Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking

2015 Update

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INTRODUCTION

The transportation community may find it challenging to involve the public in a meaningful way. Still, quality planning and project development require meaningful input from the public. Many members of the public are genuinely interested in what is happening in their community but do not know how they can effectively provide input to influence the outcome of a transportation plan or project.

How does a transportation agency grab and hold the public's interest in a project or plan and convince people that active involvement is worthwhile? How does an agency provide the means for the public to have direct and meaningful impacts on decisions?

Public involvement is just one of the terms planners use for gathering information from the public. Other terms include public participation, public outreach, and public engagement. These terms are virtually interchangeable. They are all about ensuring that people have a voice in their transportation systems.

This guide provides a variety of tools to secure meaningful input from the public on transportation plans, programs, and projects—and it can help agencies improve their overall public involvement techniques.

ENGAGING PEOPLE THROUGH OUTREACH AND ORGANIZATION

Involving the Public in Transportation Planning

When FHWA and FTA talk about involving the public in transportation, what do we mean? The public includes anyone who resides, works, has an interest in, or does business in a given area potentially affected by transportation decisions, including organized groups. It is important to note that private and public transportation service providers also have the opportunity to participate. Finally, minorities, low-income communities, the older persons, individuals with diabetes, and others traditionally underserved by transportation systems should be encouraged to participate in transportation planning. people traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems.[1]

Why is it Important to Engage the Public?

The public is a rich source of ideas, full of people who can contribute to improving their transportation systems. Community members intimately know their region's transportation issues and challenges and are invested in seeing short- and long-term improvements come to fruition.

Federal Law

Federal statutes and regulations provide general guidelines for public involvement. Transportation agencies have great flexibility in developing specific public involvement and public participation plans. Techniques for each situation may differ, depending on things like demographics and specific impacts of a project, but the general approach to developing a public involvement and public participation plan should contain elements that are relevant to all communities.

Please see **Appendix A** for current federal guidelines on public involvement.

Full Representation

Outreach to all potential participants from transportation agencies at all levels leads to representation from broad and varied segments of the communities agencies serve.

It is important to reach people who are not used to participating in transportation planning. Transportation systems that reflect the needs of the people those systems serve will not exist without full representation during planning. Community members bring different abilities, needs, and distinctive perspectives on transportation.

[1] http://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/briefingbook/bbook.htm

A Planned Approach

Good organization and well-planned outreach distinguishes a public involvement effort that is aimless and high-level from one that is purposeful, grounded, specific, and productive. In initiating public involvement in transportation, agencies must begin with clearly-defined planning goals that focus on specific issues to be addressed, the kinds of input needed, and the sectors of the public that should be involved. The more specific a public involvement plan, the greater its chances of producing input that an agency can use in decisionmaking.

Once the *what* of an overall strategy is in place, an agency has to determine the *who* the strategy will serve and *how* the strategy will serve them. Staff should carefully orchestrate ways to contact people, give people the information they need, hear and document their views, respond to their feedback, and incorporate their concerns. Good organization establishes a systematic, planned approach to working with people, so that an agency receives the information it needs at the right time. Good organization also allows room for flexibility and openness, as needed.

Meaningful Involvement

Transportation agencies must do more than simply plan an event, such as a meeting. While meetings with stakeholders, community leaders, and the public are vital to achieving the best outcomes, *meaningful involvement* means acting on public comments and feedback.

A top-down style of interacting with the public can lead to meetings that are scheduled at inconvenient times, projects that are unveiled late in the process, public involvement limited to taking comments at public hearings, and several other undesirable outcomes, according to the 2012 Transportation Research Board report, *Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking*.[2]

Meaningful involvement, on the other hand, gets the public to become active participants in the democratic process—in this case, the transportation planning process.

Professional organizations such as those listed below are excellent resources for transportation agencies that would like to achieve meaningful public involvement.

International Association of Facilitators
International Association of Public Participation
Public Relations Society of America
U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution

[2] http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_710.pdf

Including People Who Are Traditionally Underserved

Public involvement needs to encompass the full range of community interests. People who have been underserved may have more difficulty getting to jobs, schools, recreation, and shopping than the greater population, and they may be unaware of transportation proposals that could dramatically change their lives. Many have important, unspoken issues that should be heard.

Underserved groups provide a rich source of ideas that can improve transportation for the entire community. Agencies must assume responsibility for reaching out and including underserved populations in the planning decisionmaking process. This outreach requires strategic thinking and tailoring public involvement efforts to these communities and their needs.

Who Are in These Groups?

Individuals from minority[3], Tribal[4], and low-income[5] groups historically have experienced barriers to participation in the public decisionmaking process. In this document, the term *traditionally underserved* refers to those groups. Barriers may arise from cultural, linguistic, and economic differences. Recent efforts to include varied cultural or disadvantaged groups in transportation planning have been designed to assure equitable access.

Minority
Non-White persons, including African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

Tribal
Any of the Indian or Alaska Native Tribes, bands, nations, pueblos, villages, or communities recognized by Federal regulation.

Low income
A household at or below Federal policy guidelines, or any group of low-income persons within the same geographic region; may include dispersed or transient people.

Diversity creates opportunities for developing unique outreach strategies to fit various cultural and economic differences within a community. Language differences may be only the most immediate hurdle to overcome toward working effectively with various cultural groups. Economic barriers such as the costs of child care or transportation to meetings also hinder participation.

Most importantly, **understanding and accommodating the various ways people interact with one another**, or their belief in their own power to do so, **is the major element of** ensuring that the whole community works together toward common goals. A good starting point in effective interaction is to use the descriptive names that groups prefer, understanding that naming preferences change over time and may differ within a single community.

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3 http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/training/presentations/title_vi/title610.cfm
4 https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tribal/news/consultation.htm
5 http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/training/presentations/title_vi/title609.cfm

Today, agencies work to empower people to help define the kinds of processes they need to participate effectively. Thoughtful consultation with traditionally underserved groups and older populations allows agencies to identify specific barriers and find effective ways to overcome them. In Orange County, CA, there was high attendance from all sectors of the public during a series of introductory open houses for a planning study—except for Mexican-Americans. In subsequent meetings with leaders from this community, county planners learned those constituents were uncomfortable with the open-house format and intimidated by one-on-one interaction. Supplementary, informal, small-group meetings in Latino neighborhoods led to increased participation.

Governments at various levels have played a significant role in protecting the rights of underserved populations. Federal environmental regulations require that transportation plans, policies, and investments involve traditionally underserved communities.

In addition to the basic aim of inclusive outreach to traditionally underserved groups and older populations, public involvement efforts should have the following objectives:

- Convey issues in ways that are meaningful to various cultural groups.
- Bridge cultural and economic differences that affect participation.
- Use communication techniques that enable people to interact with other participants.
- Develop partnerships on a one-on-one or small group basis to assure representation.
- Increase participation by underserved groups so they have an impact on decisions.

Title VI

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance.[6]

All recipients of Federal funds must comply with Title VI guidelines. Please click here for the full text of Title VI.

Environmental justice

The guiding principle of environmental justice is that all programs, policies, and activities (including transportation projects), should provide fair treatment and meaningful involvement to all people regarding the effects of those projects on the physical environment.[7]

Executive Order 12898 amplifies Title VI by providing that, "each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations."[8]

[6] http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php
[7] http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice
[8] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/facts/ej-10-7.cfm

The order also directs Federal agencies and agencies that receive Federal funds to not exclude minority and low-income populations from participating in or benefitting from programs, policies, and activities. Those populations can often be included by modifying existing participatory programs.

Please click here for the full text of Executive Order 12898.

Why is it Critical to Reach Out to These Populations?

Outreach to traditionally underserved groups helps assure that all constituents have opportunities to affect the planning decisionmaking process. These efforts are particularly useful because they can provide:

- Fresh perspectives.
- First-hand information about community-specific issues and concerns otherwise unknown to the agency.
- Flag potential controversies.
- Feedback on how to get the communities involved.
- Solutions to problems that best meet their needs.

These efforts widen the basis of consensus for a plan or project. The greater the consensus among all community members, the more likely a plan or project will succeed.

Agencies should address issues specific to underserved groups early in the planning process. Special forums may be held for minority communities at the outset of developing long-range plans, so 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. Participation and an engaged leadership leads to trust and openness in decisionmaking.

Reaching LEP groups

People with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are people who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.[9] It is important that agencies make an effort to reach LEP people, so that final plans and projects fully represent the communities agencies serve.

Executive Order 13166 challenges Federal agencies to “develop and implement a system by which LEP persons can meaningfully access those services consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency.”[10]

Proactivity is perhaps the most important element in reaching LEP people. Federally assisted programs and activities must take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP persons have meaningful access, and all

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[9] http://www.lep.gov/faqs/faqs.html#OneQ1

[10] https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/civilrights/programs/lep.cfm

agencies that receive Federal money must develop an LEP plan. While designed to be unbiased, the starting point for taking reasonable steps toward meaningful access for LEP persons is an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors:

- The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee.
- The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program.
- The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives.
- The resources available to the grantee, recipient, or agency, and costs.

The intent of this guidance is to find a balance between resources and needed depth of assessment that ensures meaningful access by LEP persons.[11]

The Miami-Dade MPO, for instance, which operates in an area where more than 21 percent of the population is not proficient in English, developed an LEP Plan to reach areas where many LEP people live. This plan measures the number and proportion of LEP people, how often LEP people encounter the MPO's programs, the importance of services the MPO provides, and the resources available and cost to reach LEP populations.

As funding permits, the Miami-Dade MPO produces multilingual publications and documents, posts information on its website, produces key planning documents in English, Spanish, and Creole, and provides interpreters at meetings and events.[12]

Miami-Dade is not alone in providing translation services and other outreach to LEP people. Many agencies with large LEP populations provide interpreters when needed and as funding allows as well as translations of most of their literature. Florida DOT has a bilingual affairs staff and a bilingual newsletter. The Southern California Association of Governments—the MPO that includes Los Angeles—has foreign language teams. The transit agency in Houston, Texas, prints information in up to five languages. In Orange County, CA, transit agency staff members wear blue dots on their name tags at open houses if they are bilingual. Alaska DOT has local residents who volunteer to interpret for Eskimo communities.

Translations
When agency staff or volunteers perform translations, it is important to remember that people who do not speak English well also may not speak standard forms of their native language. Agencies need to make sure that translations are clear, easily understandable, and in a dialect native to the group being reached. A Portuguese translation, for instance, must recognize that people from Portugal have difficulty understanding Brazilian Portuguese, and vice versa.

[11] http://www.lep.gov/faqs/faqs.html#OneQ5
[12] http://www.miamidade.gov/mpo/downloads/MPO_ppp_201203.pdf

People With Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stipulates that people with disabilities be involved in developing and improving public services. For example, in rail transit planning, collaboration with the persons with disabilities is essential for station planning . In highway planning, collaboration with persons with disabilities is essential for developing access points beyond those that are required.

Locations where public involvement takes place must also be accessible, and information must be accessible for persons with vision or hearing disabilities.

ADA requires specific participation activities, particularly for paratransit plans. These include the following efforts:

- Outreach—developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means to communicate with persons with disabilities.
- Consultation with individuals with disabilities.
- Opportunity for public comment.
- Accessible formats.
- Public hearings.
- Summaries of significant issues raised during the public comment period.
- Ongoing efforts to involve persons with disabilities in planning.

Why is it critical to reach persons with disabilities?

The ADA prohibits discrimination against anyone who has a mental or physical disability. As much as 14 percent of the American population has hearing, vision, or mobility limitations. In addition, many other Americans are temporarily disabled during part of their lives—whether aged, sick or injured, or recuperating. In identifying and consulting with representatives of the disabled, agencies find a wide range of different needs. Ideas and input from people with disabilities provide insight about their needs related to using programs or facilities being developed.

All events held for programs or projects with Federal-aid funds and open to the general public must be made accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities. Special efforts are required to comply with the statutory requirements of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and ADA.

How do agencies reach people with disabilities?

Transportation agencies have various ways to reach people with disabilities. For example, the Spokane Transit Authority solicits feedback from persons with disabilities through its Rider Alert program. The Orange County Transportation Authority schedules one-on-one meetings with disability advocacy groups to gain insight for their planning efforts. In Juneau, AK, public workshops were held to discuss compliance with ADA’s transportation requirements.

What should agencies keep in mind when reaching out to persons with disabilities?

Agency staff should know the types of disabilities that are present in the communities they serve. Just as LEP individuals may require interpreters, sign language interpreters may be needed if there are deaf individuals. Local volunteers may be available, but a list of local language interpreters and signers should be kept under contract on an as-needed basis. Two interpreters are needed for meetings longer than 1 hour, so that interpreters can take breaks. Public notices for a meeting should state that sign language interpreters will be made available upon request, as many State DOTs and MPOs already do. An individual who is blind and deaf can be accommodated by an interpreter who uses sign language in direct contact with that person's hands.

Listening assistance may be required, depending on the meeting place. For example, small machines are available to amplify speakers' voices via a transmitter and receiver system heard only by those with hearing disabilities. Many State commissions for the deaf have these machines available to borrow. In Massachusetts, the Guild for the Hard of Hearing offers them on loan. Many meeting rooms in newer buildings have an FM loop embedded in the floor to be used for transmission. A State commission for the deaf may have Computer-Aided Real Time reporting in which a reporter transcribes proceedings onto a screen during the meeting.

A telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) is essential for communicating over the telephone with people who are deaf or have communication impairment. Under ADA, all public agencies should have this inexpensive, modem-like device. A TDD connects to a telephone into which messages are typed rather than spoken. A screen on the device displays the message. Some TDDs may also record messages on paper.

Older persons, a portion of whom may be disabled, may also have special requirements that agencies need to consider. These requirements can be addressed by some of the efforts already noted, such as providing listening assistance. Other requirements may include handicapped-accessible meeting locations, as described below. For planning purposes, it is important to remember that a larger percentage of older people do not drive but still require access to critical services, such as health care, and to enriching cultural opportunities. In areas with a high percentage of older adults, planners may consider incorporating paratransit or similar services into agency programs.

Who leads the process?

Every State DOT and MPO should make events accessible to people with disabilities. State commissions dealing with disabilities offer information on accessibility needs, as do local agencies and advocacy groups. Many of these groups will assist with outreach for transportation processes.

Some States have formed federally-funded Assistive Technology Partnerships to provide information, research, and training for persons with disabilities. In some cases, State agencies provide basic information on transportation meetings and events to individuals with disabilities. In Massachusetts, for example, the Commission on the Blind, the Association for the Blind, and the Vision Foundation all receive information about dates or events and transfer that information to audio tapes, which are accessible to sight-impaired people via telephone.

What are the costs?

Assistance need not be expensive, but it requires special care and attention. Staff members need to be mindful of the special needs that must be met in setting up public meetings and hearings. In some cases, it is appropriate to hire a staff person trained in the needs of the disability community. In other cases it is possible to use existing State or local agency services.

How can agencies organize outreach to disabled persons?

The following checklist can help agencies ensure that their meetings and hearings are accessible to the disability community:

Accessible meeting or hearing site

- Has the site been visited and viewed with physically disabled people in mind?
- Are primary entrances, such as doorways and steps, accessible by wheelchair?
- Is there circulation space for wheelchairs throughout the facility and at the front of the meeting area or hearing room?
- If there are microphones, are they available at wheelchair height?
- Is there an amplification system to aid hearing?
- Are water fountains, rest rooms, and public telephones accessible by wheelchair?
- Is the meeting site accessible by public transit or paratransit?
- Is there parking for persons with disabilities?
- Are there signs indicating accessible route to the meeting area?

Meeting materials and services

- Are meeting notices in alternative formats for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and visually impaired people?
- Are published meeting materials available prior to the meeting in alternative media: large print, computer disk, tape, or Braille?
- Are sign language interpreters available if requested?

How does improving accessibility relate to techniques other than public meetings?

All public meetings or hearings must be accessible in order to comply with ADA. This also includes charrettes, brainstorming sessions, and visioning meetings. Civic advisory committees serve the interests of persons with disabilities when they include representation from the disabled community. Committees and focus groups where an agency selects representatives or participants may not need to be fully accessible, but special arrangements need to be made for disabled representatives or participants.

Are there drawbacks?

There are no drawbacks to involving persons with disabilities. Transportation planning is not fully inclusive of all community interests until the disabled community is represented. The goal of public involvement is to include everyone in the process. This can be done by making community participation accessible and by promoting integration of people with disabilities with other people who want to have a voice in transportation.

Bringing Together a Core Participation Group

Community-Based Organizations

Agency staff need to research the communities potentially affected by a plan or project in order to identify a diverse group of community leaders. These community leaders can help identify major players in a community. This can be done by word of mouth, interviews with key people, and attending advertised community activities. It is important that practitioners maintain up-to-date contact lists for community-based organizations and key individuals who can be tapped for discussions. Human service coalitions, like the United Way, colleges and universities, and national organizations often maintain contact lists.

Agencies sometimes focus initial attention on active community groups to prepare for later approaches to the general public. Community groups, such as Civic Advisory Committees, can provide an underserved community with a meaningful way to participate as well as a sense of empowerment.

MPOs in Portland, OR, and in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN, work through established neighborhood organizations. Community organizations often reflect community-wide concerns and can advise an agency on useful strategies for interaction. In Arizona, Tucson's MPO involved several Mexican-American neighborhood associations in updating its long-range transportation plan. In Chicago, the Center for Neighborhood Technology brought minority groups into existing regional citizen coalitions. Instead of creating a new community forum, agencies can save effort and resources by working with an established organization that already reaches community leaders. Agencies need to be cautious, however, about presuming that any one group represents an entire community.

Civic Advisory Committees

What is a civic advisory committee?

A civic advisory committee (CAC) is a representative group of stakeholders that meets 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. CACs have been used for many years and are not in themselves innovative, yet they can be used very creatively. For example, a CAC was used in Louisiana to find consensus on environmental issues for input to public agencies. In Florida a CAC provided input on designs for deployment of a traffic information system.

It is very useful to have agencies represented on a CAC as a way for local residents to interact with their government. For example, in Portland, ME, a 35-member CAC developed a long-range transportation plan with agency assistance. Because it can be used either alone or in conjunction with other techniques, a CAC is widely used to achieve a basic level of local input for transportation planning and development.

A CAC has the following basic features:

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

Why is a CAC useful?

A CAC is a forum for hearing ideas. It is a place where agencies and groups present goals and proposed programs. It provides a continuing forum for bringing the public's ideas directly into the planning decisionmaking process. In the San Francisco Bay area, special efforts have been made to include representatives of traditionally underserved populations.

A CAC molds participants into a working group. It is democratic and representative of opposing points of view, with equal status for each participant in presenting and deliberating views and in being heard. It is a place for finding out where participants stand on issues. It is a place where people become educated on technical issues, over several meetings if necessary. It gives a better understanding of the effort and milestones of public agency progress. Its members feel freer to ask agencies for assistance, clarification of points, and follow-up on questions.

A CAC demonstrates commitment to participation. Its existence demonstrates progress toward involving people in projects and programs. It helps find common ground for consensus about a solution. If consensus cannot be reached, a CAC provides a forum for identifying positions, exploring them in depth and reporting the divergences of opinion to the agencies.

A CAC is flexible. It can be part of regional or State planning or part of a single project—either way it garners assistance from the community in anticipating construction and identifying measures to reduce potential disruption. It can be subdivided. In the St. Louis area, three CACs were formed to develop the regional long-range plan.

Who participates in a CAC?

Representatives of community groups or stakeholders are selected in one of two ways. Either an agency carefully identifies all stakeholders, including the general public, or the public self-selects CAC memberships—those who are interested attend. If membership is not fully representative, an agency should encourage unrepresented groups to attend or seek their input in some other way. The San Francisco County Transit Authority appoints 11 CAC members, drawing upon a pool of self-selected candidates who submit resumes. People who attend meetings are asked if they would like to be considered for CAC membership. The Authority proactively seeks diversity and balance of representation by race, gender, neighborhood activists, business interests, the disability community, bicycle proponents, and others. The Authority uses the CAC as a sounding board on a variety of transportation issues.

Though no special training is required, attendees typically have a broad, long-term view in discussing issues within a geographic area—not a specific, single project. In many areas, such as the San Francisco Bay area, agencies make targeted efforts to involve freight interests.

People participate by examining and discussing issues with others. Mailings prior to a meeting help participants understand issues and form questions. Major points of discussion are typically recorded. On some issues the agency and the public may desire substantial detail.

How do agencies use the output?

A CAC helps monitor community reactions to agency policy, proposals, and progress. By observing interactions during CAC meetings, agencies become aware of opinions and stances at an early point in the process—often before these opinions become solidified. Working with a CAC, an agency crafts compromise positions through give-and-take over a relatively short period of time. For example, in Pennsylvania a CAC helped determine the extent to which a highway project would affect a rapidly developing area in the Pocono Mountains.

Who leads a CAC?

A CAC elects its own leader. Dynamic and firm community leadership can enliven a CAC. In Chatham County, GA, which includes Savannah, a charismatic leader strengthened the CAC's role in planning. Typically, CAC members select a leader who interacts with agencies in an open and friendly manner, who is sensitive to group dynamics, and can effectively lead the discussion by drawing opinions and positions from participants.

What does a CAC cost?

A CAC requires support staff within an agency, and the work can be substantial. Meeting minutes must be taken. Background information, minutes, and agendas must be sent out before meetings. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives must attend to provide resources for CAC questions and response preparation. A CAC may want to sponsor a special meeting on transportation's role in the community, as was done in Pittsburgh. Additional assistance may be required in some instances. For example, in Washington State a CAC led by a facilitator helped plan a highway bypass on the Olympic peninsula.

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is essential. Written materials may be needed to supplement meeting notes, and these materials should be distributed before the meeting. In many cases, an agency needs to carefully explain its position or analysis, which may require detailed materials and staff time.

How is a CAC organized?

Ideally, a CAC will have a limited number of members, to allow for in-depth discussion. However, flexibility is needed. Rigid rules may discourage future participation by excluding people who might be able to provide valuable input. If there is no cap on the number of members of a CAC, a large CAC can be divided into subgroups. However, subgroups may curtail interaction among diverse interests. A CAC and its sponsoring agency should explore how to overcome limitations. For example, CAC members can attend conferences where they can learn about ideas and interests that are not represented on the CAC.

A CAC usually has officers, with a chairperson or director, an assistant director to chair meetings in the absence of the chairperson, and a secretary who may be an agency staff person. Elected officers may serve for a year or more.

CAC meetings are managed by the elected officers with assistance from agency staff. Formal parliamentary procedures, if oriented toward voting, are less useful than informal rules and consensus-building techniques. Meetings are usually held on a regular basis.

Pre-meetings help plan the regular sessions and draft policy goals. CAC officers and agency staff work together to bring substantive issues before the larger group. Subcommittees are established to explore details of issues, with meetings held between the regular sessions of the CAC.

A typical CAC agenda will cover the following items:

- Introductions, if attendees vary each time.
- Welcome newcomers.
- Discussion of agenda, seeking changes or additions.
- Discussion of items on agenda in order, unless a change is requested.
- Presentations of information as necessary for clarification.
- Determination of whether a consensus on each issue exists.

How is a CAC used with other techniques?

An established CAC can be a forum to incorporate many public involvement techniques. A CAC leader can use brainstorming to establish consensus on a project. Facilitation by an outside specialist is used within a CAC to establish or resolve a particular or pressing problem. Visioning techniques are used during CAC meetings to establish long-range policy goals. Discussions should consider special issues related to Americans with disabilities. Video techniques can illustrate specific points during CAC meetings.

What are the drawbacks of a CAC?

A CAC may become inactive if the public perceives that it is being manipulated by a transportation agency. CAC members may feel overwhelmed by technical information if agency staff do not explain essential facts. Transparency can avoid a perception that a CAC is being manipulated by an agency.

A CAC is most useful on a project or regional scale. A statewide CAC or one for a very large region can be unwieldy when a large number of people are involved and travel is required of both staff and participants. Effective leadership is essential. A CAC's success depends on participants feeling that they are being heard and have a stake in decisionmaking, in an efficient and fair manner.

A CAC does not encompass all points of view. By virtue of being representative, a CAC is never all-inclusive. A CAC's voice may be skewed if it does not represent all stakeholders and the general public, accordingly it may be difficult to represent minority interests.

Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas. People who feel they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw. When Agency staff feel that the process is leading nowhere, they may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

Decision and Policy Boards

Who serves on MPO decision and policy boards?

People who serve on MPO decision and policy boards are drawn from many sources. They include transit representation, State department of transportation, representatives of major modes of transportation, community and business leaders, leaders from special interest groups, and interested individuals. Length of tenure varies, depending on tasks, but is generally one to five years. They represent groups organized around civic, environmental, business, or community interests; specific geographic areas; or they serve as individual experts in a field. They need not be elected officials or agency staff. The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) appointed a community committee to develop and recommend alternatives for reconstruction of a large Interstate bridge.

These boards are established by statute, regulation, or political decision. Ad hoc committees are set up by legislative acts or executive decision to investigate specific subjects. They may be temporary or permanent. In Portland, OR, a committee of community members works with MPO staff to develop scopes of service for projects and to review and select consultants. For the U.S. 301 corridor study, Maryland's governor created a 76-member task force to address regional transportation issues, develop and evaluate possible transportation and land-use solutions, and recommend public policies. Most members were private citizens.

The composition will vary based on its assigned task. A board may include citizens and elected or appointed officials, or be composed entirely of citizens. It may be assisted in its task by staff members assigned from elected officials or agency representatives. The Airport Policy Committee of the San Diego MPO has a mixed representation of citizens and professionals. Metro Council, the MPO for Minneapolis-St. Paul has citizens and elected officials on its 30-member Transportation Board, including 10 municipal elected officials, 7 elected county officials, 9 private citizens including the chair, and 4 representatives of State or regional agencies.

People are appointed to boards in a variety of ways. They are nominated or appointed to these positions by public officials, or they volunteer or are elected by their peers. The ways they come to serve depend on the rules and nature of the policy body.

The board's role establishes the amount of influence wielded by citizens appointed to a board.
It is important to recognize special interest groups within communities. These may include representatives from groups such as the American Lung Association, the Chamber of Commerce, a construction industry association, a ridesharing corporation, the Sierra Club, and the League of Women Voters.

Why are decision and policy boards useful?

People from the community bring new points of view, new ideas, and a community-centric perspective directly into the decisionmaking process. The MPO in Little Rock, AK, focused on whether an idea made sense to them, their neighbors, and the people most affected by the decision.

Decisions have greater legitimacy if residents are involved. Including the public in providing information into the decisionmaking process demonstrates an agency's commitment to participatory planning.

Do decision and policy boards have special uses?

Decision and policy boards are often referred to as stakeholder committees when they are primarily populated by well-known community representatives or residents with specific technical knowledge. Stakeholder committees oversee specific aspects of complicated programs and may include citizens with specific technical knowledge. For the Hudson River Waterfront Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement in New Jersey, local residents advised agency staff in implementing air quality monitoring procedures.

Community representatives work directly with project design consultants. For proposed construction of I-70 through Glenwood Canyon in Colorado, the Governor appointed area residents to work with the State's highway planners and the principal design consultants to address public concerns from the beginning of preliminary engineering and highway design. Along with frequent public hearings, local representation served to satisfy public demand for a greater voice in the project.

Local people facilitate communication between decisionmaking bodies. A stakeholder committee of the San Diego MPO worked with officials to forge consensus on several controversial issues related to airport policy. These people provided a free flow of ideas, unconstrained by concerns for existing policies, and were able to help overcome political deadlock.

Community representatives serve as informed spokespersons for an agency's programs. Stakeholder committees may host public meetings, communicate with other groups, and attend neighborhood events. They strive to use non-technical language to make citizens more comfortable and willing to participate in discussions.

Residents help achieve an agency's goals through stakeholder committees. For the rail system in Miami-Dade County, a stakeholder committee was appointed, composed of elected officials and neighborhood representatives. These citizens subsequently provided leadership on two referenda supporting funding for the new rail system.

Stakeholder committees assist with public involvement programs and provide advice based on what they hear in their own discussions with the public. Seattle's Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) appointed a group of people to assist in developing a ballot proposal for regional transit.

How are decision and policy boards organized?

The first step is to determine the need for local representation. Agencies may be aware of the need because of comment or criticism from local people. The media sometimes call for local representation when an agency undertakes a specific task. An agency also becomes aware through discussions with peers in other areas.

Another initial step is to research legal requirements. State laws may specify whether individuals may sit on MPO boards. Participation may be limited by an organization's by-laws.

An agency then devises a strategy for local representation, designing community positions to suit the board's functions and objectives. The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) in Albany, NY, comprised of elected officials, puts local people on many task forces, along with local agency representatives, and institutional and business leaders.

An agency solicits local interest in a variety of ways. The media help by opening the issue to public discussion. A letter soliciting interest in participation on boards or committees might be sent in a general mailing. For a long-range planning effort, the Albany CDTC took a sample survey of local people to determine interest in participating on planning and policy committees.

An agency seeks a balance of various viewpoints. The nature of a task may draw volunteers who represent only one side of an issue, yet a board should encompass many stances.

A formal appointment process is then established. A simple letter or a more formal event lends legitimacy to the process and gives satisfaction and encouragement to an appointee. A written document formalizes the time frame, responsibilities, and the expected products. It is also important to point out the extent of the powers that accompany the appointment and how the results of the task will affect further agency actions.

Agencies should involve elected officials and keep them informed. Officials are often able to provide helpful insight. They may also want to be informed of the board's progress.

Agencies must also determine the nature of their involvement on boards. This may take the form of representation, usually in an ex-officio and non-voting capacity. It may involve board support, in the form of staff services, meeting space, and use of equipment for presentations and recording of proceedings.

A method of selecting a committee chair is needed. Often a board selects its own chair, or the chair is appointed. If elections are to take place, introductions of board member candidates are appropriate, so that an informed selection is made. Introductions can be informal or take a more formal approach, such as written position papers that define an individual's expectations and goals for the processes and products.

The scope of a task and associated deadlines will determine how often meetings are held. In order to accomplish an assignment, a board may need to meet frequently. Many citizen committees meet monthly, but specific projects or responsibilities may dictate different schedules. Board members should play a major role in determining meeting frequency.

Communication is maintained between meetings. Minutes of each meeting are kept for the record and distributed to remind participants of past events and decisions. Issue papers are distributed prior to meetings to help people prepare and to aid discussions. Many agencies keep local representatives informed with periodic status reports.

Decisionmaking bodies need time to adjust to the dynamics of public involvement. In some cases, important informal communication occurs during breaks or outside meeting hours. For effective communication among policy board members, the sponsoring agency may take time to foster a positive atmosphere or use familiar procedures. For guidance, many MPOs, such as those in Portland, OR, San Diego, and Phoenix, use the commonly-understood meeting procedures outlined in Robert's Rules of Order.

Ethical issues must be considered. Public agencies frequently have established rules of professional ethics, and these rules extend to community participants. For example, potential conflicts of interest need to be identified and addressed immediately.

How are decision and policy boards used with other techniques?

Community representatives are important components of a public involvement program and complement almost any other technique. However, local representation cannot be the sole method an agency uses to involve the public in the planning process. Community representatives are most effective if they relate continuously with their constituent groups and participate in an agency's other public involvement outreach techniques.

Local representatives are ideal speakers. They are generally well-informed and usually have extensive experience and exposure to issues. They are good candidates for a speakers' bureau, but agencies must remain considerate of demands placed on their time.

Collaborative Task Forces

What is a collaborative task force?

A collaborative task force differs from a civic advisory committee, and from decision and policy bodies. While each group focuses on similar issues, each also plays a different role contributing to the decisionmaking process. A civic advisory committee acts primarily in an advisory role, studying issues and presenting a mosaic of opinion to the agency; consensus is not required. Citizens on decision and MPO policy bodies are community members appointed, along with other representatives, to boards or agencies that make decisions or propose recommendations to elected officials. By contrast, a collaborative task force usually helps solve a specific problem, working strenuously toward consensus and presenting a strong and unified voice.

A collaborative task force is a group assigned a specific task that has a time limit for reaching a conclusion and resolving a difficult issue. These decisions are subject to approval by official decisionmakers. Its membership usually includes local people or representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or agency executives. Agency staff are frequently assigned to provide technical support. 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 agency 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.
- Serial meetings to understand and discuss the issue.

Why is a collaborative task force useful?

A collaborative task force can extend community input for decisionmaking and enhance self-governance. Task force discussions help agencies understand participants' qualitative values and reactions to proposals. They can aid in development of policies, programs, and services and in allocation of resources. A collaborative task force was used to explore alternatives for the Charles River crossing of Boston's proposed depressed Central Artery and to recommend a preference to the Massachusetts Highway Department.

A collaborative task force helps resolve impasses through a participatory process. Following a difficult process or unsettled controversy, it allows people to get involved and find solutions.

Task force members represent a cross-section of interests. Having a cross-section of interests helps make the process and decisions more transparent and provides public ownership over outcomes. The views expressed are typically comprehensive. Often the group begins by making small and specific decisions early in the process; later group decisions become somewhat easier.

Do collaborative task forces have special uses?

A collaborative task force deals with high-profile issues that have generated significant public or media attention and community polarization. This technique can be used productively at any time in a complex project or planning study, but because of time and cost commitments it is often used to resolve an impasse. If some participants or the agency itself take intractable positions, consensus becomes very difficult or impossible to achieve.

A collaborative task force can bring together a range of opinions. Broad representation is accompanied by extensive review of relevant issues. In a collaborative task force, a great depth of discussion is expected and can be accommodated. For example, a group of 58 community people and agencies in Maine worked together to explore turnpike widening and alternative modes of transit in implementing an initiative approved by the voters.

Who participates in a collaborative task force?

Participant groups are invited by the sponsor, with the groups selecting their representatives. Representatives are selected from affected interests, but the collaborative task force may add new representatives to round out its membership.

A broad cross-section of interests is desirable and may include local governments, transportation or environmental groups, civic or business groups, and consumer organizations. Other people are involved through outreach and participation programs, including open house presentations or newsletters.

People participate by engaging in the discussion. Members of the group react to each other's opinions and bring up alternative ideas. The facilitator guides discussion to cover all agenda items that the group determines it wants to cover. Participants may require coaching and training in conflict resolution.

How do agencies use the output?

A collaborative task force is used primarily when an agency can seriously commit to incorporating the group's decision into ongoing work. Because of the important role of a collaborative task force, the sponsor may agree to add its findings to the range of alternatives, if the findings are feasible. For example, ConnDOT formed a collaborative task force to deal with the difficult issues of rebuilding an interstate highway bridge and its approaches in downtown New Haven. ConnDOT agreed to accept the task force's consensus recommendations among alternatives as long as the recommendations were technically feasible and within the budget.

The sponsor sets broad limits on issues to be explored. A mission statement for the task force is clearly identified before it begins its work. The schedule reflects the complexity of the issue and the time required to come to a resolution within the task force.

Many sponsors observe groups in a non-participatory role without assuming any leadership function. Representatives of the sponsor respond to questions from the group and provide technical assistance while retaining a neutral position. Expressions of support for the process from high-level agency leaders also help sustain commitment and progress, especially when a task force is wrestling with difficult issues.

Who leads a collaborative task force?

A collaborative task force needs a facilitator to maintain the agenda and schedule and to ensure that all participants are heard. The facilitator assists participants in verbalizing or crafting positions and in developing a constructive process for group decisionmaking, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

The facilitator plays a special role in the task force. Feedback and encouragement to the group are required to maintain progress in developing issues and steps toward resolution. Facilitators need to tell the group when the process is doing well and warn them if a dead end or seemingly unsolvable conflict is approaching. They may need to coach and instruct task force members in methods of conflict resolution.

The facilitator must be viewed as neutral to the process but supportive of the goals and outcomes that the group determines. The chosen person may be from inside an agency but is typically an outsider provided by the sponsor. The group can dismiss the facilitator if it perceives that the person is not serving their interests.

What does a collaborative task force cost?

A collaborative task force requires significant resources. A facilitator experienced in group processes and conflict resolution is mandatory, and staff technical support is required. Graphics and in some cases presentations by technical experts in language geared to the general public are needed to understand technical issues. Modeling of anticipated impacts, structural and engineering issues, and traffic simulations need to be explained. Each meeting can consume several hours.

Specialized consultants may be needed to provide a neutral facilitator or technical support for complex projects. Schedules are tailored to fit the needs of participants and the sponsor. Meetings may be held in the evening to allow participants to attend without interfering with daytime jobs. The time required for preparation is substantial, because each meeting must be tailored to the agenda determined by the group.

Policy support within an agency is required. Staff follow the course of discussions and respond to the need for information. A neutral meeting site not associated with the agency or any stakeholder must be selected. Staff work is essential for preparation of meeting minutes, notices of upcoming meetings, correspondence, newsletters, press releases, or advertisements about outreach events.

How are collaborative task forces used with other techniques?

A collaborative task force uses other techniques as needed. Brainstorming or a charrette can be integral to a task force's work as it seeks solutions to difficult problems. Visioning may establish a desirable goal to work toward. Facilitation is essential early in the process, when goal-setting helps establish a means to measure progress.

A task force can sponsor its own events to apprise the community of issues and potential solutions. These events are useful ways to elicit and review community comments and to find responses as appropriate.

How are collaborative task forces organized?

The sponsor determines the interests to be represented on the task force and selects a facilitator. Typically, a cross-section of organizations is invited to participate, and each selects its representative to the group. The task force then identifies additional participants essential for broad representation. On two rapid transit lines in Boston, task forces were assembled for design of each individual station. The Federal Transit Administration has a current project to develop collaborative decisionmaking processes.

A collaborative task force has a target date determined by the sponsor to provide a framework for and guide scheduling. For example, in Canada, a task force of 24 interest groups met over an extended period to plan a light-rail transit facility for Calgary, Alberta. A task force's mission may be defined by the sponsor in broad terms, but the group usually determines its own approach to problem-solving. It is self-governing, and its work is usually based on a consensus process rather than voting.

The sponsor sets an overall schedule, leaving detailed scheduling to the task force itself. The sponsor provides technical support, either from within the agency or from consultants familiar with the topic. To retain neutrality, the technical staff should not be co-workers of the facilitator.

The task force determines the need for a chairperson. The group develops its own norms or rules to guide the process over time. These may be explicit or implicit; in some instances they are prepared in written form to remind participants of their expressed intent.

The task force monitors its own progress. Where appropriate, the facilitator reminds the group of the agenda and schedule and makes suggestions to keep the work moving toward resolution.

What are the drawbacks?

The process is long and could be expensive. To achieve a full understanding of all issues, an extensive number of meetings and presentations is required. This long process demands patience, good will, and a commitment of continued funding. Participants must make an extensive commitment to the process. Staying with the program over a long period of time may be difficult for many individuals. Similarly, agency commitment is critical.

A high degree of facilitation skill is required to keep the task force on course. Technical support is needed to respond to questions and prepare responses to unforeseen work that may be requested.

Understanding Different Communication Styles

Identifying an Audience

Before each communication with the public—whether a small brochure, a meeting, a completed Transportation Improvement Program, or anything else—transportation professionals should clarify who they are trying to reach. Identifying an audience is about reaching interested parties—the parties that will be affected by a particular project or communication. Interested parties by Federal law include, "citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties."[13]

Identifying an audience of interested parties need not be painstaking or lengthy, but agency staff should consider several key questions. Does it make sense to tailor the message to a general audience? Or should special interest groups, elected officials, or particular populations within the community be targeted? Is the agency reaching out to a highly technical audience or a less-educated audience? Answering these questions will help produce communication materials and efforts that stay on point. Most agencies have communications or public relations staff skilled in identifying audiences—planners should take advantage of these resources.[14]

Geographic Information System (GIS) tools can be an effective way to identify and understand where an audience is coming from before even reaching out for public input. These tools can quickly integrate Census data to identify traditionally underserved communities, LEP people, zero-car households, and

[13] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/orders/#a6

[14] http://talkingtransportation.wordpress.com/2014/06/26/transportation-agencies-work-to-effectively-share-their-environmental-stories

many others.[15] Knowing facilities that are available, such as schools, churches, and community centers, can help identify places to reach the public in person. Other data, such as resident complaints, crime rates, and the most commonly used transportation modes can also shed light on the needs of a particular community.

The Miami-Dade Transportation Outreach Planner is just one example of a GIS tool developed by an MPO to identify target audiences. Users can quickly pinpoint the number of residents, race and ethnicity information, languages spoken, income and employment data, disability data, education levels, and other demographic information for cities and counties.

Understanding an Audience

After agency staff identify their audience for an individual communication or effort the next step is to *understand* their audience. Taking the time to understand the audiences and communities that an agency serves is perhaps the single most important thing an agency can do to encourage public involvement.

Interest-Based Public Involvement

Interest-Based Bargaining[16]

Interest-Based Bargaining (IBB) goes by several other names, but the most informative alternative name is *win-win bargaining*. During interactions agency staff and the public can find mutual interests and concerns by focusing on interests first, rather than locking individuals into predetermined bargaining positions. Parties will frequently find that competing interests are not competing at all. IBB allows participants to become joint problem solvers, rather than adversaries. The next section, *Values, Interests, and Needs*, explains how an agency can start to think about understanding community interests.

The following components form the core of IBB:

People are not the problem
Conflict happens when perceptions are misunderstood. Each individual has his or her own perception of events and the world at large, as Roger Fisher and William Ury explain in *Getting to Yes*. Recognizing this fact is the first step toward seeing an issue from someone else's point of view—and being able to understand other points of view is a big step an agency can take to engage with the public.

Remember that the problem does not lie with an individual who has a viewpoint contrary to that of an agency. That individual is entitled to his or her point of view. The individual only becomes the problem when agency staff let that happen. Staff should focus on addressing the issues that the public may have with a project and not the personality of the person raising the issues.

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[15] http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_710.pdf (p. 3-5)
[16] http://www.fmcs.gov/Internet/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=131&itemID=15804

Focus on interests—not positions

Many leaders—in business, government, and communities—they often ask the wrong question when communicating with the public, according to Fisher and Ury. The question is not, *what do you want?* The question is, *why do you want this?* Asking *why* will lead to answers that clarify interests and will provide a well-rounded perspective on underlying issues.

During any meeting with the public or community leaders, it is important that agency staff use active dialog and listening—these concepts are explained in detail in the "Interacting During Meetings" section of the chapter, *Techniques for Involving the Public.* The first step in problem-solving is not to find solutions. The first step is to understand where the public is coming from. Active dialog and listening can help achieve that goal.

Invent options for mutual gain[17]

The universe of outcomes from communication and negotiation is not fixed. When interests of the parties are known, parties should brainstorm outcomes that will have a mutual benefit. It is important for the parties to keep in mind that premature judgments and thinking of the communication as a win-lose rather than win-win situation will severely impede brainstorming. The scope of options may need to be expanded to find a mutually beneficial outcome.

Parties may agree easily to an outcome, but it is usually beneficial to decide on objective criteria on which to judge potential outcomes before the outcomes are brainstormed.

Insist on objective criteria

The parties must adhere to the objective criteria they have agreed to. These criteria may be based on successful past practices, or industry standards. Objective criteria allow the parties to fairly evaluate potential outcomes. Objective criteria, brainstorming, and mutual respect throughout the process will help produce an outcome that all parties view as *legitimate*. When parties agree to an outcome they perceive as legitimate they are much more likely to carry out that outcome.

Values, Interests, and Needs

By understanding Values, Interests, and Needs (VIN) agency staff can mitigate problems and avoid emotionally charged situations. The ultimate goal of public involvement is to get quality feedback from stakeholders so that good decisions can be made. People who are upset are not apt to give thoughtful feedback on transportation projects.

A VIN analysis can help an agency understand where a segment of the community is coming from. For instance, say an agency is widening a street that will impact an apartment complex. The agency can perform a VIN analysis with the homeowner's association—to understand and account for the values, interest, and needs of the people in the apartment complex. The VIN analysis will help agency staff communicate with the residents and get to the bottom of their concerns. It will help to identify emotional hotspots before they become emotional infernos. Agencies that publish long-range plans

[17] http://www.adr.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=7363

based on input from the public produce plans that account for the values, interests, and needs of the entire community that they serve.

Most MPOs and State DOTs have professional communicators on staff. These communications professionals often know how to conduct focus groups and ask the right questions to perform VIN analyses. It is important that agencies take advantage of their on-staff communications expertise.

Benefits of a VIN analysis

VIN analyses will take staff time, cost money, and can be difficult. But performing a VIN analyses during the early stages of a project will also save time, money, and headaches as the project progresses. Identifying emotional hotspots and crafting a communications approach that accounts for those hotspots will lead to projects that run smoothly and are completed in time and on budget.

Different Learning Styles

Each person has a particular style of learning that he or she prefers. One person may be a visual learner, who does well with pictures and graphics, while another person may be an auditory learner, whose ideal way to process information is by listening. Four styles of learning are described below.

No transportation agency can reasonably satisfy the learning styles of every community member it serves, but communication achieved through public participation can increase if staff keep in mind to address different learning styles when possible. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, for instance, hosts workshops and provides a variety of printed materials and online information, including photo albums, videos, and social media.[18]

VARK[19]

There are many models and theories that can help agencies identify different learning styles. One system is called VARK—Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. While no transportation agency can reasonably account for the learning styles of every individual the agency serves, the VARK method can help staff communicate with the public and increase participation.

Visual learners learn by seeing. They are attuned to body language and facial expressions, often think in pictures, and are best served by graphics and visual representations.

Auditory learners learn by listening. They often prefer to work in groups, listen to recordings of meeting notes, and think through problems out loud.

Read/write learners prefer written information. They learn by rewriting notes, reviewing notes, and organizing visual information into text.

[18] http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/documents/10180/27099/Public+Participation+Plan+Update+2013.pdf/3c761441-0762-41b4-b1f7-f6fdb589e770

[19] http://www.southwesterncc.edu/sites/default/files/Tutor_Program/Learning%20Styles%20-%20VARK.pdf

Kinesthetic learners learn by touching. They often are very active and may have difficulty sitting still for long periods. They may work in a standing position, take frequent breaks, and will prefer hands-on learning.

This questionnaire from the Connecticut Training & Development Network can help identify learning styles using the VARK system.

Different Communication Styles[20]

Being able to recognize the three major communication styles that most people use can help agency staff understand where a member of the public is coming from and how to interact with that person. Agency staff that *understand* the following communication styles can react appropriately when they *encounter* these styles.

Aggressive

Aggressive communication is characterized by a me-first philosophy. People who use this style may be close-minded and monopolize conversation. They are often overly critical, loud, and impatient. The aggressive style may be met with resistance and defiance, but patience, empathy, and assertive communication can help agency staff get to the core of why an individual is acting aggressively.

Passive

Passive communication is characterized by hesitancy and deference to others' ideas. People with this style may be apologetic or self-conscious. They may speak in a low volume, have downcast eyes, and be fidgety. Using the passive style evokes a lack of self-esteem and powerlessness. Agency staff who recognize individuals who are passive may need to encourage those individuals to become engaged in transportation planning because passivity does not indicate a lack of knowledge or creativity.

Assertive

Assertive communication is characterized by a belief in one's self and in others. People using this style are not focused on winning a particular point but rather ensuring that a project reaches an outcome that is most desirable for the people it serves. They are often non-judgmental, decisive, and have a sense of humor. An assertive person is enthusiastic and even-tempered.

It is unlikely that a person will use one communication style all of the time, but the assertive style is clearly the best communication style for most situations. There are several situations in which it is appropriate to be aggressive or passive. The aggressive style can be effective when a decision needs to be made quickly, such as during emergencies. The passive style can be effective when confronting a minor issue, when emotions are running high and parties need to calm down, when the power dynamic is not in one's favor, or when a position is impossible to change, such as a government policy.

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[20] http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/sba/comm_style.htm

New and Traditional Media

To reach as much of the public as possible, it is good practice to use a variety of communication methods. Social media networks are some of the easiest and most cost-effective tools for transportation agencies to engage the public in the planning process, although they should be looked at as a tool, not a replacement for traditional methods. Not everyone in an agency's universe of public stakeholders will use social media, but social media can engage a large segment of the public, particularly younger stakeholders who might not otherwise have a voice in transportation planning.

While it is good practice to use a variety of social media to inform the public of projects and meetings, whether or not it is worth agency resources to make a strong new media push comes down to knowing how the audience that is being targeted communicates.

Define Goals and Objectives

Clearly define the goals and objectives of the public involvement program. Make them specific to the needs of the particular transportation project or plan. Ask:

- Who is the "public" for this venture?
- What information does the public need in order to understand it?
- What kinds of information does the agency need from the public?
- When in the process will this information be most timely?
- In what ways will it be used to develop the best possible project or plan?

Identify Stakeholders

Identify potential participants from a list of people likely to be directly affected by a project or planning process. Include special interest groups, other agencies, freight interests, community leaders, the disability community, minorities and ethnic groups, LEP, low-income people, and the less educated. Ask people to recommend other potential participants or groups that represent the community or specific interests.

Meet With Elected and Unofficial Community Leaders

Meet with community leaders and other key community members (such as teachers, police, health care practitioners, social services, and clergy) to refine the goals and objectives. Initiate and maintain contact with people who are known to be interested in or directly affected by an agency's proposal or planning process. Include residents and businesses from the general area where improvements are proposed. Include a representative sample of stakeholders from throughout the planning region as well as the transportation underserved and other hard-to-reach groups.

Solicit initial comments on the proposal itself, on who the appropriate target audience is, and on how best to involve them in the process. The target audience might be individuals, community representatives, or special interest groups (such as business, freight, and environmental organizations). Document the input and note the reasons for specific approaches.

Build a Contact List

Set up a contact list of potential participants that includes their affiliation(s) and note their particular concerns. Welcome them to the participation process. Describe the purposes and goals of the project or planning program, provide an overview of the ways people can become involved, and give date, time, and agenda for initial meetings. Establish personal contact with those who are unable to read a mailing.

Offer Different Participation Levels

Organize participants who are intensely interested into core groups, and establish ways for others to participate as their input is needed.

Offer people ways to participate that match their level of commitment. Invite those who are highly involved to address specific tasks or issues on a regular basis. Offer an array of other participation options for people with less time or a lesser stake in the project or plan.

Seek Early Feedback

Seek early feedback from community advisors to see if the public involvement approach is working. Identify needed changes. Determine the effectiveness of agency communication links.

Set Up a First Meeting and Follow Up

Choose a date or dates convenient to most participants. Consult community leaders for best times and places for meetings. Notify the public and the media, and send a mailing to everyone on the contact list. Follow up with participants after an initial meeting has been held.

TECHNIQUES FOR INVOLVING THE PUBLIC

Open Meetings

Transportation agencies at all governmental levels should follow appropriate guidelines for meetings that are open to the public. The *Government in the Sunshine Act* requires that Federal agency meetings must be publicly announced at least one week before the meeting. Meeting announcements must include the time, place, and subject matter of the meeting, whether the meeting is closed or open to the public, and contact information for an official designated to handle questions and requests.

Agencies must also comply with State guidelines for public meetings and hearings, which may have requirements that differ from those in the *Government in the Sunshine Act*. Some States, for instance, require that agencies make a public announcement at least two weeks before the meeting.

For the full regulation on open meetings for Federal agencies please click here.

Determining the Best Type of Meeting

Public Meetings and Hearings

How do meetings and hearings differ?

Public meetings have been used for years to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. They provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to interact one-on-one. Any meeting can become a hearing by including a verbatim transcript of comments. This type of transcript is kept in the project file. The main purpose of a hearing is to accurately hear the public's input.

Generally, a required public hearing is more formal than a public meeting and occurs near the end of the data-gathering activities. A formal public hearing gathers community comments and positions for the public record and provides input for final decisions. There are specific processes to follow and items to be included in the official transcript. Public hearings are required by the Federal government for many transportation projects. A public hearing is a formal opportunity for people to be heard. A public hearing must be held during Federal environmental review, or a public hearing must be offered. If a required public hearing is to be held or is requested after being offered, a transcript and any written comments are submitted to the Federal lead agency.[21] Public hearings may also be held during transportation planning as determined by the sponsoring organization.

[21] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/fapg/cfr0771.htm (23 CFR 771.111)

Why are they useful?

Meetings are widely used to achieve a basic level of community input and to exchange information with a range of residents. Public meetings are optional and are tailored to agency and community needs. The public usually prefers meetings over formal hearings because meetings do not have a public transcript and there is less pressure to speak in front of a large audience.

There may be multiple meetings on a single topic as part of MPO or statewide planning, or a single meeting can address several related projects or community planning issues. A single meeting covering several topics may be more efficient in terms of staff time and mailing costs, and can help avoid participant burnout, particularly when many of the same people are interested in several projects or plans. A single meeting covering several topics can also help to place individual project issues and goals within a broader community context.

Formal public hearings, by contrast, fulfill regulatory requirements. Reasonable notice to the public of either a public hearing or the opportunity for a public hearing must be provided. Submission to the FHWA of a transcript of each public hearing and a certification that a required hearing or hearing opportunity was offered. The transcript will be accompanied by copies of all written statements from the public, both submitted at the public hearing or during an announced period after the public hearing.

How do agencies benefit?

Meetings and hearings help agencies monitor community reactions to agency policies, proposals, and progress. Agencies and people can observe reactions to proposals, to understand community members' opinions and stances. If public meetings are held early in the process, these opinions may be analyzed and responded to before they become solidified or difficult to modify.

Who leads public meetings or hearings?

Meetings may be led by an agency staffer or a member of the public. In some instances, it may be appropriate to hire a professional facilitator to lead a meeting, especially if the issue being discussed is controversial, or if the public does not highly regard the agency's reputation. A discussion document can help prepare participants.

By contrast, hearings are led by a public hearing officer, who is an agency representative.

What are the costs?

Resource and staff needs can be substantial, depending on the type of meeting. For a meeting or hearing preceded by an open house, agency staff should explain or display major elements of the plan or process so that community members understand the big picture. Transcriptionists, sketch planning maps—which can be spreadsheet- or GIS-based—notepads, or comment sheets are needed to record public comments at the meeting.

How are they organized?

Agency staff organize public meetings and hearings, and prepare pre-meeting materials, including meeting announcements and agendas, displays, and audio-visual materials. The public should know that these materials are free and available. Agencies must consider the needs of people with disabilities and transit access in selecting a convenient place and time.

Ground rules can keep meetings focused and constructive. Ground rules may include the following:

- Recognizing the legitimacy of others' concerns.
- Arriving prepared for discussion.
- Listening carefully and sharing discussion time.
- Encouraging everyone to participate.
- Identifying areas of agreement, clarify differences, and searching for common understanding.
- Establishing time limits for speakers.

After a public meeting, agencies should provide written meeting summaries that describe areas of agreement and disagreement. All points of view must be clearly and fairly stated. A public hearing should produce a verbatim transcript.

How are they used with other techniques?

To attract a wide audience, agencies need to prepare a media strategy for a public meeting or hearing. Adequate advertising for public events always includes more than a single newspaper advertisement.

During a public meeting, a brainstorming, visioning, or charrette technique may be used. A facilitator may be appropriate. Special provisions need to be made to meet the needs of disabled people accessing the meeting. Video or audio tapes of proceedings are important for analytic or other purposes.

What are the drawbacks?

Public meetings do not always allay community doubts about agency credibility. Although they improve the possibility of adequate public involvement, meetings must be frequent and well-focused on substantive issues to demonstrate that the agency is committed to public involvement. In addition, an agency needs to make clear the link between meeting input and decisionmaking. Formal hearings may also intimidate people and restrain commenting, particularly when there is a large audience. This fear can be overcome by allowing written comments and private sessions with a transcriber.

Open Houses and Forums

What are open houses and open forum hearings?

An open house is an informal setting in which people get information about a plan or project. Unlike a meeting there are no formal discussions or presentations. Instead, the community receives information through a variety of media, including written products, exhibits, and open dialogue with attendees. All attendees are encouraged to give opinions, comments, and preferences to staff.

An open forum hearing is a public hearing with elements of an open house. After reviewing exhibits and talking with staff, participants can provide comments in several ways that will appear in the formal transcript of the public hearing. The public hearing represents the formal stage of community involvement; it is intended to identify issues, goals, objectives, values, and concerns related to the project. Open forum hearings require formal notice, even though the hearing itself is informal. If a Federal environmental document is required, the public hearing process is required and a transcript of the public hearing and any written comment are submitted to the Federal lead agency.[22]

Open houses and open forum hearings have the following characteristics in common:

- Information is presented buffet-style.
- Space is provided for tables or booths, and project information is displayed.
- Agencies provide comment sheets. Participants turn in comment sheets or mail them later. (Pre-paid postage sheets will improve returns.)
- Agency or technical staff answer questions or provide details.
- They can be used for a planning process or project development.
- Since there is no fixed agenda, these events are usually scheduled for substantial portions of a day or evening, so that people can drop in at their convenience and fully participate.
- Brochures or videos introduce the open house or open forum process.
- Agencies usually provide take-home written materials, brochures, or maps.
- They can include non-agency displays. Sister agencies and community proponents or opponents may be given space to present displays, documents, or handouts in separate, visible areas. Some agencies have found that allowing public groups to set up tables outside the meeting or hearing room helps the public distinguish official agency information from other sources.

In addition to having all the features of an open house, an open forum has the following characteristics:

- The agency must publish a formal notice of the time and date.
- People have a chance to clarify comments by reviewing transcripts before putting their opinions on the record.
- Comments are recorded.
- Comment transcripts are made available after the event.

Why are they useful?

Open houses and open forum hearings strive to provide an informal, casual, and friendly atmosphere. The format focuses on issues rather than positions. People drop by at their convenience, get the information that interests them, and stay as long as they wish. Informality encourages participants who

[22] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/fapg/cfr0771.htm (23 CFR 771.111 (h))

are intimidated by formal meetings; often the quality of responses is higher. The short time required for participation attracts people who do not want to sit through long public meetings.

Participants have direct interaction with staff who might not otherwise be readily available. Making technical staff available shows that an agency is open to community input. People can receive immediate responses to questions about issues. Technical staff can reduce misinformation and rumor.

Open houses can be tailored to participants' specific needs. They are held, as necessary, to improve public understanding of a process or project.

Do they have special uses?

Open houses help encourage communities to become more interested in programs, plans, and projects. The publicity and the procedure call attention to a process that is underway. They are often used when a project is complex, so that the project can be broken down through detailed information presented graphically or in text. The format allows time for people to see displays and documents close-up.

Open houses are held at an early stage in planning or project development to gather information from people. Further along in the process, they update this information or seek comments on the progress of a draft plan or a project.

Who participates? How do they participate?

Anyone interested in a plan or project development can attend, and agencies should urge people with a specific stake in an issue—both advocates and opponents—to attend.

Open houses or open forum hearings accommodate people who are reluctant to speak in front of an audience. Open houses or open forums can also serve as a setting for non-English speakers to engage agency staff. The Orange County, California, transit agency provided bilingual staff at an open house in connection with a planning study. Bilingual staff were identified by blue dots on their name tags.

The media should be encouraged to attend. Information provided is generally comprehensive and may include useful visuals. Stakeholders should also prepare visual and written materials.

How do agencies use input from meetings?

Agencies use community comments for guidance in planning or project development. Comments help an agency take the pulse of the community, shape and modify plans, and monitor reactions of the individual stakeholders most affected by the proposal or project.

Agencies review comments and incorporate them into plans wherever possible. They also provide a record and acknowledgement that the public's input was received. For open forum public hearings, comments and responses form the bulk of the formal transcript of a session, which also includes the agency brochures, summaries of agency displays, a transcription of oral comments, and copies of all written comments.

Who leads the process?

Agency staff always take the lead for hearings and usually for open houses as well. They are responsible for organizing the session, setting up materials, getting agency representatives to the session, recording the testimony, and documenting the process and community attendance.

Agency representatives with relevant expertise manage tables at open house sessions. Technical experts or consultants may assist. At open forum hearings, a public hearing officer is appointed by the agency to assure the session runs smoothly and to monitor agency staff responses to comments.

What are the costs?

Open houses and open forum hearings can be relatively inexpensive or may be more elaborate. Expenses increase with the complexity of the project and the scale of graphics or display materials required. Expenses also increase as an agency makes extra effort to publicize the event.

There may be a fee to secure a venue—neutral venues, like public schools and libraries, are preferable.

How are they organized?

An agency will define the topics it will present. This process guides the agency in preparing written materials and audio-visual materials that best describe the issues or projects.

An agency will then designate an event coordinator best suited to organize the event around the selected issues. For example, the coordinator may be from the planning disciplines if the subject is long-range planning, or from the engineering disciplines if a design project is being announced or explored. The event coordinator should schedule a date and time that is convenient for people who work during the day.

An agency may need to hold events in multiple locations for large geographical areas and for planning processes. To encourage people to attend meetings for its Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, the Oregon DOT held open house meetings in school cafeterias, libraries, senior centers, and a community theater.

An agency will then get the word out about the event. Having a media strategy will help an agency determine content and spacing of announcements. Media announcements dramatically enhance public awareness and improves the accuracy of the plan or project information the media receives.

The agency will also prepare illustrative materials for display. Presentation boards, copies of documents, maps, and videos are very helpful. Topics covered may include traffic, noise, analysis, specific sites, economics, design, neighborhood impacts, routes, goals, evaluation criteria, and policy issues. Fact sheets or maps can be provided for visitors to take home. The South Carolina DOT uses color coding on graphics intended for community review to emphasize and highlight the projected impacts of a project.

Each display table or area will allow the public to address issues in depth. Agency staff people with specific areas of expertise are stationed at each display. Reception staff welcome new arrivals and let them know how the open house works. Other staff members can help record comments or explain issues to people. For open forum hearings, transcribers must record comments or input can be captured on comment cards.

How are they used with other techniques?

Open houses can be combined with public meetings, with informational presentations first followed by an open house. Displays, brochures, documents, videos, and other materials can also introduce a meeting and help people prepare for it.

Open houses sometimes incorporate brainstorming or focus groups. North Carolina's Triangle Transit Authority conducted mini-focus groups as part of multiple open houses about long-range transit options for the region.

Information designed for the public is essential, including press releases, briefings, speakers' bureaus, brochures, posters, mailings, and media announcements. All information must be timely, to assure that public hearing notice requirements are met and to give people time to fit the event into their schedules. Reminders can be sent a few days before the session.

Social media and mailing lists should also be used to inform the public. An agency should make special efforts to solicit participation and attendance from traditionally underserved populations.

An open house is a convenient place to conduct an informal survey. People can complete the survey right away or mail it back. Informal surveys let an agency obtain responses quickly and analyze the results to ascertain community interest and understanding.

What are the drawbacks?

An open forum hearing that does not have an audience session will also lack debate on a proposal's merits. Critics sometimes charge that agencies use open forum hearings as a "divide and conquer" strategy. But when people hear one another, they in fact develop an improved understanding of a proposal and its implications for the community. To assure that multiple viewpoints are presented at an open forum hearing, the Ohio DOT allows community groups to set up exhibition tables near the open meeting tables, labeled clearly to distinguish them from agency tables.

An open house or forum reaches only those who are willing to attend. Potential stakeholders who do not attend, may not receive essential information, and their opinions will not be heard.

An outreach period is limited to a few days, even if hearings are held in different locations. A single event should not be the sole opportunity for people to be heard. A key element of a successful public involvement program is continuously reaching large numbers of people.

Informal conversation does not replace written comment. In brief conversations with agency officials during an open house, people sometimes get lulled into a sense of being heard and fully understood. Agency staff cannot be expected to retain all opinions and may not have sufficient time to note each statement. Unless an official recording is underway, people should be encouraged to present written comments to ensure that their opinions are heard.

At traditional public hearings, elected leaders may announce their views to a large public audience. At open forum hearings, however, officials can speak to only a few people at a time, and some constituents may not have the opportunity to hear elected officials' viewpoints.

Effective displays and materials may be expensive. High-quality displays are essential to promote rapid comprehension and understanding of a proposal. Audio and visual recordings are often used as a method of explaining both the proposal and the process of public review.

When are they most effective?

An open house most effectively disseminates information either at an early stage, such as the location or design stage, or before decisionmaking. Montana DOT uses an open house or walk-in session in tandem with a traditional hearing, particularly when it is essential to register opinions from many segments of the community.

Workshops and Retreats

What are workshops and retreats?

Workshops, retreats, and site visits are special meetings to inform people and solicit input on specific policy issues, plans, or projects. In size and importance, they can range from a subset of a larger meeting to a large multi-day event.

A **workshop** is a task-oriented meeting, held by a project sponsor, that is organized around a particular topic or activity. It is generally focused on a topic, has an element of training involved, and is generally of shorter duration than a conference. Because of the element of training, workshops are often seen as more worthwhile than conferences. Typically, it involves a relatively small group of 20 to 40 people and addresses aspects of a narrowly-defined topic. Workshops usually last one to three hours for small groups to allow participants to address work through an agenda. Because they are relatively short and task-focused, workshops can be standalone events or part of a larger meeting, conference, or retreat.

Retreats are held in non-traditional settings and are especially useful to work on personal conflict resolution and communication. Participants give their undivided attention to specific issues without interruptions from everyday distractions. The complexity of an issue or topic will determine whether a retreat lasts more than one day.

Why are they useful?

Conferences, workshops, and retreats are useful at any planning stage. They are used early to set the stage for formulating plans or projects. They are used mid-process to showcase and refine specific aspects of plans or projects, resolve conflicts, and work toward consensus. Near the end, they demonstrate findings and conclusions.

These meetings offer agencies and the public a way to zero-in on specific issues and concerns. They deal with a single topic and its ramifications, or focus on notable impacts of concern to individuals or groups. They provide an opportunity for detailed discussion on a variety of elements of a plan or a project. The Massachusetts Highway Department sponsored a series of conferences on the future of Route 128, Boston's beltway. One metropolitan-level conference included presentations by experts from around the Country, while the other two focused on State and local concerns.

Do they have special uses?

Workshops and retreats are particularly useful for smaller groups of people who want to participate intensively. They are inherently participatory and encourage a collaborative atmosphere. Informality encourages discussion and give-and-take. By focusing on narrow topics, workshops allow time for every participant to express a viewpoint. They are easily integrated into a larger participatory process.

Workshops and retreats make it easier to participate without "going on the record." Typically, participants can speak out without being quoted at a later time and questions are asked only to glean information.

Retreats are used to develop details of a transportation program. 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 University of Georgia's Institute of Community and Area Development was retained to organize, conduct, and facilitate the meeting, resulting in recommendations that have been implemented by the Georgia DOT.

Retreats can clear the air on contentious issues, bringing disputants together to hear all sides of an issue and work out differences. They can work on thorny problems and look for elements of agreement. With a neutral facilitator, retreats provide an off-the-record means of stating and working on issues between opponents. The process of addressing difficult issues helps loosen adversarial relationships and creates the possibility for compromise and consensus.

Who participates?

Special meetings target specific stakeholders. Conferences, workshops, and retreats can be tailored to subsets of groups or constituencies that do not normally participate. Over time, it may be appropriate to add workshop sessions to incorporate local concerns into planning or project development. In Costa Mesa, CA, organizations sponsored *living room dialogues* among small groups to air feelings and issues about day laborers who gathered in a park and shopping center. Discussions led to a hiring center for day workers and a new human rights commission.

Knowledgeable people should be part of each special meeting. For conferences, experts in specific fields serve as speakers or presenters of information. For workshops and retreats, resource staff are essential to provide information and answer questions. Agency staff ordinarily act as individuals in the meetings, unless participants ask specialized questions. For breakout sessions, workshops, and retreats, a trained facilitator acts in the neutral, central role of leading the meeting and keeping it on course.

Workshops and retreats can target specific groups. The Edison Electric Institute held a two-day retreat to improve communication between industry and consumer groups. A group of 20 to 24 people were invited, chosen by their demonstrated ability to effectively present a position for their groups. Time was allowed for socialization to encourage personal relationships and dialogue among the participants.

How do agencies use workshops and retreats?

Special meetings show that an agency is committed to public involvement and can enhance agency credibility among the public. They provide agencies with in-depth public feedback about a project or plan. Agencies obtain new ideas and participants can offer suggestions for policy changes or for alterations in details of a project. Special meetings provide an opportunity for participants to debate one another.

Who leads them?

Workshops may be led by an agency staffer or community volunteer, if the size of the group is manageable. A large workshop requires special skills to moderate the event and keep it on target. An agency project manager may attend a workshop but usually should not lead the session if issues are highly controversial, since that may compromise objectivity. Workshops may be led by citizens.

Retreats require a neutral moderator. Agency staff may be able to lead the session but may be seen as biased if they are involved in the process or project. A neutral moderator or facilitator should remain unbiased in soliciting ideas and comments from all participants and should keep the retreat focused on target goals.

What are the costs?

Initial costs include renting meeting space and breakout rooms, if they are needed. Conferences require staff for entrance and registration areas and individual rooms should be prepared for presentations. Staff will also need to arrange for speakers, including costs for hotels and food if speakers are coming from out of town. Registration fees can offset costs.

Workshops are less costly than conferences. A workshop usually requires only a room and a staff person to manage materials, welcome participants, and document the process. A retreat requires a room and a neutral facilitator. It is usually inappropriate to charge a fee for a workshop or retreat.

Finding rooms in publicly-owned sites helps keep costs down. Colleges or universities are often good locations for conferences, workshops, or retreats. These sites are usually neutral locations where participants feel welcome.

Supplementary funding sources may be available. The MPO serving Pittsburgh received financial support from a local foundation to pay for all costs of a weekend retreat for a blue-ribbon panel reviewing a long-range plan.

How are they organized?

Agency staff will organize a conference. Agencies should be aware that resource costs can be significant, including hiring consultants to act as conference assistants. But special meetings should also be coordinated with community members, who can help think of issues to cover, who should be involved, and locations and times.

Conferences require a rigid structure and agenda for speakers, presentations, and break-out groups. Preparation for a conference requires a good deal of staff work to organize the content and publicize the event to the community.

Workshops and retreats can be organized more casually than a conference and are flexible in selection of date, place, and format. Workshops and retreats need an agenda and information on what the agency intends to do with feedback.

How are they used with other techniques?

Brainstorming is an integral element of conferences, workshops, and retreats and is a useful way to quickly involve many participants in the process. For more on brainstorming, please see the “Brainstorming” section in the chapter, *Selecting an Organizational Feature*.

Workshops and retreats can advance visioning by focus on long-term goals.

Facilitation is an important element of special meetings, especially workshops and retreats. Participants need a facilitator’s guidance on timing, focus, and reporting the events of a workshop or retreat.

Small group techniques are used in workshops to open a meeting and gain participants’ interest. They can then be used to set goals for the meeting and to guide the process.

Special meetings supplement regular meetings. Conferences, workshops, and retreats are high points of a program of public participation but do not by themselves constitute a public participation program.

Are they flexible?

The level of effort for a special meeting depends on the purpose of the meeting. A special meeting can meet community needs within the resources available to an agency. Conferences require the greatest output of resources, while workshops may expend few agency resources.

What are the drawbacks?

Agencies will need to produce substantial publicity for special meetings, and all special meetings require extensive staff preparation. Resources can be quickly expended during the preparation period.

Conferences are often expensive and may be viewed as exclusionary. Arrangements for space and speakers can be significant. Publicity must be extensive to attract media and community attention.

Agencies will need to hire a skilled facilitator for a retreat.

Workshops are ineffective if leadership cannot keep them on track. Workshops will not be positive and productive unless staff or experienced personnel are present to guide its progress.

Transportation Fairs

What is a transportation fair?

A transportation fair is an event used to drum up interest for transportation in general or for specific projects or programs. It is typically a one-day event and is heavily promoted to encourage people to attend. Arizona DOT, for example, often provides a day for the public to walk, ride, skate, and bike on new highway segments, before the new road is open to vehicle traffic. To promote fairs, agencies can highlight attractions such as new technologies, and notable personalities can also draw participants.

Agency staff should organize their transportation fairs around visual elements, such as exhibits, videos, and maps or models of projects. A speaker or presenter is not required but can help focus the attention of viewers on the purposes of the fair. A fair gears individual displays toward a desired message. Once prepared, exhibits can be used again at another location and date.

Transportation fairs have the following basic features:

- Visual interest and excitement.
- A variety of exhibits: maps, photos, models, slide shows, videos, vehicles, give-away items.
- Accessibility, with a central location that is convenient for the target audience.
- Extensive publicity to attract participants.
- A variety of community members attend.
- Elicit comments and points of view of participants.

Why are they useful?

Transportation fairs present information to the public in a unique, educational, and exciting format. Participants are encouraged to view exhibits, ask questions, consider information, and give comments. Sharing information and discussing issues serves as a status report on projects and programs for the public. With good publicity, transportation fairs will become known opportunities for people to participate in transportation planning.

Transportation fairs are an opportunity for casual community input. They can be held in a central location where many people pass by, such as a store downtown or a shopping mall.

Transportation fairs ask participants to focus on the components and details of a project or program, and offer advice and suggestions. They emphasize specific, positive points about a project and can include exhibits of all types to highlight the wide variety of people, organizations, and effort involved in a project or program. They allow an agency or organization to point out salient, desirable elements of a project, while responding to potential drawbacks.

Who participates?

Fair attendees are self-selected. Individuals decide whether or not to attend—often based on the location and date of the fair. Because a fair is not an invitational event, a representative sample of community groups or stakeholders cannot be expected to attend. Despite this self-selection, diverse viewpoints are usually represented.

Attendees examine presentations and ask questions about the exhibits. At a typical fair, before attendees leave they are encouraged to fill out questionnaires or response forms with written comments, which are collected and analyzed for input.

How do agencies use the output?

The principal output is improved community awareness. Written and oral comments by community residents are collected at the fair and used as input to a project or program. This information may be anecdotal but, with analysis, may prove useful to the sponsoring agency.

Comments should be used in association with other community input. Comments help agencies become aware of opinions of participants, often before they become solidified and difficult to modify. Because they are made in a casual atmosphere, comments are sometimes more conciliatory than they would be in a different setting.

Who leads transportation fairs?

Agencies or private groups sponsor fairs. Public agencies hold fairs to detail a specific project and its impacts, and to demonstrate support for it. Private transportation management groups hold fairs to attract new members or explain new programs. Public officials can be productive at a transportation fair, depending on the fair's purpose.

A transportation fair does not require a formal leader on the day of the event. However, a fair can be scheduled with specific times for presentations or brief talks or to introduce featured guests, such as celebrities or elected officials. At such times, a moderator or other person will make introductions.

What are the costs?

Transportation fairs require agency staff support and there can be substantial work involved. Finding a site—usually on land or in buildings that are privately-owned—takes preparation. Agency representatives must be scheduled to attend if they are needed to respond to inquiries or explain technical issues.

Written materials can supplement graphic presentations. Maps and brochures can remind participants of major themes that were covered during the fair. Printing and production costs for transportation fairs can be fairly high.

How are transportation fairs organized?

Transportation fairs are managed by an existing organization and fairs may have a chairperson or director, depending on the complexity or importance of the event. Staff must manage exhibitors, oversee production of graphic or written materials, and make the physical arrangements on the day of the event.

Organizational meetings should be held to set policies and goals for the fair, select a date and place, solicit exhibitors, and develop publicity for wide public distribution.

How are they used with other techniques?

Like other methods, transportation fairs are a part of the whole. They are not a stand-alone approach for public involvement and they pair well with other techniques. They can be sponsored by a civic advisory committee to show work in progress.

Transportation fairs can help agency staff identify candidates for membership in civic advisory committees. They can also be a time to present awards to individuals who have contributed to improved transportation services.

What are the drawbacks?

Fairs cannot replace other techniques because they are one-time events that are usually not representative of the entire community. Because they are temporary they do not meet Federal standards for continuing public involvement. They cannot replace a public process that records statements in a more formal manner, where local people can be certain that agencies are hearing them.

Transportation fairs do not lead to public consensus. There is no deliberation between potentially opposing groups. The principal purpose of a fair is to disseminate information, not to receive ideas. Attempts by the sponsor to derive consensus from a fair may cause problems and the sponsor may be charged with not taking public involvement seriously.

Representative comments cannot be expected because a fair is not likely to include all potential participants. In fact, comments from participants are appreciated because they are to some extent unexpected. In certain instances, little or no feedback will be directly useful to an agency. However, unarticulated comments do not mean that the fair was a failure; many participants do not view writing comments as an essential element of their enjoyment of the exhibits at the fair.

Even if an agency receives few direct comments from a fair, they can me a useful part of a public involvement plan. They are an opportunity to meet the public, provide information, and answer questions in a friendly atmosphere.

Games and Contests

What are games and contests?

Games and contests are special ways to attract and engage people who might not otherwise participate in transportation planning. They often vividly demonstrate issues and the consequences of decisions. They enhance participation by giving people tangible, interesting, easy-to-relate-to activities rather than reams of reading material or numerous meetings to attend.

Games and contests may include the following:

- Games or contests on the Internet.
- Board games.
- Card games.
- Crossword puzzles or other word games.
- Games of chance, such as raffles.
- Essay, design, or poster contests.

Why are they useful?

Games and contests help generate publicity about planning and project development. Publicity about a planning process is sometimes hard to generate, but involving people in a game or contest often results in significant coverage because people think they are fun. The fun factor is important to acknowledge, because it breaks down barriers between technicians and community people, generates good will for an agency, and gives people something interesting to look forward to.

Games alert people to a broad range of issues, give them information, and pinpoint their transportation priorities by asking them to make decisions and tradeoffs. Games that involve choices—for instance, placing game pieces to indicate acceptable development densities or spending play money for industry or environmental protection—help clarify priorities, identify the range of positions, and aid agency decision-making. By making choices about where to put development in relation to transportation, participants can see the relationship between transportation and land use, and understand others' perspectives and the consequences of decisions.

Games and contests involve a broad variety of people who might not otherwise participate in planning and project development processes. No one is likely to be an expert at a custom-made game, so everyone starts at an equal level of skill. Few other participation techniques match games and contests for light-heartedness, playfulness, and liveliness.

Games and contests generate publicity, because they grab attention and provide a useful way for people to focus on an issue. They engage people quickly and involve their thoughts during the time it takes to play. They provide a sense of accomplishment beyond simple advertising.

Do they have special uses?

Games and contests sometimes change an agency's image in the community. Agencies that have been thought of in the past as outsiders uninvolved in the community are seen in a different light when they sponsor a game or contest. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) sponsored a children's game for 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 provided conspicuous evidence that MBTA was interested in involving the neighborhood in the transit-line extension.

Games and contests are exploratory, as they stress possibilities for change in the environment, transportation, and the places we live. They get participants to understand different perspectives and concerns by opening up opportunities.

Games are risk-free for participants. People are often willing to play a game in which they encounter the potential impacts, because there are no real-life consequences. Yet, by being involved, they get to understand issues from different perspectives.

Games and contests can educate children on transportation topics. As children learn about their transportation systems, so do parents. The MBTA also developed a picture guide book for children, *Anna Discovers the T*, designed to teach children how to use the transit system—with the goal that children would help their parents learn as well.

Who participates? How do they participate?

Interested community people, officials, or other stakeholders engage with games that transportation agencies design. Games and contests can be widely distributed to engage people who need to be aware of issues or themes and to open up communication lines. A game of chance, such as a raffle, can reach a large group of people and make them aware of an issue. A group of merchants in Cambridge, MA, reached thousands of people during a transit construction project by giving away bicycles, roller skates, rides on an antique fire engine, free transit passes, a month of free parking, and a trip for two to Montreal. A suburban transportation management organization held a raffle to publicize ridesharing by giving away dinners for two, gift certificates, and bicycle tune-ups. These contests help increase communication between the agency and communities and make it easier to engage them in the future for help in making decisions.

Internet and computer games can appeal to a large number of participants. They should be simple enough so that people who are unfamiliar with computers can play. Computer games focused on role playing are helpful for people who would particularly benefit from seeing other perspectives. These include, for example, using a computer to illustrate what different floor area ratios would mean in terms of development density or to show how close various transit alignments would come to neighborhoods.

For meetings, small group board games can foster interaction. A board game used by the Santa Barbara, CA, Community Development Department asked players to place blocks on development parcels following the allowable zoning. In a risk-free, non-threatening way, players were able to state preferences for development based on their own reasons. No judgments about positions were allowed, but, by evaluating the game, it became relatively easy for participants to see that the development allowed by the existing zoning would be very dense.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies incorporate ranking games at meetings to learn community priorities, stimulate interest in planning issues, or publicize project development. Contests are effective in reaching people who are not traditionally involved. As part of a school curriculum, the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department ran a contest that asked school children to describe verbally or to illustrate what transportation means to them. About 900 students in 160 teams submitted contest entries. This contest got people involved and interested in learning about the details of running a transportation system.

Agencies also use games for training, which helps staff understand their potential for public involvement processes. The MBTA created a board game called "On Track" to train its operators. Questions tested operators' customer-service skills and knowledge of the MBTA system and its history. Such training efforts help staff understand what tools are useful and how games and contests that are engaging, fun, and easy to learn can contribute significantly to a public involvement process.

Who leads games and contests?

Contests should be designed, promoted, and led by people who have a clear vision of the goals of the contest—whether the contest is for publicity, education, or more specific transportation planning options. An organizational leader is needed to support the contest from publicity through distribution, receipt, and tabulation of forms and awarding prizes.

Games require trained leaders who understand the game's goals. A leader must be enthusiastic and fully understand the process. Agency staff or outside consultants may lead games. Guidance through a game may be required, even if the game is well-developed. After the game, the leader must skillfully guide people through discussion and evaluation.

What are the costs?

Significant time and skills are required to develop concepts for games and contests. Outlining a concept may take as little as a week, but a single, hand-produced board game can take six weeks or more from concept through final production.

Creating an Internet or computer game takes even more resources and can take thousands of hours to develop and test. Preparing simpler games takes less time. Crossword puzzles, simple word games, or word search contests do not take long to develop.

Creating a contest usually involves less staff time than conceiving a board game. Depending on the complexity of the contest and how many entries are desired, the time commitment for staff is probably in hours or days, rather than weeks. Prizes must be donated—they cannot be Federally funded.

Large-scale contests are much more structured and expensive. Preparing entrance requirements, books, posters, and other materials for official entrants will involve a major effort.

Agencies can join forces with other agencies or private-sector firms to sponsor large-scale contests. That way, efforts are distributed among all of the sponsors rather than falling on staff from a single agency.

How are games and contests organized?

Goals for a game or contest must be clearly established. As each concept for a game is put forward it should be tested to see if it meets the game's overall goals.

Board or computer games require staff or consultant time for design, illustration, rule-making, printing, and distribution. Target audiences for distribution should be outlined before these games are designed and produced. Simplicity for players is key—the game should be easy to understand and play.

Contests require staff or consultants to prepare, implement, and follow up the entries. Contests are introduced at any time in a process and are successful ways to keep interest sustained over the long haul. Follow-up is particularly important if the agency wants to generate interest and gather names for mailing lists. No players should be added to mailing list without approval.

Board games involving role play are often most effective early in a process, because they immediately allow participants to see issues from other points of view. This helps establish an atmosphere of open-mindedness and sets a positive tone. However, games that illustrate conflicts that arise out of budget constraints or community development issues are often used to move away from a stalemate in the middle or at the end of a process.

How are they used with other techniques?

Games and contests are used to educate participants, broaden their thinking, and increase understanding of an issue, plan, or program.

Agencies also use games and contests as ice-breakers at meetings. They supplement other techniques and enliven staid processes that rely on passive meetings.

Games can be used in mediation. They can also be part of special events, such as transportation fairs. Portland, OR held a transportation fair that offered board games and computer games for children, some in a separate room with supervision so parents could participate in the fair and allow their children to play and learn.

Contest announcements should be included in newsletters, handouts, and other written materials.

What are the drawbacks?

Poorly designed games will not generate usable public input. Some games do not appeal to most of the desired audience. Overly complicated or detailed contests only draw people who are already involved and interested. If games or contests are not linked to other involvement activities or if their goals are not clear, participants will feel let-down and frustrated. Games are viewed as frivolous if they are not integrated well into a complete process for meaningful public involvement.

Games and contests do not interest everyone. Certain members of the community may interpret playing games as trivializing the issues and talking down to them. Agencies can avoid this perception by making sure the game relates clearly to the situation at hand and the goals of using it are explained up-front.

Games and contests can be expensive in terms of staff or consultant time. Games are sometimes quite elaborate or expensive and may require high-end hardware, software, or other equipment not normally available for community meetings.

When are games and contests used most effectively?

Games and contests are useful for attracting attention and participation at the beginning of a process. A computer simulation modeling game was used in Hawaii to test different assumptions about energy use, the economy, and various policy decisions.

Games and contests help enliven or sustain interest in a plan or project. To maximize initial effort and subsequent follow-through, MBTA publicized its new cross-town bus service and announced a six-month design contest for logos. Contest entries were later displayed in buses and trains.

Interacting During Meetings

Active Listening[23] [24]

What is active listening?

Active listening is one technique that agency staff can use during meetings to encourage members of the public to express their opinions and thoughts on where their transportation system is headed. Active listening can bolster trust between agencies and the public. When people feel like they are being listened to they are more likely to participate in transportation planning.

Agency staff should keep the following points in mind when using active listening:

- **Tiredness**. Active listening may not seem like it takes energy, but it actually takes a great deal of attention. Active listening should make the listener tired.
- **Posture**. Shifting positions can help the listener resist becoming tired, but staff should be aware

[23] http://transportation.ky.gov/Public-Involvement-Toolbox/Pages/Active-Listening.aspx

[24] http://www.epa.gov/ciconference/previous/2007/2007_presentations/wednesday/230pm/wenska_difficult_people.pdf

of their posture and avoid slouching and other body language that may make the speaker think staff are not listening.

- **Practice and patience**. It takes time to become an excellent active listener. The more that agency staff consciously listen the better they will be at engaging the public and eliciting feedback that will lead to the best transportation outcomes.

How do agency staff actively listen?

Agency staff can use the following tips to actively listen when interacting with the public:

- **Focus on the speaker**. Establish eye contact. Use non-verbal facial expressions to indicate that you are listening. According to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet guide on active listening, "to paraphrase an old saying, good listeners are like poor boxers: they lead with their faces."
- **Use receptive language**. Encourage the speaker's train of thought by using receptive language such as "I see."
- **Key words**. Keep attuned to key words. The listener should mentally gather, sort, sift, evaluate, synthesize, and order the information he or she is receiving.
- **Inquire.** Test your understanding by asking open-ended questions.
- **Acknowledge.** Listen for underlying feelings of the other person and reflect them back
- **Paraphrase and Respond**. Summarize back to the speaker what he or she has said to verify that the information was understood correctly. Ask questions to clarify, but do not ask leading questions and avoid giving personal opinions.

When should agency staff use active listening?

Public involvement activities—whether interviews, workshops, or presentations—require good listening skills. Project leaders and other staff should practice simply being a willing receiver and gatherer of information before interpreting or reacting to that information. Agency staff should avoid inserting personal opinions. Many community members will have a need to be heard and to feel understood, especially during controversial projects. Some level of active listening is often needed throughout a project lifecycle. Active listening is especially important whenever an agency is seeking information or feedback from the community.

Distractions, attitudes, or personal biases can often interfere with the ability to clearly hear and understand what someone is saying. Listeners should avoid deciding outcomes and how they feel while a speaker is explaining a thought. *Judgmental awareness*—when a listener draws conclusions before a community member has finished speaking—can prevent a listener from understanding alternatives to their own point of view. *Non-judgmental awareness* is about being open to different and new ideas.[25]

What are the drawbacks?

There are few drawbacks to practicing active listening, although active listening responses are not appropriate when agency staff are asked for their professional opinion, advice, or direction.

[25] http://transportation.ky.gov/public-involvement-toolbox/Pages/default.aspx

For more information

Please see the Active Listening website from Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Neutralizing Hostile Questions

Agency staff will find themselves in confrontational situations during transportation planning. Each segment of the community that an agency serves will react differently to transportation proposals. The following tips can help neutralize hostile questions and environments:

- **Root causes**. Agency staff can stay calm and in control by keeping in mind that there is likely a legitimate concern beneath hostile questions and trying to steer conversations toward those root concerns.
- **Reframing a message**. One way that agency staff can get to root causes is to reframe a message. Every question has an implicit message or theme. A question may catch agency staff off guard, either because it is controversial or because it is seemingly off topic. Agency staff should ask follow up questions that target underlying issues, refocus the conversation, and must avoid being affected by their own emotions in the moment.
- **Empathy**. Hostile situations can be neutralized by acknowledging a speaker's frustration, maintaining eye contact, giving answers in a calm, careful, and thoughtful way, and asking questions that help understand the speaker's point of view.
- **Understanding roles**. Agency staff should remember that they are representatives of the agency they serve. Hostility may seem personal but it is often directed toward the agency as a whole, not an individual representative.

For more information

Please see the Institute for Participatory Management & Planning and the Presenting Information at Public Meetings webpage from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Changing a Meeting Approach

Situation Assessments

Agencies can use a situation assessment to understand the needs and conditions of a project and stakeholder community to help design an effective public participation process.[26]

The core of a situation assessment is gathering information to determine the public participation techniques that are feasible and most appropriate for given circumstances.

At the conclusion of a situation assessment, an agency should have enough information to determine the level of public participation for a project or decision and to design the public participation process.

[26] http://www2.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-situation-assessments

A situation assessment consists of two phases:

- **Phase 1** revolves around the internal assessment, which clarifies the need for public participation and the agency's expectations about the appropriate level of public participation.
- **Phase 2** is the external assessment, which identifies segments of the public that should be engaged and provides insight on how the public perceives the issue that will be addressed.

What should agencies do with the results?

Situation assessment results should provide agencies with enough information to determine an appropriate level of public participation and recommend a design or plan for a public participation process.

If an agency and the public have very different understandings of the problem or issues being addressed, then it is unlikely that the situation assessment will produce a sustainable decision. It is difficult to agree on a decision or solution when parties do not agree on the problem. If those initial barriers exist then more work may be required to frame the problem in a mutually acceptable way and align public participation expectations.

Improving Meeting Attendance

How can agencies improve meeting attendance?

For many agencies it can be challenging—even daunting—to get people to attend meetings. Often, despite an agency's concerted efforts, people simply do not come, and the level of effort does not seem to justify the results. Low attendance is especially common for State and MPO planning activities that do not focus on specific project details.

The first step toward more public involvement is to understand why people are not participating. Transportation agencies hear numerous reasons from people about low turnout at meetings, including the following:

- They are not aware a meeting is taking place.
- They receive inadequate notice.
- They have other commitments.
- They have a negative perception of the sponsoring agency.
- Public comments are not taken seriously.
- Decisions have already been made behind closed doors.
- Meetings are too time-consuming or boring.
- Meeting sites are too far away, inconvenient, or inaccessible.

The fundamental way an agency can improve turnout is to make public input count in decisionmaking—to *walk the talk*—and to let people know that expressing their opinions has a real, tangible effect. People participate when an agency offers meaningful opportunities, plans strategies and logistics carefully, and has a history of using the output to make better plans and projects.

Why should agencies strive for high attendance ?

High meeting attendance ensures a broad range of input, which lets staff identify additional issues and understand diverse perspectives. The more inclusive the process, the greater its credibility—and the more likely that it will produce usable input.

Broad participation from the beginning of a process aids consensus-building at its end. When people are instrumental in shaping the vision for a project or plan and have been involved in working through issues and alternatives, they are more likely to support the final results.

What are the main keys to success?

Agency staff must be positive and responsive. This is reflected in the level of care, attention, clarity, sincerity, and honesty its staff displays in contacts with the public. Outreach efforts before, during, and after meetings are opportunities to assert a positive attitude and improve rapport with the public.

It should be stressed that an agency should involve the public because the community's input is valued and useful. A New Jersey Transit employee said, "it's not something we have to do, but rather something we want to do—to ensure that our services and products meet the public's expectations, to serve as a quality check on our performance, and to help us find answers and set priorities." The public will detect when an agency is engaging in public involvement simply because it is required to do so.

Equally important is an agency's record translating community input into real decisions. The National Resource and Defense Council advises that people will not attend meetings if they perceive that their views will not be heard. Many agencies confirm this. When the MPO serving Portland, OR attracted more than 300 participants to a series of outreach meetings, it attributed the success to a, "track record of credibility."

Careful advance planning is crucial. Good organization assures people that their time is not wasted and that the agency has a strong handle on what needs to be accomplished. Agencies can improve meeting attendance with the following methods:

- **Clearly define the purpose** of a meeting, how it relates to the overall public involvement program and the larger transportation planning or project development effort, and how the results will be used.

- Decide whether a meeting will **emphasize information or interaction** and explore options within these approaches. Estimate the number of participants and consider break-out groups if a large audience is expected.

- **Identify desired participants** and their particular needs. Factors such as familiarity with the plan or project, the degree of sophistication, and the ability to understand English all affect meeting planning. Determine which staff members and resource people need to take part and what their roles will be.

- **Have clear agendas**, including the purpose, discussion topics, types of activities, names of speakers, and overall schedule.

- Set meeting times and locations that **make it easy for people to participate**—for instance, after work hours, in convenient neighborhood locations and comfortable settings conducive to interaction. Participants can be consulted beforehand about what times or dates are preferable.

- Prepare and coordinate meeting materials with the **appropriate technicality** and type of information. Allow ample time for writing, editing, printing, and collating. Good visuals convey principal points, aid audience understanding of a plan or project, and encourage people to ask questions.

- Provide **notice well in advance** of a meeting so that constituents can set aside time in their schedule for preparation and attendance. E-mailed and mailed invitations, as well as invitations on social media, can serve as a save-the-date card.

What else helps increase attendance?

Agencies can ask community groups about what issues to raise and what meeting dates and places are likely to draw people to participate to determine an appropriate format based on the community's traditions or preferences. This is particularly crucial when the community has minorities and ethnic groups whose cultural attitudes strongly influence how they participate in public processes. Agencies that offer a variety of formats attract more participants and show that they intend to make it easy for the community to participate in transportation planning.

Agencies are experimenting with a broad range of strategies and approaches to attract more participants and make the public involvement process more meaningful and productive. The following are some of their most successful ideas:

- **Follow up** a meeting notice by email, mail, or phone to ensure that notice has been received and to stress the importance of attendance and input.

- **Survey** communication preferences to find out what works best for the community. One size does not fit all. The Missouri DOT conducted a statewide survey asking, "How can we best communicate with you?" Results indicated that newsletters worked best for this audience.

- **Focus** each meeting on a special issue. If community members clearly see how the specific issue affects their lives, they more readily attend meetings.

- Use publications put out by other agencies and groups to announce meetings. **Sharing resources** helps agencies reach a variety of potential participants cost-effectively.

- List meetings in a **calendar of events**. A little research can uncover numerous places where people look for information—for instance, in weekly calendars in local newspapers or on local news websites, or on public access television channels that offer community bulletin boards.

- Engage support through **local schools**. Most parents give thoughtful consideration to materials they receive through their children's school.

- Stir interest with **name recognition**. The more people see an attractive logo or easily-identifiable symbol or slogan, the more likely they are to be curious about what's behind it.

- Establish **information networks**. Word of mouth is a powerful tool. Houston's transit agency uses leadership groups of residents and businesses that take direct responsibility for informing other people about transportation issues and meetings.

- Offer low-cost **meeting perks**, from transportation to child care and entertainment for children.

- Offer **alternative modes** of participating for individuals constrained by time or distance, such as teleconferences or dialing in.

- Feature **well-known experts** or political candidates. If well-publicized, the presence of prominent people enhances attendance.

- Feature agency board or staff members as **guest speakers**. The active interest of high-level staff demonstrates the value an agency places on public input.

- **Evaluate** outreach efforts after a meeting. Determining what worked and what didn't helps assure that future meetings will be more effective. When participants see that the agency has improved its process, their enthusiasm is renewed.

- **Maintain interest** through follow-up. When people know their presence has been appreciated, they are more inclined to continue with the process. Follow-up includes social media posts, reports, phone calls, surveys, and new information. For invited participants, courtesy dictates a thank-you note. Written responses are also appropriate to follow up unanswered questions or unresolved issues.

- Target **key individuals** to invite to upcoming meetings. Participants who are active in the community should be encouraged to attend and bring neighbors.

- Court **press coverage** and establish good media relations. Agency community relations staff usually knows which reporters cover transportation issues. Feeding these reporters choice bits of news and keeping them up-to-date helps assure they will cover the story well and in a timely fashion. On the other hand, agencies should avoid blanketing them with material. Good relations with radio reporters can also lead to segments that serve as a cost-effective alternative to reach broad segments of the public.

- **Paid advertisements**, public service announcements, and spot interviews can make more people aware of a transportation effort and call attention to upcoming meetings.

Who leads the effort?

Agency staff develop strategies and techniques for improving attendance and tailor their approach to meet community needs as well as the project's particular demands.

Community leaders or elected officials can suggest what works best in their communities, advise strategies, and put agencies in touch with others who can improve outreach. Agency credibility is often improved when a community leader conducts a meeting or introduces agency staff.

Professional facilitators foster a fair, neutral atmosphere. For complex or controversial issues, facilitators help attract people who doubt they will otherwise be heard. They also contribute innovative ideas on how to increase public participation.

What are the costs?

Costs depend on the number of people an agency needs to reach and the community's past involvement with agency programs. Direct expenses include ads, graphics, visuals, mailings, translators if necessary, facility rental, and equipment. Staff costs are incurred to plan and implement a program, monitor progress, and make required adjustments. Costs may be significantly less for outreach to a community that has a well-established relationship with the agency.

What are the drawbacks?

Agencies that lack a track record in participatory planning sometimes have difficulty establishing a process and convincing the public that efforts are sincere. Agencies that previously made token efforts without using public input to improve their plans or projects may find it doubly hard to engage the community. A reputation for an honest commitment to involving the public is only built over time.

Preparations to increase meeting attendance are time-consuming. There may be few staff available who are savvy about engaging the community. A trial-and-error period is sometimes needed to determine what works. Agency inaction, errors, and poor planning compound the difficulties of establishing credibility.

Site Visits

What are site visits?

Site visits are trips that community members, officials, agencies, and consultants take to proposed or actual project areas, corridors, impacted areas, or affected properties. They are also known as field visits or site tours.

Why are they useful?

Site visits show the physical context of a proposal. They are an opportunity for community members to show engineers and other agency staff details and conditions they might have missed. Site visits also help get people to participate who normally would not be involved or may be uncomfortable working with agencies. Engineers and other staff find an informal, risk-free opportunity to communicate with the community.

Site visits improve media coverage and accuracy of reporting, on occasions when the media are involved. A reporter who devotes several hours to a site visit is more likely to understand and write clearly about complex, subtle issues and planning details.

Do they have special uses?

Site visits can help people understand a particular technology. Visits are made on buses, transit lines, roads, or other forms of transportation to illustrate the operations, problems, and advantages of a specific mode.

Site visits can address new questions. Participants helping to develop the Central Artery North Area project in Boston’s Charlestown neighborhood had difficulty understanding the dimensions of a park proposed for the top of a depressed highway. Going to the site on a low-traffic morning, agency staff used chalk to outline the proposed new parcel. With a rooftop view of the outlined space, participants were able to appreciate the new park’s size. The local newspaper carried a feature on the visit to help the community grasp the enormity of the parcel.

Site visits may be organized as tours. Bus or train tours may be an appropriate way to include a large group. In special instances, air tours are useful. For people unable to attend, a video tour is a good alternative.

Site visits can also be organized at locations similar to the proposed site. Cities contemplating new rail systems have sent delegations to cities where such systems already exist. During these visits, meetings were arranged between the delegation and agency officials, community members, and the business community.

Who participates?

Anyone can participate as long as the site is accessible. Site visits are sometimes targeted to advisory committee representatives, elected officials, neighborhood activists and local residents, environmentalists, or the business community, but people from the disability community may find site visits difficult.

Site visits help local people make a particular point about a proposal, especially if they feel the agency does not understand the point. Sioux City, IA, kicked off a long-term transportation plan with a citywide bus tour for its Task Force to get overview of the physical attributes of the city. Task Force members saw issues in all parts of the city. Agency staff thought the trip was invaluable tool to hear local concerns.

Information about site visits is widely distributed to potential participants through many media. Notices are mailed to active participants and are published in local newspapers and on social media, or on signs in local stores or activity centers.

Special invitations help draw specific participants. An agency may target certain people because of their concerns or issues. In these instances, a special written invitation or phone call helps ensure that those individuals attend the site visit. A follow-up letter or notice also helps draw special participants.

How do agencies use site visits?

Agencies use site visits to better understand the physical environment, make better-informed decisions, and clarify conflicting positions on particular physical points, such as sources of background noise levels or distances between buildings and proposed tracks. Inviting media representatives on site visits results in better-informed reporting and editorializing.

Who leads site visits?

Site visits must be led by experienced, knowledgeable staff who know the area and the issues. Staff must communicate the issues in a non-judgmental, open-minded way that invites participation.

A community representative can help lead a site visit. This leader should not be biased or present only one segment of the community. Community groups have different perspectives, and bias can be divisive.

A high-up agency official or an elected official may lead a site visit, particularly for high-profile, controversial projects. Community members may feel that top officials are the most appropriate leaders for such projects.

What are the costs?

Costs vary. Transportation costs are high for long-distance visits that require extensive arrangements. Costs were a significant factor when community representatives from Burlington, VT, along with agency staff, considered traveling by air to see the light rail in Portland, OR.

Staff time will vary. Staff time costs are relatively low for local site visits but could involve several days for distant trips.

Agencies can provide food, especially if the visit is lengthy or if there will be extended discussion. Light snacks and beverages convey an informal message and encourage people to stay and ask questions.

How are site visits organized?

Agency staff contact community leaders to see if there is interest in a site visit. If there is, staff should ask for names of potential invitees and compile an invitation list. If the list is short, the agency can ask invitees if they feel comfortable opening the visit to a wider audience by listing it in local newspapers, posting notices in public places, or sending a notice to an entire mailing list.

Community members can ask an agency to conduct a site visit. Agency staff should pinpoint goals of the visit, agency personnel who should be present, and others who should attend. It is important to work together in setting an appropriate date, time, and other logistics to demonstrate cooperation and assure participation.

Site visits are held at convenient times, such as evenings or weekends. These times should be selected in conjunction with the community. They should also be selected so that site conditions are not obscured by equipment or bad lighting. It is preferable to hold a site visit during the time the site is most active or when the site represents a condition that people are concerned about.

A meeting can be added to a site visit if the logistics work. It is helpful to discuss what people saw while impressions are fresh. A formal meeting on-site requires detailed planning. Chairs, lighting, and weather must be considered. If an agency wants an on-site meeting, it should get agreement from the community.

Descriptive materials are provided before the visit, including a summary of the proposal, the purpose of the visit, and specific characteristics to look for. Maps and materials may be needed to explain major elements of the proposal.

Generally, participants gather in one location and leave together for the site. Occasionally, participants gather at the site itself. A definite arrival time is set, since an opening explanation is crucial and helps the group work together; the informality of learning together helps break down factions within the group.

The organizer of the visit may also lead it. It can be conducted as a walk or drive around the site. The visit should be narrated, so that participants are aware of where the proposal affects the land. Time should be allowed for discussion of each area and for a question-and-answer during and at the end of the site visit.

Summaries should be put together promptly. Participants may gather and discuss what they experienced.

A written record should be prepared, including a list of participants, items to investigate further, and areas in which there was agreement and disagreement.

How are site visits used with other techniques?

CACs are good candidates for site visits. The San Francisco Citizens’ Planning Committee took site visits to joint developments in other communities. During a Hudson waterfront transit alternatives analysis in New Jersey, CAC members toured potential air quality monitoring sites.

A site visit can be a first step in another technique, such as a charrette. Computer simulations are more

accurate and credible if they include information gathered during site visits.
Site visits that include news media are important to a successful media strategy. Newsletter articles highlighting site visits and incorporating photos and diagrams can demonstrate that an agency is committed to public involvement.

What are the drawbacks?

Organizing a visit and getting appropriate people there can be logistically challenging. Coordinating schedules, weather, and transportation requires considerable effort and staff time.

An agency may organize several site visits for large projects. Despite careful planning, a site visit may fall flat due to weather or other conditions over which the staff has no control. A trip to a proposed site may cause participants to recall the site incorrectly later if it is viewed on a day when there is poor weather or if part of the site is inaccessible.

A site visit will fail if staff cannot answer questions or are poorly prepared. Community members will feel they have wasted their time if agency staff are not listening or are defensive.

The costs of a visit to a distant location are often prohibitive. Airplane, train, or bus group travel to other cities may be beyond an agency's budget.

Non-Traditional Meeting Places and Events

What are non-traditional meeting places and events?

Non-traditional meeting places and event locations are sites that are not the usual meeting halls or public buildings where many participation efforts are held. Non-traditional options may include shopping centers, drop-in centers for the elder community, county fairs, neighborhood fairs and block parties, and sporting events. To reach people who don't typically participate, agencies need to go to where communities congregate and feel comfortable—in other words, to their own turf.

Many non-traditional meeting places give an agency a wide range of public contact. When these meeting site options are used, community access is easier and the public's interest is heightened. By choosing non-traditional community locations and events, an agency shows its sincere interest in involving community people and tailoring participation opportunities to their needs.

Why are they useful?

Non-traditional locations help agencies increase attendance. Sites may be physical locations or events open to the public. Transportation agencies have used the following non-traditional locations and events to attract new and different participants to the transportation planning process:

- **Shopping malls** attract large numbers of people. Activities can include videos, mini-focus groups, children's activities, and presentations.

- **Agricultural fairs** are good locations for exhibits. Agencies may use interactive video games and take an overall educational approach to issues of air quality, congestion, and alternative modes.

- **Neighborhood fairs** and events are effective venues to distribute information. Displays or mini-meetings may be held in conjunction with career days, block parties, house meetings, bus trips, or local community festivities.

- **Sporting events** are good places to meet and talk with people. As part of a planning study the Missouri Highway and Transportation Agency set up displays at a football game. People were encouraged to stop by, ask questions, and fill out a survey form.

- Centrally-located, convenient **community centers** may be used to distribute agency information. Local libraries are a good place for viewing displays and can be used, along with websites, to make project environmental documents available. Public parks have been used for large meetings and for events where transportation agency staff and the public can interact.

Agencies receive a wider array of comments from more people when they pursue non-traditional meeting places. With greater community awareness about a new process, more people are encouraged to participate in related meetings.

New approaches to public involvement enhance an agency's credibility. The community benefits when planning and project development meetings are held at local sites at convenient times, since many people may not be free to attend meetings during business hours.

Sites or events that attract large numbers of people are especially effective. By going to where people congregate in large numbers, an agency takes advantage of a pre-existing audience. Non-traditional sites draw crowds that a public meeting rarely does. Shopping centers attract people in such numbers that an agency may not need to publicize its presence.

Do they have special uses?

Using project sites for meetings helps the public understand technical issues. A visit to a project location or a tour of an alignment provides first-hand experience to help people envision a plan or project.

Non-traditional sites help an agency reach specific target groups. The Kansas DOT met at local sites for regional meetings with business and industry as it developed its long-range plan. The Maricopa Association of Governments in Phoenix developed two types of meetings at local sites, one for business and key community leaders and the other for the general public.

Meetings can be focused on specific modes. The Regional Transit District in Denver invited people to one planning study meeting held on a trolley. During a planning study in Miami, the Florida DOT invited elementary and middle-school students to tour the existing system and encourage their parents to participate in decisionmaking by attending meetings.

Who participates?

The public is usually invited to participate informally. At a booth or display, the public can view exhibits or talk to a staff person. At a project site, people get information from the surroundings as well as from agency displays, brochures, and presentations. Depending on the location and the type of meeting or display, the public can provide comments.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies need to consider how to document comments. Comments recorded in writing by participants or staff bring new insights or considerations to a plan or project. But the informality of the situation may make it difficult for passers-by to write their comments, particularly if they have children with them or if there is no convenient place to sit and write. In such cases, recording oral comments for later transcription is one option. Another is providing comment forms that can be filled out at home and mailed.

Who leads?

Agency staff people are most likely to lead non-traditional events. If informal presentations are required, agency staff or consultants may handle them.

Community residents can lead and assist agencies with non-traditional events. Familiar neighborhood faces encourage neighbors to ask questions and participate. Community members can work with agency personnel to staff exhibits.

What do they cost?

Costs vary. Labor-intensive events are expensive. One-day events may require two agency representatives to staff a booth and field questions from community residents. But, costs can climb for lengthy events such as State fairs.

Although it is useful for staff to be on hand, they are necessary only if large crowds or many questions are anticipated. If an issue is especially controversial or complex, it is best to have staff accompany the exhibit. Otherwise, the display can include telephone numbers to contact for further information.

Agencies will incur varied operational costs, including staff time, space rentals, equipment, event scheduling, graphics, advertising, and producing and playing videos. For bus tours, there may be rental fees.

How are they organized?

An agency's public involvement goals and brainstorming can help determine the site and format. Community leaders and groups with experience at particular sites can provide valuable advice.

Sites that are open at convenient hours raise attendance. Non-traditional times for meetings may help people schedule time to attend. Evening or weekend hours are frequently offered for people who are unable to attend meetings or exhibits during regular working hours or weekdays. Agencies can also increase participation by informing the local media of an event and its schedule.

A variety of methods are available to use in unconventional sites, including the following:

- **Booths or tables** are used to give and get information. Conversations with staff at booths can clarify agency goals and elicit community comments.

- **Kiosks** also offer a method of giving and getting information. Interactive displays can provide information people may find useful. Displays can also be set up to record comments or survey customer attitudes. Colorado DOT has used interactive touch screens in shopping centers.

- **Props** help stimulate dialogue in non-traditional meeting places. In preparing a long-range transportation plan, the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission used props such as renderings, photos, engineering designs, and videos to help participants visualize scenarios of managed growth, maximized density, and minimized infrastructure development.

- **Videos** may be shown at special sites, with web addresses of their locations online for wider distribution.

- **Portable exhibits** can take the place of staff and still inform the public. These exhibits include boards, photographs, renderings, kiosks, interactive displays, videos, or maps. Portable exhibits are set up in public buildings, malls, or other locations. It is important to find locations where a display can be monitored by security officials, so that it will not be defaced or destroyed.

- **Mobile exhibits** can be mounted inside a vehicle used to travel around a State or region. With permission they can be stationed at nearly any location, including malls, universities, or local public buildings. Arizona DOT uses a mobile facility to inform the public in sparsely-populated areas. The Washington, DC, MPO used a *vision van* to publicize its visioning effort and gather survey information.

Informality helps attract people to agency events or displays in any setting and is particularly important at non-traditional sites. Displays or events that allow one-on-one interaction are less intimidating for people who tend to shy away from meetings in traditional locations.

Technical descriptions are not usually required. Discussing engineering concepts or environmental impacts in plain language can be challenging but an agency will reap the rewards of improved public understanding.

Evaluating the success of unusual events aids future outreach efforts. Agencies need to carefully assess how variable factors such as time of day, location, access by public transportation, or nature of the event affected its impact, so that future planning can capitalize on factors that contributed to success.

How are they used with other techniques?

Non-traditional meetings and exhibits supplement other public involvement programs. Different locations with special props spark new interest in community member who are active, or attract new participants into transportation planning. At new sites, charrettes, focus groups, or visioning may be used as lead-ins to discussing complex issues.

What are the drawbacks?

Staffing can be expensive. Staff and equipment costs climb for long events, such as State fairs that last 10 days or more. Props, videos, and interactive displays require on-site assistance to set up equipment, and popular exhibits, such as train cars, often require extra preparation.

Unusual meeting sites and approaches may be intimidating to potential participants, especially groups not traditionally involved in decisionmaking. Agencies should provide special attention to gain their confidence.

Weather conditions should be factored in when selecting a non-traditional meeting site. The East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission avoids outdoor meetings during the summer when air conditioning is more comfortable.

People may not be interested in interactive displays. One State DOT reported that many people passed by and casually looked at its displays at a State fair, but staff doubted that viewers were really engaged. Agencies need to carefully define objectives when choosing unusual venues and design its presence to accomplish worthwhile aims that justify the costs and the effort.

When are they used most effectively?

Non-traditional meetings are effective when they coincide with other events and meetings, and they are important prior to major milestones. A series of events or exhibits before major decisions on projects or plans garners input from people who may not attend regular community meetings.

Non-traditional meetings also help bring transportation planning to remote populations. People from rural areas may be able to attend non-traditional meetings where traditional meetings may be less accessible. If access for rural people is usually difficult or time-consuming, agencies should offer a range of information at a community site or event, such as a fair.

Selecting an Organizational Feature

Brainstorming

What is brainstorming?

Participants *brainstorm* when they come together in a freethinking forum to generate ideas. When brainstorming is used properly—either alone or in conjunction with other techniques—it can be a highly effective method of moving participants out of conflict and toward consensus.

Brainstorming has the following basic outcomes:

- Generates as many solutions to a problem as possible.
- Lists every idea presented without comment or evaluation.
- Groups and evaluates ideas to reach consensus.
- Prioritizes ideas.

Why is brainstorming useful?

Brainstorming brings new ideas to bear on a problem. The freethinking atmosphere encourages fresh approaches. Brainstorming enhances creativity because individuals are encouraged to bring up all ideas—even those that might appear outrageous. Even imperfectly developed thoughts may jog ideas for other participants.

Problems become more clearly defined as questions arise. Alternatives appear in a new or different perspective. Novel approaches to an issue can arise during the process. Brainstorming gives participants a sense of progress and accomplishment and helps them move onto more difficult tasks.

Who participates?

Anyone can participate in a brainstorming session. Providing background information to participants will encourage them to contribute. Information should be distributed before the session, if possible. Large groups can be divided into small groups to promote full participation.

People participate by bringing their ideas to groups of 6 to 10. All ideas are noted and recorded to reassure participants that their comments are being adequately considered. People can prioritize their ideas by using strips of colored adhesive dots. About seven dots per person works well. Working individually, participants use dots to indicate their preferences. The dots can be divided among several good ideas or concentrated on one idea that is very important. The sheets of paper with dots help identify the top priorities. Distributing meeting notes encourages participation in future efforts.

How do agencies use the output?

Through brainstorming agencies become aware of issues, problems, and detailed solutions that might not otherwise come to light. New ideas directly from stakeholders help agencies craft compromise positions and set priorities.

Who leads a brainstorming session?

Brainstorming needs a facilitator or moderator from within the group, agency staff, or an outside firm. The group leader can be an individual on an existing staff, but a person experienced in facilitating the technique is preferable. Facilitators must be sensitive to group dynamics and be able to draw statements and positions from participants in an affable way. They must assure that all participants are heard and that civility is maintained. Agency staff can help groups that are having difficulties with the process.

What are the costs?

Brainstorming is inexpensive. Depending on the issue to be discussed or the degree of anticipated conflict, an outside consultant may be a desirable addition.

Material needs are minimal. A quiet room is essential. Materials should be on hand to provide data and background information. This information need not be overly detailed, but questions are sure to arise. Potential materials include the following:

- Large sheets of paper, with markers to record ideas.
- Boards to display applicable data.
- Large, visible maps.
- Overlays to allow sketching on maps.
- Adhesive dots.

How is brainstorming organized?

Successful brainstorming happens because of careful management. Agency staff needs are minimal but may include a facilitator and probably an assistant for managing charts and recording ideas. Resource people should be available to answer questions.

To plan a brainstorming session agency staff will need to define the precise issue being addressed, identify potential participants, decide on the process and schedule to be followed, and determine anticipated outcomes of the session so that participants know the scope and stakes involved. It is also important to detail for participants how the agency expects to use the results.

Effective brainstorming sessions are small—6 to 10 people. If the group is too small, participants are not stimulated to generate ideas; if it is too large, the more vocal few may dominate the meeting.

Brainstorming usually follows a simple agenda similar to the following:

- Introductions with brief outlines of participants' backgrounds.
- Discussion of the brainstorming process and how it fits into the overall process.
- Generation of ideas, listed without evaluation or criticism.
- Clarifying and explaining ideas, as required.
- Review, grouping, and eliminating redundant ideas.
- Prioritization.
- Presentation of each group's results by the moderator to the larger group.

How is it used with other techniques?

Brainstorming is always a part of a larger process. It is frequently used when an agency is starting a lengthy or complex undertaking. It can be part of a focus group—to open discussion and introduce participants; it can be part of a charrette—to establish the points of view of participants; it can be used in civic advisory committees—to establish a consensus on a project; and it can be used in public meetings.

What are the drawbacks?

Facilitation can pose unique challenges. A single questioner can disrupt proceedings by continuously raising questions and suspicions about the motivations of participants or sponsors. Unassertive participants may be neglected without active solicitation of their participation. Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas.

Unspoken attitudes may affect results. Individual participants who feel diverted from more apparently purposeful tasks become impatient if they feel the process is a waste of time. It is essential to focus brainstorming on issues that make sense to the participants and to clearly explain how the results will be used. People who feel they are being controlled or patronized often withdraw from full participation. Agency staff members who feel that the process is unproductive may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

Charrettes

What is a charrette?

A charrette is a meeting called to resolve a particular problem or issue. Within a specified time limit, participants work intensely to reach a resolution. The sponsoring agency usually sets goals and time limits. A leader is appointed who is responsible for bringing out all points of view from concerned local residents as well as agency representatives and experts.

A charrette usually includes the following components:

- Definition of issues to be resolved.
- Analysis of the problem and alternative approaches to solutions.
- Assignment of small groups to clarify issues.
- Use of staff people to find supporting data.
- Development of proposals to respond to issues.
- Development of alternative solutions.
- Presentation and analysis of final proposals.
- Consensus and final resolution of the approach to be taken.

Why are they useful?

Charrettes are problem-oriented. The breadth of background of participants assures full discussion of issues, interrelationships, and impacts. Its time limits challenge people to rapidly, openly, and honestly examine a problem and help potential adversaries reach consensus on an appropriate solution. For example, charrettes were used to formulate alternatives to a controversial highway project in Knoxville, Tennessee, and a downtown plan for Jacksonville, Florida, by guiding business and civic leaders and neighborhood people to a recommended solution.

Charrettes produce visible results. They are often used early in a planning process to provide useful ideas and perspectives from concerned interest groups. Mid-process, charrettes help resolve sticky issues. Late in the process, they are useful for overcoming impasses.

Charrettes encourage the public to participate in transportation planning and reduce feelings of alienation from the government. They let the public to ask questions before decisions are made. They supplement, but do not replace, other public involvement tools.

Do charrettes have special uses?

Charrettes generate alternative solutions to problems. The format encourages openness and creativity. All suggestions from the group—however outrageous—should be examined to encourage thinking about better approaches.

Who participates?

Anyone can participate in a charrette. A wide range of people with differing interests should attend. Traditional participants represent organized groups, but individuals with any stake in the issue should be encouraged to attend.

How people participate depends on the charrette leader. An experienced leader will assure that a range of views are heard. The leader invites people to take a stance and present their points of view. All participants are assured an opportunity to speak out, and the leader encourages even the most reticent participants to speak up without fear of rebuke or ridicule. The open, free-wheeling charrette format encourages enthusiasm and responses.

How do agencies use the output?

Charrettes sharpen an agency's understanding of the perspectives of interest groups. Early in project formulation charrettes provide a glimpse of potentially competing demands, can be a barometer of the potential for consensus, identify issues, and generate alternatives.

Who leads a charrette?

Charrettes must have a leader experienced in the technique. The leader must be disciplined to keep participants focused and should be familiar with group dynamics and the substantive issues the group faces. The leader tailors the setting, background materials, and issues to the goal of the charrette and elicits participation from all group members within the allotted time. One or two staff people should be available to support the leader and supply data and information.

A steering committee usually makes arrangements for a charrette. It may be composed of representatives of Federal and State transportation or other agencies, consultants, affected municipalities, and community groups. The steering committee should agree on a leader for a charrette.

What are the costs?

Charrettes require sufficient space, background materials, and an experienced leader. Graphics must be available so participants can quickly comprehend problems and envision alternative solutions. Background materials must be available at the start of the charrette so that no time is lost explaining the problem. Preparatory work leading to a charrette is intensive, whether done in-house or by an outside specialist.

The following staff should be available for a charrette:

- A leader experienced in the charrette technique.
- Staffers who understand the derivation and use of the data.
- Staffers who have worked on the problem.
- Staffers who have worked with applicable policy.

The following materials can be produced for a charrette:

- Large maps.
- Overlays to allow sketching on maps.
- Boards to display applicable data.
- Large paper and markers to record ideas.
- Photographs of sites.
- Handouts of basic goals, time limits, and meeting ground rules.
- Printed background information and data.

How are charrettes organized?

Organization depends on the complexity of the issue being tackled and the length of the event. The following organizational components are needed for a successful charrette:

- Agreement on the process.
- Agreement on timing.
- Determining potential participants.
- Finding an experienced charrette leader.
- Managing special funding, if required.
- Seeking out resource people.
- Sending invitations and background material well in advance.
- Finding an appropriate space for meeting.
- Handling required publicity.
- Setting up space to encourage informal discussion.
- Portraying issues clearly, verbally and with graphics.

Are charrettes flexible?

A minimum of four hours is essential for a charrette focused on a modestly complex problem. While the average charrette ranges from one to several days, some agencies hold one- and two-week charrettes or organize them as multiple sessions over a period of time.

Charrettes can be arranged any time during a planning process, but preparation is crucial. Advance work can take a month or more, depending on the focus issue. Charrette materials should be tailored to the focus of the meeting.

How are they used with other techniques?

Charrettes mesh well with other techniques. When matched with a civic advisory committee, a charrette will be geared toward solving a specific problem. Paired with the visioning process, it is an effective way to elicit ideas. A charrette can also be organized to focus on a single issue raised during brainstorming.

What are the drawbacks?

Because an agency will develop a charrette to focus on a specific problem or issue it is usually a one-time event. Invitations and timing must be thoroughly considered and discussed to maximize interaction and broad participation. Goals must be made clear so expectations do not exceed potential outcomes. The depth of analysis from a single short session can be disappointing. Follow-up work must be carefully considered before and during a charrette.

When are charrettes most effective?

Charrettes are effective when they are used to resolve an impasse. Neutral participants should be invited to bring fresh ideas. When a problem is immediate, a charrette is effective because people are vitally interested in the outcome. For maximum effect, a charrette should have the approval of elected officials, agency heads, and community groups. A charrette is also useful at the following times:

- Early in a project.
- Following a brainstorming session.
- When focus on a single issue is required.
- When a range of potential solutions is needed.

Visioning

What is visioning?

Visioning is a process consisting of meetings that lead to a goals statement. With a 20- to 30-year horizon, visioning sets a strategy for achieving long-term goals.

Priorities and performance standards can also be part of visioning. Priorities are set to identify essential goals. Performance standards allow an evaluation of progress toward goals over time.

Why is it useful?

Visioning offers the widest possible participation for developing a long-range plan. It is democratic in its search for disparate opinions from all stakeholders and directly involves a cross-section of constituents from a State or region in setting a long-term policy agenda. It looks for common ground among participants exploring and advocating strategies for the future. It brings in often-overlooked issues about quality of life. It helps formulate policy direction on public investments and government programs.

Visioning is an integrated approach to policymaking. With overall goals in view it helps avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing problems. It accounts for the relationship between issues, and how a solution may generate other problems or have an impact on another level of government. It is cooperative, with multi-agency involvement, frequently with joint interagency leadership.

Does visioning have special uses?

The visioning process is participatory, generating the ideas that will establish long-range policy. It draws upon deeply-held feelings about the overall direction of public agencies. After openly considering many options visioning generates a single, integrated vision for the future based on the consideration of many people with diverse viewpoints. When completed, it presents a democratically-derived consensus.

Who participates?

Agencies extend invitations to visioning sessions to the general public or to a panel that represents the public's interests. It is essential that agencies broadly distribute information that is presented simply, is attractive, and is relevant and timely. It should also include clear goals of participation and show how comments will be used in the process.

Community residents participate through meetings and surveys. A typical method of involving local people is through a questionnaire format, such as a report card, that seeks comments on issues and future possibilities.

How do agencies use the output?

Through widespread public participation in visioning agencies become aware of issues and problems, different points of view, and competing demands. Drafting responses to comments helps sharpen overall policy and helps focus priorities. Visioning also helps illuminate conflicts and resolve competing priorities.

Who leads a visioning process?

A chief government official can lead visioning. Several State Governors have made visioning a cornerstone of State policy planning for infrastructure investments and State operational departments.

Agencies also lead visioning projects. Statewide agencies led new visioning projects in Maine and Hawaii. Regional agencies led visioning projects in Jacksonville, Indianapolis, and Seattle.

What does visioning cost?

Visioning costs vary. The chief items are staff time and materials to set up and carry out the program. Staff people should include a leader committed to the process, a community participation specialist who is well-versed in the applicable policies, and staffers who can interpret and integrate participants' opinions from surveys and meetings. Meeting materials are minimal but can include large maps, paper pads, and markers to record ideas. Research and preparation can be extensive if information forecasts are developed or if alternative scenarios need to be fleshed out.

How is visioning organized?

Agency staff will develop a vision statement within a set timeframe. The schedule incorporates sufficient time for framing issues, eliciting comments through surveys or meetings, recording statements from participants, and integrating them into draft and final documents. Visioning staff members are typically assigned from existing agencies that are familiar with issues and essential contacts to be maintained.

Is visioning flexible?

Visioning is extremely flexible in terms of scheduling and staff commitments. Scheduling takes weeks or months and staff are temporarily or permanently assigned to the project.

Preparation for visioning is crucial and touches on many complex issues. Advance work is essential to give time for staff to prepare the overall program, agendas, mailing lists, questionnaires, and methods of presentation and follow-up. Visioning programs should be carefully scheduled to allow maximum time for local citizens to provide input and adequate response time before the agency selects final policies.

How is it used with other techniques?

The visioning process encompasses many other public involvement techniques. In the Seattle area, a visioning process on regional growth and mobility futures included the most extensive regional public involvement effort ever conducted there, including symposiums, workshops, newspaper inserts, public hearings, open houses, surveys, and community meetings.

Visioning is often the first step toward other public involvement techniques. As a policy umbrella it can precede establishment of a civic advisory committee and guide a CAC's work in reviewing individual projects or programs. Visioning also leads to brainstorming sessions or charrettes. Visioning is often the basis for public evaluation and implementation; it led to performance monitoring of State agency activities in Oregon, Minnesota, Iowa, and Texas, followed by public reports.

What are the drawbacks?

Visioning requires significant time and staff commitments to maintain contact with numerous community participants and carry the program forward. Listening to participants can consume several months' time. Staff must be committed full-time once the process is in motion.

Staff must have the patience to deal with many diverse views and individuals, time and schedule requirements, and complex issues and interrelationships.

Finally, visioning is a one-time event and remains on a generalized policy level—there is substantial risk that a long-term plan will not satisfy all interest groups if it is based solely on visioning sessions.

When is visioning most effective?

Visioning is most useful early on as an agency establishes or revises policies and goals. It demonstrates openness to new ideas or concepts suggested by the public. A visioning project will be most effective when it is supported by elected officials, agency heads, and community groups.

Visioning is useful for achieving the following outcomes:

- To set the stage for short-range planning activities.
- To set new directions in policy.
- To review existing policy.
- When integration between issues is required.
- When a wide variety of ideas should be heard.
- When a range of potential solutions is needed.

Scenario planning

Scenario planning is an analytical process that can help transportation professionals prepare for next steps in projects and proposals. Scenario planning provides a framework for developing a shared vision for the future by analyzing various forces in the community that affect growth, such as health, transportation, the economy, environmental concerns, and land use. Scenario planning, which can be done at the Statewide level or for metropolitan regions, tests various future alternatives that meet state and community needs. A defining characteristic of successful public sector scenario planning is that it actively involves the public, the business community, and elected officials on a broad scale, educating them about growth trends and trade-offs, and incorporating their values and feedback into future plans.

For more information please refer to the FHWA Scenario Planning Guidebook.

Small group techniques

What are small group techniques?

Small groups are groups with fewer than 20 members. They make it easy for people to actively participate and interact and steer participants toward constructive dialogue. They meet as small gatherings or as break-outs of large meetings and offer opportunities for creative, flexible interchange of ideas and lively, meaningful participation.

Small group techniques have the following basic characteristics:

- Emphasize active participation and interaction.
- Are usually run by a group leader or facilitator.
- Have a task, theme, or goal.
- Help reach consensus or develop priorities.
- Gather a range of ideas, opinions, and concerns.
- Are applied to either planning or project development.
- In a breakout group, a small group task reflects the larger group agenda.
- Report back to a larger group.

The small group techniques discussed here are far from standardized, and their names and execution vary. Some small group techniques overlap. Agencies may settle on a hybrid meeting or process that uses elements from each. The key to using them is to identify the element or structure of a particular technique that addresses the needs of the participants and the goals of the meeting.

Why are small group techniques useful?

Small groups foster interaction between participants. People are encouraged to speak frankly and openly. Ground rules, such as allowing only one person to speak at a time, help level the playing field between participants. Open and fair meeting processes promote give-and-take interaction.

Small groups make a larger meeting more efficient and productive. Break-out groups use various techniques to address a specific issue. Many ideas are brought up in small groups that might not surface in a large gathering. The larger gathering becomes more productive as break-out group findings on specific topics are reported and incorporated.

Small group techniques foster dissemination of information to the broader community. Representatives meet in small sessions, cover issues, and report back to peers, elected officials, constituents and other stakeholders.

Finally, small groups can produce strategies for achieving a larger meeting goal. They help keep conversation on track or establish a step-by-step process for handling discussion and can help develop consensus or an action plan.

Are there special uses?

Small groups can be particularly useful for controversial issues. They provide a non-threatening venue for all sides to express opinions and encourage mutual respect and constructive listening.

Complex issues and concepts receive in-depth explanation and review, and each participant has time to absorb material and ask questions. Participants feel more confident in an analysis if they understand the technical issues and methods involved.

Small group meetings can recharge a participatory process with interesting and different ways of looking at a topic. Disenchanted group members may rejoin the process if they see a way to achieve goals in a new and focused way. To critique and revise its public involvement program, the Central Puget Sound RTA called together 60 community leaders and organized them into small groups to work on specific elements of the program.

How are small groups structured?

The style, format, and organization of small group meetings vary. Some techniques are familiar and regularly used; others are less common. The following are some of the most common ways to organize small groups:

- **Breakout groups** are subdivisions of a larger meeting to deal with specific issues. Small groups meet in separate areas—corners of a large room or several smaller rooms. Each group appoints or elects a discussion leader, and each participant has a chance to express an opinion. After discussion the breakout groups report back to the large meeting.

- **Community juries** consist of individuals impaneled to hear testimony related to a specific issue. Jurors, chosen for their impartiality, hear reviews of an issue by neutral experts. The jury discusses and deliberates and subsequently issues its findings. Always non-binding and with no legal standing, the findings of such juries can pinpoint fatal flaws or gauge public reaction.

- **Roundtables** are meetings, usually around a table, to examine an issue through discussion by all participants. Each participant is a stakeholder, so the issue is debated from many sides. Free discussion and diverse opinions are encouraged. Experts in a field can participate, as can residents, business people, and interest groups. Roundtables are often breakout groups that focus on one or more topics related to an entire issue or project. Seminars and workshops often use a roundtable format, which are distinctive because they emphasize thorough discussion.

- **Seminars** give participants an opportunity to learn about a particular topic and exchange information and viewpoints. A seminar usually focuses on a single topic. Often, a seminar offers a short presentation followed by discussion by a panel or participants. Seminars tend to attract participants who are engaged and knowledgeable.

- **Study circles** are organized around a series of meetings to discuss critical issues. Members are assigned readings and other tasks between meetings. The process is very structured, often using study guides and discussion questions developed by agency staff or a steering committee. Participants discuss each facet of the issue in detail. The same group meets periodically to investigate and debate the issue. Participants are appointed or self-selected.

- **Workshops** are small groups that focus on one or more topics, working intensively over a short period of time.

How do people work in small groups?

Problem-solving strategies are essential for small groups to be effective. Small groups need a specific format or process to achieve the goals of a meeting. The following techniques can be used within the specific meeting structures cited above:

- A **conflict utilization opinionaire** uses survey techniques to explore how individuals deal with conflict. Before addressing a project issue, a group of 8 to 20 people meet and fill out a questionnaire or complete a writing task to express their attitudes about conflict. They then discuss how staff or leaders should deal with it and suggest the best techniques for reaching consensus or understanding.

- **Decision science** is a process of reaching consensus or formulating alternatives. It narrows the focus of discussion to the distinguishing characteristics of various options. A group begins by agreeing on elements that are not in dispute. The group agrees on as many points as possible; for example, “we agree that we should minimize the impact on the agricultural properties,” or, “we think improved access to that abandoned factory will encourage economic development.” Eventually the group reaches points on which they do not agree. Decision science lays a foundation of agreed-upon assumptions so that discussion can target unresolved issues. The technique requires a facilitator to develop the consensus items and organize discussion to resolve an issue or formulate a group of alternatives.

- **Delphi**—also known as *policy delphi*—reaches consensus by asking a small group of experts to give advice. The results can generate further discussion at committee or public meetings. The delphi process begins when an agency distributes questionnaires to a panel of experts and tabulates their responses. Results are sent back to the panelists, who reflect on their colleagues’ opinions and either alter their stances or provide reasons for sticking to their positions. This process is continued until a majority agrees on the basic concepts and elements of a plan.

- **Dialogue facilitation** lets participants speak on deeply-held personal beliefs about an issue. People hold conversations that are outside the bounds of the topic under discussion. Individuals do not know which side of the main issue other people are on. They may eat a meal together and chat about families, interests, and other topics outside of transportation. Participants then discuss the main issue—not as enemies or antagonists, but as individuals. Consensus is not expected. Rather, the goal is to open up communication. Using a principle of family therapy—*you have to live together, so you might as well get along*—dialogue facilitation asks each person to participate in conversation.

- A **nominal group process** refers to several different methods of identifying issues and priorities. One variation uses index cards for participants to record priority issues and other information; the cards are then tallied or analyzed. In another variation, participants generate ideas silently and then list them as a group. They discuss what each idea means and then silently and individually rank the ideas. Another method is to have experts discuss an issue with a small group and prepare suggestions for participants' reactions.

- **Open space** technology is a method of assigning meeting leadership. The Colorado DOT used this method to manage breakout sessions of a large group. Participants introduced a topic or concern, wrote it on a card, and posted it on the wall. Examining the cards to choose a topic, group members signed their names on the card of their choice. Topics with the largest number of names were chosen for discussion groups. People who introduced the topic were responsible for leading a breakout session on it. The Colorado DOT chose issues from these sessions as part of a management review effort.

- A **Samoan circle** only makes vague reference to the Pacific island group called Samoa. In fact, the formal structure began during a land use study in Chicago. A Samoan circle is used to organize discussion of controversial issues or within large groups, instead of holding a free-for-all complaint session. It identifies stakeholders and prioritizes actions or areas of agreement. A Samoan circle has no facilitator, chair, or moderator. Participants are expected to maintain their own discipline. They gather in two concentric circles—an inner circle with a table and four chairs, and an outer circle, with ample walking and aisle space. Everyone begins in the outer circle. The issue is presented, and discussion begins. Those most interested take chairs in the inner circle. Those less interested stay in the outer circle. All are able to move in or out of the center as the discussion flows or topics change. Speakers are not restricted in what they say or how they say it, but they must sit in the inner circle. Someone wishing to speak stands behind a chair; this signals those already in the circle to relinquish their chairs. No outside conversations are allowed and comments are often recorded. Votes from non-speakers can be taken at the end, if desired. To close a meeting, empty seats are taken away one by one until there are no more chairs.

- A **SWOT** (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis takes an analytic approach to a concept or issue it identify strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities the concept will provide, and threats to its success. Using those criteria, the group evaluates chances for success or effectiveness. Priorities are resolved by voting and reaching consensus within the group. In a related technique, force field analysis, a group defines *helping* or *hindering* forces and how they affect the group's objective or discussion.

- **Synetics** can recharge a discussion by diverting it away from the issue being addressed. After discussing an unrelated topic, a group analyzes the dynamics of the side discussion to shed light on interpersonal relationships.

- **Value analysis** helps evaluate alternatives and their consequences in terms of widely-held values in the community. This technique is frequently used in the utilities industry. Participants compute the attractiveness of each alternative, assign points for each value, then total them into composite scores. The technique shows values that are in conflict and what trade-offs might be possible.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies use results to refine plans or projects and move a process forward. Small groups generate information, ideas, and opinions. Small groups are a way to achieve consensus.

Small groups can spur creative solutions or new ideas and scenarios. In a small group session in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, a local resident architect sketched out a bold idea that became the conceptual design for a major roadway reconstruction. Small groups foster further interaction between agencies and the public, often with a heightened level of trust.

Who leads small groups?

Agency staff, outside experts, or community members can lead small groups, but leaders must be trained.

A neutral outside facilitator is important for small groups dealing with difficult issues. Some agencies offer training for local residents in leading discussions; others use outside experts. In Wilson, North Carolina, a local bank donated the time and expertise of several senior staff members to supplement agency managers. Working on the county's strategic planning and visioning process, the bank staff helped facilitate breakout groups focused on specific transportation topics.

Small groups usually have one or two leaders. Co-leaders are chosen from opposing sides of an issue to make sure all positions are adequately heard. This is important when there is no single group leader who is viewed as neutral or objective on the issue being discussed.

Leadership choices depend on the complexity of the small group technique. It is important to have an experienced leader when an agency attempts to use a specialized technique.

What do small group techniques cost?

The costs of running a small group are minimal but staff time for preparation and management is sometimes considerable. Participants need time to report back to a larger group or to the agency. In some instances, agency staff, and their associated costs, are needed to facilitate small groups.

Training improves productivity and leads to fewer meetings, offsetting total costs to some extent. An alternative is to retain consultants to manage small group sessions. Also, with minimal training, participants can play other roles that help cut outside costs, acting as recorders or reporters or in other support roles. These roles reduce the need for staff effort.

Meeting facilities become a cost when a neutral location is needed. To contain costs, publicly-owned facilities such as schools or colleges should be considered.

Costs for equipment, supplies, and refreshments are usually modest. Adequate provisions engender good will between a sponsoring agency and group participants.

How are they organized?

Agencies should solicit opinions, develop action items, and evaluate alternatives, while participants should explore impacts, suggest alternative actions, and make their voices heard. To remedy low attendance at large regional forums, the New Jersey DOT sent staff to hear from communities about its long-range plan. Small groups met on Saturday afternoons in senior centers, colleges, and center-city neighborhoods.

Participants will produce positive results if they feel that a meeting is well-structured. Audiovisual techniques—video, overheads, displays, laptops—are just as important in small groups as in large meetings, particularly when technical information or concepts are being discussed. They help engage participants, grab their attention, and establish a tone that will encourage participation. Meetings should be dynamic, fun, and interesting for participants. There must be a method of summarizing, documenting, and reporting findings and agreements beforehand. Even a large meeting that is not well-attended can produce results when participants work in small groups to focus on specific issues or tasks.

The process must be fair and open. All participants need to have equal roles and be treated as peers. A group must be as inclusive of as many points of view as possible. Potential interests and stakeholders must be identified before assembling a small group, so that no one is ignored. If a large number of interests are represented, agencies often hold more than one small group session.

A method for selecting leaders must be determined before a group meets—whether leaders are appointed or chosen by the group. In some cases, it is appropriate to train small group leaders and clarify the responsibilities they are to undertake.

Participants need to understand the process, their roles, and expected outcomes. As in a larger session, the context, purpose, and goal of a meeting should be explained and understood. If the process is unusual, an enthusiastic leader can help explain the process and carry it forward.

Adequate facilities and supplies are important. Groups can use paper, easels, markers, laptops, and other tools to record ideas. Refreshments help create a comfortable, informal atmosphere. Equipment such as projectors will be needed. Breakout rooms are desirable for small-group sessions that are part of larger meetings. Supplies must be available for specific techniques, such as cards for the open space technique.

Staff or appointed parties will make sure that follow-up happens, if needed. A small group that is part of a larger gathering should be linked back to the larger group. Pennsylvania DOT held large public meetings for its Statewide pedestrian and bicycle plan and then broke into smaller facilitated sessions. Participants identified critical design problems as they affect cyclists and pedestrians. The groups then offered possible solutions and reported their key findings to the large group.

How are small groups used with other techniques?

Small groups must be integrated into an overall public involvement strategy and are usually held periodically to update community groups and interested people on the planning progress or project development. Such meetings supplement larger group meetings by developing detailed information or exploring specific issues.

Small groups adopt techniques available to larger groups, including charrettes, facilitation, visioning, and surveys. Alternative dispute resolution techniques such as mediation are used when an impasse is reached.

Small groups can also meet via tele- or web-conference. Telecommunications can bring people together without extensive travel.

What are the drawbacks?

Preparation can extend the timeline for a project or plan. But small groups also save time in the long run if they provide opportunities for many people to participate and become familiar with the elements and impacts of a proposal.

Small groups require care and attention. Space must be available and notices distributed promptly and to the right people. Staff often lead meetings or record their progress. Agencies sometimes provide a neutral site and refreshments for the group.

The support of small groups requires commitment from both an agency and the public. Both need to be assured that small group meetings are worthwhile, productive, and needed and that the results will be useful in the overall process of public involvement. It is sometimes appropriate to have agency officials participate in small groups or observe the process to demonstrate its utility.

Are they flexible?

Small groups are inherently flexible. They are used in a variety of situations, with a number of different organizing techniques, at various times in the process, at nearly any location, and with a wide variety of participants. They are organized to respond to specific issues and participants. Also, small groups can meet just about anywhere. Many meet in public agency offices, schools, or universities; some in private business facilities.

Small groups contribute to almost any larger process. The intended use of small groups must be identified early in a meeting process so that people who are interested can comment. In a large meeting, breakout sessions should be identified on the agenda.

When are they used most effectively?

Small groups are useful at many different times in a process. They are effective at the beginning to alleviate polarization and early perceptual problems. When a process stalls, small groups re-start public involvement or move it forward. They are used before issues reach an impasse, or if participants are feeling excluded. Finally, they are used in either planning or project development to prioritize issues or work on action items.

Taking Initial Action Steps

Face-to-face contact and two-way communication are vital elements of public involvement. Meetings can provide both. Agencies can take the following steps to get people together:

- **Meet with community groups to discuss and set up a meeting schedule.**
  Contact community groups to establish a basic meeting schedule. Optimize participation by asking what kinds of meetings should take place and how often they should occur.

- **Consider the scope and substance of meetings.**
  Outline the goals of a meeting or series of meetings in advance, so that participants can comment and offer suggestions. Consider if general meetings need to be supplemented by meetings focused on specific topics for specialized audiences. Share findings and ask if further development or discussion of individual points is desirable. Explain how and when agency decisions are made and how meeting output will affect decisions.

- **Select organizing principles meetings.**
  Explore different types of meetings that may attract interest and outline potential meeting structures, so that maximum participation occurs. Vary sponsorship or leadership of meetings.

- **Place the meeting in the context of the whole plan or program, including decisionmaking.**
  Anticipate where the process will go and why. Determine from the beginning what information is needed, when it is needed, and how it will be incorporated into decisionmaking. Make this context clear to participants, so they understand how their input will affect the plan or project.

- **Evaluate the approach with participant advisors.**
  Seek perceptions and advice on the process from people outside the agency. Evaluate whether the intended scope, substance, and style of meeting are likely to be beneficial to the agency itself and to the participants.

Establishing Communication Outside of Meetings

Key person interviews

What is a key person interview?

A key person interview is a one-on-one talk about a specific topic or issue with an individual recognized or designated as a community leader. A key person might be an opinion leader, a spokesperson for the community, an elected official, the head of an organization, or a representative of local media.

The main purpose of a key person interview is to obtain information. 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 learn about the person's views and constituency, and his or her perceptions of the agency, the planning or development process, and the political setting in which work is being done. Key individuals are likely to have knowledge, wisdom, and insight that can help an agency.

Interviews start early in the process to learn about the area and the issues and concerns to be addressed. Agency staff may ask for names of other individuals who should be contacted for interviews or be involved in the participation process. Key people can offer guidance on organizing a public involvement process that includes essential, interested people, and that reaches out and includes people traditionally underrepresented.

Key person interviews also are held just prior to decisionmaking. The Maryland Transit Administration found that opinions evolved from the beginning to the end of a study. Agency staff held key person interviews near the end of a process but before decisions were made.

Customarily, interviews are held face-to-face. Frequently, a key person feels more comfortable if an interview takes place on home turf, such as his or her office or neighborhood. Although usually conducted in person, key person interviews are also done on the telephone.

Why are such interviews useful?

Key people often provide more detail on political or emotional aspects of an issue that may be difficult to discuss in a public meeting. Liaison staff for a master plan study in Boston's South End interviewed community and business leaders to learn about potential impacts that would not have been revealed in a large public setting. Interviews also elicited input about ongoing concerns to help create a vision of the character of redevelopment for the area.

Interviews are helpful for rapidly getting details on the community, understanding residents' priorities, and identifying points that should be covered during meetings. Key person interviews also help target potential participants. They identify stakeholders who may interested in taking a larger role in a project or proposal.

Interviews elicit ideas for structuring a public involvement program. They help set a framework for discussion by identifying potential members for an advisory committee or meeting places perceived as neutral. 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 changes in the work undertaken by consultants.

Key person interviews enhance an agency'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.

Do they have special uses?

Key person interviews are useful when a project affects a small group in a unique way—for example, a block of businesses, a neighborhood, or a specific institution. The group may be concerned about impacts of a proposal and welcome early contact.

Interviews are a good way to introduce agency personnel to the community before beginning a public participation process. One-on-one interviews can also defuse a potentially confrontational situation. Parties to disagreements want to be heard. This is particularly important if the key person has been antagonistic in the past, since it enhances an agency's understanding of opposing viewpoints.

How do agencies use these interviews?

Agencies 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. They establish lines of communication between community members and agencies. Local people contact their leaders to obtain information or to register opinions, concerns, and complaints.

Who conducts key person interviews?

Staff members usually conduct key person interviews. The staff person conducting a meeting should be comfortable with one-on-one contact, personable, open, a good listener, good at probing for details, and able to respond to key questions.

Sometimes it is more appropriate for senior staff to conduct interviews. For example, it might be more appropriate and effective for a senior official rather than a junior-level staffer to meet with the vice president of a major corporation.

Sometimes a well-briefed outsider is the appropriate person to contact traditionally underserved groups. The interviewer must be well-briefed on issues important to the community and to the person being interviewed.

What do they cost?

Costs vary, but interviews can be relatively cheap if they are conducted locally. Staff time can be intensive and constitutes the most expensive part of interviewing. Staff time can be significant if a large number of key people from various locations are involved and travel is extensive.

Costs are closely tied to the number of interviews conducted. A sampling of 10 to 20 leaders is effective for certain purposes, while a more broad-based outreach may necessitate 100 or more interviews.

How are they organized?

It is important that agency staff undertake a range of efforts to learn who the real leaders are, particularly in traditionally underserved communities. One approach is to use the following indirect methods:

- Review old and current mailing lists.
- Review newspaper clippings.
- Review meeting notes from related projects or earlier planning processes.
- Review impact reports, environmental documents, and project-related testimony.
- Get copies of sign-in sheets from meetings held by others.
- Observe neighborhood meetings for other issues and projects.
- Talk to people knowledgeable about local leadership.
- Ask around at professional association meetings.

A more direct approach is to ask community members to name leaders—this process continues until names are repeated and the agency is reasonably confident most key participants have been found. Some initial ways to do this by telephone include:

- Contacting local officials.
- Asking action groups and churches who the respected leaders are.
- Asking neighborhood groups and agencies who the respected community leaders are.
- Contacting friends who live in the area or consultants who have done work in the area.
- Sending a community audit survey that includes a question on community leadership.

It is often important to meet key people in their own community. Key people frequently view their neighborhoods as neutral, comfortable, and non-threatening places.

Phone interviews are informal and immediate, but less personal. They sometimes are done while the key person is at work and can be very focused. Although phone interviews lack the personal contact of face-to-face talk, they are easier to do impromptu. They are often revealing, because the call seems more casual, immediate, and unrehearsed.

The purpose and topic of the interview should be communicated in advance. The interviewer should stress that the interview is important and that other key people are being interviewed. This lets the interviewee know that his or her ideas will be considered along with others. It is useful to explain that the agency wants to listen and learn. A short description of the planning effort with maps, drawings, or photos is useful, along with brief written materials.

Details should be available about the proposal or issue being discussed. The next step might be to ask questions prepared by agency staff. An interview may also be informal and free-form, with a brief statement about the discussion topic followed by open-ended questions. The interviewer should make it clear that the opinions expressed are for the agency's internal use in planning and project development.

The interviewer documents the interview in writing. Documentation frequently maintains the anonymity of the interviewee. At times, it is important to be able to cite the interview as authoritative, but permission must be obtained before quoting people who have been interviewed. Ideas from several interviews can be combined and summarized to maintain anonymity. In summaries, key people's names may be listed, but most comments are not attributed to individuals. Interview results for a Portland, ME, I–295 Connector project were summarized according to themes: comments on transportation issues in general and pros and cons about the proposed connector. Only when it was essential to identify the person who made a statement—such as a concern about the alignment's effect on a specific property—were ideas attributed to individuals.

Follow-up is essential. Depending on the intensity of the planning process and schedule, weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly follow-up contacts, either by telephone or face-to-face, are critical. Follow-up keeps key people and agency staff up-to-date on what is happening. Follow-up can be based on initial interviews early in the process to create and maintain a channel of communication.

How are they used with other techniques?

Interviews with leaders can help identify potential members of a neighborhood planning council. They help increase and improve outreach to traditionally underserved groups, ethnic groups, minorities, and elders. A civic advisory committee or task force can grow from suggestions made during key person interviews.

What are the drawbacks?

Key people may not represent the total range of community values. Interviews must be used with other techniques that validate or contradict the information gleaned from the interviews.

Heavy reliance on meeting notes and sign-in sheets from public meetings tell an agency who the visible public leaders are, but key people who work behind the scenes may be missed. Key person interviews do not replace direct talks with interested or affected groups. Such interviews do not substitute for direct public involvement.

Community members may be alienated if their key people are not interviewed. If some people are misidentified as key people, community residents may accuse an agency of ignorance or malice. In Portland, ME, a school principal identified as a key person turned out not to be as knowledgeable and not as helpful as had been anticipated.

Interviews should include a full range of people, including opponents. The MPO in Sioux City, IA, used its district directors to help identify people to interview. It was careful to include people who in the past had been critical of some of its activities or policies.

Many agencies interview only public officials, such as the town manager, aldermen, or planners. Although these interviews represent one segment of key people to contact, efforts must include interviews with representatives of interest groups, opinion leaders, neighborhood associations, individual residents, users, and more.

Are key person interviews flexible?

Key person interviews can take place at any time, cover a variety of topics, and be structured or open-ended. However, if there is negative news on the horizon it is best conduct interviews before that news is reported. Interviewers must be good listeners, open rather than defensive, and know who to probe.

When are they used most effectively?

Key person interviews are useful at the start of a process and just before decisionmaking. Of course, it may be necessary and desirable to continue contact throughout the process. Follow-up interviews are done in the same manner as initial interviews. To save time and staff resources, follow-up may be done by phone. Credibility will suffer if an agency does not follow up the interviews or maintain contact with key people.

In many cases, key people are well aware of a former process that went awry. Their insights on past stumbles can help an agency avoid missteps. In addition, they have a sense of how a project or proposal will be received within their community. This information aids an agency in modifying plans to be more responsive to community concerns and to present to the public.

Traditional media strategies

What are traditional media strategies?

Traditional media strategies inform customers about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, billboards, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings, and fliers. Agencies that use these strategies take an active role in disseminating information.

The simplest media strategies include fliers about projects within a corridor—a targeted market area—or variable message signs on highways that inform motorists of delays ahead or of alternate routes. Promotional brochures are used in direct mail campaigns or—as in Portland, Maine—through a full-size newspaper supplement explaining the regional transportation plan. Reporters and editorial boards of newspaper, broadcast, and Internet media who are briefed with in-depth background on a project or program will be prepared to report on an agency’s approach in an even-handed way.

Why are they useful?

With traditional media strategies an agency has the opportunity to proactively frame their message. Framing a message takes thought and attention about all aspects of a program or process. Media strategies are routinely incorporated into projects that need public focus, consensus, and understanding in order to move forward.

Effective media strategies deliver a uniform message and can reduce misinformation that often becomes a barrier to public understanding. Strategies can be styled to meet varying levels of interest. For a regional transit plan in Seattle the agency integrated a detailed program of media coverage with other forms of community outreach.

Many people rely heavily on the media for information about events, plans, or projects that affect them. The media are an important resource for people who have little time to attend meetings or participate in public involvement activities.

Do traditional media strategies have special uses?

Media coverage helps generate interest in a project or program. In any program, the critical first step is to develop a central message addressing such questions as: *What is the plan or project? What does the public need to know in order to participate effectively? Who is the audience?* Once these questions have been addressed, agency staff can define the specific media to carry the message—the kinds of media that will best encourage public participation.

For specific transportation projects staff typically reach out to community residents along an affected corridor, to interest groups, and to municipal officials. These projects usually require a multi-pronged media strategy.

Cable television is much cheaper than paid network advertising and has a more local flavor. Public access channels often record public meetings and other forums and replay them. In addition, local cable channels have news programs, guest editorials, and interviews where project issues can be highlighted.

Who participates?

Stakeholders and agencies often cooperate in a media program for a project. Civic advisory committees or other community representatives can identify the best way to get the word out. As people who have been or are affected by a past or current project these representatives can provide insight on outreach.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies can use random surveys to test market penetration and determine whether the message is reaching their target populations.

Traditional media plans can also elicit community responses. Mass mailings can include simple questionnaires to be returned to the agency. A television presentation can suggest that reactions be mailed to the agency, or that viewers go to the agency's website. On two-way talk shows, agency staff interact with community callers to answer questions directly.

The key is to put together a plan that informs and educates the public by delivering the central message, no matter which media strategies are used.

Who leads media strategies?

Media strategies are led by agency staff, either staff most closely identified with the project or a public affairs officer. Involving local people is particularly important to a successful media campaign. Community input and feedback help take the pulse of a program to be sure the chosen media are effective.

What do media strategies cost?

Media strategies are often expensive, so they must be used carefully and efficiently. A minimum strategy includes a central message, perhaps contained in a basic press kit with maps, fact sheets, and other background information, supplemented by a media tour of a project site. Complex projects call for a more elaborate strategy.

Other strategies are relatively low-cost. Briefings with editorial boards of both print and electronic media, as well as regular low-key contact with reporters and other media staff, are low-cost ways to deliver a message. Public service announcements are also usually low-cost.

Costs rise with the kind of media used. A television, radio, newspaper, or Internet campaign can be costly, involving air time and production and printing costs. Depending on the needs of the project, a media strategy can range from relatively simple placards to a high-profile media campaign involving radio and television advertising in prime time.

Although costs of a paid media campaign can be high, the investment often pays off, particularly when an agency is trying to meet the following goals:

- Guarantee that an announcement, information, or meeting date is published or broadcast.
- Reach audiences that probably will not be reached in any other way, or if maximum exposure is needed.
- Have a say in where material is placed; for example, requesting a certain page location for a paid advertisement or a certain time slot for radio or television.
- When a map, graphic, logo, slogan, or written material needs to be shown in a certain format or with a certain design that identifies the project or plan.
- When an agency wants to assure that its message goes out exactly as written—paid advertising is not edited.

How are they organized?

Media strategies should be comprehensive. Strategies need to be evaluated as they are being assembled and after they are implemented. Agency staff should ask the following questions:

- **Breadth of techniques**: How many and what kind of techniques are appropriate?
- **Effectiveness**: How many people were reached and how did they react to particular media?
- **Ease of implementation**: How easy or difficult is it for the agency to implement the various elements? Is an outside consultant needed?
- **Cost**: What are the benefits in light of constrained resources?

Preparation and monitoring are crucial. Advance work is essential for staff to prepare the overall program and central message and to identify the targeted audience. A well-organized, complex media campaign will target several specific audience—for instance, residents or employers in a corridor affected by a project, or daily expressway users.

How do they relate to other techniques?

Media strategies are used in conjunction with other techniques. For example, televising civic advisory committee meetings enhances the participation process by giving meetings a wider audience. Results of brainstorming, visioning, charrettes, and community surveys can be reported in the media.

What are the drawbacks?

Media outlets may outpace an agency by looking for a scoop and framing the message without agency or community input. Public agencies have little control over stories before they are published or broadcast. Agencies frequently spend valuable resources explaining a message or trying to reshape public opinion rather than framing the message in the first place.

Media strategies need a high level of commitment sustained over time to be successful. Strategic planning starts at the outset of a project with the development of a detailed central message.

When are they most effective?

Media strategies are effective when they are developed early and sustained. In this way, the public is well-informed and aware from the beginning. Public participation is enhanced and there is a better chance that a project or program will succeed.

Public information materials

What are public information materials?

Public information materials can be used as part of a media strategy or separately to raise awareness about a transportation investment that is underway or in the planning stage. Public information materials are an essential form of communication in any public involvement process and come in a variety of formats, from printed to online. Materials can be factual, present a point of view, or in some instances are legally required and require drafting from an expert.

Public information materials are often visually appealing and many do not need much detail. Some materials are quite small and contain a single item of information, such as a logo for a metropolitan planning effort or a telephone number for more information. Some are geared to individual recipients, while others such as billboards reach out to a mass audience. Public information materials can summarize large amounts of information simply and in straightforward fashion.

The following are examples of public information materials and media:

- Advertisements—display and legal notices.
- Billboards.
- Brochures.
- Display boards.
- Electronic media.
- Fact sheets.
- Fliers.
- News articles.
- Newsletters.
- Newspaper inserts and articles.
- Notices.
- Posters.
- Press releases.
- Progress bulletins.
- Public service announcements.
- Slides and overheads.
- Social media posts.
- Summaries of reports.
- Utility bill stuffers.
- Television.
- Web pages.

Why are they useful?

Public information materials provide basic information about a process, project, or document in a fast, concise, and clear way. They often summarize or capsulize the overall thrust of a process. They provide information on what to do to respond, comment, get more involved, or get on a mailing list for a project or study.

Public information materials are an easy way to update information periodically for people who aren't actively involved in an issue but who are curious or interested about its status. These people often do not need as much information as those who are intensely involved.

Public information materials are widely distributed to make it easy for people to find information. They increase the chances that people actually get information, because distribution is extensive and does not rely on press releases, word of mouth, or memory. Because public information materials target a broad public beyond those who attend meetings they expand the number and geographic distribution of those who can become informed and participate.

Information can be presented in graphic, non-technical, and non-verbal ways. Renderings, simplified diagrams, models, and cartoons communicate information different ways.

Do they have special uses?

Public information materials inform and educate people about opportunities to participate. Attractive, well-illustrated, easy-to-understand materials make it easy for people to comprehend a process or a proposal is important to them. If they highlight ways for people to participate, community members will learn about the different methods for them to get involved.

There are multiple benefits to instilling the importance of public involvement at an early age as well as getting feedback on projects and programs. Games, placemats, and posters have been used to attract children to transportation projects.

Public information materials should be multilingual when needed. Extensive or even moderate use of multilingual materials can create goodwill and demonstrate that an agency is trying to reach out to all groups.

Who participates?

Nearly everyone, even technical staff, can use public information materials. By emphasizing visual presentations agencies can reach people who are busy and have only a few moments to catch the message. The visual element makes it possible to reach people who may have difficulty reading. Visual information should be supplemented by materials designed to reach those with sight impairments.

How are public information materials accessed?

People read or view public information materials in a variety of locations. They read them online or in print, see them on television, in grocery stores, and restaurants, or hear them on radio. They review brochures or other printed material at home. They view displays in public buildings or at meetings. Libraries, state DOT offices, transit stations, or city halls are good locations to lend videos, provide summaries of reports, and distribute other public information materials.

Agencies can distribute materials, such as reports, report summaries, slide shows, or videos that need wide distribution, on the Internet, particularly when producing physical copies is impractical.

Who produces public information materials?

Production is led by staff experienced with communications, public involvement, desktop publishing, graphics, with strong writing skills and deep knowledge of community issues. Writers must be able to translate technical information into language the greater public can understand.

Other agency staff may be involved, including public relations staff. Policy staff review material for consistency with agency goals and other activities. People skilled in graphic design and production are key to well-prepared information materials.

Private companies and institutions can assist in the production process. This may involve donating billboard or exhibit space, paying for printing, producing public service announcements (PSAs), or helping get editorials printed or aired.

How do agencies use public information materials?

Public information materials test concepts or policies for agencies. A fact sheet on a proposed policy position can generate comments and objections. Agencies use public information materials to explain a policy position or invite public comments. Agency messages are clearer when they are presented in an uncluttered way, without in-depth detail and technical information about options and alternatives.

Public information materials can focus on issues that affect a given area or subarea, highlighting concerns about alignment, noise, travel time, and other impacts. They also offer opportunities for private-sector involvement. Public-private partnerships are forged through donations of billboard space, newspaper inserts, or utility bill stuffers.

Public information materials can and should reach traditionally underserved groups. Reaching out with basic information and facts presented with visuals brings people into the process who might otherwise not participate. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission prepared illustrated glossaries of transportation terms to help the public understand the planning process. The MBTA in Boston prepared a transit design kit that showed drawings of different transit vehicles, answered basic questions, and was printed in Spanish and English.

What do they cost?

The cost of public information materials varies widely, depending on complexity and volume. Small materials, such as brochures, fliers, or newsletters, are relatively inexpensive to produce, even on a large scale. Materials are expensive to produce if they require four-color printing, large display panels, models, or billboards.

Costs are incurred for staff time spent in production. Written information, such as PSAs and news articles, takes time to produce. Designing and developing graphics can be expensive, and the process from concept to development to a camera-ready script can be lengthy. Outside consultants are sometimes needed for major items such as displays or models.

Costs are closely related to the visual quality of public information materials, but quality is crucial. A piece that is visually bland, cluttered, dull, or otherwise unattractive obscures the message. As in advertising, attracting people and getting them to read or look at materials requires eye-catching, good-looking designs.

Costs are also incurred in distribution, but bulk rates are available to help reduce mailing costs. Another alternative is door-to-door distribution by volunteers.

How is production organized?

Public information materials are conceived at the beginning of a plan or project. They can be oriented to support key goals and milestones of the participation and technical planning processes. A time line for production and distribution is prepared. Materials are planned to coincide with major events and give periodic updates throughout the program.

The target audience is then identified. In most cases, the audience is the general public. However, an agency may need to target and customize materials to different groups. A local community heavily affected by a proposed project may need special publications or explanations to address its concerns. Materials targeted to business or industrial interests can help solicit funding.

General information about a process or project is made available—information that will remain constant throughout a process or project can be made available repeatedly. Public information materials highlight an event or milestone, such as a major meeting, the release of a report, the start of a new phase, or the conclusion of a project.

Public information materials can be presented as a survey for a wide audience. Typically used in printed materials, survey materials describe facts and include a tear-off sheet to be sent to an agency. They also may list a telephone number, email address, or website where the public can register comments.

Press releases serve as input to future media coverage. Reporters following the process may use new details of a proposal as the basis for a story. Basic facts are provided to help reporters assemble articles and avoid mistakes or misleading information that could cause difficulty or awkwardness for an agency.

How are they used with other techniques?

Public information materials are used with almost any other technique of public involvement. They give basic information for open houses and open hearings, media strategies, on-line services, drop-in centers, and briefings. They are used to announce meetings, charrettes, conferences, workshops, and retreats. They contribute names for mailing lists by soliciting interest from community residents.

Transportation fairs are excellent places to distribute public information materials, particularly fun items such as buttons, magnets, posters, and literature. Games and contests can also mesh with public information in creative ways. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) held an art contest for children on the theme of "Flying Saves Lives." The FAA also published a bilingual book, *A Visit to the Airport—Un Viaje al Aeropuerto*, which included several games, some in two languages.

What are the drawbacks?

Public information materials are an essential part of any public involvement program but require wide distribution. Failure to provide periodic basic information can severely hurt a public involvement program and could cripple a project.

Finding ways to distribute information takes creativity. Demand on staff time and resources can be intensive. Staff members must know how to examine the public's needs and produce appropriate materials to meet those needs.

Public information materials cannot substitute for other forms of public involvement, because they are typically a one-way communication. People who see them must take other steps to get more information or to participate. Agencies should make the steps simple to take, and respond promptly when community people call.

An agency might have to prepare public information materials to respond to editorial criticism, counter negative publicity, compensate for difficult-to-read technical reports, or respond to issues that arise during a project.

Materials that are too general and add no new substantial information are often regarded negatively or ignored. Many people feel it is inappropriate for public agencies to spend a lot of money on fancy public information material when other efforts or programs are being cut back. To gain optimal response, materials should be straight-forward in design and content, especially if input from participants is desired and if it needs to be made clear that plans or projects are not yet finished.

Public information materials may fall flat if the information is too technical. Where possible, agencies should avoid intimidating or technical language. If materials are not comprehensible to an average person, good will is lost, and potential participants may become suspicions about an agency's motives.

Are they flexible?

Public information materials are distributed in several ways. They can be sent by mail to a project mailing list or an acquired list, or be inserted in another group's mailing. They can be included in bills sent out by public or private organizations.
Public information materials can be posted online and can include announcements of meetings, due dates for comments, recent activities, upcoming events, and more.

Public information materials can be used in displays. They can be positioned to be seen from a sidewalk, highway, or rail line. They can be illustrations on window cards. They can be posted in interiors of transit vehicles on car cards.

Public information materials can be distributed at meetings. They can be exhibits, videos, fact sheets, slides and overheads, models, or progress bulletins.

Timing is flexible for most public information materials, except meeting notices, newspaper deadlines, and materials relevant to public hearings and official comment periods, where exact timing is crucial.

Staff commitments for producing public information materials is flexible except for deadlines for production, printing, mailing, or presentation.

When are they used most effectively?

An overall strategy for public information materials is developed early in a process. At that point, an agency can strategize about what audiences need to be targeted, what types of materials are needed, and when they will be most effective. For instance, general materials about the nature of a project can serve as background information that remains relevant throughout the process. Timing must be carefully considered, and materials should be scheduled so they are available in advance of an event, meeting, close of comment period, or articles in the media.

Social media strategies

What is social media?

Social media networks are some of the easiest and most cost-effective tools for transportation agencies to engage the public in the planning process. Not everyone in an agency's universe of public stakeholders will use social media, but social media can engage a large segment of the public, particularly younger stakeholders who might not otherwise have a voice in transportation planning.

Social media is often referred to as a single entity, but it is really made up of many different platforms that each communicate messages in different ways. Social media strategies are successful when messages are relevant and actionable for users and when they are adapted to each platform. A customized, tailored message makes the user feel as if the agency is talking with them, instead of talking at them.

Transportation agencies can enhance public engagement by using the following social media networks:

- **Facebook**. The world's largest social network, with nearly 1 billion monthly active users as of May 2015.[27] Agencies can post meeting notices, solicit input, and engage on transportation topics one-on-one with the public.

- **Twitter**. A popular microblogging where posts are no more than 140 characters. The conversation on Twitter is faster than it is on Facebook, allowing agencies to respond to transportation issues in near real-time.

- **Tumblr**. Another microblogging site. There is no word limit, but shorter posts are generally preferred. Good for posting pictures and short text to update the community on in-progress projects.

- **Instagram**. A primarily mobile application for posting and commenting on pictures. Agencies using Instagram would connect best with the public by continually posting a range of pictures that illustrate important project updates as well as internal employee-based initiatives.

- **Meetup**. Primarily for gathering the community for face-to-face meetings. Agencies can use Meetup to advertise meetings for a monthly fee and can better understand the demographics they are reaching by noting community members who rsvp and attend meetings.

For everyday communication with the public, transportation agencies may find less use from professional development social media networks, such as **LinkedIn**.

Why should agencies use social media?

Facebook and Instagram have the highest levels of user engagement. More than half of users on both platforms check the site at least once a day.[28] Social media networks can be viewed either as tools for transportation agencies to **have conversations with the public** or to **broadcast information to the public**. Social media gives voice to people who might not otherwise know how to engage in the transportation decision making process and gives agencies a direct avenue to reach people in underserved communities.

How can agencies leverage social media?

Social media is always evolving. It is important that agencies stay aware of new tools and platforms to engage the public; however, it is even more important that agencies **have a plan** for how social networks are used and **develop a governance model** for how employees should engage in the conversation on behalf of the agency.
Agencies that have clear expectations upfront are protected from unnecessary risk and liability and

[27] http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info
[28] http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/12/30/social-media-update-2013/

allow employees the freedom to communicate across the social media landscape in a timely way.

Agency staff who act as an agency's voice online should understand the following key points:

- The types of conversations that the agency wants to have.
- How the agency wants to engage its audience.
- The types of conversations, posts, and comments that should be avoided.

As much as possible, transportation agencies should incorporate social media goals into their broader communications plans. As part of the communications planning process, it is wise to develop an editorial calendar that outlines not only traditional communications initiatives but where, when, and how the agency plans to communicate to the public through social media. While social media plans are subject to change as projects progress, it is important that approvals be secured in advance so there is never a lag in communication. Continuous dialog fosters public engagement and provides agencies with more comprehensive project feedback.

The following examples are by no means exhaustive, but transportation agencies can begin to mold their social media policies based on existing guidelines from other government agencies:

Memphis Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Web 2.0 Use Policy
Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council Social Media Policy
Environmental Protection Agency Social Media Policy
Hampton, VA Social Media Policy

What are some best practices to improve public engagement through social media?

From 2011 to early 2013 the US State Department spent $630,000 to increase its "likes" on Facebook.[29] Why? Because a *like* on Facebook is an indication of popularity. The more likes an agency has on its Facebook page, the more likely that users are engaged. But most regional and local transportation agencies don't have the budget to hire professionals to expand their social media reach.

Here are a few tools and best practices that agencies can use to improve public engagement at little or no additional cost:

Likes

- On Facebook, Instagram, and other networks, a like indicates that a user is in favor of a particular post, picture, or agency—for instance, Facebook users may "like" the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). A like is typically represented by a thumbs-up graphic.

[29] http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/federal-eye/wp/2013/07/03/ig-report-state-department-spent-630000-to-increase-facebook-likes/

- Ask the public directly—for instance, at public meetings—to go to the agency's Facebook page and click the "like" graphic.

- Use Facebook social plugins, which let users share content from agency sites to their profiles with one click.

- Posts that are tailored to the community's particular needs and photographs that are active and help tell a story encourage users to like those entries.

- Like other transportation agencies and relevant groups—giving likes helps to get likes.

- Be aware that while more likes are generally better than fewer likes, the number and quality of comments is perhaps a stronger indication of public engagement.

Tweets

- On Twitter, an individual post is called a tweet.

- When appropriate, include links, pictures and videos—for instance, an agency might embed video from a recent public hearing into a tweet.

- 140 characters is the max, but 100 characters is even better. Tweets that come in under 100 characters have a 17 percent higher engagement rate.[30]

- Be sure to use a website such as go.usa.gov to shorten lengthy links from government websites.

- Build trust with the public by quickly responding to questions and requests.

Hashtags

- Hashtags provide context for a particular post on Twitter, Instagram, and other social networks. A hashtag is preceded by a pound (#) sign.
- Hashtags turn any word or group of words into a searchable phrase, but hashtags cannot include any spaces.

- Agencies can create new hashtags using any combination of words. Create and use the same hashtags often—for instance, #publicforum, #fixingtheroads, #welisten—so the public, and the agency, can return to those hashtags and review conversations.

Consistency and an emphasis on public service are perhaps the two most critical pillars of communicating via social media. Consistent use of social media will ensure that the widest range of public stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in transportation planning. Approaching social

[30] https://business.twitter.com/best-practices

media as a tool for serving the public will help ensure that agencies post to social media thoughtfully, and often. When transportation agencies do good works and complete projects, social media content that the public will want to share and engage with will naturally follow.

What is the best social media network to use?

Government agencies tend to engage the public most often through Facebook and Twitter. But the social media networks that a particular transportation agency uses may depend a great deal on the demographics of the community that agency serves. For instance, an agency trying to attract more women to planning meetings might start posting meeting notices on Facebook, where usage rates are ten percentage points higher for women than men. Agencies can explore the following resources for detailed demographic data and other information that can help determine the social media platform that will most effectively reach underserved communities:

- Howto.gov—Social Media
- Pew Research Internet Project
- US Census Bureau: Computer and Internet Use

What are some examples of agencies using social media?

Transportation agencies will find numerous uses for major social media platforms. Here are just a few real examples from real agencies.

CMAP uses Facebook to maintain dialog with stakeholders

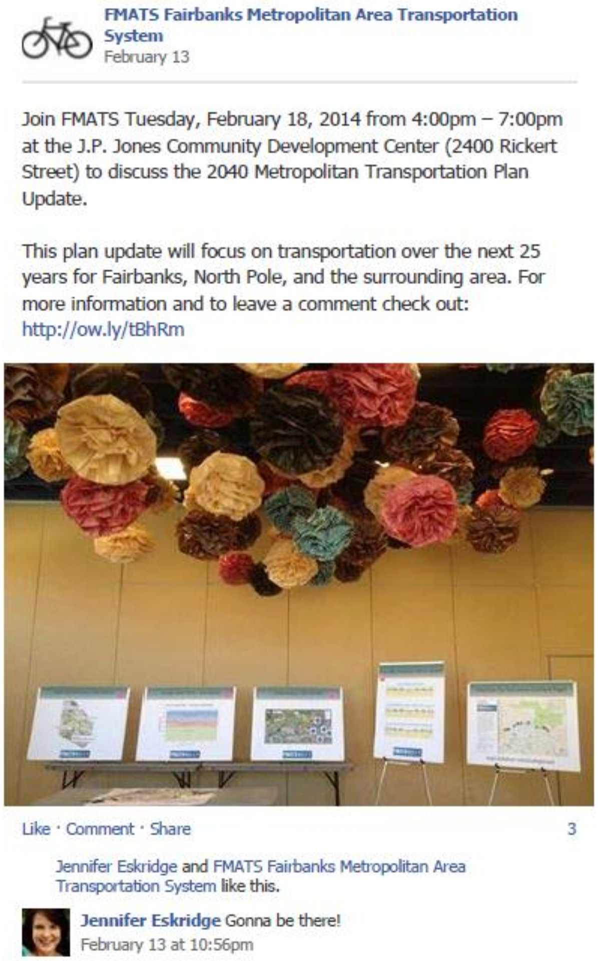
CMAP posted the below announcement on Facebook on February 5, 2014. The post has a positive tone, congratulates numerous community partners for their good works, and shows the agency and the public engaging.

DVRPC uses Twitter to fix problems

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), which includes Philadelphia and the surrounding area, received a tweet from a citizen about broken equipment and took action. DVRPC actively uses its Twitter account to show the public that the agency is listening.

FMATS seeks community involvement using Facebook

The Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System—the MPO for Fairbanks, AK and the surrounding area—posted this meeting notice on February 13, 2014, soliciting the public's attention about a transportation plan.



FMATS Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System
February 13

Join FMATS Tuesday, February 18, 2014 from 4:00pm – 7:00pm at the J.P. Jones Community Development Center (2400 Rickert Street) to discuss the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update.

This plan update will focus on transportation over the next 25 years for Fairbanks, North Pole, and the surrounding area. For more information and to leave a comment check out: http://ow.ly/tBhRm

Like · Comment · Share 3

Jennifer Eskridge and FMATS Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System like this.

Jennifer Eskridge Gonna be there!
February 13 at 10:56pm

For more information

- Facebook best practices
- Twitter best practices; hashtag best practices
- Tumblr tips
- Instagram tips for getting started
- Meetup tips for meeting organizers

GovDelivery and contact lists

What is GovDelivery? [31] [32]

GovDelivery is a private communications firm that more than 1,000 government agencies worldwide use to help manage a range of engagements with the public. Services include a communications cloud that agencies can use to store large contact lists, and a range of other communications support efforts, including email, text messages, and social media, that can enhance public engagement.

What are contact lists?

Contact lists include names and addresses but may also include email addresses, telephone numbers, social media accounts, and other information. Agencies use contact lists to reach the public with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, newsletters, summary reports, and other information about its activities.

Why are these contact lists useful?

Contact lists demonstrate the extend of an agency's outreach efforts. A large contact list shows that an agency has tried to reach many people and has worked diligently to justify funding for a project or to involve the public in its work.

Agencies can analyze contact lists to evaluate programs. Agencies examine the effectiveness of a public involvement program by comparing the names on its mailing list with the names of people who have responded or participated. Areas where the population has not responded can be targeted for special attention.

Do they have special uses?

Contact lists provide an off-the-shelf pool of potential committee and task force members, particularly if they comprise names of people who have signed in at meetings, called in to a hotline, contacted an agency through the web, or otherwise expressed interest in an issue—in other words, people who may want to serve in an advisory capacity.

Agencies can use contact lists to reach property owners affected by a project or program and as a basis for surveys. Larger lists are better in this respect, since they take a larger sample of a population. Lists of registered voters provide a random sample, while lists of people who are interested in a project are a self-selected group. A survey of self-selected individuals can be useful, since respondents are more likely to be well-informed. However, such a survey should not be regarded as statistically valid.

[31] http://www.govdelivery.com/how-we-help

[32] http://www.govdelivery.com/products

How are contact lists compiled?

Agency staff can compile contact lists using meeting sign-in sheets, online forms where people volunteer contact information, from individuals who call with comments and suggestions.

Contact lists can and should be shared among offices within an agency and perhaps with other agencies and organizations. Outreach is enhanced as the number of names increases, and sharing information helps keep the costs of list maintenance reasonable.

How are they organized and maintained?

The most basic task is to assess needs and expectations for the list. Agency staff should answer the following questions: What information does the agency want to distribute? What methods will be used to package the information? How frequently will the list be used? How much effort can be put into its maintenance? What resources are available?

The second step is to structure the information. Each individual's information constitutes a separate record and might include the following basic set of fields:

- Name.
- Address.
- E-mail address.
- Phone number.
- Social media pages.
- Topics or issues of interest.

Optional information might include the following:

- Occupation.
- Household size.
- Adults in household.
- Affiliation (government official, interest group, etc.).
- Number of meetings attended.
- Mailings sent and other contacts made.
- Statements or other responses made.
- Membership on committees.
- Source of information if names are an assemblage of other mailing lists.

Many records will include information for only a few fields. A new field may be added at any time when a mailing list is used for a specific purpose, such as keeping track of attendance at a particular meeting.

The final step is to use the contact list for mailings and other communications. To conserve expenditures in agency staff time and energy, private services such as GovDelivery can help organize communications.

Entering data is a continuous process as new people attend meetings or use hotlines, addresses change, or an agency takes steps to broaden its constituency. As lists expand and change agencies should reassess their value. 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 and representatives from neighborhood and Alaskan native groups.

How are they used by agencies?

Agencies use contact lists to distribute information in a variety of ways. General information, such as newsletters, meeting announcements, or invitations, can go out to an entire list. For a transportation improvement program, an agency may send a summary to an entire mailing list, along with a notice that the complete report is available, while sending the full document to a selected group.

Agencies can keep records of comments received as well as personal profiles, and a master list with subsets of individuals to contact on specific issues. Agencies add names collected during all outreach activities and sort the list for people interested in a particular issue for a targeted outreach such as a presentation to the governing body of a town.

Who leads?

Contact lists need an organizer and caretaker to determine the fields to be included and to keep the list up-to-date. A skilled and creative clerical person with good computer skills and attention to detail can easily execute the work. Meeting and event organizers can be asked to collect participant information.

What are the costs?

Building and maintaining a large contact list is labor-intensive. Additional time is needed during peak periods when a large number of names is received or if a large mailing is underway.

Contact lists also save work efforts. They allow an agency to contact many people at one time with individualized outreach. They save staff time on phone calls. A well-organized, computerized list simplifies clerical tasks related to correspondence.

Equipment requirements are modest. Most data management software packages and services are inexpensive and can handle large contact lists.

How are mailing lists used with other techniques?

A mailing list is a basic building block of a good public involvement program. Used periodically throughout a process to distribute information, mailing lists require and contribute to a record of people interested in transportation. Agencies can use a well-maintained contact list to announce public meetings, open houses, and other events, to set up civic advisory committees, administer community surveys, and to set up speakers' bureaus.

What are the drawbacks?

The principal drawback is the amount of time needed to set up a list. This time commitment includes a significant labor cost. Postage and printing costs for large lists also put great strain on a budget.

Contact lists may exclude segments of the population. Traditionally-underserved populations are particularly apt to be excluded. These people frequently do not come into contact with an agency until a direct impact becomes an issue. Special efforts can broaden the reach of an agency's mailing list.

Trading names and addresses with other agencies is an issue. Agencies need to inform people that lists will not be used for commercial purposes but for keeping them abreast of recent developments.

Contact lists are not a statistically-valid basis for surveys. Agencies should be cautious when using data received from surveys, particularly those from small lists.

Sometimes agencies rely excessively on contact lists to reach the public. Often, the public treats bulk mailings as junk mail and ignores them. Agencies need to remember that mass outreach cannot replace direct contact through meetings, focus groups, drop-in centers, and other efforts.

Are mailing lists flexible?

Contact lists are applied to many tasks, including building committees, focus groups, and task forces, distribution of surveys, and distributing notices, newsletters, and reports. They can be tailored to contain virtually any informational category. Lists can be sorted to make sub-lists of people based on location, occupation, issues, interests, or other criteria.

When are they most effective?

Contact lists are used throughout a process and for many purposes, but they should be linked to other public involvement activities. A mailing list is meaningless unless an agency has newsletters, announcements, invitations, or other materials to share with the public.
Focus groups

What are focus groups?

A focus group is a small group discussion led by a professional communicator. Focus groups regard transportation as a product that can be improved and regard the public as customers. They are used to gauge public opinion, customer concerns, needs, wants, and expectations.

Participants are selected in two ways: random selection, to assure all segments of the community are represented, or non-random selection to elicit a particular position or point of view. A combination of selection techniques will attract people well-versed in transportation issues along with those who are solely consumers of transportation services.

A focus group has the following basic features:

- Eight to twelve participants.
- A carefully-crafted agenda with five or six major questions.
- Minimal presentation of context and subject.
- Identification of major points of agreement and divergence of opinion.
- Emphasis on gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation and interaction.

Why are they useful?

Focus groups are a chance to get behind people's expressed attitudes and assess policy directions and program objectives. They are a chance to review allocation of resources and they help confirm or deny established goals or set new directions.

The informal atmosphere and small size of a focus group encourage participation. A focus group is a place for people to speak out without criticism. Spontaneity produces fresh information. Many focus groups have found that participants readily volunteer ideas and comments that have not been recorded elsewhere.

How do agencies use the output?

Agency staff should always record output from focus groups. Some are held in rooms with a one-way mirror so that sponsors can observe the group in process.

Focus group information supplements other community input. A focus group agenda is guided by the information needs of a larger project or program. Opinions derived from the group inform the larger effort.

Focus groups are also tailored to assess public reactions. Because they typically deal with broad policy or program goals and impacts on the community they do not dwell on technical issues. They help agencies or organizations understand overall public reactions to programs or policies at a single point in time.

Who leads a focus group?

A focus group needs a facilitator. The facilitator is essential to keep the group to the agenda, elicit opinions from each participant, and prevent one participant from dominating. Opinions may be lost in a sea of anecdotes unless the facilitator steers the group toward the agenda.

Facilitators need guidance on the agenda and purpose of the focus group. Sample questions for the group can be provided to the facilitator by the sponsor. The sponsor may be present during the focus group or as an outside observer. During a break in the discussion, the sponsor may confer with the facilitator to assure that all agenda topics are covered.

What are the costs?

Focus groups are relatively inexpensive compared with the costs and effort of administering a full opinion survey. Extensive statistical analysis is not required, because a focus group provides only qualitative information. However, agencies often choose an outside firm to provide a paid, neutral facilitator. Public agencies tend not to pay participants, in contrast with private market research organizations.

Focus group meetings seldom last longer than two or three hours. For participants' convenience it may be held after work hours. Schedules can be tailored to fit needs of participants and the sponsoring agency. If required, a focus group can be organized within a matter of weeks. It takes a moderate to long amount of time to select, invite, and confirm participants. The time required to prepare focus group agendas and questions is not significant if an experienced facilitator is available to work with the sponsor.

How are focus groups organized?

Agencies must provide policy direction. A sponsoring agency selects the agenda, participants, and facilitator and may provide questions for the participants. A meeting site must be selected and may need to be on neutral ground if the sponsor prefers not to be identified.

How are they used with other techniques?

Focus groups cannot replace other public involvement techniques, but they can provide input. They are used to identify concerns and issues prior to implementing a media strategy. They are used to refine requirements for transportation alternatives and can be repeated at intervals to gauge changes in public opinion. They also provide a qualitative supplement to quantitative community surveys.

What are the drawbacks?

Focus groups provide only qualitative information. They are not statistically representative of the greater community. As a one-time event, they do not meet Federal standards for continuing public involvement and cannot replace a more formal process that records each participant's comments and presents those comments to the appropriate authorities.

A focus group does not bring public consensus. Potentially opposing groups do not deliberate important issues. The goal is to obtain opinions—not to debate or disseminate information. Focus groups produce individual viewpoints of the groups that participants represent. Results are used as a guideline for further thinking and analysis.

Surveys

What are public opinion surveys?

Public opinion surveys assess widespread public opinion. An agency administers a survey to a sample group of people via a written questionnaire or through interviews in person, by phone, or by electronic media. The limited sample of people is considered representative of a larger group.

Survey results show public positions or reactions to agency actions and gather information for use in the process. Surveys can be formal (scientifically assembled and administered) and provide broadly applicable results, or informal.

Informal surveys tend to bring responses from a self-selected group of people—those who are more personally interested in specific transportation issues than the population at large. However, informal surveys can be designed to reach a broader group than those who attend public meetings.

Why are they useful?

Surveys portray community perceptions and preferences. They accurately report on what people know or want to know. They test whether a plan or plan element is acceptable to the public as it is being developed, or test an agency’s perception of what people are thinking and reinforce decisions made through participatory programs.

Surveys can test whether opinions are changing. Results can be useful to the leaders of a process or to elected officials and community leaders. Results are used to guide efforts to meet public concerns and develop effective messages for public information and for a media strategy. They give meaningful clues on whether the public will accept a plan, program, or process.

Better information enhances an agency's understanding not only of public concerns but also of the process of public involvement. An agency can respond to survey results by providing missing or inadequate information that did not get through to the public or was misinterpreted.

Surveys focus public thoughts about a service and provide context for an opinion. A public opinion survey in Chicago found that public attitudes about transit are not only a function of services received but are also strongly affected by people's feelings about crime, government in general, public civility, and the neighborhoods where a trip begins or ends.

Who participates?

Surveys directly involve a relatively small population of a State or region. Surveys that use a randomized sample of the population can be stratified to include only people within a specific geographic area, income group, or other category of people from whom information is desired. Although it never replicates the overall population precisely, the results are statistically valid.

Respondents represent a composite view of the larger population. In a scientific, statistically-valid survey, answers are expanded to reflect what the population as a whole might have answered if they had all been asked the survey questions. Informal surveys can never be viewed as the basis for such extrapolation. However, large informal surveys can generally indicate the predominant features of public opinion.

Who leads public opinion surveys?

Public opinion surveys can be led by trained agency staff. Often, particularly for statistically valid surveys, outside help is appropriate . Professional survey takers can help execute a survey quickly and accurately to assure the public that results are valid and unbiased.

What are the costs?

Informal public opinion surveys are relatively inexpensive. They can be prepared by agency staff and administered at meetings or as part of a document.

Scientific surveys are expensive because of the complexity of drawing a sample population and structuring questions. Survey preparation and administration can take significant time. Collecting, transcribing, and summarizing data becomes increasingly expensive as the number of questions or size of the sample increases. Also, a survey cannot stand alone; it must be accompanied by other public involvement techniques, each which has its own costs.

How are public opinion surveys organized?

Agency staff first ascertain the need for information and determine the most appropriate way to get it. If an agency needs opinions about a planning effort or project that is getting underway, for instance, it needs to determine whether formal or informal comments are most appropriate. In part, this decision depends on whether the agency wants opinions relatively quickly from known participants (an informal questionnaire) or needs considered opinions from groups that are not ordinarily involved in transportation processes (a more formal questionnaire and sample selection process).

Agency staff or survey professionals then determine the types of questions to be asked. Opinions about the process can be elicited from those surveyed—its overall approach, its progress to date, the direction it is taking, and potential next steps. Questions can be directed toward particular aspects of a project. Whether the questions are asked of known participants or people unknown to the agency, it is important to frame them in a clear, unambiguous manner. Sometimes questions need to be in languages other than English or be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Finally, agency staff or survey professionals establish the survey questionnaire. Public opinion surveys are taken in a variety of ways. A simple method is the telephone interview. Surveys with printed or online questionnaires need extensive preparation and testing to avoid ambiguities or misunderstandings when they are received in the community.

How are they used with other techniques?

Public opinion surveys supplement other techniques. For example, results of surveys can provide grist for discussion in civic advisory committees, charrettes, or brainstorming sessions. Survey results can be a focus of a video production or a facilitated meeting. Surveys usually produce quantitative results that can complement the qualitative results obtainable from a focus group. Public opinion surveys should be conducted so they are accessible and understandable to people with disabilities. Informal surveys may be included in public information materials, especially if distributed through local newspapers.

What are the drawbacks?

Survey results may not reflect the entire community's views, especially in the case of informal surveys.

They are not interactive. Surveys produce data, not a dialogue between the community and an agency, and they can spread misinformation if they are poorly or ambiguously drafted.

A public opinion survey can be difficult to undertake for some stakeholder groups. Some people prefer one-on-one discussions of issues that affect them, while others prefer surveys because they do not have time to go to meetings.

When are public opinion surveys most effective?

Public opinion surveys can be conducted at almost any time during a process. Used carefully and repeated over time, they keep an agency well-informed of changes in public knowledge of a planning effort or project development and people's preferences within that knowledge.

Briefings

What are briefings?

Briefings are usually issue-focused meetings between agency administrators, project managers, board members, or other staff and a specific group or part of the community. Elected officials, business leaders, the media, regional groups, or special interest groups can participate. They may be organized in the following ways:

- **One-on-one meetings** with key individuals—for instance, between an agency representative and a community representative or leader.

- For **key groups** to establish rapport between agencies and the community and lead to a free discussion to clarify issues.

- At **critical times** in a program application or project schedule—either at the beginning of a project or planning effort or at regular intervals to keep leaders or the media informed.

- For **one-way or two-way communication**. Agencies often use them solely to convey information, but the format can include a question-and-answer session or two-way discussion as well. Notices should make clear what format will be followed.

Why are they useful?

Briefings are opportunities for focused communication. They can be scheduled quickly so that project leaders can communicate with key community groups or leaders.

Briefings can allay doubts or fears by providing an opportunity for questions. They give an agency a chance to test the waters on an issue with a subset of the community. Within the narrow focus of a briefing, community residents give an agency the feedback and direction it needs to be fair and equitable.

Briefings are a good way to establish communication links with affected groups. They help clarify issues and demonstrate an agency's sensitivity to local concerns. Because every project will affect different segments of the public, an agency should discuss impacts and services with those most affected.

Briefings provide candid feedback from the community. Community members can comment off the record—unrecorded comments may provide a truer picture of people's opinions.

Do they have special uses?

Briefings are a good way to introduce a new program or delineate project principles to a community already familiar with an existing project. They also help assuage concerns about a project and generate additional public involvement. After a briefing, a community group may be more willing to work with an agency as the project or program advances. A community may want to participate in subsequent meetings to safeguard its stake in an agency's proposals.

Briefings may break through temporary barriers to full public participation. In circumstances where the communication process is difficult or complicated, they help an agency reach specific groups.

Briefings give critics a better understanding of a project. They also give critics a chance to respond in detail, away from larger meetings that may dilute their participation.

Briefings can repair damage. A misunderstood or misrepresented agency can use briefings to get back on track. Briefings on critical portions of a proposal are useful to open discussions. An agency may signal its need for advice from community groups on ways to build greater understanding or future cooperation. Poor communication is improved if agency staff talks briefly and then listens attentively to the responses.

Opening a process with a series of briefings shows that an agency is organized, eager to get the word out, and ready to establish trust with community groups. When an agency targets specific groups it shows that it both recognizes their existence and values their participation.

Who participates?

Briefings can involve any interested group—elected officials, organization heads, appointed officials, community groups or associations, business leaders, or professional associations. When an agency initiates a briefing it will ask particular individuals to participate. When a community group requests a briefing an agency should ascertain the group's interests and send appropriate, knowledgeable staff. Community groups may want a personalized presentation of a proposal in relation to their neighborhood.

A briefing is usually a simple gathering held around a small table, in an office, or in a conference room. Alternatively, a briefing can be a conference call. Agency representatives should be well-informed about the issues to be addressed, particularly as they affect the participants.

How do agencies use the output?

Briefings reveal whether an agency is effectively communicating with stakeholders. Agencies get feedback on the effectiveness of their public involvement program. Before an event is announced, briefings help agencies assess its potential effectiveness and adjust plans accordingly. They also help prevent agencies from misunderstanding the viewpoints of their target groups.

Who leads briefings?

Well-informed, articulate agency staff people lead briefings. Since a briefing is an opportunity to improve communication, agencies send senior staff or others who know the project or program thoroughly and are aware of participants' interests or concerns. Experts may also be needed to discuss technical information.

Agency staff may share responsibility with a community leader. The agency need not lead a briefing alone. Community groups may participate more freely if a community leader leads the discussion. In such an instance, an agency representative participates to satisfy the group's need for information and to get its input. Agency representatives should be prepared to lead a briefing if a community group has no designated leader. In some situations, elected officials or agency board members may take charge.

What do they cost?

Briefings are relatively inexpensive. The primary cost is preparation time, travel, and the meeting itself. Research or presentation materials may be needed, but special preparation costs can be limited. Agencies can often use pre-existing presentation materials. An agency may use project-specific presentation materials to maintain continuity. Offering refreshments can serve as an icebreaker at a small meeting.

How are briefings organized?

Agencies must respond quickly to a request for a briefing. Response time reflects an agency's commitment. Having to wait several months to meet with staff seriously damages a group's trust in the agency's sincerity. Every effort should be made to provide a timely response. If an agency has no time to organize a briefing, it may share documents, videos, or conduct phone calls as a substitute strategy.

Briefings are customized for each situation. The particular characteristics or concerns of a group suggest the best structure. An agency must be sensitive to the group's needs, nature, and purpose, and identify key people. As a briefing sponsor an agency determines where the group would be most comfortable and what approach should govern the meeting. Any good public involvement program includes constant monitoring of the press, meeting feedback, and other sources of intelligence about the community. When an agency knows its communities—why they exist and where their interests lie—it can prepare for a briefing and organize it accordingly.

Agencies should send their best representatives to briefings—such as a team of people with complementary presentation skills. A high-ranking staff member or technical specialist can answer questions and demonstrate an agency's commitment to participation. Not all staff members are good public speakers, and good speakers may not function well in small discussion groups.

Communication between an agency and the community should be continuous. No matter which party initiates a briefing, agencies should continue the communication process beyond a single session. An agency may approach a briefing as the first in a potential series of meetings.

How are briefings used with other techniques?

Briefings are one part of a larger public involvement program. They supplement official and public interaction between community groups and a public agency. Briefings should not be the only means of communication, nor should they result from a group's frustration due to lack of other opportunities for dialogue. Briefings are important supplements to larger public meetings, but they cannot replace them.

What are the drawbacks?

Agencies that rely on briefings may develop a reputation for not being transparent. Holding small, seemingly controlled briefings only in times of crisis or when actions are critical to an agency may alienate the community that the agency serves.

Are briefings flexible?

Briefings can be held at nearly any time. Good timing can help make a briefing successful. Agency staff must be flexible, since community groups may request briefings on the spur of the moment. An agency may find it beneficial to hold briefings at the following points during planning or project development:

- Immediately before a major event or decision.
- After a crisis.
- After an especially unsuccessful agency effort.
- Before introducing new strategies.

Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers

What are speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers?

Speakers' bureaus are groups of trained representatives who can speak about a process or program. They can be community people or agency staff. Bureau members meet with public and private organizations and groups on behalf of a project, program, or planning activity. Members of a speakers' bureau provide information about planning or project activities, listen to people's concerns, answer questions, and seek continued participation and input from the public. Agencies sometimes call them "listeners' bureaus" to emphasize two-way communication and the intention to listen to the public.

Public involvement volunteers add to the capabilities of a speakers' bureau. These volunteers are people from the community temporarily enlisted to assist an agency in developing and implementing a public involvement program. Volunteer programs and speakers' bureaus may be used together or separately.

Why are they useful?

Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers serve a variety of community groups. Speakers can be organized to address civic groups, social clubs, professional organizations, neighborhood associations, and other groups, but they have other uses as well. The Maryland State Highway Administration created a speakers' bureau to reach out to community members in a project study area. Speakers addressed county chambers of commerce, county commissioners, local Rotary clubs, neighborhood associations, building industry associations, churches, political clubs, city councils, local planning commissions, the regional delegation of the State legislature, the regional council of governments, the State association of counties, the regional transportation association, the professional engineering society, and real estate firms.

Speaking to community groups at a place of their choice increases attendance. Local groups involving people on their own terms and issues enhances interest and broadens participation. Groups such as business or professional organizations welcome community issues to the table at their own meetings, where they focus on specific issues and concerns.

Speakers' bureaus help agencies understand community viewpoints. Community representatives value the opportunity to present their concerns directly to an agency representative who has come to speak with and listen to them. They expect the representative to carry their comments back to the agency for incorporation into plans or programs.

Do they have special uses?

Public involvement volunteers can help assemble a community perspective on a project or program. Volunteers who live in the community offer special insight into a process or project. They often understand the benefits and impacts of a project in an personal way that agency staff may lack.

Speakers' bureau presentations can be tailored to address specific concerns. Presentations can address the special interests of business, environment, or local neighborhood groups. An agency can receive details of the concerns and amplify its understanding of the perspectives of different constituencies. An improved understanding helps an agency incorporate community points of view into its products.

Public involvement speakers and volunteers are useful at events such as open houses, where person-to-person communication is a focus. They also represent agencies at transportation fairs or events sponsored by other agencies.

Public involvement speakers and volunteers help bridge communication gaps. Multi-lingual speakers serve as interpreters at events with sizable non-English-speaking representation. The Alaska DOT recruits community volunteers to serve as Inuit interpreters for meetings in rural areas. When DOT planners were scheduled to appear during council meetings they took along Inuit interpreters to translate their long-range plan presentations and facilitate question-and-answer sessions.

Who participates?

A variety of people serve as speakers or volunteers—members of partnership agencies, consultants, agency board members, elected officials, or community residents. Speakers from civic and technical advisory committees have the advantage of being already familiar with a planning effort. Agency representatives (including public involvement and technical specialists) serve as a nucleus to guide training.

Speakers can reach diverse segments of the community by appearing before homeowner organizations and neighborhood associations, chambers of commerce, regional environmental and civic organizations, labor unions, professional associations, religious groups, fraternal and philanthropic organizations, and educational institutions.

How do agencies use speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers?

Once a public agency selects and trains speakers, it relies on them as on-call resources to respond to requests by community groups for agency presentations. Public involvement volunteers are genuine members of the community and they are often seen as more neutral than agency staff.

A public involvement volunteer program also helps identify people for leadership positions. Volunteers frequently include interested individuals or stakeholders. If they are effective speakers with well-developed interpersonal skills, they may be candidates for further leadership in the community.

Who leads?

Leadership typically comes from agency staff but is sometimes found outside an agency. As speakers and volunteers address organizations and associations, people are drawn into the process. This widening pool of individuals may include many dynamic and influential people who, as they become interested in an agency's work, may be tapped for additional outreach efforts. If they are community group leaders they may become key players in mobilizing their organizations to assist an agency with its program or a specific project.

What are the costs?

Speakers' bureaus are relatively inexpensive. Basic costs are incurred in sending speakers to a public meeting, whether they are volunteers or not, including travel, handout materials, feedback cards, presentation equipment, and possibly refreshments. Some agencies reimburse volunteers for travel costs, including meals.

Public involvement volunteers can stretch a limited outreach budget. Agencies can keep public involvement costs down by efficiently using volunteers. Volunteers also enable an agency to greatly expand the scope and intensity of its outreach program. Volunteer speakers assist agency staff so that the agency can hold more meetings and reach more people on a limited budget. Speakers and volunteers extend agency capabilities for a brief period or for a longer period of planning or development.

There are start-up costs associated with organizing the bureau and recruiting and training speakers. Staff time costs are associated with debriefing speakers after their meetings and with necessary record-keeping and meeting follow-up. The Atlanta Regional Commission trains volunteers to be speakers and for every meeting led by a volunteer sends a junior staff to take notes and ensure agency follow-up.

Public involvement volunteers and speakers are sometimes paid for temporary work. For special events, projects, or programs, agencies may pay volunteers and speakers a nominal sum to foster goodwill.

How are speakers' bureaus and volunteers organized?

Proactive agencies will create a speakers' bureau and then solicit invitations for speakers to come to meetings of community groups. Project managers often control staffing for their projects, and they may be equipped to select and manage speakers and volunteers. Alternatively, an agency's speakers' bureau can coordinate speakers or public involvement volunteers for all of the agency's projects and programs.

Agencies offer speakers' bureaus as a public service. The initial task is to let groups and organizations know such services are available. Agencies contact the prominent civic and social organizations within a study area and offer speakers for future meetings. This arrangement allows the agency to distribute meetings over time to make the best use of time available to its speakers.

Agency staff must provide training for speakers and volunteers to be effective. For speakers and volunteers, training should be simple and continuous. Basic training includes tips on posture, elocution, diction, and timing. New speakers can benefit from practice sessions, role playing, and attending presentations by veteran speakers. Volunteers with public speaking experience may need instruction on technical issues or a political context. Other volunteers and agency staff may need coaching in the art of speaking. Training should be available to speakers from the beginning of their involvement, and periodic refresher sessions should be worked into the program.

Because speakers are perceived as representatives of an agency, it is imperative that agencies recruit people qualified and willing to do the job. Speakers function as ambassadors, and their work should represent an agency's best efforts.

Speakers need adequate materials and preparation. A core presentation can be devised, including handouts, maps, videos, or presentation boards. Before meetings, agency staff can assist a speaker in tailoring the presentation to the host group's special interests. Many speakers' bureaus also distribute questionnaires to the host groups and prepare a list of specific questions to be discussed at meetings. Speakers should be given an easy method of reporting back to the agency.

Speakers rely on agency staff for support and assistance. Junior staff often accompany speakers to meetings to take notes, help with materials or equipment, and assist with follow-up and reporting. Written records of all meetings are prepared, with special attention given to major comments, perspectives, and concerns. Agency staff help speakers follow through on responses to questions or requests that cannot be immediately addressed at a meeting.

Speakers and public involvement volunteers are matched to community group needs so their particular backgrounds and skills are effectively employed. In a large-scale project, many organizations learn of the agency's efforts and seek additional information. The agency speaker or volunteer coordinator then works to assign appropriate speakers to the various host groups.

Speakers and volunteers should be committed to communication and follow-up. Speakers and volunteers facilitate communication between an agency and its constituency and get the right information out to people who request it.

How are they used with other techniques?

Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers are integrated into a larger effort with a variety of other public involvement techniques. Although they are useful and relatively inexpensive, they cannot substitute for other methods of reaching and involving the public.

Civic Advisory Committee members are ideal candidates for speakers' bureaus. Because they are already actively involved in an agency's efforts, they can speak comfortably about the agency's project or program.

Speakers and volunteers explain agency work at open houses. Open houses can be intense, with many simultaneous one-on-one discussions. The support of volunteers makes the effort easier for an agency with limited full-time staff. Public involvement volunteers also assist staff in the variety of tasks involved in preparing and implementing an open house.

Public involvement volunteers can staff drop-in centers or booths at transportation fairs. They direct people to displays or written literature and answer questions. If they cannot answer specific questions, they take names and addresses for follow-up by an appropriate agency staff member.

Trained public involvement volunteers offer advice on program elements. With speaking experience and exposure to community groups, volunteers can offer insightful perspectives on an agency's public involvement program.

What are the drawbacks?

An agency has less control over unpaid volunteers than it does over staff. An agency may design the speaking program, but it cannot completely control the message the speakers give out. To minimize this difficulty, the leader of the speakers' bureau needs to select speakers who are trustworthy and that match their audience.

Speakers and volunteers are not a substitute for staff involvement. Speakers' bureaus volunteers are not shields between the public and agency officials. Agency heads, project managers, program coordinators, and technical staff still need exposure to the community during the public involvement process.

Agencies should not expect volunteers to put in the same hours or travel the same distance as paid staff. While an agency may not be able to pay its volunteers, it should acknowledge their contributions and guard against demanding too much from them.

At a critical stage in a project, especially if there is a potential for confrontation, it is best to avoid using volunteers for presentations. They have more to lose in the local community than an agency does.

Are speakers' bureaus and volunteer programs flexible?

Speakers and volunteer programs are modified as conditions change and requests come in for agency presentations at group meetings.

These techniques make an overall program more flexible. By creating a speakers' bureau or organizing volunteers, an agency adds flexibility to its outreach. Speakers and volunteers bring a variety of additional skills, contacts, and personal qualities to an agency's program or project that might otherwise not be found among agency staff.

When are they used most effectively?

Speakers' bureaus are effective when approaching a milestone event, a critical decision, or a program review. It is critical that agencies get the right speaker before the right group at the right time. Some speakers are considered *big guns*—people of high stature in the community. In addition to political influence, some individuals or groups may command greater respect within the community, and a well-timed endorsement or sign of support can help an agency's project.

For labor-intensive events, it is cost-effective to use volunteers to augment staff or stand in for staff. A group of trained, informed volunteers helps agency staff do more in the time available. Volunteers staff information tables, collect names and addresses, and forward inquiries to staff.

Piggybacking on other meetings

Organizations often prepare a calendar of events and transportation agencies can schedule a variety of public involvement efforts to *piggyback* on these events. Piggybacking can help a transportation agency reach audiences that otherwise might not participate in transportation planning. Agencies can interact with people in a situation where they are comfortable and feel safe. It also provides an opportunity for an agency to leverage the trust that an organization has with their community. While elected officials and organizational leaders are appropriate places to start getting information about community events, when transportation agencies build relationships with community insiders they will get a more day-to-day picture of which events would allow greater breadth and depth of public involvement.[33]

Technology

Video recordings and videoconferencing

Why are they useful?

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth a million. To some people a video is more useful than reading or hearing about an effort. With television nearly universally available, and with the wide availability of the Internet, videos can play a vital strategic role in transportation planning and project development.

Videos can be used to introduce people to meetings and hearings. Set to replay endlessly, videos present the same message each time without variation, and they should be produced in an informative, lively, and friendly manner. This may be extremely important when used with, say, a formal public hearing.

Videos illustrate different planning scenarios or project alternatives and help people visualize a situation before, during, and after construction. Many incorporate computer simulations, such as a ride on a transportation facility before it is built.

How do agencies use the output?

Dry runs of presentations are often recorded. Presenters rehearse a presentation, review it on video, critique elements such as substance, voice modulation, posture, body language, jargon, and use of visual materials, and then make changes.

Agencies often distribute videos over a large geographic area and in more than one language. They can clarify a complex process to supplement an oral presentation. Videos also update the community on construction staging plans and mitigation proposals.

[33] http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/publications/low_limited/lowlim08.cfm

What do videos cost?

Simple videos produced in-house are inexpensive but may not be successful in reaching a target audience with the right message. An amateurish production may alienate people from an agency's approach or goals, because the community may think that its unprofessional quality reflects on the project itself. A more professional production is expensive but more cost-effective in the long run.

Video production demands a high level of staff expertise. If in-house staff do not have sophisticated production skills then outside assistance will be needed to produce a high-quality, cost-effective video.

Who develops videos?

Video usage requires a lead creative person within an agency. This can be an existing staff person or a staffer hired for this purpose. Agency staff are often the best resource to draft a video script and ensure that it is consistent with written materials and the goals the agency is aiming to achieve.

Production frequently requires outside assistance. Videos should be professionally and competently produced, using professional-quality equipment.

How do videos relate to other techniques?

Video techniques are often part of a media strategy. A video can be released for use on television, providing news media with an accurate portrayal of a process or project. Videos are a good means of providing information about meetings or ongoing planning processes.

Videos reach people who would not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including people with disabilities. Agencies should accommodate community members with hearing disabilities.

Videos can be an element for discussion in a focus group or charrette. Public meetings and hearings can be recorded. Videos document positions established at civic advisory committee meetings. They can report on agency progress at a transportation fair. Videos cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff. Participants should always be informed if they are being recorded.

Videos *can* substitute for site visits. A video can illustrate the characteristics of a region or a corridor, alternative modes of transportation, alignments and adjacent neighborhoods, potential impacts, mitigating measures, and methods of participation.

How are they produced?

Videos incorporate a variety of technologies such as live action, computer images, graphics, maps, and charts. They can be produced incrementally. A finished script and storyboard can be developed and turned into a video. Special equipment may be needed to transfer video from a recorder to another medium.

Who participates?

Any community member can use videos. The only requirements are a television set, computer, smartphone, or playback device. Printed materials such as brochures often complement the information presented in a video. Agencies should provide telephone contacts for further information.

What are the drawbacks?

Viewers watch videos without being able to give feedback and without hearing opposing views, although some cable television stations use interactive techniques, such as a video followed by viewer responses via telephone.

Video viewers are usually self-selected. Access is limited to viewers with a device that can play video. Special attention should be given to the needs of people with disabilities. Interpreters may be needed to make the information available to individuals with hearing disabilities. Text must be sufficiently large so people with sight disabilities are able to read it. For the blind, narration should be sufficient to explain the material even though it cannot be seen.

Agencies sometimes overestimate viewers' attention spans, making videos too detailed or too long. Agencies should seek professional advice about how to define their message succinctly and with an appropriate level of detail. For easy comprehension and retention, a good video strikes a balance between substantive information and simplicity.

Telephone

What are telephone techniques?

Telephone calls can be used to provide information and exchange opinions, and they have long been used for community involvement. The following telephone techniques can help enhance public involvement:

- **Auto attendant**: a series of tiered recordings that lead to a recorded answer or the appropriate staff person.
- **Information bureau**: a staff person responds to a broad variety of standard queries, such as bus schedules or meeting dates.
- **Hotlines or voice bulletin boards**: a staff person or recording answers questions about a specific project or program.
- **Telephone town hall**: a telephone call-in, similar to large conference call, which may be combined with a webcast or scheduled television program.
- **Interactive voice response system**: information retrieval from a main computer using telephones or terminals.

- **Interactive cable television information**: a series of information boards or videos that can be called up by phone to a television screen.

Why are they useful?

Telephone techniques are interactive. Responses can vary from pre- recorded messages to staff responses on specific topics.

Telephone techniques reach a variety of people who might not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including people with disabilities. They are used in community surveys to reach a statistically viable sample of the general population. When combined with television, telephone techniques potentially open a new audience for public involvement.

Do telephone techniques have special uses?

Agencies can use telephones to cover many topics. An audio text service can be programmed to give answers to hundreds of questions, including times and dates of community meetings.

Agencies can also use telephones to cover large geographic areas. Telephones can be available around the clock for messages, can be programmed to respond in more than one language, and can be used to poll community opinions.

While all telephone techniques can be useful for a variety of situations, **telephone town halls** in particular have emerged as an effective way for agencies to reach the public.

Telephone town halls are often used for projects affecting corridors within a defined geographic area. An agency sends a pre-recorded message to residents living in the potentially affected area. The message is an invitation to residents to listen to project information and updates, presented by agency staff. The pre-recorded message includes a phone number that residents can call at a given time to listen to the staff presentations. A telephone town hall may include a webcast or television element, such as streaming video on an agency website, so that call-in participants can watch the presentations.

Community members who are not comfortable with large or in-person meetings may be more apt to participate in a telephone town hall. For residents who want to participate in the transportation planning process but don’t have the time to attend meetings, a telephone town hall can be an easier way to stay informed and interact with their transportation agency. In some cases more than 5,000 residents have participated in a telephone town hall, many times more than the number who attend in-person meetings.

Community members can also ask questions of agency staff during telephone town halls. Questions, answers, and summary notes are posted on an agency’s website.

Who participates? How do they participate?

Telephone techniques are easy to understand. No special training for participants is needed for them to get involved or express ideas. Any community resident can participate in most telephone techniques—the exception being the structured telephone survey, which requires statistical sampling techniques.

When using telephone techniques it is important that an agency provide background information to help participants understand the subject matter. Agencies need to make special efforts to accommodate people who do not speak English.

People can participate in several ways, for instance, by phoning their queries or ideas to an agency. The agency is responsible for noting and recording ideas and for informing inquirers of how their comments are being recorded and considered. Agencies can further foster participation if results of telephone interactions are distributed to participants.

How do agencies use the output?

Telephone survey results are especially useful in sampling public opinion. They demonstrate the degree of public support for an agency's proposals and can shape future efforts. They show potential political difficulties and can be useful in developing policy.

Hotlines help people reach the staff person with the right information and help an agency receive and disseminate accurate information.

How do they relate to other techniques?

Telephone techniques can be part of a media strategy. They can provide information about meetings or ongoing planning processes. Community surveys are sometimes made by phone. Telephone surveys or opinion polls are frequently used to obtain information that is not otherwise available to an agency. They are also used during a process when a specific piece of information is required.

Results of telephone polls are used in many other situations. They can be part of a focus group—as an element for discussion; they can be part of a charrette—to establish general points of view of the community; and they can be used in civic advisory committees—to respond to feedback on a project.

Telephone techniques are especially useful in obtaining community reactions after programs or proposals have been adequately explained. But, they cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff.

What do telephone techniques cost?

Simple answering devices are inexpensive, but staff are needed for other telephone techniques.

Telephone surveys are often inexpensive but in all cases involve a sampling technique that should be statistically valid for subsequent use and for credibility.

The expense of producing a telethon or cable television program depends on the extent of information to be presented. Live action and animation are the most expensive portions of a presentation.

What are the drawbacks?

Participation is limited for recorded messages, unless a means of contacting staff or obtaining additional information is offered. Information is often disseminated without a means for people to offer opinions or to reach appropriate staff people for further queries.

Telephones do not always allow people to hear other opinions. A hotline provides agency information only. For telephone surveys, there is a waiting period before participants can learn of results.

Results from telephone town halls are usually made available shortly after polling is completed. A telephone town hall can extend an agency's reach, but may come across as scripted. They can be useful for providing information, but do not replace face-to-face interaction for obtaining community input.
Interactive displays and kiosks

What are interactive video displays and kiosks?

Interactive video displays and kiosks are similar to automatic teller machines. Information is provided through a presentation that invites viewers to ask questions or direct the flow of information. Viewers activate programs by using a touch- screen, keyboard, or a mouse.
Interactive displays and kiosks have the following characteristics:

- Deliver information to the user.
- Offer a variety of issues to explore, images to view, and topics to consider.
- Elicit specific responses, acting as a survey instrument.
- Enable the user to enter a special request to the sponsoring agency or join a contact list.
- Are used in a variety of locations and may be either stationary or mobile.
- Receive and store user input.

Why are they useful?

Interactive displays can reach people who do not normally attend hearings or meetings and help people quickly understand plans and complex programs. They should be located where large numbers of people gather—for instance, in shopping malls, community colleges, government buildings, and airports. They raise public awareness about projects and reassure people that their government is listening.

Interactive displays can supplement other methods of obtaining public input. If an interactive display is part of an open house, participants may be able to provide written comments based on the interactive display program. Kiosks may be equipped with comment cards and a mailbox type container in which to deposit the cards. Project staff would collect these comment cards periodically. Agencies use feedback from interactive video displays just as they use public input obtained by more conventional means.

Do they have special uses?

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 has used interactive displays to illustrate how nuclear power facilities work.

Interactive displays can elicit preferences from people who do not otherwise participate, to collect comments and public input, to disseminate detailed information, and expand contact lists.

Interactive displays complement staff availability. Interactive terminals are appropriate as a primary or initial contact and cost- effective for answering requests for general information. For specific responses or more detailed information delivery, other public involvement techniques would be required. Video displays do not replace face-to-face contact with the public.

Who participates?

People of all ages participate. Children, adults, and older persons are encouraged to use displays, ask questions, and retrieve information. Interactive displays in public places allow an agency to reach people who otherwise would not participate in transportation processes.

Interactive displays reach people at a variety of education or computer-literacy levels. They are often multi-lingual. Designs should facilitate ease of operation to encourage people without computer experience to interact with the program.

How do agencies use the output?

Interactive displays supplement other methods of dissemination, and can conserve staff resources. Output from an interactive display can be used to record preferences or to recognize and respond to specific participant concerns. They are also used to expand contact lists.

Displays offer agencies flexibility in controlling and directing where a message goes. As with commercial video productions, specific audiences can be targeted. A program can be designed to appeal principally to adults who seldom go to public meetings or to parents of children who are interested in transportation. When presentation information is developed to appeal to that audience, the interactive feature of a touch screen adds a means of collecting reactions.

Who leads?

Software experts design and develop interactive displays. These sophisticated computer programs are usually produced by contractors. Preparation, distribution, and maintenance of interactive displays, collection of stored data, and reprogramming of machines require technical and logistical skills.

What are the costs?

Costs associated with kiosks and interactive displays can be broken down into hardware, software, updates, and maintenance. Purchasing hardware and installing a kiosk may cost more than ten thousand dollars per unit. In most cases, agencies purchase kiosks rather than lease them. They may reprogram kiosks after a project is complete to fit a new information need.

The cost of software for kiosks varies. Price often depends on the complexity of the graphics and interaction screens. Extensive graphics and sound, graphics that must be designed by the vendor, and original video footage would add significantly to the cost.

Costs to update the content of the video display or kiosk could range from a few hundred dollars for simple text-based changes to thousands of dollars for new video screens. These costs could be avoided or reduced if agency staff manage the updates. If the kiosk design involves a central computer controlling the display and software uses a common development language, agency personnel may be easily able to make updates to the kiosk information.

Kiosks and interactive video displays also need regular maintenance, including cleaning, refilling paper, and stocking extra parts for quick repairs. Agencies can reduce maintenance costs by assigning on-site staff responsible for maintenance. Alternatively, a kiosk vendor may charge several hundred dollars per month for maintenance services.

How are interactive video displays and kiosks organized?

Interactive displays are best situated in places where they will attract users. Displays are frequently linked to terminals in a central location that monitor their continued performance and reliability.

Interactive displays may be operated as a network of terminals. The decision to use kiosks depends on the nature of the project, other public involvement techniques being used, community norms, and available resources. Because of the cost individual kiosks, if an agency is going to seriously consider kiosks or interactive video 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.

How are they used with other techniques?

Interactive displays cannot be an agency's sole means of public communication. Instead, they offer a dynamic and absorbing way to expand public involvement. Innovative use of this technology offers a unique way to meet an old goal: sharing information with the public.

What are the drawbacks?

People may perceive interactive displays replacement for personal communication. Software and hardware are a high up-front cost and software packages need to be updated regularly. Maintenance costs are also incurred. Screens get dirty, especially touch-screens, and may need daily cleaning.

Vandalism is a factor in site selection, the type of equipment selected, and the location of the power source. The installation should be designed and sited to help maintenance staff cope with defacement.

Liability issues may be associated with location of displays. Movable and stationary displays should be insured.

Computer Presentations and Simulations

What are computer presentations and simulations?

Computer presentations and simulations electronically display detailed and complex information in visual, uncluttered ways that are easy for the public to absorb.

Why are they useful?

Visual images are universally understood and help surmount language barriers. Whether or not people are computer-literate nearly everyone will readily respond to visuals. Images help move discussion beyond conjecture to more substantial issues and concerns.

Computer presentations and simulations enhance interactive communication. Images are used to accommodate and incorporate community suggestions over a series of meetings. Community leaders can explore what-if scenarios and investigate the potential for change.

Computer images convey complex information in easily-digested segments. Individualized pieces of data on demographics or economic impacts can be turned into graphics for participants to discuss. They can present environmental and aesthetic impacts. Simulations can give a bird's-eye, pedestrian's, or passenger's view, while still or in motion.

Showing a proposed facility in a familiar context can help give the public a more complete understanding of a project. Digital photos can overcome misconceptions and serve as a check against distortion or misrepresentation by either promoters or critics. Many agencies use digitized before-and-after photos to demonstrate how projects will change the landscape of a particular part of the transportation system.

Do they have special uses?

Computer-generated visuals can help to resolve conflicts. 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.

Computer graphics convey complicated information simply and attractively. Graphics are projected onto walls or screens, using a portable computer and projection equipment. Data, charts, and graphs from computer-based systems can illustrate statistics or survey results.

Computer illustrations can facilitate discussions. Computer images are used to illustrate specific impacts and visual characteristics. Video animations or photo mosaics facilitate discussions concerning light and shadow issues, perceptions of motion and movement, architectural integrity, and contextual suitability.

Who participates?

Technical committees, elected officials, community groups, and others use computer-generated illustrations for presentations during public meetings and for agency reports and other public documents.

Computer-generated data and images communicate effectively to special groups. Community members with hearing disabilities are reached through annotated visual images with text. People with limited reading skills can easily understand a presentation filled with images and explanatory narration. People view computer-generated materials either at meetings or at home. They see them on a wall or on large video monitors at public meetings. They use interactive compact disks or video cassettes at home or at places such as public libraries and schools. People also receive computer-generated information through electronic on-line services or via cable or public television.

People review proposals and projects at their convenience; they can view reports that incorporate computer-generated graphics and videos on their home computers or laptops.

How do agencies use the output?

Images and graphics convey a great deal of information efficiently, so that agencies do not dominate discussion during a public meeting. An agency can communicate quickly and receive rapid responses from participants. Presentations and simulations can be shared via the web or USB drives. With speedy transmission, agencies send out up-to-date information and keep themselves informed of quickly-developing issues or participants’ concerns.

Who leads?

Sophisticated computer simulation graphics require specific training. Computer simulations are complex to create and may require the expertise of computer specialists. Agencies may need to hire professional consultants who specialize in environmental simulation, computer graphics, computer animation, or digitized photographs.

What are the costs?

Computer costs are based on hardware, software, and staff time. Staff time is required for learning software programs. While prices for software packages are relatively low, time for staff to learn and operate programs is often substantial.

Costs of computer materials for presentations depend on the complexity and sophistication of the presentation. A laptop computer and a projector facilitate effective presentations but can be expensive.

Sophisticated computer applications such as simulations are expensive, and their use may be limited to large, complex projects or issues.

How are computer presentations and simulations used with other techniques?

Computer graphics are integrated with other elements of a public involvement program. As with any presentation materials, the content of a presentation must be determined well before production of the graphics or simulation model. Materials are designed in formats that accommodate additions and changes due to public comment or suggestions.

Computer applications can be used in surveys and interactive displays. Computer images and simulations are central to messages or data agencies deliver online.

Media campaigns use computer-generated images and data. Public service announcements incorporating computer images are broadcast on television and on the web as part of an information campaign.

What are the drawbacks?

Computer images and simulations are not appropriate for all projects or programs. Images are powerful, and they are sometimes misunderstood. For controversial subjects, computer images may suggest that an agency is biased toward one alternative. If illustrations are perceived as deceptive, the public may question the agency or discussion process. If possible, agencies should consult with people representing many positions before developing computer images or illustrations.

Are computer presentations and simulations flexible?

Flexibility is usually related to software costs. Complicated software programs allow an agency to prepare images and simulations for public presentation but also give some leeway to project designers and technicians working on-the-spot to accommodate design suggestions from the audience.

Once in place, computer graphics programs can be used repeatedly and in new ways. Discussion about a complex transportation will generate many potential solutions before reaching a set of final alternatives. Throughout this process, participants need help visualizing and understanding the characteristics of alternatives. Computer images can provide such visual aid.

When are they used most effectively?

Visual images are effective at nearly any stage in a process. A visual depiction of possible changes in a transportation system can be used to acquaint community people with an agency's tasks. Computer images work especially well when used for people with limited language skills or for groups that speak several different languages.

Computer simulations are particularly useful for assessing alternatives, helping people visualize potential impacts and operations. They are used in corridor studies, long-range planning, transportation improvement programs, or other program or project tasks. Visual communication is very useful at the beginning of a project or at a critical time when decisions are being made.

Geographic Information Systems

What is a geographic information system?

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) combine traditional maps with layers of related information in an electronic format. A GIS assembles, stores, manipulates, and displays data that is identified by location and can relate information from different sources. Any variable that can be located spatially can be input to a GIS. Location may be annotated by x, y, and z coordinates of longitude, latitude, and elevation, or by such systems as ZIP codes or highway mile markers. A GIS can also convert existing digital information into forms it can recognize and use. In addition, census or other tabular data can be converted to map-like form, serving as layers of thematic information in a GIS.

The following are some of the many broad uses of GIS[34]:

- **Mapmaking**: Incorporating the mapmaking experience of traditional cartographers into GIS technology to automatically produce maps.

- **Site Selection**: Analysis of multiple physical factors when they must be considered and integrated over a large area.

- **Emergency Response Planning**: Analysis of the impacts of natural disasters on surface structures, size of affected populations, and emergency response time and available routes.

- **Simulating Environmental Effects**: Realistic, three-dimensional before-and-after perspective views of the environmental impacts of a given project.

Why is GIS useful?

A paper map may show where transportation facilities are located, but a GIS map showing the same will be backed up by a full database of information on transportation, land use, and environmental resources.

GIS offers public involvement professionals flexibility in displaying information. Users determine how and at what levels associated information is displayed. As a result, maps can be quickly customized to a particular purpose. Maps can also be used with the public to gather input and display the possible scenarios resulting from that input in a real-time setting.

GIS also allow conditions to be analyzed over time. For example, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) has used GIS for decades to assist in regional and local planning efforts. By

[34] http://www.usgs.gov/research/gis/title.html

working with its partners, SANDAG has developed cost-efficient techniques to update its land use database on a regular schedule. SANDAG, along with numerous other agencies, offer interactive maps that can be customized to demographic, economic, transportation, and trans-border themes, offer GIS files for download.

Does GIS have special uses?

GIS can be used in participatory and collaborative mapping. For example, practitioners and community residents can collaboratively sketch community boundaries, as seen by local residents and identify important community assets and liabilities, such as cultural resources, historic sites, and toxic sites.

GIS also supports *what-if* scenario planning. Mapping of roads, bus routes, pedestrian paths and bikeways commonly can help assess those used and preferred by local residents. Results can be overlaid with current and proposed transportation projects for a quick snapshot of potential impacts and can be integrated with new projects.

Who participates?

GIS can be used interactively with participants at public meetings, open houses, and small group meetings. Practitioners may engage participants as a group or in a one-to-one setting. In addition, GIS tools can be set up as a stand-alone interactive display for meeting participants to review and comment on proposed plans or analysis. GIS products could also be part of interim and final project or plan documents.

GIS tools are often part of agency websites. Computer-savvy members of the public are most likely to use these tools. Usage is limited to those with access to computers and Internet connections.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies can use GIS to gather community reaction and obtain community opinion on projects and plans. Through GIS, agencies may gain a better understanding of which neighborhood or community elements are most important to the public. GIS may also assist with joint decisionmaking and empathy building. Interactively mapping scenarios can help all parties better understand each other’s interests and concerns.

Also, because of the electronic interchangeability of the GIS data files, agencies may save time and resources once a final concept is approved by using the same materials for the next stages of the project or plan development using materials developed, in part, for public involvement purposes.

What are the costs?

Costs to implement GIS systems may be high depending on the strategic interest and information technology resources of the agency. Agencies may have the necessary hardware and software, as well as professionals trained in GIS on staff and available to assist in its use for public involvement. If not, staff training or consultants may be necessary.

GIS does involve a substantial time commitment. Depending on data sources available, maps may have to be generated for intended purposes. In most cases, information for public display would need to be customized to the particular project.

How is GIS used with other techniques?

GIS can be used jointly with other techniques in the following ways:

- Enhance public meetings, small group meetings, open houses, conferences, and workshops by conveying complex information in manageable layers of information.

- Facilitate activities like brainstorming, charrettes, and visioning to develop better, community-based concepts.

- Provide opportunities for the public to see a GIS rendering online and provide feedback.

What are the drawbacks?

Costs and training time may be a drawback to using GIS. If the hardware, software, and personnel capabilities do not exist in the agency, or are not being currently employed on a project, significant costs can be incurred to purchase computer equipment and train staff, or hire consulting expertise. The availability of datasets and compatibility of data may also impact the cost of using GIS.

When is GIS used most effectively?

GIS tools are most effective when there is a need to convey complex information graphically, information that can be tailored to particular users or audiences, and complementary public involvement techniques.

Visual preference surveys

What is a visual preference survey?

Visual preference surveys help communities determine which components of a plan or project environment contribute positively to a community's overall image or features. They are used to explore perceptions of one or more visual concepts of a proposed plan or project.

Visual preference surveys can be in the form of a written ballot, an online survey, a structured set of self-administered questions, a facilitated discussion, a focus group format, an open semi-structured forum, or used as part of another preference-collection technique.

Why are they useful?

Visual preference surveys provide the public with a broad and relatively inexpensive range of options for depicting community features for a proposed plan or project. The actual technique may use sketches, photographs, and computer images to provide the basis for participants to rate or assess each visual depiction on a preference scale, such as a five-point scale. As a result, participants can express judgments and possibly reach a consensus about a visual design, architecture, site layout, landscape, and similar design features, which may be incorporated in plans and projects.

Once visual concepts are developed they are presented in a public forum or other gathering to provide the public an opportunity to review, study, and comment on their preferences for the features depicted by the visual representations. Typical uses of visual preference surveys include helping the community define preferences for architectural style, signs, building setbacks, landscaping, parking areas, size and scope of transportation facilities, surfaces finishes, and other design elements.

Does it have special uses?

Visual preference surveys can help agencies understand and develop the following elements:

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

Who participates?

Public participation depends on the type of visual preference survey technique being used. For example, if a focus group format is used there must be some public selection process to include a set of individuals who are representative of the views and interest of the larger community. At other times, a visual preference survey may be included as part of a public hearing or public meeting process, with one of several stations or display areas to present visual options. At the display area an agency would collect feedback through interviews or preference rating forms.

How do agencies use the output?

Survey results provide insights and direction to the agency on the preference of the sampled group. Based on the objectives of the survey and the representation of the community in the sampled group, the agency may make key decisions on the preferred types of project design features, studies, or plans. The results of the survey also help focus community opinion on projects and plans, can be a catalyst for further discussions, help educate the public about the design or plan choices, and offer an alternative form of collecting public or community opinion and feedback. Because of the visual basis of this technique, concepts and survey results are easily conveyed in the mass media.

What are the costs?

Visual preference surveys cost usually a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the range of visual options to be displayed, the desired sample size, and the method(s) of collecting and analyzing public preferences. Agencies can use staff or a consultant to carry out the survey. Surveys conducted using free or low-cost online tools can substantially cut expenses.

How are they used with other techniques?

Visual preference surveys complement other survey techniques. They can be used as part of a wider set of techniques to help educate the public about key features of a project or plan and to assist in the development of ideas or concepts. Visual preference surveys can complement public meetings or hearings, vision development, charrettes, focus group discussions, and small group meetings.

What are the drawbacks?

Visual preference surveys are time consuming. They require developing one or more visual renderings of options or design features under consideration. Set-up may require several weeks of preparation, depending on data availability, the skills of the artist, and the size and level of detail of the rendering.

It is possible that the public will develop false expectations based on a visual rendering. Agencies need to ensure that a designer's visualizations are true. Agencies using this technique will need to consider alternative ways to involve people with visual impairments.

When are they used most effectively?

Visual preference surveys are most effective when major design decisions need to be made. The technique can also help build community consensus and momentum on a preferred design. This technique is effective for complex issues and concepts that lend themselves to visualization.

Voting

What are voting techniques?

Voting lets the public express a preference for an issue or idea and have their preferences recorded, usually anonymously and instantaneously. Mobile technology means users can connect to the Internet or e-mail providers and cast preferences for products and services.

Why are they useful?

There is no voter intent problem (*was a ballot marked correctly?*) when surveys are conducted via direct-recording electronic systems, where the participant does not fill out a paper ballot and simply touches a screen, pushes buttons, or fills out the survey online. Preferences are captured quickly, and the only requirement is electronic access to the ballot.

Does voting have special uses?

Voting is useful when seeking preferences quickly from an audience. However, care must be taken to understand the nature of the voting group so that results are carefully analyzed and inferences correctly drawn about preferences for more general populations or groups.

Who participates?

Voting participants may represent a subpopulation or the more general population. Agencies may pre-select or screen voters, or those who simply have access to voting devices or websites may be allowed to vote. The choice of technique and who participates depends on the objectives of the public involvement process.

Agencies need to address issues of voter fraud, double counting, and ease of access. Some of these issues can be resolved by using identifying numbers or letters for each vote cast.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies use voting results similar to how they use survey or visual preference results. In general, the output allows for rapid public reaction to a project or plan, obtaining community preferences for selected scenarios, helping to educate the public about a particular project or plan, and encouraging participation through the fundamental democratic principle of voting.

What are the costs?

Agencies may encounter potentially high initial cost or rental cost for physical voting systems, although these costs can be reduced substantially by using Internet surveys websites, such as SurveyMonkey.

How are they used with other techniques?

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

What are the drawbacks?

Agency staff must be aware when they interpret results that instant voting accounts only for the opinions of those who voted.

Remote sensing applications

What are Remote Sensing Applications?

Remote Sensing Applications (RSAs) are a combination of hardware and software that allow the application to process information about land, water, or an object, without physical contact from the sensor. The term remote sensing most often refers to the collection of data by instruments carried aboard aircraft or satellites. Remote sensing is also conducted through a land-based network of environmental sensing stations maintained by a variety of federal, state, and local agencies. Such remote sensing may track weather conditions, measurements of air and water conditions and quality, or other specialty data.

Why are they useful?

RSAs let agencies collect and analyze environmental data at a low cost and with relative convenience. As a public involvement technique, RSAs help the public understand past and current environmental conditions in a particular study area or region. RSAs also provide first-hand access to data that may be used to help educate the public, build confidence in other analytic methods, and foster a more active public role in a project or plan development.

Do they have special uses?

RSAs provide the public with a firsthand appreciation of the macro and micro environmental features of a study area. Depending on data quality, RSAs can be useful throughout a project, including when an agency is identifying issues, developing options, and selecting a preferred course of action.

Who participates?

Agencies usually develop and maintain RSAs. Special interest groups may also use basic data from remote sensors to analyze and summarize their findings. Data sources are often free via the Internet.

Agency staff need access to the data and conditions under which the data was collected to conduct a remote sensor analysis. The data is then processed using software. Results are verified, summarized, displayed, printed, and summarized for further interpretation. A variety of collection and analysis activities are conducted between commercial firms and academic or non-profit organizations. For example, ESRI—a private firm that specializes in GIS—maintains a conservation program that provides industry- academic-nonprofit collaboration on a variety of environmental and community remote sensing projects.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies use RSAs in the following ways:

- To educate the public about baseline environmental conditions and trends.
- To analyze and develop findings of community and environmental impacts of a proposed plan or project.
- To assist in displaying or conveying complex environmental information.
- To obtain public comments or reactions.

What are the costs?

RSA costs can vary significantly. Some RSA information can be low-cost because data and analyses are available through the Internet. If analyses or findings are not available, RSAs may need to be developed to meet a specific project need. Sometimes this expertise is available within an agency. Consequently, costs may vary from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, depending on the objectives of the RSA, the level of precision required, and the complexity and scope of the sensing data and analysis.

How are RSAs used with other techniques?

RSAs complement other environmental data collection techniques. They most effective when macro-scale surveys of environmental data are required and the hardware and software for data collection, analysis, and reporting have been developed and verified. The data and findings can be used to assist or augment other public involvement techniques such as using reports and display materials to impart a baseline knowledge of environmental conditions, identifying issues and concerns, developing alternative solutions, selecting among alternatives, and communicating and displaying information.

What are the drawbacks?

RSA techniques are relatively straightforward, but the complexity of the process from sensing data to the communicating of findings is highly complex and may not be clear to a non-specialist. This may create some issues related to credibility and validity. Also, RSAs built from scratch will be expensive, although increased use of RSA recent decades has helped to lower the user costs.

When are they used most effectively?

RSAs are most effective when the study topic is somewhat familiar to the public—for example, weather sensing—when the analysis is intuitive and straightforward, and when findings contribute to additional understanding and interpretation of the issues or discussion topics at hand.

Interactive Broadcasts

Interactive broadcasting is a person-to-person technique that lets viewers respond to and interact with agency staff by telephone or computer. Services such as Skype, which offer easy videoconferencing via computers and webcams, are similar to more complex interactive broadcasting techniques.

Interactive broadcasts include the following elements:

- A television or web broadcast that includes telephone numbers or web addresses for the public.
- Participants who use telephones or computers to comment or ask questions.
- Staff who record comments and respond to questions.

Electronic town meetings are a good example of interactive broadcasting. During electronic town meetings large numbers of people participate directly from their homes or other designated locations. A meeting, presentation, or panel discussion is held in a central location with an audience, while a TV crew records and broadcasts the proceedings over local cable. Home viewers phone in questions for discussion leaders to answer, similar to a talk radio call-in program.

Why are interactive broadcasts useful?

Interactive broadcasts provide direct and immediate access to public meetings for those who cannot attend in person. It can help the public grasp a planning concept, understand complex programs, and absorb large amounts of information quickly. Electronic town meetings may engage members of the public who would otherwise not participate in civic affairs.

Informal surveys can be a central element in interactive broadcasts. Viewers use telephones or computers to register approval or disapproval on a specific project or issue under discussion. Results are tabulated and shown on the program, perhaps generating additional responses.

Do they have special uses?

Interactive broadcasts are especially useful for public presentations. Information can be disseminated at regular intervals to a home audience. Interactive broadcasts can help agencies reach a wide audience and increase awareness and inclusiveness.

Interactive broadcasts can also target a specific audience. Broadcasts can reach specialized audiences through non-English language or other special media channels or shows. For instance, Berks Community Television in Reading, PA, hosts a two-way cable television program designed to reach older persons.

Who participates?

Interactive broadcasts include many people, particularly if a program is well publicized. Broadcasts on a major local or regional channel or popular website stand the best chance of reaching the most viewers.

How do agencies use the output?

Viewer comments help agencies identify community perceptions about critical issues, impacts that are sensitive, preferred alternatives, and ways to improve plans and make responsive decisions. In metropolitan planning, an agency can use viewers' comments to identify differences of opinion and needs in subareas of a region or among types of interest groups. To get a clear sense of how public opinion is changing over the course of a project, a record of comments serves as a benchmark that can be compared with past or future responses. Such reference points help an agency evaluate long-term program goals or objectives and reassess meeting techniques.

Viewer input may be used to expand contact lists. Participant names, email addresses, and other information can be registered along with questions and concerns.

Who leads?

Interactive broadcasts require skilled professionals. Interactive broadcasts may demand technical skills of studio crews and facilitators who coordinate feedback through a telephone company. Although conventional presentation needs and requirements of a public meeting come into play, a skilled moderator is required.

What are the costs?

Interactive broadcasts such as an electronic town meeting can be expensive. Sophisticated equipment and skilled operator requirements raise costs. Contracting services are necessary for high-speed digital telephone lines to accommodate incoming calls and instantly tabulate data. An agency with access to a public TV channel may be able to reduce costs. For example, community access cable channels or schools with broadcast media facilities, both which typically have public service missions, may be used.

Interactive broadcasts carried out through web services can significantly reduce costs.

How are interactive broadcasts organized?

Cooperation from a local TV station may be required. A local station such as a local access cable channel or a local government or college station will reach most, if not all, homes in a broad area. A broadcast or town meeting event must be publicized on the station as well as in other print and electronic media so that people know when to tune in. A local TV station may recommend a local media personality to moderate the program, keep discussion moving, and enliven the program.

Technical assistance on broadcasting is essential. Local stations are likely to be conversant with interactive techniques or can help find the right contacts.

Comparison with a public meeting or hearing is useful as a starting point. Many public agencies are versed in the logistical requirements and strategic use of such meetings. Presenting essential facts about the project or program provides a springboard for discussion, but agencies should be aware that incorporating interactivity will affect the program format and shape the agenda.

How are interactive broadcasts used with other techniques?

Interactive broadcasts supplement a broader outreach program. They cannot be an agency's sole means of communication with the public. Due to costs and time constraints, interactive broadcasts may accent or culminate a larger effort to inform the public. However, they also can be useful to survey public perceptions of an issue. It can also function as a large-scale public meeting.

What are the drawbacks?

Perceptions of the meaningfulness of participation via interactive broadcasts vary. Participants may doubt that a television program or webcast will have lasting impact. People may perceive it as a replacement for personal communication.

Imbalance can magnified by live broadcasts. With any project or program, the danger arises that only one or a few interests will participate and that dialogue will not accurately reflect the full array or relative strength of community opinions. Callers may want to grandstand on a particular issue. Agencies can limit speaking times but cannot deny a determined individual the opportunity to speak. This emphasizes the importance of agency outreach to the full array of community interests.

Broadcasts add pressure on agencies to reach quick decisions. Television events put decisionmakers in direct contact with members of the community, and the community may want immediate action. One transit agency held an open house for a planning study that was heavily attended by a segment of the community that opposed an alternative. The community group arranged for the meeting with agency and legislative leaders to be broadcast in a hearing format over a local TV channel. During the meeting, a speaker with vocal support from the crowd demanded a satisfactory decision from the agency and legislators in two weeks, rather than the several months scheduled in the study plan.

Input from interactive broadcasts, like that from informal surveys, is not statistically representative. Only interested people participate. Broadcast responses supplement but do not substitute for more formal survey data as an accurate way to gauge public reaction.

Are they flexible?

Interactive broadcasts are inherently flexible for verbal presentations. An agency spokesperson can update the community on a project or a planning process. Adding graphics to a presentation will require additional time and effort.

When are they used most effectively?

Electronic town meetings are most effective when focused, relevant public input is needed at an important juncture. The Central Puget Sound RTA, in partnership with a local commercial station, presented a two-hour, prime time program on its proposed rapid transit system. Moderated by a local media personality, the program showed featured transit systems from other cities. A 100-person audience was able to show approval or disapproval for various options via hand-held opinion meters that scored opinions on a scale of one to ten. A panel of experts and critics kept the discussion balanced.

Interactive broadcasts can continually update transportation information. A cable TV program or webcast can offer a telephone number to call for further information. Interactive broadcasts are especially valuable for conveying images or visual representations of ideas, including renderings and animations of existing and potential conditions.

Interactive broadcasts can build momentum for or against an improvement. This is particularly important when funding sources are in question. However, project opponents can also hijack that momentum. Political leaders who make budget decisions pay attention to high-profile events that reach a broad segment of their constituencies.

GENERATING FEEDBACK

Establishing Places for the Public to Interact

Useful feedback comes from people who have full information about transportation planning and decisionmaking. Agencies need to establish a variety avenues to readily and conveniently provide information. Many agencies start by providing basic information and meeting records online and staffing phone lines during ordinary working hours. Human contact is vital and should remain a staple in public involvement, even when an agency uses many other methods to reach people.

The following techniques and tool can supplement public outreach.

The Internet

Websites and social networks provide communication channels and information around-the-clock. The rapid evolution of computing technology lets individuals to communicate online through hand-held, portable devices such as smartphones. As costs for these devices continues to fall, a greater percentage of the communities that transportation agencies serve will be able to communicate anytime, anywhere, and in detail on topics of interest.

In addition to improving communication the Internet provides instantaneous access to planning documents and all other public information. Websites allow for a geographically dispersed audience to participate in transportation planning. People do not necessarily have to attend meetings to have their comments recorded.

Why is it useful?

The Internet allows the public, transportation agencies, and interest groups to communicate and share information through polls, comments, documents, videos, and graphics. Feedback via the web is used at any stage in a long-range planning or project development process. Feedback is typically provided in response to information posted by an agency about proposals or programs, and it is used in the same way as feedback from public meetings and other outreach efforts.

Web services provide detailed information about agencies. Most agencies maintain on-line telephone directories that list departments and projects alphabetically. These simple services bring an agency's phone directory to the citizens' living rooms.

Online services give detailed information about construction projects and their impacts. Many State DOTs, such as the North Carolina DOT and Texas DOT, provide specific information about current road conditions and construction projects. From a statewide map, users choose projects in their area, obtaining details on project purpose, dates of construction, lane openings, a corridor map, affected side streets, frequencies of highway advisory radio channels, and construction-zone safety tips. The service lists a telephone number for more information. Armed with such data, a motorist can make choices on how to avoid delays due to road construction.

Data and research on transportation are shared. Caltrans worked with a private firm in an experimental program to provide traffic counts by freeway entrance/exit for Southern California. Caltrans also offers limited use of agency-developed software. The University of Nevada at Las Vegas has a home page describing the work of its Transportation Research Center. Users call up summary information of research projects underway at the University of California at Berkeley, whose research work, distributed via the California State Government Network, includes executive summaries of projects and results.

Does the Internet have special uses?

Internet services and websites can target specific interests, such as bicycling and pedestrian safety within the agency's region and links to bicycle and pedestrian information from other States and sources.

The Internet also gives agencies access to databases that are virtually limitless in size, including databases of transportation literature, interactive maps containing regional data, contact information for stakeholders, and opportunities for the public to join mailing lists.

Websites offer some privacy, so that people who are uncomfortable speaking in front of groups can compose a message and still participate in transportation planning. Agencies also offer surveys or preference questionnaires via on-line services. Comment forms encourage participants to review issues and write personal opinions.

Who participates?

Usage is limited to those who have access to a computer with connections to the Internet and the time and inclination to participate. Attracting local people with the greatest stake in a project or interest in a program is difficult if they are not computer literate, although increasingly more people have access to computers, mobile devices, and the Internet. Nominal computer skills are necessary, but these skills are also becoming more common. Visualization techniques and intuitive websites can help those who are less familiar with computers access and understand critical planning information. Agencies must consider how information can be made available to people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English.

Who organizes Internet outreach efforts?

Any agency can take advantage of existing commercial online services. The design and development of a successful on-line service begins by evaluating a public agency's hardware and software capabilities and determining its information management objectives. Agencies may have to hire outside information management consultants to design, set up, and troubleshoot an on-line system.

Because of the usefulness of Internet-based communications, many agencies and organizations have developed their own capabilities to plan, design, develop, operate, and maintain online services. Many organizations have an internal website, which is accessible only by authorized individuals, usually limited to employees, and an external website, which contains information for the public, such as the agency's mission and organization, major plans and projects, key upcoming events, recent news, archived data, and ways to contact the agency.

What are the costs?

Cost vary depending on the requirements and complexity of online services. Developing a website requires knowledge in public relations, communications, computer technology, telecommunications, agency regulations and procedures, and planning and budgeting. Agency staff should conduct a careful analysis of the requirements for website design to estimate life cycle costs.

Public agencies may provide agency staff for the development, operations, and maintenance of these websites or contract for some or all of these services. If an agency needs an outside contractor to design, set up, and monitor system operation, costs depend on the extent of help needed.

Costs to an agency may be shared with individuals who use the services. A variety of pricing and cost recovery business models are in use. Website access is typically free, with the user bearing the cost to connect to the website. A user's cost typically is the expense of using their personal equipment plus the subscription cost to an Internet Service Provider. Other users may access the website through free services, such as those available at public computer stations in government offices or public libraries. Free, public kiosks may also provide Internet access to certain types of agency information.

Once websites are running, costs to an agency are relatively low. Agencies incur maintenance costs, but overall, websites are cost efficient. Similar requests for information are handled at once, or staff members are better positioned to understand and collect input from the public. Online services are cheaper than direct mail, although outreach is limited to those with Internet access.

Websites and online services need to conform to agency policies and procedures. While a website that disseminates information is valuable for establishing a common place for individuals to receive information and interact with agency staff, many agencies restrict information on a public website due to computer security risks or the complexity of tracking and monitoring requests. The scope and scale of these restrictions vary by agency.

How is the Internet used with other techniques?

Agencies foster education and participation through greater information sharing. Interaction through the Internet helps agencies better understand the public's needs, monitor reactions, and improve public awareness. Websites supplement an agency's conventional outreach techniques, such as public information materials and direct contact to stakeholders. It is vital that agencies have a web presence, but the Internet should enhance the public's traditional means of participating.

What are the drawbacks?

Adjustment to technological change is slow, and some social and economic barriers persist. Concerns about equity among participants should be kept in mind when choosing this technique. For example, agency staff need to consider how to make information available to people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English.

Online users do not represent the entire community. Ethnic groups, minorities, disabled people, older persons, and other people traditionally underserved by transportation may have limited access to Internet resources, although such limitations are increasingly less pronounced as mobile technology and public access to web services becomes more common.

Websites cannot replace meetings, which let participants interact with one another and focus on key points of discussion. The Internet lacks the dynamic face-to-face interplay that generates and airs ideas during a meeting or focus group.

Information overload is a potential problem. As the Internet makes communication easy and many people join in, the sheer volume of information available becomes overwhelming. Agencies are unlikely to receive individual comments unless they help people focus on specific issues. Frequently, this involves communicating through traditional public information materials and meetings.

When is the Internet used most effectively?

The Internet is best used to improve and expand opportunities for communication, to include dedicated or focused small groups, and to provide busy people with basic information when they want it.

Hotlines

What are hotlines?

Hotlines are agency telephone lines that receive inquiries from the general public. They offer updated information on a project and general news regarding a special program, and take specific inquiries and gather information from the public. Hotlines are staffed by a contact person, or operate automatically with recorded messages.

Most hotlines have the following basic features:

- An established, well-publicized telephone number that operates at during business hours; many hotlines offer 24-hour toll-free communication access via an 800 number.
- An answering machine to receive calls when staff is unavailable.
- A staff person designated to receive and respond to calls.
- A policy for how agency staff should respond to calls.

Why are they useful?

Hotlines allow anyone with access to a telephone to contact an agency. They are inexpensive and easy to use for informing a wide range of individuals about a project or planning process and for allowing them to ask questions or voice opinions.

Hotlines deliver specific information to update community members on upcoming program events or announce recent project milestones and decisions. Agencies check the line regularly and make responses promptly. Messages should be updated frequently, so that information is current and callers are confident that the agency is monitoring the system. Special technology enables people with hearing and speech disabilities to activate hotline features.

Hotlines offer information and an opportunity to register opinions or ask questions. They can be used for community members to report issues to staff, such as potholes or graffiti. Staff members can give real-time responses. Answering machines should include a mechanism to record names, addresses, and questions or opinions.

Who participates?

Anyone with access to a telephone can use a hotline. Cross-medium, blanket publicity is the key to making sure that the telephone number is well-known, such as advertising a hotline on social media, agency websites, flyers, and physical collateral such as refrigerator magnets. New Jersey Transit hands out refrigerator magnets with its hotline number at all public events. Members of a project technical team hand out magnets when they meet people in the field.

TDD services make hotlines accessible to people with hearing or speech disabilities, and may be easier for disabled community members to use than agency websites. These callers contact a TDD-compatible hotline through their own service. The service then contacts the hotline. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority regards this service as an essential component of its compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Staff members must be available to respond. Hotlines with recorded messages do not offer callers immediate personal contact. A member of a project or agency staff should call back once messages are retrieved. Answers to information requests need to be timely and responsive in content.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies use hotlines to gauge public opinion about a project and to identify specific, recurring issues or questions. Calls do not represent a random sample, but they indicate community opinions. If an agency receives several questions in a certain subject area, it can adjust its outreach program to improve general understanding of those issues. Recordings allow an agency to prepare a thoughtful response rather than to put staff members in a position they might feel pressure to shoot from the hip, especially when dealing with an upset caller.

Who leads the technique?

No special background is needed to set up and operate a hotline. The actual setup is coordinated with a telephone company. Operation of the equipment fairly simple, and the person who records greetings should enunciate clearly. People who answer calls should be well-versed in the specifics of the project and be able to answer follow-up questions.

What are the costs?

Hotline costs vary, depending on the complexity of the system, use of a standard or toll-free telephone number, and the staffing plan. A hotline can be as simple as a telephone hooked to an answering machine. Costs increase when additional branch lines are added, requiring specialized equipment.

Staffing costs are linked to usage. Staff members only need to dedicate time when they are actually on the telephone, with some additional time needed for documentation and other administrative tasks.

How are hotlines organized?

Most phone companies can provide help setting up an answering system. An alternative approach is to contract with a telephone company to provide the service and permit the agency to access it via an office telephone. This arrangement works for a system with recorded messages. A toll-free number can also be used. Telephone companies bill based on usage, so operating costs are linked to effectiveness.

Agency staff checks messages regularly to assure prompt responses. If staffing permits, a member of the project team is designated to answer calls as they come in, at least during business hours. This person should be well-versed in several aspects of the project so that she or he can answer a variety of questions. Project management may maintain a contact sheet of team members who can answer detailed questions about specific issues.

How are they used with other techniques?

Hotlines are used prior to open houses or open forums. In this way, they enable staff members to research answers and better prepare for an event by knowing names and which meetings community members plan to attend.

Hotlines are integrated with a variety of other techniques in the public involvement toolbox. They are used, along with media advertisements, social media, and newsletters, to publicize public meetings and events. They can be used as an RSVP device for committee meetings and to build mailing lists.

Some agencies are increasingly using online hotlines. The Tennessee Department of Transportation, for instance, offers what it calls an online litter hotline that lets citizens report drivers who litter on State roadways.

What are the drawbacks?

Callers may be frustrated if they receive a recorded message rather than a live staff member. An unhappy caller who is already upset with some aspect of an agency's program becomes more upset when unable to make immediate human contact. This problem is alleviated if a staff member answers the telephone during peak business hours or if the answering system at least gives callers the option of reaching a person. If a satisfactory response to the inquiry comes promptly, most callers overcome their initial frustration at not having their call answered in person.

Are hotlines flexible?

Hotlines can be changed to meet specific functions. A hotline can provide a calendar of upcoming events, celebrate project milestones, or offer a clearinghouse for questions from concerned citizens. Frequent adjustments to hotlines assure the timeliness of information.

When are they used most effectively?

Hotlines are most effective when they are integrated with other techniques. They should be used as part of an outreach program that includes a variety of printed, electronic, and personal media. Hotlines complement other outreach techniques, providing a means to initiate meaningful personal contacts.

Drop-In Centers

What is a drop-in center?

A drop-in center is a place for a give-and-take exchange of transportation information in a community. An easy-to-find location on home turf makes it convenient and easy for people to get information on a program or plan and to express their viewpoints. Drop-in centers offer informal, continuing contact with the community. They may go by other names, such as field office, site office, or clearinghouse.

Drop-in centers have the following characteristics:

- **Visible** to the community—an office, storefront, or trailer in any visible, accessible, and convenient location within a project area or corridor.
- May be **mobile**, using a van or trailer, to maximize contact with various stakeholders.
- Open during specific, **regular hours**, not just occasionally or sporadically.
- Usually exists for a **designated period of time**, such as during the planning or construction phase of a project.
- Usually staffed by planning or project staff **knowledgeable** about the area and issues.

Why are drop-in centers useful?

Drop-in centers provide easy, convenient access to information for people who might not otherwise participate in a planning process, particularly if doing so requires a long trip to an unfamiliar location. Informal, day-to-day contact between agency representatives and members of a community is easier and more likely if a drop-in center is established in a highly-visible area.

Establishing a drop-in center impresses a commitment to communication with the community and can help convince citizens that an agency wants to involve people in planning or project development. Agency staff receive first-hand knowledge of the community's needs and concerns. A drop-in center provides low-risk access for community residents to get answers and make comments about a process and project. Many people are not comfortable asking questions at public meetings, and some do not want to make statements of support or rejection in front of their peers. A drop-in center offers a low-key, easy way to ask questions or make comments.

Do they have special uses?

Drop-in centers are often used during high-visibility projects with major impacts. The Colorado Department of Transportation opened a drop-in center as part of a controversial highway project. Input from the center led to significant revisions over the three years of planning and environmental work.

Drop-in centers provide continuity and historical reference for long-term, comprehensive projects. They help when an agency is based far from a project site, improving community access to the agency. A drop-in center in a seasonal community helps get stakeholders involved. Tourists and other seasonal people often need more incentive and assistance to engage in transportation issues.

Drop-in centers can be used to break down barriers between agencies and communities. A drop-in center in a neighborhood that is racially, ethnically, or economically different from an agency's home base helps show that the agency is serious about addressing community concerns.

Who participates?

Any member of a community, particularly residents and businesses, can use a drop-in center. An office located, for instance, on the first floor in an area with heavy foot traffic draws passers-by off the street. Neighborhood groups, other agencies, and consultants benefit if the office is well-situated and stocked with materials on current projects.

Community groups can use a drop-in center established by a transit agency for their own meetings. This draws people to the center and introduces them to its resources. It also brings other agency representatives, elected officials, and interest groups into the neighborhood to help them understand its people and their issues.

How do agencies use output from drop-in centers?

Drop-in centers give agencies opportunities for broader outreach and communication. Agencies are in a better position to listen, address concerns, and counter misinformation when their staff have frequent contact with the community through a drop-in center. The MPO in Portland, OR, used a rehabilitated city bus in its planning for system-wide fare changes. The bus was driven 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 provided a video about the fare changes.

Who leads?

Staffing patterns vary with the nature of a project. Some drop-in centers are staffed by three or four people, while others have just one. To a large extent, staffing depends on project scale, level of controversy, and popularity of the drop-in center.

Drop-in center staff members must be knowledgeable about the area and about technical issues and programs. They must be good listeners and be aware of and involved in community concerns. Staff must be able to relay concerns, questions, and community sentiment to other project personnel. Staff must also be able to liaison between the community and project officials. They should be friendly and personable, not confrontational or defensive. Sometimes, drop-in centers are staffed by community members who provide local knowledge, input, and contacts.

A drop-in center may also be staffed by an existing neighborhood agency familiar with community issues. If possible, that agency should be involved in transportation and able to answer questions about a proposal or direct citizens to a knowledgeable person.

A drop-in center can also function primarily as exhibit space with no staff on hand other than a security guard or caretaker to protect the displays. However, most drop-in centers are professionally staffed, because interaction between staff and visitors is key to a successful planning process.

What are the costs?

Costs to establish and maintain a drop-in center can be high. Assembling a staff, renting space, installing a telephone, and supplying office equipment can be expensive, especially if the office is active for a long time, although rental costs can be reduced by sharing space with other agencies or community groups. Creating an inviting, friendly atmosphere and maintaining a comfortable environment can also be expensive. Costs can be allayed when unpaid public involvement volunteers help staff a center.

A mobile drop-in center such as a trailer is somewhat cheaper. A mobile center can be moved to different sites to reach more people. It can also be used on more than one project. Large quantities of handout materials may be needed to accommodate a potentially high volume of visitors to a mobile drop-in center. Encouraging interest in a project leads to requests for more detail or new information.

How are drop-in centers organized?

Drop-in centers can be established at the beginning of a planning process when an agency needs to build relationships with the community. They are also used when interest in a process is at a peak, or to respond to an issue or problem related to constructed. Peak interest may be generated as a project advances or media coverage increases.

A long-term center provides continuous contact with project personnel after the planning phase. A drop-in center set up during the planning phase of a highway project affecting Boston’s Charlestown neighborhood continued through construction. The center linked a highly-interactive planning and design process with the construction phase.

The drop-in center must be easy to find and visible from the street and must have convenient hours. Keep in mind that most community members are working from 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. Having a drop-in center open on weekends and evenings maximizes opportunities for community visits. Shorter weekday accessibility and Saturday hours can keep staff time to 40 or fewer hours per week.

It is essential that agency staff be well-prepared for opening day. The community should have two to four weeks of notice before a drop-in center is opened. The existence of a center must be publicized in many community publications and with signs in the windows. The office telephone must be fully operable at opening with sufficient materials. Opening day might include a special event to publicize the office and kick off the public involvement effort.

How are they used with other techniques?

A drop-in center can become a hub of activity for public involvement. It is an ideal place for meetings and charrettes. The center can host a hotline or other telephone techniques. Citizen training and coordinator-catalyst activities can be organized through a drop-in center. It can serve as a community planning center, clearinghouse, and location for open houses. Teleconferencing centers can be set up at drop-in centers to allow people to communicate not only with the office staff but also with agency personnel in the main office.

What are the drawbacks?

Rental costs can be high. Renting a storefront in a central, easily accessible area can be expensive. Agencies may be able to obtain donated space in the communities they serve.

Agencies must commit to keeping drop-in centers open for a specified time period or as needed. This commitment includes staffing. Staffing needs can be daunting. One or two full-time people may be needed over a significant period of time. The cost effectiveness should be explored before an agency makes a commitment to a drop-in center. One way to reduce staffing needs is to make the drop-in center available for fewer hours per week. Another is to engage public involvement volunteers who can help staff the center.

An exhibit-type drop-in center, with graphic displays and little else, is less flexible and interactive than a staffed office. A lightly staffed, under-maintained office will not help an agency or a project. Communities may be alienated by an unattractive drop-in center and an uninformed staff. A field office must have updated materials, displays that are understandable to lay people, and an interested staff.

The agency may want a high degree of control over information distribution at a drop-in center. For a center to be successful, staff needs to be able to give information relatively freely without having to go through channels at the main office. If access to information is restricted or unreasonably slow, credibility suffers and community activity at the center drops off.

Liability issues are a consideration. Drop-in centers must be safe and clean for visitors.

When are drop-in centers most effective?

Drop-in centers are effective during project development. Many State DOTs use drop-in centers at project locations to give information to people and obtain comments and opinions about the project as it is developed by an agency. They are also used during design and construction stages to maintain contact and build trust within a community. Continuity from planning through design and construction phases is an asset to an agency in terms of working closely with a community.

Drop-in centers can be valuable as an introduction to the planning process. They are particularly useful where community residents are underrepresented in transportation planning or project development. Encouraging Opinions and Resolving Differences

Public Opinion Surveys

What are public opinion surveys?

Public opinion surveys assess widespread public opinion. An agency administers a survey to a sample group of people via a written questionnaire or through interviews in person, by phone, or online. The sample of people is considered representative of a larger group.

Survey results give insight into public positions or reactions to agency actions and gather information for use in the process. Surveys can be formal—scientifically assembled and administered—or informal.

Scientific surveys give broadly applicable results. Informal surveys tend to bring responses from a self-selected group of people—those who are more personally interested in specific transportation issues than the population at large. However, informal surveys can be designed to reach a broader group than simply people who attend public meetings.

Why are surveys useful?

Surveys portray community perceptions and preferences. They can accurately report on what people know or want to know. They test whether a plan or plan element is acceptable to the public as it is being developed, or test an agency's perception of what people are thinking and reinforce decisions made through participatory programs. They can identify concerns before a public vote is scheduled.

Surveys also test whether opinions are changing, if repeated over time. Results can be used to guide efforts to meet public concerns and develop effective messages for public information and for a media strategy. They give meaningful clues to the likely level of public acceptance of a plan or program.

Better information enhances an agency's understanding not only of public concerns but also of the process of public involvement. An agency can respond to survey results by providing missing or inadequate information that did not get through to the public or was misinterpreted. This adds to the substantive discussion of issues that respondents identify are important.

Surveys focus public thoughts about a service and provide a context for an opinion. A public opinion survey in Chicago found that public attitudes about transit are not only a function of services received but are also strongly affected by people's feelings about crime, government in general, public civility, and the neighborhoods where a trip begins or ends.

Who participates?

Surveys directly involve a relatively small population of a State or region. In turn, that population is involved only in a one-way participatory effort, without the opportunity for give-and-take with the sponsoring agency. For surveys with a randomized sample of the population, chosen in a statistically-valid way, the sample can be stratified to include only people within a specific geographic area, income group, or other category of people from whom information is desired.

Respondents provide a composite view of the larger population. In a scientific, statistically-valid survey, answers are expanded to reflect what the population as a whole might have answered if they had all been asked the survey questions. Informal surveys can never be viewed as the basis for such an expansion. However, large informal surveys can generally indicate the predominant features of public opinion. In an informal survey in Atlanta, nearly 1,500,000 people were reached through an overall media strategy; more than 10,000 people filled out questionnaires on a regional visioning program.

Who leads public opinion surveys?

Public opinion surveys are led by trained agency staff people. Often, particularly for statistically valid surveys, outside help is appropriate because these surveys can be complex. Professional survey takers also help an agency move expeditiously and achieve results that are valid and unbiased.

What are the costs?

Informal public opinion surveys are relatively inexpensive. They can be prepared by agency staff and administered at meetings, as part of a document, or online.

Scientific surveys are expensive because of the complexity of drawing a sample population or structuring the questions asked. Time is also a significant factor because of survey preparation and administration. Collecting, transcribing, and summarizing data becomes increasingly expensive as the number of questions or size of the sample increases. A carefully-selected sample reflecting many types of interests within the larger population takes additional time and money. Also, a survey cannot stand alone; it must be accompanied by other public involvement techniques, each of which come with costs.

How are public opinion surveys organized?

First agency staff identifies the information it needs and the most appropriate means of getting it. If an agency needs opinions about a planning effort or project that is getting underway, for instance, it needs to determine whether formal or informal comments are most appropriate. In part, this decision turns on whether the agency wants opinions relatively quickly from known participants—an informal survey—or if it needs considered opinions from groups that are not ordinarily informed or involved in transportation processes—a formal survey.

Agency staff then determine the types of questions. Opinions about the process can be elicited from respondents—the survey approach, progress , the direction it is taking, and next steps. Also, opinions can be directed toward particular aspects of a project—the corridor characteristics, alternatives under investigation, and others. Whether the questions are asked of known participants or people unknown to the agency, it is important to frame them in a clear, unambiguous manner. Sometimes questions need to be in languages other than English or be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Finally, agency staff establish the survey questionnaire. Public opinion surveys are taken in a variety of ways, including online surveys, visual preference surveys, scenario planning opinion, telephone, mail surveys, face-to-face at community events, . A simple method is the telephone interview. More elaborate methods involving printed questionnaires need extensive preparation and testing to avoid ambiguities or misunderstandings when received by a community respondent.

How are surveys used with other techniques?

Public opinion surveys are typically used to supplement other techniques. For example, results of surveys can provide grist for discussion in civic advisory committees, charrettes, or brainstorming sessions. Survey results can be a focus of a video production or a facilitated meeting. Surveys usually produce quantitative results that can be counterbalanced by the qualitative results obtainable from a focus group. Public opinion surveys should be conducted so as to be accessible and understandable to people with disabilities. Informal surveys may be included in public information materials, especially if distributed through newspapers or online.

What are the drawbacks?

Surveys are not interactive. Used in isolation, surveys produce data, not dialogue. The information in a questionnaire should be neutral to allow respondents to make up their own minds about a question or concern. Surveys can spread misinformation if poorly or ambiguously drafted.

A public opinion survey is sometimes difficult to undertake for some stakeholder groups for certain topics. Some people prefer one-on-one discussions of issues that affect them, while others prefer surveys because they do not have time to go to meetings. Survey results may not reflect the entire community's views, especially in the case of informal surveys.

When are public opinion surveys most effective?

Public opinion surveys can be taken at almost any time during a process. Used carefully and repeated over time, they keep an agency well-informed of changes in public knowledge of a planning effort or project development and community preferences. PlanMaryland often uses public opinion surveys to improve their planning processes and ensure that as many community groups as possible have a voice.

Facilitation

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is guidance of a group in a problem-solving process. The group leader—a facilitator—should be someone who does not have a stake in the issues or topics under discussion. The facilitator works with a group, including community members and agency staff, and helps them reach a conclusion.

The facilitator manages discussion by consent of the participants. The goal of both the facilitator and the group is to arrive at a collective decision through substantive discussions. Facilitation leads to empowerment and consensus. To the extent that a group is representative of stakeholders, the conclusion is a position or a level of consensus it has jointly achieved.

A facilitated meeting has these basic features:

- Group energies are focused on a task or a limited issue.
- Discussion is structured without controlling what is said.
- Discussion is kept on-topic, with new issues identified and reformulated as they arise.
- Participation in discussion is equitable.
- The facilitator probes for consensus or agreement.

Why is facilitation useful?

Facilitation brings out all points of view represented in a group. In a small group a facilitator can encourage discussion from all participants. Sharing viewpoints stimulates discussion. A facilitator can ask hypothetical questions to get discussion moving if there is a lack of fully developed viewpoints.

Facilitation often saves time. Facilitation skills can break a stalemate and allow a group to move toward consensus. Facilitators work toward an open process. They ensure that the group is fully aware of the issues prior to discussion of steps to be taken. Facilitators assure that participants are educated on technical as appropriate and seek fleshed-out viewpoints from participants. They ensure that points are clarified and elicit follow-up on questions. Facilitators respect differing opinions and make sure that all members of the group are also respectful.

Does facilitation have special uses?

Facilitation indicates a commitment to action. Facilitated meetings take on importance that a regular meeting does not, indicate that an agency is committed to overcoming obstacles, demonstrate a commitment to involving local people in decisionmaking, and shows that an agency is taking public comments seriously.

Facilitation can be used at almost any time to assist a group struggling with an obstacle to collaborative decisionmaking. It can be used to discuss small or overarching issues and can be used for comprehensive planning issues, project-level decisionmaking, policy review, or detailed design.

Who participates?

Representatives from community or stakeholder groups are invited to participate in a facilitated discussion. A diversity in viewpoints is expected. This diversity must be represented to ensure full discussion.

Participants do not require special training. Participant interest may range from a broad, long-term view of the issues within a geographic area to a specific and more short-term view of issues surrounding a project or program.

People participate by examining and discussing issues with others in the group. Discussions will be in as much depth as available time permits. A facilitator helps a group work within the time available to it. Typically, major points of discussion are recorded by an individual assigned the task. An agency staff member or community member should be assigned to take minutes and notes.

How do agencies use the output?

Facilitation is aimed toward an outcome, whether that outcome is garnering reactions to agency policies or proposals or reaching consensus on an action.

Group consensus can be used as input to an agency's work. A facilitator's goal is to bring a group together on an action or issue and find points of agreement. She or he may be able to craft a compromise position through give-and-take and over a relatively short period of time.

Who facilitates?

The sponsor or agency selects a neutral facilitator. The facilitator must be accepted by the group as unbiased, constructive, and fair. She or he should be an experienced professional familiar with assisting group discussions via group processes, communication, and conflict resolution skills. The facilitator elicits facts and opinions and helps the group distinguish between them. It is helpful if the facilitator is also intimately familiar with the subject matter being discussed.

In this capacity, a facilitator does not express a personal opinion. Neutrality is maintained at all times. If an opinion is requested it can be given, but prior to offering the opinion the facilitator should announce that she or he is stepping out of the neutral role. At no time should a facilitator make a decision for the group. Facilitators may use a *what I'm hearing* technique to bring discussion back to the agenda and check on whether people are in agreement.

What are the costs?

Facilitation requires agency support staff. Minutes and notes must be taken. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives typically attend to provide responses to participants' questions. In some instances, technical staff need to be available to carefully explain the agency’s position or analysis

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is essential. Background information must be prepared as appropriate so that participants can quickly grasp the issues.

How is facilitation organized?

The sponsoring agency determines the need for facilitation. A divisive issue may call for facilitation. For example, the Virginia DOT used a facilitator to work on resolving potential conflicts with neighborhood organizations.

Agency staff determines the meeting's agenda and schedule. The sponsor meets with the facilitator to discuss the agenda and approach to be taken within the meeting. A site is selected, typically in a space that participants will perceive as neutral.

Agency staff should not attempt to control the direction of the meeting once it is under way.

How is it used with other techniques?

Facilitation supplements other techniques. A facilitator can assist an established civic advisory committee to progress toward its goals. Facilitation is a requirement for a charrette or a focus group and can also be used in brainstorming or visioning sessions and is typically used in a collaborative task force. Facilitation can be used in discussions associated with transportation fairs. Video can be used to record facilitated proceedings.

What are the drawbacks?

Facilitation must be done by a neutral person. When participants perceive that a facilitator is biased they feel manipulated by an agency. In practice an impartial person may need to be sought from outside an agency—which raises the costs of the meeting. A respected community member is often an appropriate choice.

The number of interests and topics that can be facilitated is limited. The sponsor of the process must recognize these limits and make them known to the group.

Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas, despite the presence of an experienced facilitator. People who feel they are being controlled or patronized are likely to withdraw from participation. Agency staff who feel that the process is unproductive may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

Time constraints work against facilitation. A short meeting may not provide enough time for a full discussion of the issue at hand. Participants feel short-changed if insufficient time is allotted to discussion of a controversial issue.

Negotiation and mediation

What are negotiation and mediation?

Negotiation and non-binding mediation are alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes designed to resolve a conflict between parties unable to reach agreement. ADR procedures aim to resolve conflict before it moves to the legal system. Agency staff can use some ADR procedures; others require outside experts, often called third-party neutrals. In some ADR procedures such as legally binding arbitration, third parties make decisions. Binding procedures, however, are not appropriate to transportation planning and project development. This report deals only with non-binding techniques.

The major ADR procedures suited to transportation decisionmaking are negotiation, facilitation, and non-binding mediation.

Negotiation is the process of bargaining between two or more interests. It can be conducted directly by the concerned parties or can take place during the mediation process. In negotiation, the concerned parties meet to resolve a dispute. In Nevada and California, after a lawsuit was filed against the Lake Tahoe-area MPO, environmentalists, developers, and other participants negotiated in workshops and small meetings to develop mutually acceptable environmental standards and long-range plans.

Facilitation is carried out by skilled leaders focused on meeting process and organization. Agency staff or third parties can facilitate. Because facilitation is broadly applicable to public involvement situations other than dispute resolution, facilitation is presented in this volume as a separate technique.

Mediation revolves around a trained, impartial third party to help reach consensus on substantive issues among conflicting parties. A mediator can be from within or outside an agency but must be neutral and perceived as such by all parties. While mediation can be binding or non-binding, only non-binding mediation is considered here. Non-binding mediation generally has the following characteristics:

- A neutral third party, impartial and unaligned with any side of the conflict; the third party has no decision-making authority.
- All interested parties are asked to participate voluntarily.
- Opportunities are offered for local people, as well as officials or leaders, to be heard.
- Community people receive responses to their suggestions or concerns.
- The parties work toward reaching consensus; the third party makes suggestions for possible compromise positions and otherwise helps the parties negotiate.
- If agreement is reached, it is usually considered a commitment on both sides.
- Written agreements, memoranda, meeting minutes, or reports are usually included.
- Sessions are typically confidential and often protected by State statute as such.

Mediation and facilitation have some similarities but are not the same. Facilitation is similar to mediation in that participants work toward mutual understanding with the help of a leader. However, facilitation works toward building consensus within a meeting, right from the beginning of the process, while mediation is usually employed when an impasse is reached.

Why are they useful?

Consensus-building efforts sometimes lead to an impasse. This is especially true for controversial or complex projects. Mediation and negotiation take a problem-solving approach. The process helps participants:

- Resolve differences outside of the legal system.
- Facilitate agreement and address primary concerns of involved local residents and other interested groups.
- Work together to ease implementation of a plan or project.
- Obtain agreement without an agency imposing an unpopular or polarizing decision.
- Deal directly with a project proponent or agency as an equal participant.

Mediation helps reach consensus on controversial transportation plans and projects. It is often used in construction disagreements with contractors. Outside the field of transportation, examples of how mediation has been used range from child custody disputes to conflicts over siting hazardous waste or energy facilities. In transportation, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has used mediation for several years.

Alternatives to mediation and negotiation are more costly and time consuming. A dispute resolution process can avoid time wasted in unproductive or acrimonious debate at meetings, litigation, major redrafts of plans when they are nearly complete, or staff effort spent rebuilding agency credibility.

Do they have special uses?

Negotiation is especially useful in informal situations, to resolve differences among parties, avoid engaging a broader group with local disputes, or address several aspects of a dispute simultaneously. Negotiation can be brought into a process at any time but is most effective before there is any polarization. In Hampton, VA, a negotiation process to find consensus on a new connector road was established. Participants were trained in the steps of the process. When the staff was further trained in facilitation and collaborative methods, consensus-building became a regular element in Hampton's planning efforts.

Mediation, by contrast, has a special and distinctive use: it is used when a process has reached an impasse or major breakdown. Mediation has been used in transportation projects and long-range planning studies where there is profound disagreement.

Who participates?

It is essential that agencies include all potential stakeholders when establishing a dispute resolution process. Stakeholders may include neighborhood residents, local business people, abutters, regional interest groups, public officials, and agencies. Failure to include all pertinent interests undoes consensus. A person or group whose position has been ignored can challenge the legitimacy of the process. Parties need to be identifiable and willing to participate. All participants must feel some pressure to agree and must conclude that they cannot do better by steam rolling each other or going outside transportation planning by, for example, appealing to the political process.

Parties in a dispute resolution process can appoint or elect representatives in order to avoid large, unwieldy meetings. This requires that groups be sufficiently well-organized to identify leaders who can speak for the group credibly. The representative process requires a high degree of cooperation and trust in selecting individuals to serve.

Mediation usually consists of a series of meetings. Negotiation can consist of one or more meetings among parties. All participants are accorded equal status in the process and are encouraged to present their views on each issue. For maximum success and effective participation, the process must strive for:

- Regular and timely opportunities for participation.
- An ongoing commitment from each participant to attend meetings.
- Full and honest expression of issues and concerns.
- Complete willingness to listen to other participants.
- Agreement on the process and basic guidelines for managing it.

How do agencies use the output?

The goal of all dispute resolution is to reach a publicly-supported decision by addressing and resolving pertinent concerns. The result should be consensus on a course of action, including the possibility of not going ahead with a plan.

Producing long-term results requires committed agency leadership. Dispute resolution may center around a particular plan, but sometimes mediation and negotiation are used as needed over a longer period of time to keep a process moving forward.

Who leads these techniques?

The neutral third party leading these techniques should have the following qualifications:

- Training in dispute resolution.
- Experience from many fields—including public involvement, law, business management, planning, and training.
- No stake in the outcome.
- A relationship of trust with all parties to a dispute.
- Strict impartiality and fairness.
- Ability to make suggestions and to find areas of agreement.

A mediator will often draft a working document that is modified to reflect developing points of consensus. A skilled mediator should be able to work on a single issue on a short-term basis, with the option to remain involved as a monitor of future activity or implementation.

Negotiation is led by agency staff or management. The chief qualification is an understanding of interest-based negotiations—whether from training or experience. Trained consensus-builders and mediators are available throughout the United States. Agency staff can also be trained to develop their facilitation, negotiation, and consensus-building skills.

How are these processes organized?

The first activity of any mediation or negotiation is conflict assessment. The third party or agency staff needs to address such questions as: *is the conflict resolvable?* and *what are possible resolution approaches?*

Preparation is crucial. In the beginning of a process it is essential to perform the following actions:

- Identify essential participants.
- Afford all participants an equal standing.
- Structure sessions to encourage participation.
- Find a neutral location for meetings, probably not in an agency's headquarters.
- Achieve consensus among participants on the agenda.
- Find convenient times for meetings.
- Provide sufficient time between sessions to do follow-up work and analysis.

A negotiation might be completed in a very short time—as little as an hour for a very specific issue with a small number of stakeholders, where generally positive, trusting relationships are already in place.

For a complex mediation, many months may be required, and complex transportation issues involving many stakeholders may take a year or two or more. It is common to hold meetings every two to four weeks for two to four hours each meeting. Time between sessions is often needed for staff to modify plans or conduct additional analysis to respond to participants' concerns.

Mediation styles will vary but it usually includes the following steps:

- Open the discussion and outline the process.
- Agree on the scope of effort and roles of participants.
- Reach consensus on the agenda among participants.
- Review the ground rules (one person speaks at a time, etc.).
- Ask all sides to present their viewpoints, perceptions of the issues, and reasons for the dispute.
- Help people express their concerns.
- State all the issues.
- Review any points of agreement that can be determined.
- Develop several alternative scenarios to bridge the gap between the disputing parties.
- Work with all sides to develop a solution to the dispute.
- Document elements of project alternatives, funding priorities, or other decisions agreed upon by the various interest groups.

In negotiation, the process is more flexible but usually involves the following steps:

- Identify underlying interests, as contrasted to positions.
- Develop alternative scenarios to meet underlying interests.
- Combine or further refine scenarios to meet as many interests as possible.
- Select a scenario via consensus.

Sometimes participants do not feel comfortable meeting in the same room with their opponents. In such cases, the third party meets individually with participants outside the group to work out an agreement step-by-step. The mediator carries proposals between nearby conference rooms until the issues are resolved. In a significant historic example, President Carter carried draft documents between Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat—in different cottages at Camp David—to obtain a formal Middle East peace agreement. In this less open method, strict confidentiality must be pledged by all participants at the outset and followed throughout the process. In some situations, use of a third party follows stringent confidentiality principles, although the resulting agreement becomes a public document or is available to anyone who is interested.

What helps people change their positions?

Participants often enter the process with strong positions that they believe are the only correct way to address their needs. Often, however, alternatives exist that still account for those needs but are easier for other parties to accept or consider.

Identifying interests begins with asking questions. Asking participants why they feel a certain way clarifies basic needs and desires that have not yet been articulated. Breaking down general interests into specific elements helps focus the areas of disagreement. Suggesting alternative choices also works.

Figuring out why people have made certain choices is a first step toward finding different ways of fulfilling their interests that may be more compatible with the other party's needs.

Working toward consensus by identifying interests rather than establishing positions is a key skill that leads to effective cooperative decision-making and consensus-building. Using professionals and seeking information and strategies from books and other resources helps make ADR processes successful.
How are negotiation and mediation used with other public involvement techniques?

Negotiation is part of an overall public involvement process and can be part of many individual techniques. Collaborative task forces have consensus-building as a major goal and often use negotiation as an integral element of their activities. Practitioners who have honed their dispute resolution skills use them informally in day-to-day work with participants and other planning team members to help foster coalitions and move toward consensus.

Written materials are required to provide information about issues or plans under discussion in mediation and negotiation, as in other public involvement techniques. Disputes are often overcome by providing adequate information or targeted materials that respond to the needs of individual participants or groups.

What are the drawbacks?

A dispute resolution process such as mediation or long-term negotiation sometimes involves a large number of interests, adds time to a process—particularly when it follows a failed previous effort—and requires significant management and organization.

Hiring a mediator or a trained negotiator is usually much more expensive than using in-house personnel. The advantage is a more skillful mediation or negotiation and an improved process, along with a clearer position of neutrality. Sometimes a participant serves as a third party if she or he is regarded as impartial by others.

Mediation may require special preparation. Some groups may not be sufficiently well-organized to participate; for example, neighborhoods that lack clear leadership. All participants, including less powerful interests, must have equal standing within the process. Consideration must be given to participants' range of knowledge and experience with the subject matter. Special printed material and briefing sessions are often necessary to give all participants an equal level of basic knowledge and understanding so they can participate effectively in the dispute resolution process.

Participants are not always pleased with the results of mediation. Mediation fails when it is undertaken after people have dug in their heels and view compromise or any alteration in their position as losing. Sometimes conflicts occur among people's basic values, such as accepting certain environmental impacts. If a large power imbalance among interests exists, mediation may raise expectations among the less powerful that cannot be fulfilled.

For various reasons, consensus may unravel. Poor attendance suggests a lack of trust or buy-in to the process. If participants drift away over a long dispute resolution process, consensus may be weak and difficult to sustain in action. Even strong consensus unravels if agreements are broken, priorities are not followed, or principles are forgotten.

Agencies are often apprehensive about the challenges and sparks that arise with many competing interests. Residents, local officials, interest groups, and agency staff may have long histories of hostility. Finding ways of defusing such antipathy and developing a fruitful mediation process is a challenge. A skilled third party's role is to effectively deal with hostility and make the outcome a success. Agency staff with strong negotiation skills also help to create a more positive working relationship.

Are mediation and negotiation flexible?

Mediation and negotiation have considerable flexibility in the following ways:

- Useful in long-range planning and project development.
- Resolve either major or minor conflicts.
- Effective with either small or large groups.
- Take place in municipalities or regions of varying sizes.
- Apply in a variety of settings—between groups or within groups.
- Work in homes, offices, or specially-designed facilities or conference settings.
- Take place over a range of time frames—short- or long-term.

Choosing the most appropriate dispute resolution technique depends on the circumstances and characteristics of the dispute, the participants, and the dispute resolution strategy.

When are they used most effectively?

Mediation is most effective when other less formal consensus-building fails and an impasse has been reached. Negotiation is most effective before an impasse is reached.

Mediation and negotiation must be part of a participatory process that includes such regular activities as working group meetings, hands-on discussion sessions, and timely responses to comments and concerns. Attempts to reach consensus by addressing concerns early helps prevent an impasse. Consensus-building generates trust that agencies will cooperate to reach a mutually satisfactory solution or agreement. Through mediation, agencies find help in reaching agreements, but they are still ultimately responsible for making final decisions.

ACTION STEPS

Agencies need specific ways to solicit feedback from community people, resolve differences, and integrate the results into a process of planning or project development.

Some initial steps include the following:

- Determine how and when feedback will be used.
    - Be receptive to feedback and prepare to use it during ongoing staff work in planning and project development.
- Establish clear channels for feedback to affect agency decisionmaking.
    - Provide well-defined avenues for information, testimony, and opinions from the public to reach agency decision-makers and policy-setters.
- Set up ways to provide further information and to receive comments and questions.
    - Establish Internet and telephone connections that people can easily use to obtain information and give feedback, comments, or receive support.
- Sponsor brief surveys or small groups to preview community viewpoints.
    - Investigate a small but representative sample of the community to pinpoint community preferences. Design the survey to objectively test preferences.
- Sponsor focus groups to ascertain community concerns in detail.
    - Include people who represent all corners of the community to get a broad outline of what people want to see and what concerns agencies might encounter in specific situations. Repeat the technique in more than one location to help determine geographically-based differences in opinion. Use the results to help set up an overall public involvement strategy and specific procedures.
- If an impasse is reached, try negotiation or third-party intervention.
    - Assess the complexity of the conflict to be resolved and how intently participants are holding to their own positions without compromise. Use a skilled, in-house person to work informally with the parties to reach consensus. If the stalemate holds fast, bring in a mediator or other third-party neutral to assist the group in approaching the issues from other angles, improving their conflict resolution skills, and coming to agreement.
- Evaluate the approach with participant advisors.
    - Ask participant advisors if a technique is appropriate or rewarding. Meet with community advisors to get a sense of the best methods of getting feedback and resolving conflicts.

APPENDIX

Statutes, Regulations, and Executive Orders

While transportation agencies have great flexibility in developing public involvement plans, the following federal statutes, regulations, and executive orders provide general guidelines toward developing public involvement plans that work for all communities.

Accessible Locations and Activities

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504

"No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20) shall, solely by reason of her or his 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 or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service."

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)."

Americans with Disabilities Act

Title II, Subpart D—Program Accessibility—§35.149

"Except as otherwise provided in §35.150, 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."

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)(l)

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

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

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508, establishes requirements for electronic and information technology developed, maintained, procured, or used by the Federal government. Section 508 requires Federal electronic and information technology to be accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public.

Interested Parties

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart C, §450.316 (a)

"Providing citizens, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transportation, 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."

Limited English Proficiency

Executive Order 13166

"To improve access to federally conducted and federally assisted programs and activities for persons who, as a result of national origin, are limited in their English proficiency (LEP)."

Prohibiting Discrimination

Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964

"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."

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 the final decisions on the project are made in the best overall public interest."

Executive Order 12898

"Each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations."

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 challenges accessing employment and other services."

Public Hearings

Title 23, Chapter 1, §128

"Any State transportation department which submits plans for a Federal-aid highway project involving the 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 environmental documents so as to inform those persons and agencies who may be interested or affected."

Government in the Sunshine Act, [§552b (e)(l)]

"In the case of each meeting, the agency shall make public announcement, at least one week before the meeting, of the time, place, and subject matter of the meeting, whether it is to be open or closed to the public, and the name and phone number of the official designated by the agency to respond to requests for information about the meeting."

Government in the Sunshine Act, [§552b (f)(ll)]

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

Public Input on Performance-based Planning

Title 23, Chapter 1, [§135 (h)(l)]

"The Secretary shall establish criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the performance-based planning processes 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."

Public Participation Plan

Title 23, Chapter I, Subchapter E, Part 450, Subpart C, §450.316

"The MPO shall develop and use a documented participation plan that defines a process for providing [interested parties] with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process."

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

"The State shall develop and use a documented public involvement process that provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points."

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-range statewide transportation plan and supporting studies."