all to refer to both types of plans. ***Appendix A*** contains a non-exhaustive overview of policies and processes where public involvement is an existing requirement and terms, such as CPP, are defined in laws, regulations, and guidance.

A well-constructed CPP is meaningful, purposeful, grounded, specific, and productive. To prepare for meaningful public involvement in transportation decision-making, organizations should begin with clearly defined goals that focus on addressing specific issues, the kinds of input needed, the segments of the public that should be involved, strategies to engage traditionally underserved and disadvantaged groups, and metrics to evaluate success. The more specific a CPP is, the greater its chances of producing input that an organization can use in decision-making are. The CPP can also help demonstrate how an organization meets or exceeds the public involvement requirements outlined in applicable Federal and state laws, rules, and guidance.

CPPs are not marketing plans. The goal is not to convince the public that a project, plan, service, or program is needed but rather to outline a process allowing for an interactive dialogue with and gathering input from stakeholder organizations and members of the public, including early input on what they need. Meaningful public involvement requires adequate time and allocation of resources. Resource constraints are not a reason to dismiss engagement strategies necessary to reach a broad and diverse representation of the community. Organizations should carefully consider the long-term benefits of building community relations.

5.2.1. Define Goals and Objectives

Goals should be specific to the needs of the program. Ask:

- Why is a public involvement process needed?
- Who is the "public" for this effort?
- How will the information obtained from the public be used to make decisions?
- What information does the organization need to learn from the public?
- When in the process will this information be most timely?
- In what ways will the information gathered be used?
- What metrics will be used for measuring success?
- What are the demographics of the affected community?
- How will effective engagement techniques be selected specific to the community?
- How will the engagement strategy promote an equitable process?
- Who are the communities and stakeholder groups that need to be engaged to ensure an equitable process?

Using a framework for participation, such as the IAP2 *Public Participation Spectrum* and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) *Spectrum of Public Involvement* can help community engagement practitioners define the strategies to employ, based on engagement goals and objectives. A framework will help the funding recipient establish and communicate clear, intentional expectations that support the appropriate level of public participation. In other words, the level of public participation should be directly tied to the potential maximum level of influence the organization intends for the public to have on the decision or action being considered. Potential levels of public influence can vary from low (informing the public of a decision) to medium (seeking public input for a decision made by the organization) to high (empowering the public to make the decision).

It is important to recognize that we are only talking about potential influence. For example, five levels of public participation are described on the IAP2 Spectrum ranging from no influence (Inform) to total influence (Empower). Actual influence is generally not apparent until the end of a community participation program, when full consideration is given to the input received. However, basing the engagement effort on a framework will help the organization understand the likely nature of public input and provide opportunities to address public concerns and interests.

5.2.2. Develop a CPP

An organization prepares a CPP to outline the implementation methods the organization will use to ensure that members of the public are able to equitably participate in the decision-making process. The CPP presents information about the programs and planning efforts the organization is responsible for, contact information, and techniques that will be used to inform and involve the public. At a minimum, a CPP should include:

- Organization program, project, or service background – state purpose, need, and context elements
- Goals – define the purpose of engagement
- Key audiences and level of engagement – define key audiences and the IAP2 *level of engagement* expected for decision-making

- Key messaging – provide core messages about the organization, program, project, and/or service
- Outreach methods, tools, and techniques – outline what tools and techniques to use
- Key organization/program/project team members – provide core team contact information (additional members of the larger team can be included in the overall distribution list)
- Key partners/stakeholders/community leaders – create a community contact information list for key participants (additional partners/stakeholders can be included in the overall distribution list)
- Program/project schedule and key milestones – outline the program or project schedule, key milestones, and key public involvement activities associated with each
- Incorporating feedback – define how feedback will be collected and incorporated. State how what was (and wasn't) incorporated will be communicated to the public
- Evaluate success – include performance metrics and a timeframe for evaluation (after key milestones, quarterly, continuously, etc.)

The review of the strategy will most likely involve key internal organization team members, but in some cases, it may be critical or helpful to vet the strategy through other organizations, key stakeholders, elected/appointed officials, or community leaders for additional insight. Once the plan is final and adopted, all staff who will be involved in engagement efforts should receive a copy.

Remember that public involvement strategies are living documents that are never truly final – they will be continuously revised during a program/project lifecycle as efforts are evaluated and as priorities grow or change. Remain flexible and recognize the need to pivot if something is not working or if the tools and techniques you selected are not producing a high level of engagement.

5.2.3. Implement the CPP

Now that the strategy has been adopted, it is time to implement the plan, which usually involves specific action items and techniques. The ***Techniques for Meaningful Public Involvement*** section of this guide offers ideas and resources for strategy implementation and outreach to the public. These elements include determining the type of meetings or events to include, tools and activities to consider, and specifics on how to ensure equity when using each technique.

Funding recipients, including State DOTs, MPOs, airport, transit, rail, and other authorities, develop CPPs in consultation with the public, sometimes in informal ways. Exercising meaningful public involvement in the development of a CPP—validating your organization's overall approach to involving communities in decision-making—should be considered a best practice. Many large organizations do engage the public in a more formal process to review draft CPPs when major updates occur. This could include hosting formal public meetings, or less formal open houses, tabling events or pop ups, and other tools. Plans for engaging people with LEP and related requirements under USDOT Orders and regulations also include information for reporting possible discrimination or other concerns, and for advising the public of related procedures. While the practices described above generally guide transit and highway planning, other transportation modes' planning processes may differ in some ways but are equally beneficial to the early establishment and ongoing implementation of well planned, comprehensive CPPs.

Along with knowing who the organization wants to engage in public involvement, it is important to know, once engaged, if a CPP was effective and nondiscriminatory. The next section, *Measuring the Success of Public Involvement Strategies*, discusses metrics for evaluating engagement outputs and outcomes.

6. MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

Effective public engagement requires continuous, interactive communication between the organization and the community. To conduct effective public engagement, funding recipients should reach the desired community members to share information about the potential action and gather input from the community on their perspectives, needs, concerns, and ideas (Grant et al., 2018[1]). For engagement to be successful and responsive to the community, the organization should use input gathered from the community to directly influence the decision about a project, program, or plan and demonstrate to the community how specific input was or was not incorporated and why. Meaningful community engagement is not simply public education, it is an opportunity for the community to influence what will happen in their community.

Engagement Output and Outcome Metrics

OUTPUTS of an engagement activity can be assessed as soon as the activity is complete and are easily observable. Output metrics include:

- Counting the number of people who attend an event.
- Average response time to inquiries from the public.
- Presence of public officials at each event.
- Number of project website hits.
- Cost of putting together the public engagement plan.

Outputs are often evaluated through descriptive statistics or content analysis.

OUTCOMES describe the changes in the planning process resulting from the outputs of an engagement activity. Outcome metrics include:

- Whether the participants felt they had adequate notice of a public engagement activity.
- Whether participants felt their input was valued in the process.
- Tracking how public input was used.
- Whether public input affected the resulting planning documents.

Outcomes can be evaluated using a combination of both opinions and facts.

Continuous evaluation of outreach is key to the success of the project. Evaluators should measure not only the immediate outputs of public engagement efforts, but also the longer-term outcomes that public engagement has on a project's planning process.

It is important to use both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the outputs and outcomes of public engagement to support a clear understanding of changes in participation and actions taken in response to engagement efforts (Griffin et al., 2018[2]). For example,

---

[1] Grant, M., Morris, A., Strum-Gilliam, T., & Brown, L. (2018). Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation [2018 Update]. Retrieved from *https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/50870*

[2] Griffin, G., Stoeltje, G., Geiselbrecht, T., Simek, C., Ettelman, B., & Metsker-Galarza, M. (2018). Performance Measures for Public Participation Methods: Final Report. Retrieved from *https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/34900*.

project website hits may indicate awareness, but not satisfaction or understanding. Supplementing the quantitative measures (e.g., hits) with qualitative measures targeting the public's understanding (e.g., focus groups or interviews) provides a more well-rounded understanding of an outcome or output.

A Transportation Research Board (TRB) project for the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) on Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement found that there are six key indicators important to the success of a community engagement effort (Brown et al., 2019[3]). These are:

1. **Influence and Impact:** Public feedback has an impact on the project decisions and ensures that organizations are not just eliciting feedback from the public as part of a "checklist."
2. **Transparency and Clarity:** Trust of government agencies has increased or improved as a result of the public involvement processes, and agencies were appropriately transparent about the project.
3. **Timing:** Public involvement started early enough and was of sufficient length and frequency to be valuable.
4. **Inclusion:** Public involvement was inclusive and representative of all targeted and affected populations.
5. **Targeted Engagement:** Public involvement included locations relevant to the targeted and affected populations.
6. **Accessibility:** Public involvement activities used multiple methods for participation.

For public involvement to be effective, funding recipients can design the outreach with these six overall aspects in mind, and then evaluate progress based on both the public's input and the organization's own self-evaluations both during and after the public involvement period(s). The NCHRP toolkit was tested, validated, and updated with five state DOTs. It provides a *survey template* for use with the public to gain feedback throughout the public involvement process.

The NCHRP survey also includes demographic questions and a companion scoring tool to see how well the demographics of the public involvement participants are proportionally representative of the demographics of the project area. This is vital to ensure that the community members' input being integrated into projects is not reflecting only the desires of a small, powerful few. The NCHRP toolkit includes companion questions for the organization to reflect on its own progress and room for improvement throughout the engagement phases. Organizations can also create their own custom survey(s) to evaluate their public involvement processes.

Regardless of which tools are used to measure the public involvement process, teams leading the effort can benefit from following established guiding principles. Griffin et al., 2018 suggests eight best practices for evaluating public participation throughout the project lifecycle:

- Coordinate expectations
- Designate resources
- Aim for fairness
- Stay flexible
- Distinguish outputs from outcomes

[3] Brown, B., Gunby, K., Strausz-Clark, J., Frugé, A., Glaze, S., Findlay, M., Tuia, J., Hajnosz, I. (2019). Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development. (pp. 102p): Transportation Research Board.

- Use quantitative and qualitative measures consistently
- Track results over time
- Keep it simple – start small

In general, organizations will benefit from incorporating and evaluating their process and focusing on equity at every step from planning through implementation and final decision-making.

Continuous evaluation of outreach impact is key to the success of the project. Evaluators should measure not only the immediate outputs of public engagement efforts, but also the longer-term outcomes and impact that the public engagement has on a project's planning process.

Appendix B of this guide outlines specific techniques and tools for public engagement. There are many tactics available to practitioners. For ease of use, this guideline includes three categories: techniques for informing, techniques for gathering input, and tools to be used within these techniques.

7. TECHNIQUES FOR MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

Many stages of transportation decision-making require collaboration with the public during planning and project development. Funding recipients should meaningfully engage a broad spectrum of representatives from the community affected by a project to understand concerns, identify new opportunities, explore alternatives, and collaboratively create a vision for the future.

Meaningful public involvement lays the groundwork for ongoing engagement well beyond the initial touchpoint with affected communities. Ongoing communication and relationship building cultivates trust and fosters transparency. Various techniques can be used to provide an opportunity for people to give input based upon their lived experiences and areas of expertise. The following section provides an overview of tools and techniques to consider. While the costs of implementation will vary, the short- and long-range benefits of meaningful involvement should be considered when evaluating program budgets.

When choosing an engagement tool or technique, focus on outcomes. Consider:

- Is the budget adequate for the breadth and depth of the outreach goals?
- Who is/are the priority audience(s)?
- Are specific accommodations needed for the audience, including literacy levels?
- Do members of the public primarily use languages other than English?
- Does the community need American Sign Language (ASL), other sign language, or large print/braille accommodations?
- Will adaptive technology (such as captioning or other tools) be needed for people with disabilities?
- Is the audience in a remote area?
- Are in-person meetings and events accessible through public transportation?
- Will the audience be able to access reliable services (internet, transportation, etc.)?
- During what time of day are the priority audiences able to participate in an event?
- What is the engagement timeline, and can thorough outreach be done in that timeframe?

Meaningful public participation does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, and there is no simple formula that dictates the number of techniques to use. The project timeline, budget, and level of effort influence the selection. It is important to evaluate the outreach plan early and often to determine if the level of effort needs adjusting. If the chosen techniques are not adequately reaching your audience, work with decision makers to add more tools, time, and budget.

Appendix B provides information on a variety of techniques. They are organized by primary use, techniques that seek to inform, those used to seek input from the public, and specific tools that can be used within techniques. Inclusive public involvement programs include techniques that seek to inform *and* gather input. Each technique sample includes a Promising Practice example of how an organization has used the technique effectively along with an icon(s) to denote when a technique may be specifically helpful under certain circumstances.

7.1. Virtual Public Involvement

Public involvement practices have changed significantly over the past decades due to advances in electronic communication tools, computer and mobile device technology, access to internet service, and lifestyle changes. From social media platforms to virtual meeting tools, the ways people access information and provide input continues to evolve. A combination of virtual and in-person activities may be necessary to conduct meaningful public involvement.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in mandates and guidelines for social distancing and restrictions on in-person meetings. Innovations in technology quickly filled the gaps so community engagement and regulatory requirements could continue through virtual participation whether online, by phone, or by paper drop box. Although many benefits of meeting in-person cannot be replaced, VPI tools provide access to information, public meetings and hearings, and other engagement tools for audiences who may not have ever been reached without advances in virtual technology. As a result, transportation professionals have the opportunity to expand the traditional venues of in-person meetings and provide the opportunity to reach out directly to the public in ways that are convenient and equitable to a broader and more diverse population—online, at home, on the phone, and in gathering places.

Using virtual tools is an effective step that can be taken towards meaningful and consistent public involvement that helps deliver successful projects. The FHWA *Virtual Public Involvement Initiative*, led by the Office of Planning and the Office of Project Development and Environmental Review, promotes the understanding that no one tool or strategy is likely to meet everyone's needs and in most cases, organizations will find the most success by combining in-person and digital public involvement strategies. The FHWA has case studies and video conversations with professionals involved in VPI efforts throughout the nation to assist public involvement practitioners in understanding the varied benefits of virtual public outreach and community engagement. These video case studies highlight how some transportation agencies are using VPI tools combined with other techniques for robust and equitable public involvement campaigns that reach diverse audiences for meaningful community engagement.

8. CONCLUSION … GET STARTED

Effective and equitable transportation decision-making needs to incorporate input from and reflect the diverse communities that our systems serve. Successful projects and plans are the result of processes that center meaningful public involvement and balance the potential benefits with the impacts to the natural and human environment. The USDOT is committed to providing guidance, support, and oversight to state and local recipients of Federal funding to assure that equity and meaningful public involvement meet the spirit and intent of laws, regulations, policies, and guidance documents. We believe that sound decision-making occurs when all factors are fully considered, and historically underserved communities are included. This means gathering input from communities to learn their needs, and informing communities about the projects, programs, and initiatives that organizations seek to undertake while planning for safe, efficient, equitable, accessible, and reliable transportation systems.

We hope that this set of promising practices provides a framework for funding recipients to develop policies, make engagement funding commitments, provide training for internal and consultant staff, and develop oversight mechanisms to build, implement, and measure the success of meaningful public involvement efforts. This guide can help supplement regulatory requirements and implementing processes to make engagement more meaningful, as well as help organizations and practitioners develop and implement CPPs. The USDOT holds several public involvement trainings and workshops and provides resources such as this document to support organizations, and practitioners. Further, the USDOT attends and participates in community events and hosts outreach events to inform the public of our services and commitment. Related information, and any future updates to this document, can be found on the *USDOT website*.

Organization-wide CPPs and project specific public involvement or community engagement plans outline the strategies used by an organization to ensure that members of the public can participate in the decision-making process in ways that are meaningful and inclusive. Efforts should be proactive and utilize strategies that both inform and obtain input from communities. They also establish the activities that meet and/or exceed the requirements outlined in applicable Federal and state guidelines. Meaningful public involvement should:

- Provide the public with information on ways to get and stay involved.
- Actively engage the public in the transportation decision-making process.
- Keep the public informed of ongoing transportation-related activities on an ongoing basis.
- Identify and seek to engage underserved communities.
- Encourage participation of community members in the transportation decision-making process.
- Continuously strive to measure effectiveness and improve public participation.

Along with knowing how to set policy and a framework for a public participation program and project specific public involvement plan that foster meaningful engagement through innovative techniques to inform and obtain input from the public, it is important to know the legal basis and to have additional details on the techniques. To help practitioners move forward, *Appendix A* provides a detailed overview of the Federal laws, statutes, executive orders, and policies that govern public involvement and an overview of the typical planning processes in which public involvement is beneficial or required. *Appendix B* provides a set of technique descriptions and exemplars. *Appendix C* discusses the use of federal funds for meaningful public involvement activities. *Appendix D* includes a list of commonly used acronyms throughout this document.

APPENDIX A. REQUIREMENTS TO CONDUCT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Several laws and regulations require USDOT funding recipients to develop and implement public involvement strategies and plans, and such plans must align with current regulations. This section provides a non-exhaustive, quick-reference overview of key activities where this guide may help an organization incorporate meaningful public involvement that is consistent with the letter and spirit of the law. In addition, each state or organization will have specific public involvement requirements for projects, programs, and plans which may be informed by the promising practices in this guide.

As described in the section on ***Building Public Involvement Capacity***, you should not limit yourself or your organization to exercising meaningful public involvement in these specific, required activities. Rather, meaningful public involvement should be a core competency integrated into all aspects of your work and transportation decision-making.

Title VI

The following resources may be helpful in incorporating and complying with Title VI during public involvement initiatives and activities:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance. Specifically, Title VI provides that "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." All recipients of Federal funds must comply with Title VI requirements, which apply broadly to recipients' and subrecipients' programs and activities.

Community Participation Plan

The USDOT Title VI program requires that USDOT operating administrations develop comprehensive community participation requirements for applicants and recipients. By deploying such plans, applicants and funding recipients move towards demonstrating their commitment to comply with Title VI (49. C.F.R. Part 21, *USDOT Order 1000.12C*). A community participation plan is one effective method to facilitate meaningful public participation and engagement to ensure funding recipients and organizations are adequately informed about how programs or activities will potentially positively or negatively impact affected communities, and that diverse views are heard and considered throughout all stages of the consultation, planning, and decision-making process. A Community Participation Plan, which may be an update to an existing Public Participation Plan or other policies, or may exist within a recipient's Title VI plan, should inform the organization's overall public involvement activities. USDOT operating administrations will issue guidelines for CPPs for their grant recipients (USDOT Order 1000.12C, Ch. II, Sec. 4).

Limited English Proficiency Plan or Language Assistance Plan

Members of the American public may be limited in their English proficiency because of their national origin. Individuals with Limited English proficiency (LEP) have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. As described in *Executive Order 13166*, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*, USDOT and the Federal Government are required to ensure that individuals with LEP have meaningful access to information that affect their lives. Per the USDOT's Departmental Office of Civil Rights (DOCR), and as described in *Policy Guidance Concerning Recipients' Responsibilities to Limited English Proficient (LEP)*

Persons, this obligation extends to organizations and state and local agencies that receive monetary assistance from USDOT and the Federal Government. Funding recipients serving LEP populations should develop an LEP implementation plan to address the identified needs of the LEP populations they serve. The USDOT and the US Department of Justice provides resources and further guidance at *About Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | US Department of Transportation* and *LEP.gov respectively*.

Department of Justice (DOJ) LEP Guidance

The DOJ's Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons provides guidance to Federal financial assistance recipients regarding Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting persons with LEP, pursuant to Executive Order 13166.

Tribal Consultation

The following resources may be helpful when consulting with Federally recognized Indian tribes during public involvement initiatives and activities:

Executive Order 13175

Executive Order 13175, "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments requires Federal departments and agencies to consult with Indian tribal governments when considering policies that would impact tribal communities.

USDOT's Tribal Consultation Plan

The USDOT seeks to foster and facilitate positive government-to-government relations between the Department and all Federally recognized Indian tribes. The purpose of the *Tribal Consultation Plan* is to develop, improve, and maintain partnerships with Indian tribes by using agreed upon processes when the Department develops, changes, or implements policies, programs, or services with tribal implications.

Planning Processes

The following state and local planning processes typically require a robust public involvement approach:

Long-Range Transportation Plan

A Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) or Metropolitan Transportation Plan is a multi-year, performance-driven document plan that is developed as a result of a regional or statewide planning process. This collaborative process engages policy makers, elected officials, stakeholders and the public through consensus building to determine the needs of a region or state's transportation system. Known as a vision document, meaningful input is necessary to determine service gaps, and prioritize system elements and funding. Within the context of the LRTP, care should be taken to educate the public on the long-term nature of these plans, which have a planning horizon of 20 years. Organizations must use the decision-making process to explain this foundational step that eventually leads to project design and construction for many of the projects included in the plan.

Transportation Improvement Program and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

After the LRTP is prepared, a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) or a Transportation Improvement Program (Metropolitan TIP) are created. These multi-year, performance-driven document improvement programs are usually developed on a two to three-year cycle but can be updated through amendments. The STIP or TIP include planned transportation improvements and projects. All projects must be part of an approved STIP to be implemented by state and local agencies. To balance the prioritization of projects included in the STIP and TIP, public outreach is key. Processes that do not include full representation often prioritize segments of the transportation system that may unknowingly fund transportation infrastructure or services that continue to limit investment in underserved or disadvantaged communities.

Strategic Highway Safety Plans

A Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) is a multi-year, performance-driven document that defines safety needs across specific emphasis areas for both the built roadway environment and in terms of behavioral safety programs. Developed by state DOTs through a cooperative process with local jurisdictions and other stakeholders, the SHSP presents the overarching framework for reducing highway fatalities and injuries on all public roads and provides the overarching vision for Highway Safety Improvement Plans and Highway Safety Plans. Meaningful public involvement can help ensure outcome-oriented safety activities are inclusive of, and benefit, underserved and at-risk communities.

Per NHTSA, the Highway Safety Plan (HSP) documents the State's behavioral highway safety program that is data-driven in establishing performance targets and selecting the countermeasure strategies for programming funds to meet those performance targets. Grant program regulations are found at *23 CFR Part 1300*. The HSP is a three-year planning document and includes discussion of the State's public participation and engagement efforts in the highway safety program. States must continue public participation and engagement efforts throughout the grant cycle. Public participation requirements were explicitly included in the grant program via 23 U.S.C. 402(b)(1)(B).

Several agencies and organizations have best practices, and other resources for conducting public involvement activities during planning processes. Helpful resources include:

FAA's Community Involvement Manual

This manual provides FAA practitioners with an understanding of the value of community involvement and describes practices and effective techniques for community participation supplementing applicable public participation provisions in relevant FAA orders: https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/air_traffic/community_engagement/FAA_CIM.pdf

FHWA Public Involvement Website

To assist those who would like to improve public participation processes and strategies, this site provides links to relevant information and exemplary case studies and examples: *https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/*

Federal Transit Public Involvement Website

This site outlines the planning process requirements related to surface transportation plans, and provides other helpful resources: *https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/transportation-planning/public-involvement-outreach* *U.S.C. Title 23*

Additional guidance for MPOs and state agencies regarding public involvement requirements during planning activities can be found in *23 CFR § 450.316* [MPO] and *23 CFR § 450.210* [Statewide].

The National Environmental Policy Act

The *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA) generally requires that environmental information is available to decisionmakers and the public before decisions are made and before actions are taken. It establishes a requirement that organizations examine the environmental effects of "major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." This requirement includes examining impacts to both the natural and built environment, and the consideration of such effects before an organization takes steps to implement the project (e.g., purchasing capital equipment).

An important component of NEPA is public disclosure. Regulations established by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), which implements NEPA, emphasize the importance of public participation in decision-making for many projects, both large and small. The level and extent of public involvement is commensurate with the potential for significant impacts, and in compliance with other applicable environmental laws and requirements. Generally, the higher the level of potential significant impacts, the more opportunities for public involvement are needed. The environmental analyses or studies outline the range of potential environmental impacts and benefits and may document commitments to the public and other Federal and state agencies charged with protecting people, animals, and other environmental attributes such as water and air quality. Public involvement may also be required to comply with other environmental laws (e.g., Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 4(f) requirements).

Public or stakeholder involvement and input helps to inform the issues to be considered within the NEPA analysis. This involvement can also alert the organization to the matters or resources important to the community.

Several agencies and organizations have requirements, best practices, and other resources for public involvement during NEPA and related environmental procedures. Helpful resources include:

USDOT Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts

This order establishes procedures for consideration of environmental impacts in decision-making on proposed USDOT actions:
https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/Procedures_Considering_Environmental_Impacts_5610_1C.pdf

Federal Aviation Administration Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures

This Order serves as the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) policy and procedures for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and implementing regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ):
https://www.faa.gov/documentlibrary/media/order/faa_order_1050_1f.pdf

Federal Highway Administration Environmental Impact and Related Procedures

This part prescribes the policies and procedures of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended (NEPA), including public involvement requirements, and supplements the NEPA regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ): *https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/part-771*

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration NEPA Procedures

Now that FMCSA is a separate agency within USDOT, it has developed its own environmental procedures for complying with NEPA, other pertinent environmental regulations, Executive Orders, statutes, and laws to ensure that it actively incorporates environmental considerations into informed decision-making: *https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2004/03/01/04-4338/national-environmental-policy-act-implementing-procedures*

Federal Railroad Administration Environmental Impact and Related Procedures
FRA conducts environmental reviews according to the revised NEPA *legislation and regulations* contained in *23 CFR Part 771 Environmental Impact and Related Procedures*, and *23 CFR Part 774, Parks, Recreation Areas, Wildlife and Waterfowl Refuges, and Historic Sites (Section 4(f))* for transportation projects. For more information, follow this link: *Environment | FRA (dot.gov)*.

Federal Transit Administration Environmental Impact and Related Procedures
This part prescribes the policies and procedures of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended (NEPA), and supplements the NEPA regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ): *https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-23/part-771*

Maritime Administration Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts
This order prescribes the policies and procedures for consideration of environmental impacts in decision-making on proposed Maritime Administration actions: *https://www.maritime.dot.gov/sites/marad.dot.gov/files/docs/environment-security-safety/office-environment/596/mao600-001-0.pdf*

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts
This part specifies National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) procedures for conducting environmental assessments and reviews, and for the preparation of environmental impact statements on proposals for legislation and other major agency actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment: *http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=2c1a9872fe3198d3416f4d080d57c34c&mc=true&node=pt49.6.520&rgn=div5*

Great Lakes Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation NEPA Implementing Procedures
This final order revises the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation procedures for considering environmental impacts to conform with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act: *https://www.seaway.dot.gov/sites/seaway.dot.gov/files/docs/SLSDC%20NEPA%20Regulations.pdf*

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations and *Executive Order 14096 Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, issued in 1994 and 2023 respectively, work to ensure that all people – regardless of race, background, income, ability, Tribal affiliation, or zip code – can benefit from the vital safeguards enshrined in our nation's foundational environmental and civil rights law including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and NEPA.

Environmental justice is defined as "the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people: (i) are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and (ii) have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices."

Building on and supplementing EO 12898, EO 14096 reemphasizes that "each agency should make achieving environmental justice part of its mission" and strengthens engagement with communities by directing federal agencies to actively facilitate meaningful public participation and just treatment of all people in agency decision-making as well as underscoring Tribal consultation and coordination. Public engagement should be meaningful, early and timely, proactive, encouraged, participative, engaging, accessible, informative, and transparent. In addition, it directs agencies to encourage and ensure that recipients of Federal funds and entities subject to contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with Federal agencies advance environmental justice. This includes ensuring that, in accordance with Title VI, "all programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance that potentially affect human health or the environment do not directly, or through contractual or other arrangements, use criteria, policies, practices, or methods of administration that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin."

See *DOT Order 5610.2C* on USDOT actions to address environmental justice.

Additional References

The excerpts in this section are organized by topic area and include statutes, regulations, and executive orders with public engagement requirements and are provided as a reference tool. This is not an exhaustive list of legal requirements.

The following resources pertain to ***accessible locations and activities***:

Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability on Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Assistance - *49 CFR Part 27*

"The purpose of this part is to carry out the intent of section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (*29 U.S.C. § 794*) as amended, to the end that "no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United *States* shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to *discrimination* under any *program or activity* receiving *Federal financial assistance* administered by the Department of Transportation."

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title II

"Except as otherwise provided in *§ 35.149*, no qualified individual with a disability shall, because a public entity's facilities are inaccessible to or unusable by individuals with disabilities, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any public entity." Please also reference USDOT's ADA regulations: *49 CFR Part 37*

The following resources provide guidance and regulations pertaining to air quality conformity:

Title 40, Chapter 1, Part 51, Subpart T, *§ 93.105*

"Affected agencies making conformity determinations on transportation plans, programs, and projects shall establish a proactive public involvement process which provides opportunity for public review and comment by, at a minimum, providing reasonable public access to technical and policy information considered by the agency at the beginning of the public comment period and prior to taking formal action on a conformity determination for all transportation plans and TIPs, consistent with these requirements and those of 23 CFR 450.316(a)."

The following resources pertain to ***early coordination, public involvement, and project development***:

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter H, Part 771, *§ 771.111(a)(1)*
"Early coordination with appropriate agencies and the public aids in determining the type of environmental review documents an action requires, the scope of the document, the level of analysis,and related environmental requirements."

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter H, Part 771, *§ 771.111(h)(1)*

"For the Federal-aid highway program, each State must have procedures approved by the FHWAto carry out a public involvement/public hearing program."

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter H, Part 771, *§ 771.111(i)(1)*
"For FTA capital assistance program, achieve public participation on proposed actions through activities that engage the public, including public hearings, town meetings, and charrettes, and seek input from the public through scoping for the environmental review process."

The following resources pertain to ***electronic information***:

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart B, *§ 450.210(vi)*
"To the maximum extent practicable, make public information available in electronically accessible format and means, such as the World Wide Web, as appropriate to afford reasonable opportunity for consideration of public information."

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, *Section 508*
"Individuals with disabilities who are Federal employees to have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of the information and data by Federal employees who are not individuals with disabilities; and individuals with disabilities who are members of the public seeking information or services from a Federal department or agency to have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities.

***Section 255* of the Telecommunications Act of 1996**
"A manufacturer of telecommunications equipment or customer premises equipment shall ensure that the equipment is designed, developed, and fabricated to be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, if readily achievable."

The following resources pertain to ***stakeholders***:

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart C, *§ 450.316(a)*
"The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing individuals, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, public ports, freightshippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation (including intercity bus operators, employer-based commuting programs, such as carpool program, vanpool program, transit benefit program, parking cash-out program, shuttle program, or telework program), representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the transportation planning process."

Title 23, Chapter 1, *§ 109(h)*

"Assure that possible adverse economic, social, and environmental effects relating to any proposed project on any Federal-aid system have been fully considered in developing such project, and that thefinal decisions on the project are made in the best overall public interest."

Title 42, § 6101
"It is the purpose of this chapter to prohibit discrimination on the basis of age in programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance."

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart B, § 450.210 (viii)

"Include a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challengesaccessing employment and other services."

The following resources pertain to ***public hearings***:

Title 23, Chapter 1, § 128(a)
"Any State transportation department which submits plans for a Federal-aid highway project involvingthe by passing of or, going through any city, town, or village, either incorporated or unincorporated, shall certify to the Secretary that it has had public hearings, or has afforded the opportunity for such hearings, and has considered the economic and social effects of such a location, its impact on the environment, and its consistency with the goals and objectives of such urban planning as has been promulgated by the community."

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart B, § 450.210(iv)
"To the maximum extent practicable, ensure that public meetings are held at convenient and accessible locations and times."

Title 40, Chapter V, Part 1506, § 1506.6(b)
"Provide public notice of NEPA-related hearings, public meetings, and the availability of environmentaldocuments so as to inform those persons and agencies who may be interested or affected."

Government in the Sunshine Act, § 552b(e)(1)
"In the case of each meeting, the agency shall make public announcement, at least one week before themeeting, of the time, place, and subject matter of the meeting, whether it is to be open or closed to thepublic, and the name and phone number of the official designated by the agency to respond to requestsfor information about the meeting."

Government in the Sunshine Act, § 552b(f)(2)

"The agency shall make promptly available to the public, in a place easily accessible to the public, the transcript, electronic recording, or minutes."

The following resources pertain to ***public input on performance-based planning***:

Title 23, Chapter 1, § 135 (h)(1)
"The Secretary shall establish criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the performance-based planningprocesses of States, taking into consideration the following:

- The extent to which the State is making progress toward achieving, the performance targets described in subsection (d)(2), taking into account whether the State developed appropriate performance targets.
- The extent to which the State has made transportation investments that are efficient

and cost- effective.

- The extent to which the State has developed an investment process that relies on public input and awareness to ensure that investments are transparent and accountable; and
- provides reports allowing the public to access the information being collected in a format that allows the public to meaningfully assess the performance of the State."

The following resources pertain to ***participation plans***:

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart B, *§ 450.210(a)*
"The State shall develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunitiesfor public review and comment at key decision points."

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Parts 450, Subpart B & C

450.212(d) and *450.318(e).* Public ports and intercity bus operators are added to the list of entities that a State shall provide early and continuous public involvement opportunities as part of the statewide transportation planning process. New authority for using planning information in the environmental review process, sections 450.212(d) and 450.318(e) are added to reference FAST section 1305 (23 U.S.C. 168).

The following resources pertain to **visualization**:

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart B, *§ 450.210(v)*
"To the maximum extent practicable, use visualization techniques to describe the proposed long-rangestatewide transportation plan and supporting studies."

Administrative Procedures

The following resources pertain to administrative procedures.

The Administrative Procedure Act

The *Administrative Procedure Act* is a Federal statute that governs the way in which administrative agencies of the Federal government of the United States may propose and establish regulations and grants U.S. Federal courts oversight over all agency actions.

Executive Orders 12866 and 14094

Executive Order 12866 and *Executive Order 14094* encourage stakeholder engagement in rulemaking development related to regulatory planning and review activities.

Federal Advisory Committee Act

The *Federal Advisory Committee Act* is the legal foundation defining how Federal advisory committees operate. The law has special emphasis on open meetings, chartering, public involvement, and reporting.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

The *Regulatory Flexibility Act* is a law designed to make government agencies review all regulations that they impose to ensure that they do not place a disproportionate economic burden on small business owners and other small entities.

APPENDIX B. TECHNIQUES FOR MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

The following techniques for meaningful involvement are organized by primary use: techniques that seek to inform, techniques that seek input from the public, and specific tools that can be used within techniques. Inclusive programs include techniques that seek to inform *and* gather input. Each technique includes a Promising Practice example of how an organization has used the technique effectively and an icon(s) to denote when a technique may be specifically helpful under certain circumstances.

Description of Icons

TIME

I have a lot of time

I have some time

Time is short

MONEY

I have a lot of money

I have some money

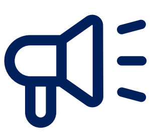
Budget is tight

LANGUAGE NEEDS

My audience uses a language(s) other than English

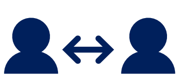
EXPANDING AWARENESS

I need to reach a lot of people from a broad range of communities



AUDIENCE SIZE

One-to-one engagement



Small audiences

Online/virtual

Table of Contents

Engagement Techniques for Informing the Public

Briefings

Briefings are issue-focused meetings between organization representatives and an individual or a small group. They can provide an opportunity for focused communication around a specific community concern. Briefings allow key groups affected by a project the opportunity to meet with the project team and ask questions specific to their concerns.

Briefings:

- Establish rapport with community groups.
- Create an opportunity for members of specifically affected communities to provide candid feedback.
- Are led by a well-informed organization representative with exceptional communication skills, aided by experts or the project team to discuss technical components of the project and answer questions.
- Are tailored according to the interests and concerns of the group or individual.
- Typically include a question and answer session after a formal presentation.
- Can include opportunities for input from attendees.

Promising Practice

King County Metro is upgrading one of Seattle's busiest bus routes in the Rainer Valley with a new RapidRide line. Metro is prioritizing engaging people who are transit-dependent in planning the route and placing stations. This inclusive engagement effort includes hosting briefings in partnership with community-based organizations to reach people where they are and share easy-to-understand project information. Between early 2019 and late 2020, Metro engaged with more than 1,500 community members. Community input helped Metro place bus stations near places people want to go and prioritize projects to make it easier and safer to get to the bus.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably (you will see some of these fundamental considerations repeated throughout this section):

- The organization and project team interact in a small group setting with key project stakeholders, such as civic advisory committees, elected or public officials, various boards, advisory groups, neighborhood residents or business owners, or special interest groups.
- Consider the needs of the group. Tailor the briefing by identifying key people for participation and the best way to present the information.
- Briefings may help amplify voices that may otherwise not be heard.
- Briefings may break through barriers to public participation by providing a personalized opportunity for engagement in circumstances when communication is difficult or complicated.
- Prioritize intentional outreach to underserved communities.
- Collaborate with the group or individual to tailor language access services. Provide multilingual staff or qualified interpreters where potential attendees include people who use languages other than English.
- For online meetings, consider technology limitations including Wi-Fi access, device limitations, and platform compatibility with screen readers.
- For in-person briefings, be aware of weather and health advisories as well as access for people with disabilities and proximity to public transportation.

Why use this technique?
Briefings are a good way to introduce a new program or provide project updates to groups already familiar with an existing project. They create a unique opportunity for interest groups to feel heard and get the attention of public officials, boards, and advisory groups. These meetings can break through temporary barriers with a stakeholder group, and potentially build trust, and repair damage caused by previous misunderstandings or historic wrongs.

Briefings give potential critics a better understanding of a project and a chance to respond in detail, away from a larger meeting setting that may reduce their participation.

When to use this tool
Briefings are used as part of a larger public involvement plan to supplement interaction between community groups and the organization. For transparency and inclusivity, briefings should be used in combination with other public involvement techniques.

Games and Contests

Games and contests are unique ways to attract and engage people who might not otherwise participate in transportation planning. They encourage participation by giving people accessible activities that help them learn about a program or project. No one is an expert at a custom-made game, so everyone starts at an equal level of skill. Although games and contests do not interest everyone, it is a light-hearted technique that may appeal to many types of participants.

Games and contests:

- Clearly and easily demonstrate project details.
- May include board and card games, crossword puzzles or other word games, essays, art, or design and poster contests.
- Can be held in-person or online.
- Can involve a broad variety of people.
- Can increase familiarity with an organization, making it more likely the same audience will engage in the future.

During games and contests:

- Fun is part of the goal.
- Publicity and press coverage may be generated because games and contests tend to grab people's attention.
- People can quickly engage, needing only time to play.
- Youth are given an opportunity to participate in something they otherwise might have difficulty understanding.

Promising Practice

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) sponsored a contest for children to provide designs to be incorporated into the ceramic tiles of a new transit station in their neighborhood. Displaying community artwork permanently on the walls of the new station showed MBTA's interest and commitment in involving the neighborhood in the transit-line extension.

The MBTA also developed a picture guidebook for children called *Anna Discovers the T,* designed to teach children how to use the transit systems.

Equity

Games and contests are useful in a variety of settings and circumstances, and can incentivize community members who might not otherwise participate or are difficult to reach, such as youth or seniors. Consider the following to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- To reach a large audience, widely publicize information on how to participate.
- Strive for cultural sensitivity; engage community members from the population you are inviting to participate in developing the games, contests, and prizes.
- Offer the game or contest in languages other than English.
- If using computer-based, mobile, or handheld technology, comply with 508 guidelines.
- When possible, offer an incentive, such as a chance to win a gift card, to encourage people to participate.

Why use this technique?

Although often used as a tool to inform, input from games and contests can be used to gauge people's priorities, preferences, and concerns about a project or program. Games that include ranking elements help organizations learn about public preferences. They make effective ice breakers; games can be used as a technique to help people understand different perspectives or difficult concepts.

When to use this tool

Games and contests are particularly effective at the beginning of a process to increase awareness, educate participants, and gauge the level of community interest or knowledge of a program of project. They are used in combination with other public participation tools to engage an audience that may be hard to reach or needs an incentive. They are especially useful when used in combination with other tactics that bring people together, such as meetings and open houses.

$$

Site Visits

Site visits are trips to proposed or existing project areas, corridors, or affected properties. Also known as field visits or site tours, they provide attendees with first-hand knowledge of a site. They can include community members, officials, agencies, organizations, and consultants. Site visits:

- Are usually organized as tours and allow community members access to informal interaction with organization representatives and project or program experts.
- Help people understand the physical characteristics of a project area.
- Can be at locations that are similar to a project site or a proposed project to provide examples.
- Can include options for participants to either travel together or meet on site.
- Have varying costs depending on distance, transportation, and duration.
- Are documented with detailed notes and may include a video recording posted to the organization or project website.

Promising Practice

When participants in the Boston's Central Artery North Area project, also known as the "Big Dig," had difficulty envisioning the dimensions of a park proposed to cap a depressed highway, a site visit gave them a better understanding. Going to the location on a low- traffic morning, agency staff used chalk to outline the area. With a rooftop view of the outlined space, participants could envision the size of the park. The local newspaper featured the visit, providing information to members of the larger community who were unable to participate.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Schedule site visits at times convenient to the intended audience, which might be in the evening or on a weekend.
- Consider offering a video or virtual tour as an option for people who are unable to attend in-person.
- Reach out to community leaders personally to gauge interest and coordinate availability.
- To reach a broad audience, advertise in local newspapers, on social media platforms, and with postcard mailings.
- Prioritize outreach to people in underserved communities.
- Provide qualified interpreters for all languages in the project area, including ASL and/or other sign language.
- Provide accommodations for people who use wheelchairs and other mobility assistance devices.
- Provide descriptive materials, including a project summary, event program with the purpose of the site visit, and maps ahead of time.
- Provide captioning for video-based engagements and ensure that electronic materials are accessible.
- Be aware of weather and health advisories, and have a plan for rain, including providing umbrellas and tents or rescheduling.

Why use this technique?

Site visits show participants the physical context of a project or proposal. They are an opportunity for community members to share their insight with project planners, engineers, and other organization staff, and for organization staff to directly answer questions that might not have been asked without seeing the site in person. Because of their more informal nature, site visits provide an opportunity for participation by people who are less likely to attend a meeting. They provide an opportunity to address potential issues such as noise, sight lines, safety, and other site-specific community concerns. Because site visits allow participants to better understand the physical environment of a project area and its surroundings, participants provide more informed comments that can influence the project team's decision-making.

Site visits create a unique opportunity for community members to feel heard and get the attention of public officials, boards, and advisory groups. These events can break through temporary barriers with a stakeholder group and potentially build trust and repair damage caused by previous misunderstandings or historic wrongs. Site visits give potential critics a better understanding of a project and a chance to respond in detail, away from a meeting setting that may reduce their participation.

Site visits provide opportunities for media coverage and can improve the accuracy of reporting. A reporter who spends several hours at a site visit and has the opportunity to ask site-specific questions may write more clearly about complex issues and details.

When to use this tool

Site visits can be used at all phases of transportation decision-making and are especially useful as a first step of community engagement for a controversial project. They provide an introduction and context to a project during visioning, as well as continued engagement during design and construction. They provide the best result when followed by other activities such as advisory team meetings, charettes, and small discussion groups.

Social Media

Social media is made up of various interactive technologies and digital channels that allow users to create and share materials, network, follow topics that interest them, and create online communities. Social media strategies should be a part of a larger media campaign (see *Media Outreach Strategies* in the Tools section of this document.) Different social media platforms appeal to different people, share information in different ways, and have different priorities. Some examples include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Meetup, Next Door, Twitter, Tumblr, WeChat, and WhatsApp. Platforms are always evolving, so organizations need to stay aware of new tools and trends.

Promising Practice

The Central Puget Sound RTA (Sound Transit) led a collaborative community engagement process to plan transit-oriented development near Lynnwood City Center Light Rail Station. To build awareness and engage a diverse audience in an online survey, Sound Transit posted organic and paid content on Facebook and Instagram.

This social media campaign reached 1,241 people living near the station who use Spanish or English through organic posts with an above average click through rate to the survey site. Sound Transit received 4,425 survey responses. This input helped the agency understand community interests and preferences for development near this station.

Social media campaigns:

- Are most successful when messages are actionable.
- Include tailored approaches for each platform rather than one single approach across multiple platforms.
- Can reach a wide audience with a high level of user engagement.
- Can be used to both broadcast information and solicit feedback.
- Work best when incorporated into a broader communications strategy. To increase the effectiveness of social media campaigns and manage risk, develop a policy for how to use social networks and a governance model for how employees are to engage in conversations on behalf of the organization.
- Use social media management platforms, such as Hootsuite and Sprout Social, to automate scheduling, posting, activity monitoring, and engagement, all in one place.

Effective social media posts:

- Are tailored to the audience's particular needs.
- Use photographs and graphics to tell a story.
- Build public trust when organizations quickly respond to comments, questions, and requests.
- Can increase audience reach when partners share your posts on their social media channels.

In addition, podcasts are an effective outreach tool, and programs/episodes are usually shared to social media or on websites. Podcasts can include audio, or audio and video, and formats may include interviews, single host, or multi-host. They can usually be accessed and listened to and/or watch at a time convenient to the consumer. They are an effective and engaging way to provide information to the public.

Equity

Social media is not an effective way to reach all members of a community. Some community members may have limited access to the internet, Wi-Fi, cell phone data plans, or computers and smart phones. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Research the demographics of the community you are trying to connect with to guide the choice of platform(s). There is no "best" social media network to use.
- Consider paid "boosts" to supplement non-paid "organic" posts and advertising to increase reach.
- Add alt text (text used to describe a visual element) to graphics and comply with 508 requirements to convey information to people with visual disabilities.
- Create posts in multiple languages.
- Tailor messages for cultural appropriateness.
- Reach out to community and public "influencers" for specific audiences.

Why use this technique?

Using social media networks is a fast and inexpensive way for organizations to engage a large audience. Short messages can be tailored to specific audiences. Social media is a good tool for introducing a project and providing links to more detailed information. As people "like" and "share" posts, the audience can grow exponentially. Although not everyone uses social media, it can successfully engage a large segment of a population, particularly youth, older people, and people who use languages other than English.

Input received through social media can range from a simple post about the issue to likes, dislikes, and questions about a project or program. Depending on the platform, input received can be in the form of a photo, a brief response or answer, or a lengthy post. Even simple input such as a thumbs-up or thumbs down can help the organization gauge project interest, likes, dislikes, and questions.

When to use this tool

Use social media as part of a larger media strategy. Because social media is not used by everyone, it is best used in combination with other engagement techniques. Social media can be used effectively to make announcements, solicit feedback, and share information. It can also be a quick way to send and receive emergency notifications and public service announcements.

Speakers’ Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers

Speakers’ bureaus, sometimes called listeners’ bureaus, are groups of trained representatives from the community who speak about a process or program. They meet with other community members, civic groups, social clubs, business organizations, and other groups to better reach specific segments of the community.

Speakers’ bureaus:

- May be comprised of organization board members, partner agencies, members of the community, and public officials.
- Provide an opportunity for two-way communication through question and answers.
- Are particularly useful at events, such as in-person open houses and fairs, where person-to-person communication is important.
- Match speakers and volunteers with specific community groups so their particular backgrounds and skills are effectively used during the event.

Promising Practice

Multi-lingual speakers can serve as public involvement volunteers and help with inclusive engagement by providing interpretation at events with audiences that use languages other than English. The Alaska DOT recruits community volunteers to serve as Inuit interpreters for council meetings and for meetings in rural areas.

Public involvement volunteers from the community assist the organization in developing and implementing an engagement plan. Public involvement volunteers can be used in addition to speakers’ bureaus to add capacity and gain trust within a community. They help the organization understand a community’s perspective since a volunteer who lives in the community may offer insight for better engagement.

When using a speakers’ bureau (with or without public involvement volunteers):

- Speakers function as project ambassadors and should be trained for their specific role and topic.
- Speakers need adequate materials and preparation for the event, including thorough knowledge of presentations, handouts, maps, videos, etc.
- Consider compensating these volunteers for their time and effort. If monetary compensation is not possible, consider providing a meal, gift cards, coupons, etc.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Prioritize intentional outreach to members of underserved communities.
- Multilingual speakers and volunteers can help bridge communication gaps and materials provided at the event should be available in appropriate languages.
- Reach diverse segments of communities by scheduling meetings with neighborhood associations, homeowner and tenant organizations, chambers of commerce, business associations, labor unions, faith-based organizations, and educational institutions.
- Organizations should not over-rely on volunteers, especially representatives from community-based organizations who participate on multiple committees and are often asked to provide free services. A stipend or compensation for time and travel should be considered when possible.

Why use this technique?

Community representatives are especially effective when participants need a locally centered perspective. Participation of speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers is unique in that they are members of the community and are often perceived as more neutral than organization staff.

Because of this, their perspective, as well as the information shared with them by members of the community, may be different and more personal than what would be shared with an unknown organization staff member or consultant.

When to use this tool

Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers are an effective tool when projects or studies are beginning, and the project team needs to get to know the community to start building relationships and trust. They are also helpful at public meetings, transportation fairs, and in-person open houses where large audiences are expected and individual conversations with many people will take place. They are useful when a project is approaching a milestone event or a critical decision when representation from a community member may help an organization's efforts.

Transportation Fairs

A transportation fair is an event used to generate interest for transportation in general or to reach a broad audience who may be interested in a specific project or program. Through a fair, an organization can present information to a broad range of people in a unique, educational, and exciting format.

Transportation fairs:

- Include a variety of visuals including maps, photos, models, simulations, and presentations to convey a message.
- Are preceded by extensive publicity to attract participants.
- Can result in comments and perspectives from a broad and diverse group of participants.
- Are an opportunity for candid, casual input.
- May be held in high foot-traffic locations such as a centrally located public space, town center, or shopping mall.
- Are not typically invitation-based events and are usually drop-in events.
- Are used for sharing information, not for developing community consensus.
- Can include a presentation or speaker to help draw attendees.
- Can include hands on, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM)-focused educational programming to engage youth.

Equity

Transportation fair attendees are self-selected, allowing individuals the opportunity to participate based on their comfort level. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Encourage participants to view exhibits, ask questions, consider information, and give comments.
- Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.
- Do not expect a representative sample of the community given the drop-in nature of a fair.
- Consider holding multiple fairs in different, diverse geographic locations to increase participant diversity.
- Schedule fairs at times when attendance can be maximized, such as weekends, at lunchtime, or in the early evening.
- Be aware of weather and health advisories and have a plan for cancellation or rescheduling.

Why use this technique?

Transportation fairs are a casual way to engage with the community and, if sited well, may successfully engage a subset of the community that has been difficult to reach, such as youth, seniors, young families, or other underserved populations. Fairs can help organization staff identify candidates for greater participation, such as in a site visit, community advisory committee, briefing, or focus group. People can engage based on their own comfort level, choosing to speak with organization staff or taking home information to read at their convenience.

When to use this tool

Transportation fairs work best when used as part of a broader public involvement strategy and other techniques. Use this tool when seeking casual input rather than formal comment. This tool can be used at any stage of the project. During scoping and visioning, an exhibit at a transportation fair can capture unusual ideas. During development or project design and construction, organization staff can inform and update the community on project progress.

Engagement Techniques for Gathering Input

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is where people come together in a freethinking forum to generate ideas. Brainstorming can be an effective method of creating a common understanding of a program or project as participants work together to define goals or solve problems. The freethinking atmosphere nurtures creativity and innovative thinking because individuals are encouraged to bring up all suggestions — even those that might seem outrageous.

Brainstorming:

- Generates ideas to develop programs and projects or to find solutions to a problem.
- Lists every idea offered without comment or judgement.
- Prioritizes solutions.
- Evaluates ideas to reach consensus.

Brainstorming sessions are most effective when led by a skilled facilitator, either from the group itself, the organization, or a consultant. Materials can be provided in advance, and the brainstorming session is carefully planned with objectives and an agenda to focus the conversation, lay the ground rules, and work toward solutions. A typical brainstorming session has a small group of five to 10 participants.

Equity

Anyone can participate in a brainstorming session; participants do not need to be trained professionals or experts. The following considerations will improve the outcome of brainstorming sessions:

- Include community representatives who will be directly affected by the program or project.
- Include a cross-section of people who may hold differing opinions.
- Use trained facilitators to engage participants who may be less vocal than others.
- Provide background information to invited participants in advance.
- Have monolingual brainstorming sessions in multiple languages to increase participation for people who use languages other than English. Having a facilitator in the language of the group is especially helpful. If facilitated non-English monolingual groups are not possible, provide qualified interpreters for people who use languages other than English. Provide interpreters with all materials in advance so they have ample time for preparation.
- Translate materials to provide resources to people who use languages other than English.
- Have monolingual ASL brainstorming sessions, with an ASL facilitator, so people who use ASL have an opportunity to participate fully with ease. If facilitated monolingual ASL groups are not possible, provide qualified interpreters for people who use ASL or other sign language. Provide interpreters all materials in advance so they have ample time for preparation.
- Provide materials in large print, braille, or tactile graphics (a way to convey non-textual information from pictures, maps, graphs, etc. to people who are blind or visually impaired using raised lines and surfaces for people with visual disabilities.)
- Provide materials, such as maps, photos, concept sketches, graphics that can be drawn on, and materials for drawing, for people to express ideas visually.

- Have a virtual brainstorming session that includes participation options for people who use assistive technology. Provide electronic materials that are compatible with accessibility software along with a way for participants to access those materials
- Hold sessions over a series of days and evenings to provide flexibility in participants' schedules.
- If held in-person, choose a location that is accessible to all. Consider a location for participants who may not feel comfortable attending a meeting in a municipal building.

Why use this technique?

Through brainstorming, organizations can hear from people with differing perspectives, generate new ideas, increase their own awareness of issues important to the community, discover potential problems, and determine solutions that might not otherwise come to light. New ideas gleaned directly from participants help organizations craft compromise solutions or program alternatives, and set priorities in collaboration with community representatives. Brainstorming also provides organizations information about the community's current understanding and perceptions of the organization and project.

When to use this tool

Brainstorming is used as part of a larger process and is an effective tool for focus groups, charrettes, advisory committees, or public meetings. When planning projects, brainstorming is effective when used at the beginning of a lengthy or complex process to help the community and the project team come to an early understanding. It is especially effective during visioning or at times when a project or program is facing an issue that has halted progress. It can be used at the beginning of every phase of work, especially after debriefing the prior phase.

Charrettes

Charrettes, often referred to as design workshops, are task-specific, collaborative, full- or multi-day events held as a planning or design activity. Facilitators experienced in collaboration techniques lead the event. Charrette participants include interdisciplinary teams, stakeholders, community members, and organization staff who have knowledge of project details and related issues or policies and understand how input will be used.

Equity

To be most effective, charrettes include a wide range of people with differing viewpoints. Attendees do not need to be a professional or expert on the project or subject. Any individual with an interest can attend and contribute meaningfully.

Other considerations when planning a charrette include:

- Hire a skilled facilitator to create opportunities for all participants to fully engage and be heard without criticism.
- Invite multi-disciplinary and interagency representatives and people with different perspectives.
- Include representatives from the community who will be directly affected by the program or project.
- Include community members on the planning committee to provide insight on how best to structure the event, promote it, and recruit community participation.
- Provide qualified interpreters for people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL or other sign language. Provide interpreters with materials in advance so they have ample time for preparation.
- Consider small group facilitators who can lead monolingual small group conversations in languages other than spoken English.
- Provide materials, such as maps, photos, concept sketches, graphics that can be drawn on, and materials for drawing, for people to express ideas visually.
- Provide materials in large print, braille, or tactile graphics.
- Provide electronic materials that are compatible with accessibility software along with a way for participants to access those materials.
- Hold charrettes over a series of days and evenings to provide flexibility in participants' schedules.
- If held in-person, choose a location that is accessible to all.
- Consider a location for participants who may not feel comfortable attending a meeting in a municipal building.

Promising Practice

In Jacksonville, Florida, the city hosted a week-long public design charrette to help guide the downtown master plan. Business and civic leaders and people from surrounding neighborhoods participated in the charrette to help shape the Downtown Jacksonville Master Plan.

Preparation for the charrette took several months. The event included a public walking tour, formal and informal meetings, interviews, brainstorming session, and a series of workshops featuring interactive input methods, such as dot-voting and sketch pads for participants to express ideas. These activities ultimately advised the plan's final recommendations, while embodying the vision that the city proposes to carry out in the future.

Why use this technique?

Charrettes help sharpen an organization's understanding of the various perspectives of interest groups and other stakeholders. Specifically, they can provide insights that are not immediately visible to organization staff on how the community uses and views a road, park, or other community resource. They are useful for creating a shared understanding of a project or program or for finding resolution to alternatives. Charrettes frequently generate creative alternatives that organization staff might not have considered. Including the community in the planning process through charrettes builds trust and project support, especially when community-influenced outcomes are implemented.

When to use this tool

Charrettes are used with other engagement tools, such as workshops or open houses, or as a follow-up to brainstorming and visioning sessions. They are useful at any stage in the planning process, especially in early planning process to provide ideas and perspectives from concerned interest groups. Later in the planning process, a charrette can be useful in resolving unexpected issues or overcoming unforeseen impasses.

Drop-in Centers

Drop-in centers are non-traditional meeting locations that offer neutral and informal space for community members to get project information, ask questions, and make comments. Drop-in centers may go by other names, such as field office, site office, or kiosk, and are often used during long-term, high-visibility projects with major impacts.

Equity

Locate a drop-in center at an easy-to-find, convenient place in the project area or at a specific project site. A location such as a storefront in the community's shopping district, or a station set up in the local library or community center, may provide effective options.

A mobile drop-in center, such as a van or trailer, can be parked at an accessible and visible location or used to attend events, such as fairs, block parties, and sporting or cultural events. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.
- Staff a drop-in center with temporary employees hired from the community to build trust and show commitment from the organization.
- Include operating hours that are convenient to the community, like evenings and weekends, not just during weekday business hours.

Promising Practice

The MPO in Portland, Oregon, used a rehabilitated city bus in its planning for system-wide fare changes. MPO staff drove the bus to schools, business areas, and grocery stores, staying as long as a week in each location. Fare collectors explained new fare information to 150,000 people.

The MPO also created a video about the fare changes.

Why use this technique?

A drop-in center alerts the community that the organization is committed to hearing from them and meeting them where they are. They provide continuity for long-term projects, especially when an organization is based far from a project site. Drop-in centers provide a low-risk alternative to public meetings where some people may not be comfortable attending or speaking. Input received at drop-in centers provide an organization with on-going, in-person feedback from community members, and an opportunity to gauge how the project is being received from inception through completion. Staff at drop-in centers can assess additional outreach needs and alert decision-makers when problems arise.

When to use this tool

Drop-in centers are used when organizations seek to reach people who don't typically participate because meeting venues may not be convenient, or an organization's office is far away. They are used during all phases of a project but are especially useful during implementation and construction when an in-person presence in the community will provide an opportunity for one-on- one interactions between community members and the project team.

Focus Groups

A focus group is a small group conversation led by a skilled facilitator and used to gauge public opinion and listen to concerns, needs, wants, and expectations. They are useful for identifying major points of agreement and/or divergence of opinions. Focus groups are not typically used for problem solving or information sharing, but rather as a way to gather perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation and interaction.

Focus groups typically have the following basic features:

- Groups are made up of six to eight participants.
- Sessions lasts two to three hours.
- Groups are guided by a professional facilitator with a carefully crafted agenda and questions developed by the sponsoring organization.
- Other tools such as video or websites provide context.
- Sessions are observed and recorded.

Participants are selected in two ways: random selection, to ensure all segments of the community are represented, or non-random selection, to elicit responses from a specific group of people. A combination of selection methods can be used to engage people both well-versed and unfamiliar with a topic, service, or product.

For non-random selection, participants might be pre-screened by going through a series of interviews that will lead to selection based on criteria developed for creating a specific audience.

Focus groups are not usually statistically representative of the greater community.

Promising Practice

During planning for the Central Artery project in Boston, also known as the "Big Dig," planners used focus groups to learn about the preferences of people who live in Boston's North End neighborhood, an area isolated from most of the city by an elevated structure.

Planners learned that their assumption—removing the structure would be welcome— was incorrect. Instead, discussion revealed that many community members opposed removing the structure because of the desire to maintain the ethnic character of neighborhood and concerns about gentrification. The project built a series of parks with water features and other amenities in the path of the old elevated Central Artery. From Chinatown through the Wharf District and North End, this is now known as the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Equity

Engaging people from underserved communities may require oversampling of invitations, a method used to mitigate for typically low response and attendance at events sponsored by government organizations.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Have multiple focus groups in different languages so that people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL or other sign language, can participate in monolingual conversations, which produce the best results. Where facilitators in multiple languages are not available, provide qualified interpreters.
- Include materials in large print, braille, and tactile graphics that are accessible to people with sight disabilities.
- Hire a facilitator to keep the group on topic, elicit opinions from each participant, and prevent one participant from dominating.
- Focus groups are typically held in the evening after daytime business hours.
- Provide compensation and a meal to encourage participation when possible.

Why use this technique?

Information gained from focus groups help organizations assess policy, inform program objectives, and understand public sentiment. They are used to assess potential public reaction and acquire a deeper understanding of people's viewpoints on a subject before presenting it to a broader audience. The informal atmosphere and small size of a focus group promote participation, and can provide a forum where differing opinions are encouraged and people are invited to speak out without criticism.

When to use this tool

Focus groups supplement other community engagement techniques and are often part of a larger project or program evaluation. They are used to identify concerns and issues prior to implementing a broader media or outreach strategy. They can be repeated at intervals to gauge changes in public opinion. They also provide a qualitative supplement to quantitative community surveys.

Focus groups are not recommended for input on technical issues or as a problem-solving technique.

Hotlines

A hotline, sometimes called a voice bulletin board, is an organization's telephone line for receiving inquiries and comments from the general public. They sometimes offer project information updates or general information regarding a program. Hotlines can be staffed by a live representative for real-time response or operate automatically with recorded messages. They can also be used to cover large geographic areas for conducting community surveys.

Equity

Telephone techniques such as hotlines reach people who might not otherwise participate in transportation decision-making processes. Community members who are not comfortable with large events or in-person meetings may be more apt to participate using a hotline. A hotline can be an easy way for people who do not have the time to attend meetings to stay informed.

Promising Practice

The Tennessee Department of Transportation offers an online hotline for community members to report drivers who litter on state roadways. People can either call the hotline or anonymously submit an online form. The owner of the vehicle receives a letter in the mail informing them of the negative consequences of their littering actions and educational materials are provided.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Provide a 24-hour toll-free 800 number.
- Program messages in multiple languages.
- Use technology that can be adapted for people with hearing disabilities.
- Indicate when the caller can expect a return call in the outgoing message. Return messages within a reasonable timeframe to alleviate a caller's frustration with not being able to speak with someone directly. For issues that require immediate attention, return the call within 24 hours.
- Inform callers of how their comments are being recorded, considered, and used.

Community members have varying levels of literacy in English and other languages. Hotlines allow people with low literacy levels to access information easily and without revealing their literacy level.

Why use this technique?

Hotlines can be updated quickly to provide the most current information about a project or announce upcoming community meetings and events. Providing outgoing messages in multiple languages is an inexpensive way to communicate a message.

Regularly monitored hotlines can be used in an ongoing way for community members to report issues, such as downed wires, accidents, or other hazards. They can also be used to provide accurate and up-to-date information during times of emergency.

When to use this tool

Hotlines are used for the duration of a program or project. Although telephone techniques such as hotlines cannot replace in-person interactions, they can be an effective part of a broader strategy that includes information sharing techniques such as advertising and printed and social media announcements.

Interactive Broadcasts

Interactive broadcasts allow participants to interact by telephone or computer. This technique uses platforms, such as local public television, YouTube, Zoom, WebEx, Skype, and Microsoft Teams, to connect with the community through broadcasting, teleconferencing, computer, and webcam. A professional facilitator leads the meeting and participants use a call-in number, website, or platform application to comment or ask questions from their homes or other locations.

In some cases, a meeting, presentation, or conversation is held in a central location with an audience, while a video crew records and broadcasts the proceedings. Home viewers call or type in questions and participate in polls or surveys. Web-based interactive broadcasts can be combined with an electronic contact management system to build a stakeholder list for future reference.

Promising Practice

Sound Transit, in partnership with a local commercial station, presented a two-hour, prime time program on its proposed rapid transit system. Moderated by a local TV personality, the program highlighted transit systems from other cities and the 100-person audience showed their approval or disapproval for various options through handheld opinion meters. A panel of diverse experts kept the discussion balanced.

Equity

Interactive broadcasts provide direct and immediate access to in-person public meetings and events for people who cannot attend in-person. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Broadcast broadcasting on local public television networks to reach older community members.
- Broadcast on television networks with audiences who use languages other than English. Have qualified interpreters available and provide captioning in languages other than English.
- Use platforms that are mobile friendly so people with low incomes, people who use languages other than English, and people who access the internet through phones or other mobile devices have the best chance to fully participate.
- Use platforms that are compatible with screen readers and other accessibility software so people with a range of disabilities can participate fully and easily.
- Provide the recording on an easily accessible public website and offer opportunities for viewers who did not attend the event live to provide input after the fact. Add captions and make sure the recording is compatible with screen readers and other accessibility software so people with a wide range of disabilities can view and participate.

There is the risk that the dialogue in an interactive broadcast may not reflect the full range of community opinions. Input from interactive broadcasts may not be statistically representative of the community.

Why use this technique?

Interactive broadcasts are a part of a larger effort to engage the community and gauge public perceptions about an issue. Interactive broadcasts can help build momentum for or against a project or program, which can be particularly critical when funding sources are in question or support is needed from political leaders. Information organizations receive from interactive broadcasts through viewer comments can help them evaluate community perceptions about critical or sensitive issues, and identify ways to improve plans or make responsive decisions.

When to use this tool

Use interactive broadcasts when broad engagement is required to reach audiences that may not use other engagement tools, such as in-person meetings, and are more likely to participate from their homes. For polling and surveys, augment data collected in interactive broadcasts with other tools such as direct mail.

Interactive Displays and Kiosks

Interactive video displays and kiosks are stand-alone electronic systems similar to automatic teller machines (ATMs.) A pre-programmed presentation allows viewers to direct the flow of information by activating the program with a touchscreen, keyboard, or mouse. Interactive displays may be operated as a network of terminals; however, these can be costly. When considering interactive displays as part of a public involvement program, a separate study should be conducted to confirm expected use, types of information perceived to be valued by the public, potential locations, and message content and format.

Promising Practice

Interactive displays can provide information about areas that are distant or dangerous to visit. The Tennessee Valley Authority and the Florida Power and Light Company used interactive displays to illustrate how nuclear power facilities work. These interactive displays include flat and GIS mapping of current and future plans; dashboards that pinpoint time and location of the most energy usage; and real-time power trackers to find power outages affecting an area.

An interactive display or kiosk:

- Can be stationary or mobile.
- Delivers information to the user without in-person contact.
- Elicits specific responses when acting as a survey instrument.
- Enables the user to enter a special request to the organization or join a contact list.
- Receives and stores user input.

Equity

Interactive displays in public places allow an organization to reach people who otherwise may not participate in transportation processes by providing independent opportunities in non-traditional settings.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Place interactive displays and kiosks in shopping centers, plazas, parks and large public events.
- Offer choices to view information in languages other than English.
- Provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth-grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.
- Display information in a way that is easy to navigate for people with low computer-literacy.
- Follow 508 guidelines for all visuals, including creating alternative text (a short, written description of an image, which offers context about that image when it cannot be viewed.)

Why use this technique?

The decision to use kiosks depends on the nature of the project, other public involvement techniques being used, community norms, and available resources. Interactive displays can provide specific, controlled information to people who do not normally attend other engagement events such as hearings or meetings. By using graphics and visual content, people can quickly understand plans or complex programs. Participants can provide contact information for future involvement.

When to use this tool

Interactive displays are appropriate as an initial contact and for providing general information. They should be located where large numbers of people gather—for instance, in shopping malls, campuses, business centers, public buildings, and airports.

Key Person Interviews

A key person interview is a one-on-one conversation about a specific topic or issue with an individual recognized or designated as a community leader or representing an organization with an interest in the project or program. A key person might be a spokesperson for the community, an elected official, or the head of a community-based organization, advocacy, or stakeholder group.

While basic information is provided to set the stage for discussion, interviews are designed primarily to elicit the interviewee's reactions and suggestions. The goal is to gain insight to the person's views, as a representative of a constituency, about the project or program, and the political setting in which work is being done.

Promising Practice

For a Newark subway rehabilitation project, interviews led New Jersey Transit to set up several station task forces rather than a single advisory committee, as originally proposed. The Newark interviews also identified safety as the overwhelming issue of community concern, which led to changing the work to improve the pedestrian experience so there is better connection to the downtown area, as well as reconfiguring traffic lanes for ride services.

Equity

Key person interviews are useful when a project affects a small group in a unique way—for example, a block of businesses or a specific neighborhood.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Provide options for conducting the interview (in-person, online, or on the phone.)
- For interviews with people who prefer to use a language other than English, engage an interpreter who is familiar with basic program or project information.
- Provide interview questions in advance.
- Interview people from a range of viewpoints, including those who may be in opposition to the project or program.
- Follow up interviews with a written summary to the interviewee, for agreement and confirmation of key points.
- Include options for people with a range of disabilities.

Why use this technique?

Key person interviews can enhance an organization's credibility. They show interest in the community and in understanding the concerns of a leader's constituents. Conducting interviews sets a positive tone for subsequent public involvement activities.

One-on-one interviews can defuse a potentially confrontational situation. This is particularly useful in enhancing an organization's understanding of opposing viewpoints. Key individuals are likely to have knowledge, wisdom, and insight that can help an organization gain awareness of the community, understand residents' priorities, and identify points that should be covered during larger meetings. Key person interviews also help identify local participants who may be interested in taking a larger role in a project or program, such as on an advisory committee.

Organizations can enhance credibility if their staff seek key people for advice on designing a public involvement program. Key person interviews are often the fastest way to find out who in the community is perceived as credible, who is difficult to communicate with, and who is a potential ally. Interviews help build a network of critical people to contact and establish lines of communication between community members and organizations. Key people may be aware of a former process that went awry. Their insights on past stumbles can help an organization avoid continued missteps. In addition, they have a sense of how a project or proposal will be received within their community. This information aids an organization in modifying plans to be more responsive to community concerns.

When to use this tool

Key person interviews are useful at the start of a process and just before decision-making. They are often held prior to larger engagement efforts. It may be necessary and desirable to continue contact throughout the process. Credibility will suffer if an organization does not follow up on the interviews or maintain contact with key people.

Non-traditional Events

Non-traditional events are meetings and experiences scheduled at locations that are not the usual meeting halls or public buildings where many government-sponsored events are held. A non-traditional event may be a site-visit or project area tour. An event could also be a table or booth at larger events or specific locations, such as:

- Fairs and festivals
- Neighborhood block parties
- Sporting events
- Shopping centers and malls
- College campuses
- Train stations and bus stops

People who attend the event have direct interaction with staff and receive information from brochures, factsheets, display boards, videos, or other visual tools.

Equity

Non-traditional events are an opportunity for members of the public to participate informally based on their comfort level. Non-traditional events allow for participation by people who may not be free to attend meetings during business hours. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.
- Encourage participants to view materials and ask questions. Include materials in multiple languages.
- Be mindful of cultural norms for engaging audiences of diverse backgrounds.
- Include a variety of visuals including maps and photos to convey a message. An interactive display board with an engagement question that people can read from a distance, then choose to approach the booth is often an effective way to draw attention.
- Provide postage-paid comment cards for people to take home with them and mail later. Include options for people with a range of disabilities and for those who speak languages other than English.

Promising Practice

Representatives of the Maryland DOT State Highway Administration attended the two-day Rockville Arts Festival to discuss the Op Lanes Maryland P3 Program. Their goal was to increase awareness of the variable toll lane project on the Capital Beltway (I-495), I- 270, and the 60-year old American Legion Bridge, which connects Maryland to Virginia. The Program team distributed informational flyers and brochures; referenced Program benefits on several large maps and interactive boards; and spoke directly with approximately 91 community members to answer questions, gather feedback and concerns, and provide clarity about the P3 Program during the two-day festival in downtown Rockville.

Why use this technique?

By going to where people congregate in large numbers, an organization leverages access to a pre-existing audience and has an opportunity to engage a wide range of people. They also demonstrate interest in the community by tailoring engagement to a local event. It is an opportunity to promote other engagement tools, such as meetings, surveys, or signing up for e-mail or following on social media.

When to use this tool

Non-traditional events are used as part of in-person engagement strategy. They are useful at any phase of planning, especially when the organization needs to raise awareness with audiences in a specific project area that may not follow transportation topics on social media or other means. Although non-traditional events are typically one-time events, attending multiple events, or consistently attending recurring events during a multi-year project, creates an ongoing presence in the community for the organization.

Partner or Community Hosted Meetings

Community organizations and other partner groups sometimes hold their own meetings and events to which organizations can be invited. Groups may be a subset of a larger community, such as local community-based organizations, advocacy groups, civic groups, sports or activity-based organizations, social clubs, business associations, culture-based institutions, faith-based organizations, homeowners' and tenants' associations, etc.

Groups may also be part of larger institutions, such as rotary clubs, service organizations, national advocacy and issue-based non-profits, and government or tribal leadership.

Promising Practice

Representatives of the Baltimore City DOT were invited speakers at community meetings during the study for redesigning Druid Park Lake Drive with the goal of increasing safety while reconnecting the community to the adjacent park. By attending community-hosted meetings, they heard from multiple neighborhood groups, advocacy organizations, and nearby neighbors to better understand community and commuter concerns for reconfiguring the roadway.

Equity

Attending an already established meeting helps with attendance because participants already planned to attend as opposed to having to accommodate another meeting. When looking for meetings to join, web-based community calendars, city meeting and elected officials' calendars, and city and community websites are useful sources of information.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Familiarize yourself with cultural norms when requesting an invitation to, and attending, an organization's meeting.
- Ask the organization the best way to present information to their group. This may or may not be in the form of a presentation.
- Provide meeting materials, such as presentations and fact sheets, in advance.
- Translate materials for organizations whose members include people who use languages other than English.
- For groups who use languages other than English, use an interpreter or, if appropriate, offer to compensate the organization if they can provide interpretation.
- Be flexible in your timing. If your topic is only one portion of the agenda, plan to attend the entire meeting as a show of respect. Arrive early. Be willing to stay late.
- Allow ample time for questions.
- Be prepared for off-topic questions and be willing to find the right person for people to contact if it is out of your area of knowledge. Offer communication options for people with a range of disabilities and for those who speak languages other than English.

Why use this technique?

Organizations whose members represent groups that might not otherwise engage in transportation planning may bring fresh perspective and insight to the transportation planning process. Attending an existing partner or community meeting provides an organization the opportunity to leverage the trust an organization has with their community and to interact with people in an already established setting where they are comfortable. Regularly attending community hosted meetings in your project area, even when transportation is not specifically on the agenda, will help the organization build a trusting relationship with community members, as well as help to gain support for a project or program.

When to use this tool

This technique is one of the most important in an overall public involvement strategy. Partner or community hosted meetings can be used during all phases of transportation project decision-making. Begin having community and partner meetings before your project starts, and attend the meetings regularly through the duration of the project. Consider attending meetings past project completion to assess the impact of the project on the community and make possible adjustments. When used in conjunction with other public involvement tools, such as social media, flyer distribution, and project specific meetings, this tool is very effective for gathering feedback and keeping a community up to date on a project or program.

Telephone Outreach

Outreach to the public via telephone has long been used for community involvement to both provide information and gather opinions. Methods of telephone outreach include town halls, hotlines, and auto dial and auto text services.

A Telephone Town Hall is a meeting that allows participants to call in. Some are listen-only, but others may be similar to a large conference call. Telephone Town Halls may be combined with a webcast or scheduled television program for viewing as well as call-in options.

Additional details on other types of telephone outreach are shown below:

- Auto dial or auto text messages: automated services are often used for conducting surveys to reach a statistically viable sample of a general population. An auto dial or text message service can be programmed for many purposes, such as providing meeting reminders and updates to people who have signed up for project/program communications, news, and updates.
- Information bureau: a staff person responds to a broad variety of standard queries, such as questions about updated bus schedules or providing upcoming meeting dates.
- Hotlines or voice bulletin boards: a staff person or auto attendant with recorded answers provides responses to questions about a specific project or program. Hotlines often have the option to leave a message for a return call.
- Interactive voice response system: information retrieval from a main computer with an auto attendant feature that has a series of tiered recordings leading to either a pre-recorded topic-specific answer or a staff person.
- Interactive cable television information: a series of information boards or videos that can be brought up by phone to a television screen.

Promising Practice

The City of Redmond Planning Commission in Washington state holds their meetings in-person and offers a dial-in number for members of the community to listen to the meeting in real- time. Although the commission cannot view and respond to comments “live,” they do accept comments and questions in advance and address them during the meeting.

When people register for a meeting, they receive a text message reminder when the meeting starts and can join through a link in the text message.

The meetings are also streamed through Facebook Live and on three local television channels.

Equity

Telephone techniques reach a variety of people who might not otherwise participate in transportation processes by providing a way to participate through technology. Consider the following to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Use technology that can be adapted for people with hearing disabilities.
- Program recordings, audio services, and telephone options in multiple languages.
- Provide a 24-hour toll-free 800 number.
- Indicate when the caller can expect a return call in the outgoing message. Return messages within a reasonable timeframe to alleviate a caller’s frustration with not being able to speak with someone directly. For issues that require immediate attention, return

the call within 24 hours.
- Inform callers of how their comments are being recorded, considered, and used.

Why use this technique?

Community members who are not comfortable with large or in-person meetings, or are unable to attend in person, may participate using a phone option for telephone town halls. Auto dial and auto text messages can quickly reach a high number of people and, especially in the case of an emergency, can help an organization disseminate accurate information quickly.

When to use this tool

Telephone town halls can be used throughout the duration of a project or program and at key times such as project kickoff, major milestones, unexpected changes, and project/program wrap up.

Hotlines, interactive voice response systems, and auto dial and text messages can be used throughout the project to alert community members of meetings and important updates.

Public Hearings and Open Forum Hearings

Public hearings are meetings that allow members of the community to be formally heard and have their comments recorded. They are structured events that typically occur near the end of data-gathering activities. An open forum hearing is a public hearing with elements of an open house. After reviewing exhibits and other information, participants can provide comments that will be included in the hearing transcript. Both types of hearings can be conducted in person or online.

Public hearings may be required as part of NEPA or project planning process, including those that are part of the transportation system and intended to gather community input for public record.

Public hearings:

- Can fulfill statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Require reasonable notice of the event be given to the community.
- May require transcripts and public comments to be submitted to Federal, State or local agencies.
- Are led by a trained public hearing officer who is typically an organizational representative.
- Are often a one-sided interaction where the public provides comments, but the organization does not typically respond or enter into a dialogue with attendees.
- Are sometimes preceded by an open house, providing time for participants to review information.

An open forum hearing is a less formal event and can be useful in identifying project issues, goals, objectives, values and concerns. The format focuses on project details rather than conflicting positions. It is often used when a planning process requires it as part of the NEPA process, such as an environmental impact study.

In addition to having the features of an open house, an open forum hearing:

- Must publish formal notice of the time and date.
- Ensures comments are officially recorded and transcripts are made public.
- Allows participants to clarify comments by reviewing transcripts before putting their opinions on the record.

Promising Practice

The Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) leads the Op Lanes Maryland P3 (I-495 and I-270 Public-Private Partnership) and Managed Lanes Study. In 2021 MDOT SHA led a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) public comment period and public hearing to seek public feedback on the SDEIS. To encourage participation, the team produced emails, press releases, public meeting notices, social media posts, 20+ display boards, flyers, radio spots (English and Spanish), print and online media ads. Staff developed a 20-page SDEIS executive summary and flyers in Spanish, French, Korean, simplified Chinese and Amharic. The team planned the public hearing, provided notetaking and interpretation services and received more than 2,000 comments during the 45-day comment period.

Equity

Formal hearings may intimidate people who are not used to providing public comments, causing them to be hesitant, especially as part of a public record. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Allow written comments and provide the opportunity for a private session that includes a transcriber for recording purposes.
- Provide qualified interpreters for people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL or other sign language.
- Prioritize outreach to underserved communities by advertising in local media outlets that are culture and/or ethnicity specific. Include both print and online media.
- Consider using a postcard mailer to advertise a public hearing to hard-to-reach and rural communities.
- Prioritize intentional outreach to communities who have not participated in the organization's public participation processes in the past.
- Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.
- Use multiple formats in print, online, and electronic communications for event announcements, including using media to advertise for audiences that use languages other than English, and ethnic or cultural media.
- For online open houses, consider technology limitations including mobile phone data limits, access to broadband and internet, and access to personal computers.
- Ensure presentations and online materials are 508 compliant, and that print materials are accessible to those with a range of disabilities or who speak languages other than English.
- Provide more than one engagement tool for people who may have alternative access needs.
- Be aware of weather and health advisories and have a plan for cancellation or rescheduling of in-person events.

Why use this technique?

Public hearings are sometimes the focal point of a public involvement process, especially when required for Federal processes. Comments received at public hearings and open forum hearings are used by organizations for guidance in planning or project development. Formal comments made on the record help organizations understand the community perspective and assess community agreement or disagreement with a project, shape and modify plans, and record reactions of individuals and stakeholder groups most affected by the project or program.

When to use this tool

Public hearings are used during key stages of the NEPA process and in conjunction with less formal outreach methods including public meetings and open houses.

Public Meetings and Open Houses

Public meetings and open houses are used to share information, provide a setting for public discussion, and gather feedback from community members. They can be held in-person, online, or both.

Public meetings:

- Provide an opportunity for organizations and the public to connect through a structured conversation.
- Typically have a presentation followed by questions and answers.
- May include interactive tools, such as polls and surveys.
- Have informational materials to take home or download.

An open house, often used in conjunction with a public meeting, is a less formal event during which people receive information about a plan or project at their own pace, asking questions as they arise. Often, organizations collect comments during open houses through comment cards or through conversations with attendees.

During open houses:

- Organizational staff and project team members engage in open dialogue with attendees who may share opinions, comments, and preferences.
- Organizational staff answer attendee questions.
- Information is displayed as posters, boards, maps, models, or projected images.
- Attendance is possible over several hours or several days.
- Non-organizational displays and information may be available.
- Websites are used as an online option in which materials are presented digitally and may include interactive features such as white-boards, comment areas, polls, and surveys.
- Feedback is received though print or digital comment cards.
- Informational materials are provided to take home or download.

Promising Practice

Accessible event times are essential for controversial or large-scale projects to provide opportunities for the most people to participate.

The Sacramento Regional Transit District held ongoing evening and Saturday open houses between 1994 and 2009 to review alternatives for South Sacramento Corridor Phase 1 and 2 light rail extension projects.

Ultimately, the Cosumnes River College was selected as the terminus station for Phase 2, with construction beginning in 2012, and service opening in August 2015. In 2016, the first full year after the project opened to service, ridership on the project averaged 4,300 trips on weekdays.

Equity

Emphasize what the project means for the community and why people should attend the meeting or open house. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Schedule events at convenient times that will allow for participation by people who are not available during a business-oriented 9:00 to 5:00 schedule, such as during the evening or on weekends.

- Hold in-person meetings and open houses at accessible locations. For underserved communities, this could mean avoiding a courthouse or municipal building as a meeting location.
- Prioritize intentional outreach to communities who have not participated in the organization's public participation processes in the past.
- Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.
- Use multiple formats in print, online, and through electronic communications for event announcements, including using media to advertise for audiences that use languages other than English, and ethnic or cultural media.
- For online open houses, consider technology limitations, such as mobile phone data limits, access to broadband and internet, and access to personal computers.
- Ensure presentations and online materials are 508 compliant, and that print materials are accessible to those with a range of disabilities or who speak languages other than English.
- Provide more than one engagement tool for people who may have alternative access needs.
- Be aware of weather and health advisories and have a plan for cancellation or rescheduling of in-person events.

Why use this technique?

Public meetings provide an opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide input that can help organizations gauge community reactions and, when possible, modify plans accordingly. They can also provide insight into additional engagement techniques that best suit the needs of the community. Having broad community events where the presentations and materials have the same information as more focused outreach builds trust that everyone is receiving the same information.

When to use this tool

Public meetings and open houses are suggested in the NEPA process during the development of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Public meetings can also be held for projects, initiatives, and processes not going through the NEPA process as an effective way to share information and gather public feedback.

Open houses and online open houses are used when a lot of information needs to be shared, particularly early in the project process.

Complement public meetings and open houses with other engagement tools such as non-traditional events, briefings, and attendance at partner- and community-hosted meetings.

Scenario Planning

Scenario planning is a method of imagining outcomes and evaluating predicted effects of multiple alternatives when planning the future of a community or region. It can be a useful tool when comparing policies, plans and/or programs. Scenario planning uses analytics, data, and other metrics to identify preferred scenarios for future growth and considers how each scenario fits with broader community goals.

As a public involvement tool, scenario planning can be conducted as a workshop to educate stakeholder groups and individuals about project area growth trends. Participants explore and debate predicted outcomes and trade-offs of various alternatives. By testing several scenarios against performance indicators and then workshopping the alternatives, participants in scenario planning help organizations select a preferred alternative.

Promising Practice

The Fresno Council of Governments (COG) in California used scenario planning in developing Plan Fresno, its regional transportation plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). These plans consider the performance implications of four scenarios to identify which package of projects to fund. Fresno COG's scenario planning initiatives started in January 2021, and consisted of: developing the SCS scenario strategies, conducting public outreach, scenario modeling, and SCS scenario outreach workshops before the Fresno COG board voted on the SCS preferred scenario selection in October 2021. Fresno COG used the best available information, such as population growth and socioeconomic data, to recognize patterns and create probable growth scenarios for Fresno's metropolitan area, as well as throughout the county.

Equity

Scenario planning workshop participants can be selected based on a subset of the community or to maximize diversity so that equitable public involvement is achieved.

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Hold workshops in different languages so that people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL or other sign language, can participate in monolingual conversations, which produce the best results. Where facilitators in multiple languages are not available, provide qualified interpreters.
- Include materials in braille or large print, use tactile graphics, or provide audio recordings to make information accessible to people with visual impairments or low vision.
- Hire a facilitator to keep the group on topic, elicit opinions from each participant, and prevent one participant from dominating.
- Offer workshops during the evening after daytime business hours.
- Provide compensation and a meal to encourage participation when possible.

Why use this technique?

Scenario planning is a useful tool at the statewide or metropolitan level. It can be used in combination with other public involvement techniques, such as visioning, to evaluate the effects of various alternatives on the community. It is most effective when organizations need to better understand the long-term impacts of policies and programs.

Information and ideas that come out of a scenario planning process can provide organizations with useful input for transportation planning. Information obtained can be used to consider how changes in transportation or other factors can affect connectivity, mobility, resiliency and other community goals in the future.

When to use this tool

Scenario planning is often used at the beginning of a long-range planning effort to identify community preferences early in the planning process. Scenario planning can augment other outreach tools such as open houses and online open houses.

Small Group Discussion

A small group discussion is used to learn about a specific stakeholder's or community group's opinions, concerns, needs, wants, and expectations concerning a project or program.

A small group discussion typically has the following basic features:

- Eight to 12 participants.
- A carefully crafted agenda with five or six questions.
- Minimal presentation of context and subject.
- Emphasizes gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation

Equity

The informal atmosphere and small size of the group encourage participation. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Familiarize yourself with cultural norms when meeting with groups that include people from backgrounds different than yours.
- Hold small group discussions in different languages so that people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL and other sign language, can participate in monolingual conversations, which produce the best results. Where facilitators in multiple languages are not available, provide qualified interpreters.
- Translate written materials for participants who use languages other than English.
- Include materials in braille or large print, tactile graphics, or provide audio recordings to make information accessible to people with visual impairments or low vision.
- Hire a skilled facilitator to create the best opportunity for all participants to fully engage and be heard without criticism. Consider a bilingual facilitator who can lead conversations in languages other than English.
- The facilitator is essential to keep the group to the agenda, elicit opinions from each participant, and prevent one participant from dominating.
- Provide electronic materials that are compatible with accessibility software.
- Hold discussions during times that accommodate participants who may not be available during daytime business hours.
- Hold in-person meetings at accessible locations. For underserved communities this could mean avoiding a courthouse or municipal building as a meeting location.
- If holding the discussion online, consider technology limitations including mobile phone data limits, access to broadband and internet, and access to personal computers.

Promising Practice

Washington State Ferries (WSF) is replacing the 70-year-old Fauntleroy ferry terminal on West Seattle's residential waterfront. To balance the disparate needs of the three communities served by the terminal, WSF convened a community advisory group during early planning phase of the project. This 25-member advisory group meets regularly to review project plans and represent the interests of their communities.

To encourage collaboration, WSF hosts small group breakout sessions with eight to 10 advisory group participants to gather focused input on specific topics. These sessions provide the group space to connect with one another and share their individual perspectives.

Why use this technique?

A small group discussion is tailored to the information needs of the project. It is an opportunity to understand the general attitude of the public and assess objectives. They can be an opportunity to review the allocation of resources, confirm established goals, or set new directions. Small group discussions are useful for identifying issues prior to implementing a broader media strategy. Used alongside quantitative engagement tools such as surveys, they provide a qualitative supplement.

When to use this tool

Small group discussions are often used when setting or evaluating policy direction or beginning a controversial project. They can be used in conjunction with scenario planning to refine transportation alternatives. Discussions with small groups, combined with attendance at community meetings and holding public meetings, can be repeated at intervals to gauge sentiment on the project as it progresses.

Surveys

Surveys are a tool to assess widespread public opinion in a quantitative (numeric) format. Respondents represent a composite view of the larger population. Ideally, the sample of people who respond to the survey are representative of the total group invited to participate, and thus their responses can be extrapolated to the larger group. Surveys can be formal (scientifically assembled and administered) and provide broadly applicable results, or informal.

Informal surveys tend to bring responses from a convenience sample that often includes people who are easiest to reach and who are more personally interested in or opposed to specific transportation issues than the population at large. Informal surveys are not used as the basis for assessing widespread public opinion although they may provide insight to locally predominant features of public opinion.

Formal surveys are created and administered by professionals who ensure the questions, recruitment methods, sample size, and analysis will ensure valid data that can be generalized to the total population. Professionals will be attentive to multiple levels of validity throughout the survey lifecycle. Calculating a statistically valid survey sample response size and ensuring the respondents are representative of the population can be complex, as there are many aspects of the survey process to consider.

Promising Practice

The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) commissioned a *survey in 2021* to learn opinions and obtain information from older adults, younger adults with disabilities, and caregivers from historically marginalized and underserved communities. They fielded the survey both online and by telephone in both English and Spanish, and by telephone in other languages upon request.

The survey yielded responses from a total of 2,435 people in those priority groups in every US state and the District of Columbia. The survey found that both diverse older adults and diverse younger adults with disabilities need public transportation to get to critical

Determining whether a formal or informal survey is appropriate will depend on whether the organization wants opinions relatively quickly from known or easy to access participants (an informal questionnaire) or wants to invest in hearing from a representative sample of people who are not ordinarily involved in planning or transportation processes (a formal questionnaire and sample selection).

Equity

Surveys can be an effective technique for engaging many hard-to-reach audiences. Surveys that use a randomized sample of a population can be stratified to include only people within a specific geographic area, and you can use survey questions to filter responses by categories. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Distribute surveys multiple ways, including mailings, e-mails, online ads, local news media, in-person at meetings and events, and through community-based organizations.
- Include people who are most likely to be affected by the decisions made based on the survey results.
- Oversample in areas that have hard to reach populations.
- Provide multiple ways to participate, such as pre-paid return mail, online, and toll-free

telephone response.
- Provide surveys in multiple languages to engage people who use languages other than English.
- Provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth-grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.
- Whenever possible, avoid automated telephone surveys. Include languages other than English with real people conducting the survey.
- Pre-test the survey with a representative of the group you are trying to reach to check for culturally appropriate language and understanding. Include options for people with a range of disabilities and for those who speak languages other than spoken English, including ASL and other sign language, to participate.

Why use this technique?

Surveys can gather information on either specific topics or broad ideas. Surveys represent community perceptions and preferences and can reach a wide audience that may not attend meetings or closely follow transportation issues. They can be used to test whether a project, program, or plan is acceptable to the public as it is being developed and help inform decisions for change.

Results are used to guide efforts to meet public concerns and develop effective messages. Surveys can produce quantitative (numeric, closed-ended) results and some brief qualitative (open-ended, descriptive) responses that complement more in-depth qualitative results obtained in interviews, public meetings, small group discussions, charrettes, brainstorming sessions, and other dialogue-based engagement.

When to use this tool

Surveys can be conducted at almost any time during a process. They are useful throughout the project as a tool to measure the change in public perception. They can help assess the changing public's awareness and sentiment toward a specific project or a larger plan. Used during scenario planning, or visioning, surveys can measure public opinion early in the process. Repeated over time, they keep an organization informed of changes in public knowledge and shifts in overall public preferences.

Visioning

Visioning is a cooperative exercise that can help an organization establish a strategy for achieving long-term project goals by encouraging participants to share community priorities related to a project, program, or planning activity. As an integrated approach to policymaking, visioning is often used in long-range transportation planning. In practice, visioning strives to find common ground among participants as they explore strategies for the future.

Visioning can take place through meetings, workshops, and retreats with specific groups and invitees, or to a broader audience through the use of written surveys and visual preference surveys. In the latter case, a questionnaire can be used to capture comments on current issues and future possibilities, and examples of what an area, amenity, or project could look like can be shown to the public and their preferences ranked.

Promising Practice

Washington State Ferries (WSF) engaged more than 7,500 people in developing the vision for their 2040 Long Range Plan. As WSF operates the largest ferry system in the U.S., this 20-year blueprint will guide their investments and service for the next 2 decades.

To understand key issues and community priorities, WSF held nine community meetings, six onboard outreach events, and two online open houses in spring 2018. The final plan reflected extensive input from ferry customers who overwhelmingly support WSF's top priority of replacing and maintaining the aging fleet to provide reliable ferry service.

Equity

Similar to brainstorming and charettes, visioning sessions that involve a cross-section of constituents, including participants with contrasting opinions, can help an organization gain perspective from a variety of voices. Anyone can participate in a visioning process; participants do not need to be trained professionals or experts.

The following considerations will improve the outcome of in-person visioning sessions:

- Include representatives from the community that will be directly affected by the program or project.
- Include a mix of people who may hold differing opinions.
- Hire a skilled facilitator to create the best opportunity for all participants to engage and be heard without criticism.
- Provide background information to participants in advance and translate materials for people who use languages other than English.
- Have monolingual visioning sessions in multiple languages to increase participation for people who use languages other than English. Having a facilitator in the language of the group is helpful. If facilitated non-English monolingual groups are not possible, provide qualified interpreters. Provide background materials to the interpreters in advance so they have ample time for preparation.
- Have monolingual ASL, or other sign language, brainstorming sessions, with an ASL facilitator, so people who sign language have an opportunity to participate fully with ease. If facilitated monolingual sign language groups are not possible, provide qualified interpreters for people who use sign language. Provide materials to the interpreters in advance so they have ample time for preparation.
- Provide materials in large print, braille, or tactile graphics for people with visual

disabilities.

- Have a virtual session that includes options for people who use assistive technology.
- If held in-person, choose a location that is accessible to all. Consider a location for participants that may not feel comfortable attending a meeting in a municipal building.
- For broader engagement visioning exercises, hold sessions over a series of days and evenings to provide flexibility for participants.

Why use this technique?

Visioning considers the diverse viewpoints of many people and can achieve widespread public participation, engaging people with a variety of perspectives.

Visioning is useful for achieving these outcomes:

- Setting the stage for short-range planning activities.
- Setting new directions in policy.
- Reviewing existing policy.
- When integration between issues is required.
- When a range of potential solutions is needed.

The visioning process aims to result in a unified plan for the future. Throughout the process, issues, problems, and questions arise, which can help to sharpen overall policy and focus priorities.

When to use this tool

Visioning is best used in combination with other public involvement strategies and when supported by the heads of multiple agencies and organizations, public officials, and community groups. When used early in a transportation planning process, it can be effective in helping establish or revise policies and goals that incorporate community feedback.

Visual Preference Surveys

Visual preference surveys are used to explore perceptions of one or more visual concepts of a proposed plan or project using sketches, photographs, maps, and graphics to provide a comparison of options for participants to rate as preferred project or program elements. Participants express opinions about a design or design features, which can later be incorporated into plans and projects.

Equity

When used broadly and in coordination with other outreach techniques, visual preference surveys can be indicative of community preferences. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- For online visual surveys, follow 508 guidelines for all visuals by including alternative text.
- At events, engage people with sight disabilities by thoroughly describing the options or providing tactile graphics.
- Translate captions and titles for engaging people who use languages other than English.
- When including written content, provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.
- Create links to online visual preference surveys that community organizations, partners, and other groups can easily share with their audiences and constituents.

Promising Practice

Sound Transit conducted a visual preference survey to hear from future Downtown Redmond Link light rail riders. The survey presented images of station design features to gather feedback on design concepts and look and feel of future station areas. 461 people provided input on the survey. Participants expressed support for stations that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities, so that everyone in the community can enjoy the benefits of light rail. Some people provided feedback on station amenities and transit options they would like to see at the station, including ways to keep the area safe for pedestrians and cyclists. Sound Transit and the City of Redmond will consider this input as they plan stations and future development and services near light rail. Sound Transit plans to begin light rail service by 2024.

Why use this technique?

Visual preference surveys offer a fast and straightforward way for people to voice their opinions and can reach a wide audience that may not attend meetings or closely follow transportation issues. They can help organizations understand community preferences and develop alternatives within transportation planning activities including:

- Community and urban design features.
- Transportation sub-area or corridor studies.
- Transportation alternatives development and analysis.
- Large scale regional planning efforts.

When to use this tool

They can be particularly helpful when the organization is seeking community input on specific design elements such as architectural style, signage, landscaping, parking, transportation facility features, etc. Visual preference surveys are useful within other public involvement strategies such as public meetings, tabling at non-traditional events and transportation fairs, online open houses, charrettes, focus groups, and visioning. They can be conducted any time during a process and are useful at key milestones in design such as concept, 30%, and 60% design completion to verify design elements.

Voting and Polling

Voting and polling activities use print or online tools to ask the public to express a preference for an issue or idea and have their preferences recorded, usually anonymously and instantaneously. Depending on distribution, participants may represent a general population or a tailored subpopulation. The choice of technique and who participates depends on the objectives of the public involvement process.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Widely publicize information on how to participate. Use social media as well as QR codes on printed flyers to reach a broad audience.
- Consider options to participate anonymously. In some communities, requiring registration or contact information will decrease participation.
- Provide multiple ways to participate such as pre-paid return mail, online, and toll-free telephone response.
- Offer voting and polling tools and in languages other than English.
- If using computer-based, mobile, or handheld technology, comply with 508 guidelines, and ensure that print materials are accessible to those with a range of disabilities or who speak languages other than English.
- Provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.

There can be concerns around people participating in a poll more than once. To mitigate this issue, when voting and polling online users can be identified using identifying numbers or letters for each vote cast.

Promising Practice

The City of Edmonds uses polls to engage community members in virtual meetings about the citywide parks, recreation, and open space plan. The City is focused on engaging hard-to-reach communities as they share information about the plan and gather input on community use and preferences for parks and open space. The City translated the polls into simplified Chinese, Korean, and Spanish to hear from people who use these languages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City relied on a robust online engagement strategy. Poll questions encouraged participation and interaction during these virtual meetings.

Why use this technique?

Voting and polling activities capture community perceptions and preferences from a wide audience that may not attend meetings or closely follow transportation issues. Voting and polling results are used similar to survey or visual preference survey results. In general, the output provides insight through public reaction to a project, plan or program. They can be used to test whether a project, program or plan is acceptable to the public as it is being developed and help inform decisions for change. Simple polls that are easy to access contribute to inclusive and interactive public engagement.

When to use this tool

Voting and polling systems can be used with other parts of the project or plan development cycle to improve the organization's understanding of community preferences. Voting and polling should be considered when the public involvement process calls for input on an idea, options, or alternative.

Workshops and Retreats

Workshops and retreats are typically small group gatherings that range in duration from a few hours to several days and are designed to solicit specific input on projects, plans, or programs. A workshop is a task-oriented meeting that is organized around a topic or activity and may include a training session. Retreats are typically held at off-site venues and are designed to thoroughly explore program options. An informal setting will often encourage better communication among participants.

Promising Practice

Georgia DOT held a 2-day retreat with 40 representatives of transportation users, operators, customers and groups to guide the agency in how to mold their public involvement process. The retreat was facilitated by an outside party and resulted in recommendations that have been implemented by the Georgia DOT.

Equity

The narrow focus on specific topics in a workshop or retreat allows each participant time to contribute to the discussion. Workshops and retreats are participatory and encourage collaboration between the organization and community members who may not normally participate as much in planning processes. The following should be considered to ensure this technique is used and implemented equitably:

- Hire a skilled facilitator to create opportunities for all participants to engage and be heard without criticism.
- Include representatives from the community that will be directly affected by the program or project.
- Include community members on the planning committee to provide insight on how best to structure the event.
- Provide qualified interpreters for people who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL or other sign language. Provide materials in advance so interpreters have ample time for preparation.
- Consider facilitators who can lead monolingual small group conversations in languages other than English, including ASL or other sign language.
- Provide materials in large print, braille, or tactile resources/graphics.
- Provide electronic materials that are compatible with accessibility software along with a way for participants to access those materials.
- Provide materials such as maps, photos, concept sketches, and graphics that can be drawn on, and materials for drawing, for people to express ideas visually.

Why use this technique?

Workshops and retreats provide an opportunity for organizations to focus intensively on a topic with a subset of the community. Workshops and retreats can be useful for creating consensus, breaking down barriers, creating new perspectives, and building community relations. They provide in-depth feedback from the community and can help identify and prioritize community concerns.

When to use this tool

Workshops and retreats can be useful at any planning stage. They are used early in the process to help set the stage for plans, projects, or programs. Mid-course, they can be used to showcase and refine specific aspects of the initiative or to resolve conflicts and work toward consensus. Near the end of a project, they can help demonstrate findings and conclusions and get final clarity on any remaining ambiguity. Workshops and retreats typically incorporate other public involvement techniques, such as brainstorming, visioning, focus groups, and small group discussions.

Tools to Use Within Engagement Techniques

Websites

Websites serve as a digital homebase for an organization's project, program, or plan. It is a central information hub where all project information is kept for instant viewing. A website is likely to be the first place where members of the public look to find answers to their questions or an opportunity to provide important feedback.

The development of a website can range from a simple single landing page with basic project content to an elaborately designed and complex interactive platform with many functions and capabilities. Websites typically house project collateral and information such as:

- Blog posts
- Brochures
- Budgets or investment information
- Comment forms or surveys
- Contact information
- Fact sheets
- Flyers
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Infographics
- Interactive experiences based on project needs
- Legal requirements
- Maps (still and interactive)
- Meeting and event schedule/information
- Meeting presentations and display boards
- Narrated PowerPoints
- News articles and newsletters
- Project graphics/infographics
- Project images
- Project reports and studies
- Progress bulletins
- Social media links
- Timelines
- Videos

Promising Practice

The Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) disrupted the national approach to REAL ID education, focusing on the impacts to all Washington residents, including residents who are not citizens and those without documentation. The statewide campaign educates people about the REAL ID law and new requirements for travel. DOL developed a campaign website (*ID2023wa.com*) in 2017 to serve as a digital information hub on REAL ID with an interactive quiz to help people determine what forms of ID they need, and educational materials like videos and an FAQ. The site and materials were produced in English, Spanish, simplified Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Design websites to work on mobile technology such as phones and tablets.
- Follow 508 guidelines for all visuals including creating alternative text.
- Translate the website into all languages used in the project area. Use a professional translation service rather than automated software, as some words will not translate

with the same meaning as intended in English.

- Provide information at a reading level that will allow people of varying levels of education to participate. Writing at the eighth grade reading level or lower is generally accepted.
- Display information in a way that is easy to navigate for people with low computer-literacy.
- Provide information on how to reach the appropriate contact.
- Provide materials in a downloadable format for people who prefer to read information offline.
- Provide information about how to get involved, announcements for public meetings and events, and a project timeline.
- Consider a comment box for participants to leave comments or ask questions. Answer questions within 2 to 3 business days.

Why use this technique?

Websites clearly and concisely provide basic information about a project, program, or plan. They summarize the overall project and can provide more detailed information that the website user can access at their convenience. Website information can be provided in a variety of ways—visually through videos, infographics, and maps, or through presentations, reports, and fact sheets.

Websites provide multiple ways for people to gather information in one central hub.

When to use this tool

Websites are a vital part of all public involvement initiatives and are used for the duration of a program or project. They can be updated as project phases evolve and also made dormant as needed.

For additional information and guidance, the US Department of Transportation web policies can be found at: *https://www.transportation.gov/web-policies*.

Virtual Presentations and Simulations

Computer, or virtual, presentations and simulations are tools to convey information digitally and are often self-guided. They include virtual open house platforms, narrated slide decks, animated simulations, and other videos productions. Photos, graphics, maps, charts, graphs, and other visuals help illustrate information such as statistics, project details, or survey results.

Virtual presentations and simulations:

- Use images, graphics, video, and animations to convey information in a way that is easily understood and can help mitigate language barriers.
- Convey complex information in a way that is easy to understand.
- Can be adapted to reflect community suggestions, enhancing interactive communication.
- Can include before and after images to show how a project will change the landscape.
- Can help minimize conflict and facilitate conversations by clarifying information.

Promising Practice

New York's New School for Social Research used simulations to resolve a dispute between the Newark Water Commission and several New Jersey towns about growth in the city's watershed. The Commission, State, city, and town representatives and local civic and conservation groups reviewed computer models of various scenarios for preserving the watershed.

Equity

Visuals can help people with limited reading skills understand content more easily. Information is easily shared electronically with large networks of people, increasing transparency in information sharing. People can view presentations and simulations at their convenience, at home, on their personal or public computers, smartphone, or handheld device, and on their own time. The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Follow 508 guidelines for all visuals in presentations including creating alternative text.
- Translate presentations into all the languages used in the project area. Provide voiceovers in those same languages.
- Provide handheld devices to increase access to virtual presentations.
- Use images with subtitles to accommodate people with hearing disabilities and people with limited reading skills; add accommodations for people with visual disabilities.
- Print presentations and provide them to community resource centers, such as libraries, for people who do not have access to computers or reliable internet services.

Why use this technique?

Virtual presentations and simulations can convey large amounts of complex information in a visual, easy to understand way. They can be used to help community members understand a variety of types of projects and programs, including corridor studies, long range planning, and transportation improvement programs. They are a useful tool to help participants visualize and understand a project and its alternatives.

When to use this tool

Virtual presentations and videos are most often used to inform the public, providing one-way information sharing. They are used to provide the community with details about a project or certain aspect of a project. They can be edited and adapted over time according to community feedback and input.

Virtual presentations and simulations are useful when a project has a compelling visual story to tell. They are effective when used in combination with other public involvement techniques. They are used during meetings of all types, integrated into interactive displays, shown at open houses, or provided as a link to a website as part of a media campaign. Virtual presentations and simulations can be adapted and used repeatedly in new ways in all stages of a project or program.

Electronic Contact Management Systems

Electronic systems for managing contact lists and notifications allow organizations to reach a large group of people quickly. Contact lists are often built using information provided by people who have participated in past engagement efforts. Management systems organize data including names, addresses, e-mail addresses, social media accounts, and more. Some contact management systems have functions that enhance public engagement such as automated email, text messaging, and social media scheduling and engagement.

Promising Practice
The Alaska DOT has kept a mailing list for decades. It includes members of the public and has changed over time to reflect new elected officials, representatives from neighborhoods, and Alaskan Native groups.

Electronic systems allow for contact lists to be:

- Easily maintained and updated.
- Organized by a primary list with subsets of individuals to contact on specific issues or projects.
- Self-selected with individuals joining a mailing list through a website or another electronic avenue.

Maintaining current information and adding to an electronic contact management system is important as new people sign up for email lists, attend meetings, use hotlines, change addresses, or when an organization takes steps to broaden its constituency.

Platforms such as MailChimp, Constant Contact, and GovDelivery are effective tools to maintain large stakeholder contact lists.

Equity

Not all individuals affected by a project or interested in a program will be comfortable providing contact information or may be missed because they do not typically interact with an organization. The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Make specific efforts to include individuals and organizations in communities that have been historically underserved.
- Provide more than one stay-in-touch option. Not all individuals may be able to provide an e-mail address or phone number.
- Make specific efforts to include new voices. There is a risk that an electronic contact list will be largely comprised of people from whom the project team has already heard from.
- Include local contacts with other individuals and organizations that may be affected or interested in a project or program.
- Adapt messaging sent through electronic contact management systems to comply with 508 standards and meet the needs of people with a range of disabilities or people who use languages other than English.
- Update the information on a regular basis, especially after calls to action and meetings/events.

Why use this technique?

Electronic contact management systems can save time and money by allowing organizations to contact many people at one time with specific messaging. An up-to-date contact list demonstrates the extent of an organization's outreach efforts and can be used to increase an organization's transparency. A well-managed list inside a contact management system will provide information about how many people are engaged, how often an individual is communicating with the organization, and can be used to see trends in where people are engaged and comment on topics. Lists can be kept for long periods of time and passed on from project to project or even between organizations.

When to use this tool

An electronic contact management system is a basic building block of any good public involvement plan and can be used during all phases of a project or plan. Contact lists can be used to recruit participants for activities and involvement opportunities like committees and focus groups or for promoting other engagement techniques such as surveys and open houses. To ensure thorough outreach, use electronic contact lists along with other outreach methods, such as flyer distribution and mailings.

Geographic Information Systems

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) combine traditional maps with layers of information to assemble, store, manipulate, and display data identified by location. GIS can convert layers of site information, census data, or other tabular data into files that display as maps. GIS can produce a map that can be overlayed with many other data points, including demographic, transportation, land use, and environmental resources. It offers flexibility as layers can be selected for display depending on the need and can be customized according to a situation and updated as data changes over time.

GIS is commonly used for:

- Mapmaking – incorporating mapmaking experience of traditional cartographers into GIS technology.
- Site selection – analysis of multiple physical factors when they must be considered and integrated over a large area.
- Emergency response planning – analysis of impacts of natural disasters on surface structures, size of affected population, and emergency response time and available routes.
- Simulating environmental effects – realistic, three-dimensional before and after perspective views of the environmental impacts of a project.
- Environment Justice analysis – understanding the short- and long-term impacts of a project on a community.
- Soliciting input that correlates to specific areas/locations or data points using interactive mapping tools and surveys on online platforms such as ArcGIS StoryMaps and ArcGIS Survey123.

GIS can be used in a participatory way, such as with community mapping exercises where practitioners and community members sketch boundaries and identify important assets and liabilities they wish to display.

Promising Practice

The Iowa DOT uses GIS technology in combination with the agency's website to create interactive tools that stakeholders can access at any time. Using ArcGIS, they combine text, interactive maps, and other multimedia tools to share interactive content online such as the Iowa DOT Rest Area Plan and the Statewide Park and Ride System. *https://iowadot.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html*

Equity

GIS as a public involvement tool provides easily understandable visual maps, that are often interactive. For those with hearing disabilities, GIS allows for data to be shared visually, providing a non-audible way of providing information. The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Translate labels and legends into multiple languages.
- When providing data using print or online formats, add alt text and comply with 508 requirements to convey information to people who use accessible technology tools.
- When providing data in-person, consider:
    - Provide multilingual staff or interpreters to interact with community members who use languages other than English.

- Technology limitations including mobile phone data limits, access to broadband and internet, and access to personal computers.
- Provide more than one tool for people who may have accessibility issues or alternative access needs.

Why use this technique?

Although GIS can be costly depending on strategic interest and technology resources available, it is an adaptable public involvement tool that can be used long-term in many different ways. The ability to convey complex information geographically, and to change and tailor displayable data is what sets GIS apart from other public involvement tools. GIS-based maps are typically used to inform and educate, but also to elicit community reactions and opinions on projects and plans, allowing organizations to gain a better understanding of which project elements are important to the public. GIS can also assist with joint decision-making and empathy-building, as interactive mapping can help participants better understand each other's interests and concerns.

When to use this tool

GIS can be used to support what-if scenarios where maps are overlaid with current and proposed transportation projects for a quick snapshot of potential impacts of new projects. GIS-based visuals may be useful during public meetings and open houses. It is a way to incorporate maps and visuals into other outreach efforts.

GIS can be used in all phases of a project or program and is particularly effective in:

- Enhancing public meetings, open houses, workshops, and conferences by conveying complex information in manageable layers of information.
- Facilitating activities like brainstorming, charettes and visioning to develop better community-based concepts.
- Providing opportunities for public feedback when used in combination with other tools and techniques.
- Allowing for more technically sound and achievable concepts to be developed through the use of real time data.

Public Information Materials

Public information materials provide basic reader-friendly information about a process, project, or program and are typically used to inform, announce, and notify an audience. They may include information on how to comment, get involved, or stay informed. Public information materials can be created in a variety of formats, print and online, and are used in combination with most other public involvement tools.

Promising Practice

The Federal Aviation Administration held an art contest for children on the theme of "Flying Saves Lives." They also published a bilingual book, *A Visit to the Airport – Un Viaje al Aeropuerto*, which included several games, some in two languages.

Examples of public information materials include:

- Advertisements
- Billboards
- Brochures
- Display boards
- Fact sheets and folios
- Flyers and progress updates
- News ads, articles, press releases, and inserts
- Postcards or other mailers
- Posters
- Slide deck presentations
- Press releases
- Radio ads
- Report summaries
- Social media posts
- Television spots
- Utility bill inserts
- Websites

Public information materials rely on combining visuals and text to convey information, messaging, notifications, and calls to action.

They work best when they are visually appealing and use minimal text. They can be widely distributed and are helpful in reaching audiences beyond those who already are informed. Community members access public information materials in a variety of ways and locations. For example, they can be read online or in print, seen on television, or read on bulletin boards in community gathering spaces.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure these tools are used and implemented equitably:

- Tailor the content for reaching specific audiences.
- Translate materials to provide resources to people who use languages other than English.
- Distribute materials in multiple ways to reach a broad audience and to reach people in underserved communities.
- Coordinate with and compensate community-based organizations to help distribute materials; they will often know the best ways to reach specific audiences and have existing relationships with those audiences.
- Include the organization's contact information and options for people with a range of disabilities and for those who use languages other than spoken English, including ASL and other sign language to reach out.

Why use this technique?

Public information materials increase the reach of public involvement activities. They are an easy way to disseminate information to people who are not actively involved in an issue or project. They are a simple way to get a controlled message to a wide range of people.

When to use this tool

Public information materials are most effective when used early in a process as part of a larger outreach program and are updated regularly for ongoing and consistent information sharing. Public information materials are a one-way tool to inform the public and should be paired with other, more interactive engagement tools.

Media Outreach Strategies

Media outreach strategies inform community members about projects and programs using paid (advertising), earned (media relations) and owned (social media and website) media outlets. Using these methods, organizations can proactively frame their message to deliver a uniform message that can reduce misinformation surrounding a project.

Media outreach strategies:

- Provide organizations with an opportunity to carefully frame messaging about a project or program.
- Help create wide awareness of a project or program.
- Can be a critical source of information and engagement for community members who have little time to attend meetings or otherwise do not participate in public involvement activities.
- Are most effective when they provide a call to action for public participation.

Promising Practice

The Washington State Department of Transportation I-405 program used ethnic media to reach in-language Chinese speakers to encourage participation in the community engagement process regarding changes to the highway. In-language transcreated print ads were placed in the Seattle Chinese Times with a call to action to join the online meeting. The project team also pitched and placed in language editorial in the same publication.

Paid Media: The use of paid media or advertising offers control of message content and allows for specific message placement to reach the intended audience. Paid media can be costly to develop and purchase but allows for the message to be placed and delivered to communities that may be underserved by other communication channels such as in-language publications or low cost or no cost outlets such as radio, billboards, and TV.

Earned Media: Developing relationships with the media outlets for placement of messaging through press releases, press alerts, and pitching publications/reporters in media outlets is less costly than paying to have the message placed. This type of earned media can add credibility and heighten the message. Earned media also offers limited or no control of message content or delivery.

Owned Media: Using owned media including social media channels/platforms and a project's website allows for direct connection and engagement with an audience and control of the message and project information.

However, the investment whether paid and/or labor, a media outreach strategy, will help an organization reach their goal to:

- Gain maximum exposure.
- Control how and what information is communicated.
- Determine where information is placed (e.g., in print, online, TV, radio),
- Determine when the information or messaging will be delivered.
- Establish a level of engagement with audience.
- Create consistent project branding and recognition.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Use multiple forms of media to engage people at different times of day, on different media devices, and in different ways such as watching TV at home, reading a newspaper online or in print, listening to the radio in a car, on social media platforms interacting with friends and family, or driving through the project area.
- Include forms of media that are low or no cost to consume, such as billboards, posters, transit ads, radio, and TV.
- Provide information in formats accessible to people with visual or hearing disabilities.
- Rely on video, graphics, and images rather than a lot of text. Identify media outlets based on usage and consumption of target audience.
- Identify media outlets that are centered around ethnic, culturally specific, or traditionally underserved members of the community.
- Provide materials and placement of advertisements in languages other than English as appropriate to the audience and the media outlet.

Why use this technique?

A multi-media outreach strategy can reach a broad audience, including those who may not be reached via other methods. Using media outlets can generate interest in a project or program, as well as continually inform the public of progress, changes, and milestones. Paid and owned media strategies are effective when an organization wants to ensure that its message goes out exactly as written.

When to use this tool

Use a media outreach strategy to inform and educate, to generate interest with a direct call to action to prompt community response and to expand the ability to reach people missed when using other methods of outreach. For example, placing translated radio ads on a station broadcasting in Spanish to reach Spanish speakers; printing ads in a Chinese publication with link and QR code to Chinese translated website; or social media ads or posts to followers and others who have similar interests.

Media outreach strategies are most effective when they are considered part of the overall outreach strategy, developed early and are consistent throughout the outreach time period. In this way, the community is continually informed from a project's early stages. When used in conjunction with other engagement techniques, using one, two, or all types of media (paid, earned, or owned) enhances public participation.

Remote Sensing

Remote Sensing Applications (RSAs) collect data using instruments aboard aircraft, satellites, or land-based sensing stations. RSAs are a combination of hardware and software that allows the application to process information about land, water, or an object without physical contact from the sensor. RSAs can track and monitor specialty data, including weather, and air and water quality conditions. Data collected from RSAs can help communities understand past and current environmental conditions as they relate to a project or program.

Promising Practice

In Arizona, where dust storms impact traffic and transportation safety, the Arizona Department of Transportation uses Weather Detection Stations to monitor approaching conditions. They combine this information with Information Technology Systems to provide advance notification to travelers and reduce speed limits in preparation for oncoming dust events, resulting in fewer crashes due to low visibility.

RSAs:

- Are used to educate communities about baseline environmental conditions and trends.
- Are used to analyze and develop findings of community and environmental impacts of a project or plan.
- Provide first-hand access to data that may be used to help educate the public.
- Provide stakeholders with an appreciation of both macro- and micro-level environmental features of a study area.
- Can be used to display or convey complex environmental information in order to obtain community comment or reaction.

Some RSA information is available for free through online resources while other data can be expensive to obtain. Commercial firms such as ESRI, as well as academic and non-profit organizations, may collect and analyze data from RSAs if staff is not able to due to cost, training, or hardware/software limitations.

Equity

The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Special interest groups can use free data on the internet to analyze data that is specific to their needs.
- RSAs can help communities better understand complex data and conditions that are impacted by a project or program.

Why use this technique?

Data from RSAs can be used to foster better understanding and easier interpretation of data that affects a project or program. Data can be analyzed and presented in easy-to-understand ways for informing the community or project team about environmental conditions during project planning. It can be used to gather baseline conditions for comparison as a project progresses.

When to use this tool

RSAs are most effective when the study topic is familiar to the community—for example, weather-sensing—and when analysis is intuitive and straightforward such as visuals in reports and displays. They are typically used with other environmental data collection and planning techniques. RSAs can be useful throughout a project, including when an organization is identifying issues and developing options for selecting a course of action.

Videos

Videos can be short or long, animated, real-life, or a combination of the two. They can range from professionally produced productions to simple in-house videos produced using cell phones. They might be a recording of a public meeting, committee or board meeting, or public hearing. They can be distributed in a variety of ways to the community to provide information about a project or program.

Video can be used effectively to:

- Introduce people at meetings and hearings.
- Supplement a presentation.
- Share a record of a public meeting, committee or board meeting, or public hearing.
- Educate the public about a project element or process by breaking down complex technical items into easy-to-understand concepts.
- Update the community on construction projects and plans.
- Substitute for site visits in hard-to-reach sites or when weather or health advisories are a factor.
- Provide an element for discussion in a focus group or charette.
- Illustrate progress on a project at an event.
- Enhance an overall media strategy.
- Include calls to action.

Promising Practice

The Washington State Department of Licensing launched a statewide campaign to educate people about the REAL ID law and the new identification requirements for travel. With all the REAL ID delays, and the new date set for May 3, 2023, DOL recently launched an attention-grabbing video starring the campaign's talking bear. The video is hosted on the campaign website (*ID2023wa.com*) and is captioned in English, Spanish, simplified Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. The video launched as part of a paid advertising campaign in May 2022 on broadcast, streaming, digital and social platforms.

Equity

To some, a video is more useful as a learning tool than reading or hearing about something through word of mouth. Videos are a great tool to reach large geographic areas as well as people who use languages other than spoken English because they can easily be translated for voiceovers and captions in multiple languages or incorporate ASL or other sign language.

Videos can reach people who might not otherwise participate in project planning, including people with disabilities, people who find meetings difficult to attend, and people who choose to receive information on demand rather than attend an event. The following should be considered to ensure this tool is used and implemented equitably:

- Accommodate community members with hearing disabilities with ASL or other sign language interpretation, closed caption, or transcription technology.
- Provide options for people with visual disabilities.
- Provide translation and voice overs to languages spoken in the community for people who use languages other than English.
- Engage community members to participate in the video as spokespeople or hosts and

during script development, production, and editing to ensure cultural appropriateness.

- Provide ways for people with limited access to computers or the internet to access the video.
- Make sure videos are phone and mobile device compatible.
- Post transcripts of live recorded videos of public meetings for people who were unable to attend and may not have access to livestreaming. Make sure the transcript is compatible with screen readers and other accessibility software so people with a wide range of disabilities can hear, view, or read it. Translate into languages other than English spoken in the area.

Why use this technique?

Videos can be useful in reaching large, geographically diverse, segments of the population when used in combination with media and other strategies, especially when attendance at in-person events is prohibited for health or other reasons.

Videos can be used to inform and educate the community, but they can also be used as a discussion point or opportunity for input. For example, an organization might have electronic survey respondents watch a short video about the project prior to answering survey questions. Or a community advisory group might follow their viewing of a video with discussion and consensus.

When to use this tool

Videos are a useful tool, particularly when used in combination with other engagement strategies. They are especially effective when combined with social media, where brief videos are the most popular form of content and perform well. Videos are often successful as an engagement tool when followed up by another strategy immediately afterwards, such as a live discussion, survey or poll, or invitation to an open house. It is helpful to provide information such as fact sheets for people to read as supplemental material. Be careful when trying to reach people in areas with limited internet access where streaming videos might not be available.

APPENDIX C. Using Federal Funds for Meaningful Public Involvement Activities

This appendix provides resources and illustrative examples on the use of Federal funds to conduct meaningful public involvement activities. Please contact the *FAA Regional Office*, *FHWA Division Office*, *FTA Regional Office*, FRA Regional Office, *NHTSA Regional Office*, *PHMSA Regional Office*, or other applicable USDOT field offices in your state with questions about specific programs or activities, and to confirm alignment with other legal requirements.

Funding Eligibility

Public involvement and participation activities are eligible expenses for most USDOT programs, including both formula and discretionary grant programs. Please refer to the *DOT Navigator* and the USDOT Bipartisan Infrastructure Law website for more information about specific programs and funding opportunities.

Public involvement can be supported through Federal formula funds that State departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, or transit agencies may receive.

The most frequently used source of funding for public involvement activities in planning are statewide and metropolitan planning funds provided through Federal transportation planning formula funds. These funds are authorized each year for planning and administrative activities by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and state departments of transportation (State DOTs). Each MPO is apportioned Federal planning funds based on a formula developed locally and agreed to by the State DOT and MPOs. Other formula and grant program funds can also be used if the costs satisfy allowable Federal cost requirements and regulations.

FTA and FHWA jointly administer the federally required transportation planning processes in metropolitan areas, as set forth in 49 U.S.C. § 5303 and 23 U.S.C. § 134. In rural areas and on a statewide basis, the statutory provisions for transportation planning are set forth in 49 U.S.C. § 5304 and 23 U.S.C. § 135. NHTSA administers the Section 402 State Highway Safety Program grants, as set forth in 23 U.S.C. 402.

In general, Federal funds may be used for public involvement activities throughout the transportation decision-making process (e.g., during planning and project development) so long as the costs satisfy the allowable cost requirements under *2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E*. Specifically, the public involvement activities must be "necessary and reasonable" for the performance of the Federal award and allocable to that Federal award (2 CFR §§ 200.403 and 200.405). Specific programs may have additional program-specific requirements.

Costs for public involvement activities are "necessary" if, without the expense, the Federal award could not be completed. A cost is "reasonable" if, at the time the decision is made, a prudent person would spend money on the item (2 CFR§ 200.404).

A cost is allocable to a Federal award if the costs involved are chargeable or assignable to that Federal award in accordance with relative benefits received. If a cost benefits two or more Federal awards in proportions that can be determined without excessive effort or cost, the cost must be allocated to the projects based on the proportional benefit (2 CFR § 200.405).

If a cost does not meet these requirements, that cost is not an eligible use of Federal funds.

The *Use of DOT Funds for Public Involvement page* of the DOT Navigator provides more information and answers to frequently asked questions about funding public involvement activities with Federal funds.

Illustrative Examples

These illustrative examples are intended to assist agencies in considering and documenting their use of Federal funds to conduct meaningful public involvement activities that are the subject of frequently asked questions. They are not statements of universal eligibility. Eligible costs under a grant or formula program are context-specific, so please contact your applicable field office to confirm your approach and alignment with other legal requirements prior to using Federal funds to conduct these activities.

Hiring Community-Based Organizations

Transportation agencies may use Federal funds to contract with community-based organizations (CBOs) to assist them in conducting meaningful public involvement activities. This practice helps build agency capacity for conducting public involvement while also building stronger relationships with communities who are familiar with and trust the CBOs.

CBOs can be contracted as consultants working on behalf of the transportation agency, in much the same ways that other kinds of consultants are often employed to conduct public involvement activities for State DOTs, MPOs, and transit agencies. In this type of relationship, there will typically be a defined statement of work, period of performance, and contract with each CBO.

This type of activity can be demonstrated to be **necessary** if the public involvement is a critical aspect of the transportation decision-making process, and particularly if the transportation agency has had difficulty engaging communities with which the CBOs have relationships.

Contracting with CBOs can be justified as **reasonable** if the contract costs fall within the normal funding range for similar services as compared with the expected benefits (e.g., successful engagement with underserved communities).

Contracting with CBOs to conduct meaningful public involvement is likely to be an **allocable** cost for Federally funded planning or project development activities where public involvement is required or recommended.

Providing Food at Public Meetings

When public meetings occur during normal meal times (i.e., early morning, midday, or in the early evening), and are targeting traditionally underserved communities, or if participants will have long commutes to or from the event, it may be appropriate to provide light refreshments or meals to participants. This is particularly true if the transportation agency has evidence that it will likely be unable to meaningfully engage with the public unless food is provided.

In order to use Federal funds for providing light refreshments or meals, the transportation agency must document that the food is necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the purpose of the event.

Demonstrating food as a **necessary** cost may include documenting that without providing food, the transportation agency is unlikely to have participation from certain communities, particularly those that have traditionally been harder to engage. This documentation may include comparisons of participation when food has or has not been provided in the past, or by documenting the cost burdens that community members would face if they had to purchase food nearby. Another factor could be the timing of the meeting in comparison to normal meal times and how long community members might need to delay a meal based on the expected meeting time as well as commuting time to and from the meeting location. Feedback from community members that they will not participate unless food is provided may be another factor.

To demonstrate that providing food is **reasonable**, transportation agencies should consider the type and cost of food options being provided as compared with the time commitment and timing of the meeting.

As with other costs in this section, providing food may be an **allocable** cost for Federally funded planning or project development activities where public involvement is required or recommended, if determined to be necessary and reasonable.

Providing Childcare at Public Meetings

Parents and guardians of young children are often underrepresented in public involvement meetings and other public gatherings. One factor influencing the relative participation of this demographic group is the need to arrange for childcare for young children in order to fully participate. To overcome this barrier and encourage greater participation from parents and guardians of young children, transportation agencies are increasingly offering childcare services during public meetings.

In order to use Federal funds for proving childcare services at public meetings, the transportation agency must document that the costs for childcare services are necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the purpose of the meeting.

An analysis of whether the cost of providing childcare is necessary and reasonable should consider if the transportation agency has evidence that without providing childcare, the agency will not be able to meaningfully engage with underserved communities.

For example, transportation agencies may demonstrate that providing childcare is a **necessary** expense by documenting a lack of participation from parents and guardians of young children in past public meetings, or by collecting survey responses from the community that identify childcare as a barrier to participating.

To show that the expense is **reasonable** agencies should consider the costs of providing childcare with the expected increase in participation.

As with other costs in this section, providing childcare may be an **allocable** cost for Federally funded planning or project development activities where public involvement is required or recommended, if determined to be necessary and reasonable.

Providing Financial Incentives or Reimbursements for Participation

Engaging with community members and understanding their needs and desires is a valuable and necessary part of the transportation decision-making process. However, meaningful, and representative participation may not always be achieved when community members must donate their time to provide valuable input to transportation agencies. Some transportation agencies have found that providing financial incentives or reimbursing participants for their time and costs can be effective in boosting participation, particularly from underrepresented groups.

Some agencies provide small financial incentives for participation in a public meeting, such as a gift card (money cards are preferable so as not to be seen as endorsing any particular business or establishment) or a voucher to cover the cost of transportation. For roles that require a greater time commitment, such as participation in a community advisory committee, agencies may provide a stipend and reimbursement of costs.

As with other types of costs associated with meaningful public involvement activities, a transportation agency should analyze whether the cost of providing incentives or reimbursements is necessary and reasonable to the public involvement activity. The expenditure would be necessary and reasonable only if an objective observer of the decision would determine that (1) participation would be inadequate and/or unrepresentative without the gift card incentive; and (2) the incentive would ensure adequate and/or representative public participation. Agencies should document their reasoning for concluding that gift cards are necessary for public involvement (2 CFR § 200.403[g]). The public involvement process should proactively seek full representation from the community. Furthermore, agencies must obtain written approval from the Federal entity prior to the purchase of gift cards.

For example, if the agency determines that community groups or demographics that are typically underrepresented in its public involvement efforts will participate in greater numbers if incentives are provided, and that the agency will be unable to meaningfully engage the community without providing incentives for participation, this may demonstrate the cost is **necessary**. This might be demonstrated by comparing participation in similar events where incentives are offered with those where they are not. Similarly, for longer time commitments, agencies might document how the specific knowledge and expertise (i.e., lived experience) of participating community members provides value to the agency that is otherwise unavailable through traditional contracts. Agencies might also ask community members if they are willing and/or able to participate without a stipend or reimbursement of costs, and document when they indicated that such financial reimbursements are necessary for them to participate.

To determine if the costs are **reasonable**, transportation agencies should consider the costs of providing the incentives, stipends, or cost reimbursements as compared with the value of the expected increase in participation in a meeting or service on an advisory board, or similar activity. In general, the scale of the cost should be in line with what a reasonable person would be willing to pay for similar services.

As with other costs in this section, providing financial incentives may be an **allocable** cost for Federally-funded planning or project development activities where public involvement is required or recommended, if determined to be necessary and reasonable.

APPENDIX D. GLOSSARY

ADA	The Americans with Disabilities Act
ASL	American Sign Language
CAC	Civic Advisory Groups
CE	Categorical Exclusion
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CPP	Community Participation Plan
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EJ	Environmental Justice
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and More
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRTP	Long-Range Transportation Plan
MPOs	Metropolitan Planning Organizations
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NCHRP	National Cooperative Highway Research Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
RSA	Remote Sensing Application
SHSP	Strategic Highway Safety Plan
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math
STIP	Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
UPWP	Unified Planning Work Program
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
VPI	Virtual Public Involvement