Arizona Department of Transportation

Public Involvement Guidelines

June 30, 2004

"During the past few years, effective interaction between transportation agencies and the public has become a significant factor in determining the parameters within which any highway project can be designed and constructed. Whereas a roadway proposal's viability once depended almost wholly on engineering and design criteria, the highway planning process today closely reflects a new set of values based on a combination of changing fiscal conditions and increasing environmental and social awareness.

Accordingly, highway and transportation agencies throughout the country have attempted to develop techniques and programs that are designed to both facilitate community outreach and effectively utilize community input."

Improving the Effectiveness of Public Meetings and Hearings
***National Highway Institute Publication* #FHWA-H1-91-006**

ADOT Public Involvement Guidelines

What is Public Involvement?

Public involvement can include any level of participation by the public in helping to shape the outcome of a project. It includes processes to gather input from the public and using that input to make better decisions.

In the public sector, a comprehensive public involvement program includes a variety of techniques that can engage diverse audiences with varying levels of interest. It also involves a combination of community relations efforts, working with the media, as well as involving elected and appointed officials whose constituents are affected by a project.

In addition, there is a difference between public involvement and public information. Public information programs usually involve one-way communications and are designed to deliver a specific message to the public (i.e. wear seat belts, or don't drink and drive). Public involvement is a two-way communication process that solicits input that helps to shape final decisions. Public involvement often includes a public information component, but public support is enhanced through the public's participation in the review and development process.

Why Involve the Public?

Beyond the many regulations that require government entities to involve the public in decisions that will affect them, a good public involvement program can help agencies avoid many time-consuming and costly problems.

When the public (anyone interested in the outcome of a decision) is involved in the process, many positive things can occur:

- Contention can be alleviated
- Participants develop an understanding of the issues and become participants in the actual process
- An informed public can lead to a supportive public
- Negative media coverage can be minimized, even turned positive
- The agency's credibility can be boosted
- Those with varying opinions can engage in a dialog exchange
- Litigation can be avoided

In some cases, unplanned public involvement lengthens a planning or construction process, but if it is incorporated into the development process at the start it can actually save time, because it tends to make the final product less controversial and easier to implement.

How Can the Public Be Involved in Technical Decisions?

Although the public may not necessarily know the slope factors of road design or structural requirements for bridges, people can still benefit from a discussion of the underlying values that impact a decision.

While ADOT's goal is to provide roads and bridges at affordable costs, it must do so in a way that protects driver safety. There are now environmental regulations and requirements in place that impact design and construction, and the economic impacts of where a road is located. So ADOT must balance these different points and make difficult decisions. These policy and value choices are appropriate points for public discussion and input.

How Involved Should the Public Be?

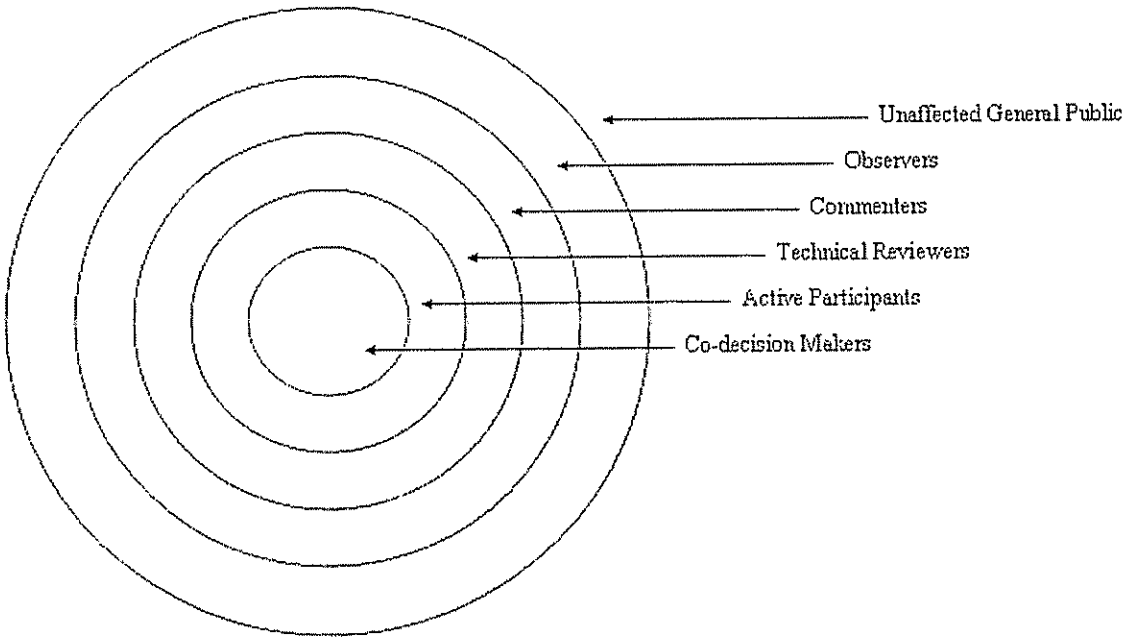
The level of public involvement will vary from project to project, depending on the level of controversy, public interest and project magnitude.

This document will provide a checklist of items to help project managers and public involvement specialists develop an appropriate public involvement plan that will meet the specific needs of individual projects.

A public involvement plan is typically used as a "roadmap" to guide the public involvement and information program for the project. The plan should be flexible and may require periodic adjustments to respond to specific needs and issues. Most plans typically have four overriding goals:

(1) Inform the public about potential impacts and clarify issues;
(2) Identify issues or concerns by obtaining public input;
(3) Educate the public to create an understanding about the need for the project and why it is being done now; and
(4) Provide the opportunity for meaningful public involvement in the planning and implementation

There are various interested and affected publics that will want to voice their opinions during a typical project. Some will be satisfied with receiving information, while others will want more involvement. The concentric circles below show the range of public interest and participation expected in a project. Those in the three outer circles will likely be satisfied to receive information and may provide limited feedback. ADOT can work to ensure that involvement opportunities are widely publicized so people can choose their level of participation. Those in the inner circles perceive a bigger stake in the outcome of the project and likely will be more involved throughout the process.



For example, on a highway improvement project, these categories could be comprised of the following groups:

- Unaffected general public – Readers of *The Arizona Republic* who see a brief article on the highway improvement.

- Observers – People who occasionally use the existing corridor, may see a road sign about the highway improvement or may read an article about it.

- Commenters – People who read about the project and check out the Web site or call the information line for more information. They may also attend a public meeting for additional information, and will make their opinions known.

- Technical Reviewers – Such as the planning staff from the council of governments, city public works staff, FHWA technical staff, local jurisdictions, etc.

- Active Participants - Neighborhood groups along the corridor, state, local and regional elected officials, industry and civic groups, environmental organizations, labor unions, and transit advocacy groups.

- Co-Decision Makers – ADOT Board, FHWA, USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, local tribes, National Parks, and any other entities with land jurisdiction, planning, funding or other involvement in the proposed project.

Note: For assistance in identifying key stakeholders ADOT District personnel are a valuable resource for input.

When Should Public Involvement Start?

It is important to incorporate public participation at the beginning of the project to maximize its effectiveness. If you opt for a low level of involvement, the actual tasks may not take place until after major planning elements have been completed, but higher levels of involvement will require steps to be taken early on in the process and should be planned accordingly. Again, the timing will vary from project to project.

The best time to start thinking about public involvement is when the initial concept planning for a project starts. If stakeholder interviews conducted early in the process, the input can help determine the level of concern and uncover potential issues that can be addressed as the planning work unfolds.

Who Should Be the "Face" of ADOT on the Project?

The public involvement process should be a combination of the project managers working with the project team and with the public involvement consultants. The consultants can field questions on a regular basis throughout the project; however, the project manager should represent ADOT in formal situations, such as public meetings. The public involvement specialists should provide training to project managers for these public appearances to ensure he or she is familiar with key message points. Project managers should also pursue training opportunities to prepare themselves for public appearances.

In formal situations, like public meetings, an ADOT facilitator, consultant or public involvement person should serve as moderator of the meeting. This person can refer questions to specific people for answers, and make sure the meeting is running in a timely, professional manner.

Along those lines, it is important that a single point of contact be appointed for each project to see that any questions submitted by a stakeholder, whether it be via a hotline, email, letter, etc., are answered in a timely manner. That point of contact might not have all the answers, but should be held responsible for finding the answer and making sure the stakeholder's questions are addressed.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

There is no one best approach for public involvement. To be most effective, it should be based on the public's level of interest, the probable level of controversy, as well as staffing and financial resources of the department. A comprehensive plan is often a

combination of media outreach, community outreach and government relations, because all of these groups can dramatically impact the success of a transportation project. Answering these questions can help determine the appropriate level of involvement for the project:

- What is the issue/project at hand?
- Will the outcome of this project have an impact on a large number of people?
- Will the impact of this project be relatively great or minimal?
- Is there a high or low level of controversy surrounding this project?
- Who are the stakeholders? Will they want to have input?
- How will the stakeholder input affect the outcome of this project? Are there actual decisions that the public participation will help to make?
- Will the public be able to see where it may influence the decisions?
- Will this project be of interest to the media or to elected officials?

The answers to these questions should help in the selection of a level of involvement that is right for the project. Keep in mind that the higher the level of controversy and the greater the impact, the more important it is to include public participation early in the planning process. Whether the project is anticipated to be high or low controversy, the project manager should work together with the appropriate project team members and public involvement consultant (if ?) to devise a public involvement plan before the project begins.

Stakeholder Interviews – Taking the Pulse of a Community

A common technique to help answer these questions and develop an appropriate level of public involvement is to conduct interviews with a selected group of key stakeholders. This helps to gauge the level of public concern and identify potential issues, and allows for development of a plan to meet that level of concern. At these one-on-one meetings, the interviewer typically provides basic project information, and then solicits input about possible issues of concern. Another objective should be to solicit additional outreach ideas from those interviewed.

Common questions for the stakeholder interviews include:

1. What do you (as a stakeholder) know about the general transportation situation or the problems that are trying to be addressed?

2. Are there some specific issues you hope ADOT will address as it moves through its planning/design/construction process?

3. Are their community outreach or communications efforts that other groups have used in this area that have been particularly effective? If so, what did they do to get people informed and involved?

4. What outreach techniques should be used in this community to make sure everyone is aware of the project?

5. How do most people get their community information?
    a. Read the local newspapers or listen to local radio stations?
    b. Neighborhood associations or community meetings?
    c. From elected officials?
    d. From school or religious groups?

6. Are there local groups or entities that you feel should be included to ensure that people know about the project and feel comfortable making their ideas known?

7. How involved do you think people will want to be?

8. Who else should be involved to, to get additional information about the community of concern?

Usually about 10-15 interviews of key stakeholders will provide a good idea of what the level of concern is, what some of the main points of concern relate to, and the best ways to communicate information about the project. In addition, it will help determine who the potentially interested parties are. Invariably, one or two interesting ideas of how to get the word out, or who to work with to help build trust and credibility, will be identified through the interview process.

The Levels of Public Involvement

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a good description of the "spectrum of public participation." [i] A copy of the spectrum is on page 8. How these levels can be applied to ADOT projects is described below.

1. Inform

The most basic and least involved of the various levels of participation. Limited to one-way communications to the stakeholders, providing limited opportunities for formal feedback to ADOT.

Example: A good example of the need to inform the public would be a small monitoring well drilling project, where a drill rig will be in the street or easement for a short time period and would cause minimal delays for nearby property owners. A typical plan would be to mail out a fact sheet with the general project information and provide a phone number for people to call if they have any questions.

To improve the communication, visuals should be used whenever possible, rather than relying solely on text.

2. Consult

Gathers input from stakeholders, but makes no promise to use that input in the final decision and does not necessarily work directly with the public. Keeps public informed of progress, acknowledges concerns and demonstrates how public input influenced the final decision.

Example: The consulting level is often used during public scoping efforts for environmental assessments and environmental impact statements. Here a wide variety of public interests are asked to submit issues and concerns. These issues are compiled and sometimes all comments are posted, but they are combined into draft alternatives for additional review and comment.

3. Involve

At this level, ADOT would work directly with the public throughout the planning and implementation of the project to ensure the public's issues and concerns are appropriately addressed as the project progresses.

Example: This is probably the most common level for ADOT projects. Many of the corridor enhancement projects function at this level, as well as siting new roads, freeway expansion projects, and many construction efforts. In these projects, there are public information elements such as fact sheets and project information lines, and public involvement elements such as open houses, Web sites and neighborhood briefings. Both are integrated into the life of the project and are used at various stages to collect input, re-affirm plans and project, and are used at various stages to collect input, re-affirm plans and achieve some level of project consensus.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

COLLABORATE
INVOLVE
INFORM

Increasing Level of Public Impact

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
P2 Objective: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	**P2 Objective:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	**P2 Objective:** To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	**P2 Objective:** To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	**P2 Objective:** To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public: We will keep you informed.	**Promise to the Public:** We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	**Promise to the Public:** We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	**Promise to the Public:** We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	**Promise to the Public:** We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools: • Fact sheets • Web sites • Open houses	**Example Tools:** • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings	**Example Tools:** • Workshops • Deliberative polling	**Example Tools:** • Citizen Advisory Committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making	**Example Tools:** • Citizen Juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

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4. Collaborate

Asks the public for direct advice and help at each step of the project, including developing alternatives and formulating a recommendation for the final outcome.

Example: A number of ADOT projects have used a formal citizen's advisory group to solicit input, support public outreach efforts, and provide very specific feedback on the design of a project.

5. Empower

Promises the public they will make the ultimate decision and that ADOT will implement the project based on the public's decision.

Example: An example of empowerment could be when a city holds a public election to fund a transportation enhancement, such as additional highway landscaping, installing rubberized asphalt, public art, enhanced public transit or additional road lanes.

Another example may occur in counties that hold elections to create or extend sales taxes to fund additional freeway construction or transit improvements.

STEP TWO: SELECT APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES

After determining how best to disseminate and gather information and feedback, select techniques that both meet the goal of the selected level of involvement and are acceptable to the stakeholders.

Following is a list of sample techniques that meet the goals of each level of involvement. Keep in mind, however, that projects can utilize techniques from multiple levels of involvement, where appropriate (for example: projects at the consult and involve levels would probably also utilize techniques listed under the inform level, such as newsletters or Web sites). Details on how to implement specific techniques can be found in the FHWA "Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Makers."[ii] A listing of Public Involvement techniques and their applicability is provided by IAP2 in Appendix A.

Inform
- Newsletters
- Web sites
- Direct mailers
- Media briefings
- Display ads in newspapers
- Local cable programming
- Community displays in public spaces
- Video techniques
- Information repositories
- Tours

Consult
- Public meetings & comment opportunities
- Focus groups
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Hotlines
- Open Houses (when a mechanism for public comment is made available)
- Study Circles: A small group process where participants meet several times to discuss critical issues using a structured process.
- Briefings: A presentation to an organized group to create awareness, impart information, answer questions and establish interest in participation.
- Speaker's Bureau
- Comment forms on Web sites
- Updates to inform of progress and how public may have influenced/be influencing the project.

Involve
- Workshops: A public forum where participants work in small groups on pre-determined assignments

- Town Meetings
- World Café: A meeting featuring a series of simultaneous four-way conversations in response to predetermined questions. Participants change tables during the process and focus on identifying common ground in response to each question.

Collaborate

- Citizen Advisory Committees: A group of individuals appointed to represent the various perspectives with a stake in the outcome of the project. Specifically created to provide advice to the decision-maker.
- Ad Hoc Task Forces: To address specific issues or parts of a project, an ad hoc group can be put together to focus in and assist with a more targeted solution.
- Charrette: An intense brainstorming process that brings together all the essential publics for a prolonged meeting or series of meetings in an attempt to generate a comprehensive list of ideas.
- Consensus Conference: A group of 10-15 randomly selected citizens gather to question experts on a policy issue, and then meet to develop recommendations.

Empower

- Voting
- Referenda
- Authorized Citizen Panels: An advisory committee given the charge to make the final decision rather than advising the decision maker.

So What Works Best When?

From the initial stakeholder interviews, you should have an idea of what communications and outreach techniques have worked well in the community or area before, as well as some ideas for what the community is looking for from ADOT in the way of information and/or participation.

With this information in hand, determine the level of public involvement to be achieved then match up the outreach mechanisms that apply. Other questions to help evaluate which techniques could be used include:

- Will this technique help reach the targeted stakeholder groups?
- Is there enough time and are there enough staff resources to implement this technique?
- Are there state or federal legal requirements that must be met – if so, does this technique help achieve those requirements?
- Is there in-house expertise to implement this technique or do is support needed?[iii]

The Public Meeting Format – What is the Right Format to Use?

There are a variety of public meeting formats to use. Some common examples include:

- Formal presentation
- Open house
- Small group discussions
- Planning workshops
- Combination presentation and open house formats

All of the formats can be effective if the meeting objectives and level of public input required have been matched with the right format. The key is to think through the benefits (and challenges) of each format, and then judge what should work best for the project. The chart on the following page provides an outline to help weigh through the pros and cons.

Here are some general tips to improve the quality of public meetings:

- Make sure the facilities are big enough to host the planned forums. It is much better to have a room that is too big than one that is too small.

- Schedule a dress rehearsal for the internal team before the actual hearing, meeting or open house. Have people practice what they are going to say and how they will answer challenging questions. It is better to walk through difficult questions prior to the public event, and the dress rehearsal helps determine if you have all the right visuals or communications elements you need.

- Provide a variety of ways to provide feedback. Don't just limit the input to verbal questions and a comment form. Other ideas include:

    - Post flip charts around the room that pose different questions
    - Ask attendees to prioritize key issues with dots
    - Have the Web site up and running so people can email right at the meeting
    - Provide a stenographer(s) to take formal testimony
    - Conduct small group discussions that run simultaneously to the meeting
    - Supply various stations with different topics – i.e. noise, design, right-of-way, etc.

- Offer ways to participate that match people's level of interest or intensity. Invite those who are highly interested to tackle specific issues, while providing broader information and input options to people who have less time or lower levels of interest.

- Don't rely solely on the media to inform the stakeholders - use a variety of mechanisms to get the word out about the meeting. Develop an email list, use existing stakeholder communication mechanisms, and put flyers in nearby

libraries and commercial areas. Also consider zip code mailings, or door-to-door distribution.

- Look for additional training or assistance that may need to take place among ADOT staff and/or consultants to work more confidently and smoothly with the public.

Selecting the Right Meeting Format

Meeting Format	Benefits	Challenges	Points to Consider	Keys to Success
Formal Presentation	❑ Everyone hears the same message at the same time ❑ Less staff intensive ❑ Less chance of people getting mis-information ❑ Q&A can be recorded as a permanent record	❑ Opponents can grandstand & take over meeting ❑ People who came for information may be intimidated to ask questions in front of a large group ❑ Does not allow for much dialogue between participants	❑ How controversial is the project? ❑ Is there a chance that a person or group will try to take over? ❑ Is the objective to provide information or increase dialogue & input?	❑ Keep the presentation short ❑ Use lots of visuals ❑ Utilize a combination open house/presentation format ❑ Conduct a dress rehearsal with staff to go over appropriate answers to questions ❑ Make sure the key presenter is comfortable with group presentations
Open House	❑ Lets the public show up when they can rather than at a set time ❑ Allows more informal dialogue ❑ Makes it hard for opponents to overtake the entire meeting ❑ Allows people to get questions answered more privately	❑ If staff is not well-rehearsed, people can get different answers from different people ❑ Is labor-intensive to staff the various "stations"	❑ Are there topic areas that make for good stations? ❑ Do you have enough trained staff to answer questions?	❑ A dress rehearsal is key so everyone is prepared ❑ Provide multiple opportunities for input ❑ Each staff person takes notes of conversations at the meeting (required for hearings per FHWA lawsuit)
Small Group Discussion or Workshops	❑ Allows for good exchange & dialogue ❑ Can help prioritize issues & initiate good brainstorming ❑ Participants tend to feel they have had better interaction	❑ Need enough rooms & facilitators to keep groups small ❑ Better for collecting input than imparting information	❑ Do you have enough facilitators & space to make this work? ❑ Is the group too large &/or diverse to make this difficult?	❑ Could do a general presentation for all, then break up into small groups for discussion ❑ Make sure facilitators are trained to handle potentially hostile audiences

STEP THREE: DEVELOP YOUR PLAN AND GET INTO ACTION

A public involvement plan should have the following basic elements:

1. Project Need and Background
2. Community Concerns and Issues
    a. This should outline who the key stakeholder groups are and the concerns that surfaced during the stakeholder interviews
3. Public Participation Objectives
    a. Describe what level of participation you are trying to achieve, and what information you need to gather from them for a successful program
    b. Include measurable goals/numbers to consider the public participation a success.
4. Public Participation Techniques to be used
    a. This should include techniques for public information; public participation and feedback mechanisms to determine how well the other strategies are working.
5. Timeline of outreach elements
    a. This should focus on major milestones of the project (i.e. Notice Of Intent, public scoping period, release of draft alternatives, etc.)

Tips for Success:

- Don't make the plan so rigid that outreach elements can't be added or deleted if the need arises. If concerns arise and there is a need to distribute a new fact sheet or hold a briefing on a focused area of contention, the plan needs to be flexible enough to accommodate those changes.

- Make sure there are a variety of mechanisms to collect public input and assess concerns. A comment form at a public meeting isn't enough, because everyone will not feel comfortable commenting this way, or they won't even be able to make the meeting. By using a variety of techniques, people can give the feedback the team is looking for in a manner that works for them.

- Rather than relying on people to come to the public involvement, get the word out and solicit input at the places where people already congregate. For example, the local public library, senior center, churches, tribal meetings or a community center can be one of the best resources for disseminating information and collecting public input. People often go to these places for information and assistance, and a simple display with a fact sheet and a comment card can reach many more people than a single open house or public meeting.

- Look for non-traditional meeting places to solicit public input, including shopping malls, sporting events, transit centers, universities and community colleges.

- It is also helpful to look for large public events such as fairs, outdoors festivals, community activities, which are being held during the planning period to determine if it would be effective to have a display booth at the event. There are people who may not participate in other efforts, but will appreciate the information and can provide feedback on the project in a neutral setting.

- In the same vain, look for existing communication routes rather than creating new ones. This could include the local jurisdiction's outreach mechanisms (cable, water bill inserts, email networks) or civic groups, neighborhood associations and homeowner's groups. People are already used to receiving this information so are more likely to read it. It also gives the project a form of third-party endorsement when it is included in someone else's material.

- If there are conflicts between various interest groups, use techniques that encourage interaction. Often there are community groups that are at odds with each other, and the department is caught in-between. Using stakeholder workshops and ad hoc committees to focus on an issue can help to facilitate communication, which can improve the final determination for ADOT.

Using electronic outreach

The level of Internet usage is very extensive, even in many rural parts of the state, and every project should have information posted on a Web site. Suggestions for effective electronic use:

- If the information is a subset of the main ADOT Web site, make it easy for people to find – give them specific information on the links in any fact sheet or handouts, or make sure the Web site has the project clearly listed in an obvious location.

- Collect email addresses at every opportunity. Add it to any comment form, and pass around a sign-up sheet at presentations and group briefings. (Note: Be aware that the sign-up sheet is optional – attendees are not required to sign in). The more addresses collected, the farther the information can be distributed.

- When an email update is distributed, encourage the recipients to send it onto 5-10 other people. The update should also list were to go for additional updates, and encourage people to sign up for further information on the Web.

- Ask for email addresses for key groups or organizations that might want information. They can then disseminate the information to their membership.

- Ask for input in a variety of ways. Don't just limit the input to "give us your comments or questions here." The Web is a great place to put visuals and graphic simulations, and then ask for viewers to describe their preferences. Other

methods are to provide surveys to input and ask for specific responses to alternatives.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is also an important part of any public involvement plan. This should not only be done at the end of a project, but after key milestones, such as public meetings. Some quantitative elements that should be tracked include:

- Number of people attending meetings
- Contacts through the Web site
- Number of comment forms submitted
- Number of comments from flip charts or small group discussions
- Number of brochures or fact sheets distributed at public events
- Circulation of newspapers where a display ad was published

There also are qualitative elements that the internal project team can help to assess. Answering some of these key questions can help judge the program's effectiveness:

- Were there ample opportunities for input?
- Were there different ways for people to input?
- Was there public feedback about the public involvement process? Did they express their opinions about how the process was working?
- Were the opportunities for public input scheduled within the planning portion of the project or were they just an add-on?
- Can the public see where it may have influenced the decisions?
- Was the final decision generally acceptable to the public?
- Was there feedback provided to the stakeholders?
- Do the decision makers believe public involvement process helped to make a better decision?

SUMMARY

Most transportation projects today must have some form of public involvement. Government regulations or laws either require it, or it is simply a matter of good public policy. A good public involvement program can be cost-efficient, timely, and can enhance the overall project design. A strong program can make even controversial projects more publicly acceptable, and enhance the credibility of the important state agency.

The primary keys to success are:

- Start the public involvement process early;
- Keep a flexible program that allows adjustments as issues arise;
- Emphasize fairness, so people feel that all views offered have been considered;

- Provide a variety of mechanisms to both communicate with and solicit input from a variety of people; and
- Try to make it tangible, so the public understands how their input affected the decision or outcome

Techniques to share information

TECHNIQUE	ALWAYS THINK IT THROUGH	WHAT CAN GO RIGHT	WHAT CAN GO WRONG
PRINTED PUBLIC INFORMATION MATERIALS			
• Fact Sheets • Newsletters • Brochures • Issue Papers	• KISS! - Keep It Short and Simple Make it visually interesting but avoid a slick sales look • Include a postage-paid comment form to encourage two-way communication and to expand mailing list • Be sure to explain public role and how public comments have affected project decisions. Q&A format works well	• Can reach large target audience Allows for technical and legal reviews • Encourages written responses if comment form enclosed • Facilitates documentation of public involvement process	• Only as good as the mailing list/ distribution network • Limited capability to communicate complicated concepts • No guarantee materials will be read
INFORMATION REPOSITORIES			
Libraries, city halls, distribution centers, schools, and other public facilities make good locations for housing project-related information	• Make sure personnel at location know where materials are kept • Keep list of repository items Track usage through a sign-in sheet	• Relevant information is accessible to the public without incurring the costs or complications of tracking multiple copies sent to different people • Can set up visible distribution centers for project information	• Information repositories are often not well used by the public
TECHNICAL REPORTS			
Technical documents reporting research or policy findings	• Reports are often more credible if prepared by independent groups	• Provides for thorough explanation of project decisions	• Can be more detailed than desired by many participants • May not be written in clear, accessible language
ADVERTISEMENTS			
Paid advertisements in newspapers and magazines	• Figure out the best days and best sections of the paper to reach intended audience • Avoid rarely read notice sections	• Potentially reaches broad public	• Expensive, especially in urban areas • Allows for relatively limited amount of information
NEWSPAPER INSERTS			
A "fact sheet" within the local newspaper	• Design needs to get noticed in the pile of inserts • Try on a day that has few other inserts	• Provides community-wide distribution of information • Presented in the context of local paper, insert is more likely to be read and taken seriously • Provides opportunity to include public comment form	• Expensive, especially in urban areas

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TECHNIQUE	ALWAYS THINK IT THROUGH	WHAT CAN GO RIGHT	WHAT CAN GO WRONG
FEATURE STORIES			
Focused stories on general project-related issues	• Anticipate visuals or schedule interesting events to help sell the story • Recognize that reporters are always looking for an angle	• Can heighten the perceived importance of the project • More likely to be read and taken seriously by the public	• No control over what information is presented or how
BILL STUFFER			
Information flyer included with monthly utility bill	• Design bill stuffers to be eye-catching to encourage readership	• Widespread distribution within service area • Economical use of existing mailings	• Limited information can be conveyed • Message may get confused as from the mailing entity
PRESS RELEASES			
	• Fax or e-mail press releases or media kits • Foster a relationship of editorial board and reporters	• Informs the media of project milestones • Press release language is often used directly in articles Opportunity for technical and legal reviews	• Low media response rate • Frequent poor placement of press release within newspapers
NEWS CONFERENCES			
	• Make sure all speakers are trained in media relations	• Opportunity to reach all media in one setting	• Limited to news-worthy events
TELEVISION			
Television programming to present information and elicit audience response	• Cable options are expanding and can be inexpensive • Check out expanding video options on the internet	• Can be used in multiple geographic areas • Many people will take the time to watch rather than read	• High expense • Difficult to gauge impact on audience
INFORMATION CENTERS and FIELD OFFICES			
Offices established with prescribed hours to distribute information and respond to inquires	• Provide adequate staff to accommodate group tours • Use brochures and videotapes to advertise and reach broader audience • Consider providing internet access station • Select an accessible and frequented location	• Provides opportunity for positive media coverage at groundbreaking and other significant events • Excellent opportunity to educate school children • Places information dissemination in a positive educational setting Information is easily accessible to the public • Provides an opportunity for more responsive ongoing communications focused on specific public involvement activities	• Relatively expensive, especially for project-specific use • Access is limited to those in vicinity of the center unless facility is mobile

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TECHNIQUE	ALWAYS THINK IT THROUGH	WHAT CAN GO RIGHT	WHAT CAN GO WRONG
EXPERT PANELS			
Public meeting designed in "Meet the Press" format. Media panel interviews experts from different perspectives.	• Provide opportunity for participation by general public following panel • Have a neutral moderator Agree on ground rules in advance • Possibly encourage local organizations to sponsor rather than challenge	• Encourages education of the media • Presents opportunity for balanced discussion of key issues • Provides opportunity to dispel scientific misinformation	• Requires substantial preparation and organization • May enhance public concerns by increasing visibility of issues
BRIEFINGS			
Use regular meetings of social and civic clubs and organizations to provide an opportunity to inform and educate. Normally these groups need speakers. Examples of target audiences: Rotary Club, Lions Clubs, Elks Clubs, Kiwanis, League of Women Voters. Also a good technique for elected officials.	• KISS - Keep it Short and Simple • Use "show and tell" techniques • Bring visuals	• Control of information/ presentation • Opportunity to reach a wide variety of individuals who may not have been attracted to another format • Opportunity to expand mailing list • Similar presentations can be used for different groups • Builds community good will	• Project stakeholders may not be in target audiences • Topic may be too technical to capture interest of audience
CENTRAL INFORMATION CONTACT			
Identify designated contacts for the public and media	• If possible, list a person not a position • Best if contact person is local Anticipate how phones will be answered • Make sure message is kept up to date	• People don't get "the run around" when they call • Controls information flow • Conveys image of "accessibility"	• Designated contact must be committed to and prepared for prompt and accurate responses • May filter public message from technical staff and decision makers • May not serve to answer many of the toughest questions
CENTRAL INFORMATION CONTACT			
Providing access to technical expertise to individuals and organizations	• The technical resource must be perceived as credible by the audience	• Builds credibility and helps address public concerns about equity • Can be effective conflict resolution technique where facts are debated	• Limited opportunities exist for providing technical assistance • Technical experts may counter project information

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Techniques to compile input and provide feedback

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INFORMATION HOT LINE			
Identify a separate line for public access to prerecorded project information or to reach project team members who can answer questions/ obtain input	• Make sure contact has sufficient knowledge to answer most project-related questions • If possible, list a person not a position • Best if contact person is local	• People don't get "the run around" when they call • Controls information flow • Conveys image of "accessibility" • Easy to provide updates on project activities	• Designated contact must be committed to and prepared for prompt and accurate responses
INTERVIEWS			
One-to-one meetings with stakeholders to gain information for developing or refining public involvement and consensus building programs	• Where feasible, interviews should be conducted in-person, particularly when considering candidates for citizens committees	• Provides opportunity for in-depth information exchange in non-threatening forum • Provides opportunity to obtain feedback from all stakeholders • Can be used to evaluate potential citizen committee members	• Scheduling multiple interviews can be time consuming
IN-PERSON SURVEYS			
One-on-one "focus groups" with standardized questionnaire or methodology such as "stated preference"	• Make sure use of result is clear before technique is designed	• Provides traceable data • Reaches broad, representative public	• Expensive
RESPONSE SHEETS			
Mail-In-forms often included in fact sheets and other project mailings to gain information on public concerns and preferences	• Use prepaid postage • Include a section to add name to the mailing list • Document results as part of public involvement record	• Provides input from those who would be unlikely to attend meetings • Provides a mechanism for expanding mailing list	• Does not generate statistically valid results • Only as good as the mailing list • Results can be easily skewed
MAILED SURVEYS & QUESTIONNAIRES			
Inquiries mailed randomly to sample population to gain specific information for statistical validation	• Make sure you need statistically valid results before making investment • Survey/questionnaire should be professionally developed and administered to avoid bias • Most suitable for general attitudinal surveys	• Provides input from individuals who would be unlikely to attend meetings • Provides input from cross-section of public not just activists • Statistically tested results are more persuasive with political bodies and the general public	• Response rate is generally low • For statistically valid results, can be labor intensive and expensive • Level of detail may be limited

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TECHNIQUE	ALWAYS THINK IT THROUGH	WHAT CAN GO RIGHT?	WHAT CAN GO WRONG
TELEPHONE SURVEYS/POLLS			
Random sampling of population by telephone to gain specific information for statistical validation	• Make sure you need statistically valid results before making investment • Survey/Questionnaire should be professionally developed and administered to avoid bias • Most suitable for general attitudinal surveys	• Provides input from individuals who would be unlikely to attend meetings • Provides input from cross-section of public, not just those on mailing list • Higher response rate than with mail-in surveys	• More expensive and labor intensive than mailed surveys
INTERNET SURVEYS/POLLS			
Web-based response polls	• Be precise in how you set up site, chat rooms or discussion places can generate more input than you can look at	• Provides input from individuals who would be unlikely to attend meetings • Provides input from cross-section of public, not just those on mailing list • Higher response rate than other communication forms	• Generally not statistically valid results • Can be very labor intensive to look at all of the responses • Cannot control geographic reach of poll • Results can be easily skewed
COMPUTER-BASED POLLING			
Surveys conducted via computer network	• Appropriate for attitudinal research	• Provides instant analyses of results • Can be used in multiple areas • Novelty of technique improves rate of response	• High expense • Detail of inquiry is limited
COMMUNITY FACILITATORS			
Use qualified individuals in local community organizations to conduct project outreach	• Define roles, responsibilities and limitations up front • Select and train facilitators carefully	• Promotes community-based involvement • Capitalizes on existing networks • Enhances project credibility	• Can be difficult to control information flow • Can build false expectations
FOCUS GROUPS			
Message testing forum with randomly selected members of target audience. Can also be used to obtain input on planning decisions	• Conduct at least two sessions for a given target • Use a skilled focus group facilitator to conduct the session	• Provides opportunity to test key messages prior to implementing program • Works best for select target audience	• Relatively expensive if conducted in focus group testing facility
DELIBERATIVE POLLING			
Measures informed opinion on an issue	• Do not expect or encourage participants to develop a shared view • Hire a facilitator experienced in this technique	• Can tell decision-makers what the public would think if they had more time and information • Exposure to different backgrounds, arguments, and views	• Resource intensive • Often held in conjunction with television companies • 2 – 3 day meeting

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SIMULATION GAMES			
Exercises that simulate project decisions	• Test "game" before using • Be clear about how results will be used	• Can be designed to be an effective educational/training technique, especially for local officials	• Requires substantial preparation and time for implementation Can be expensive
TOURS			
Provide tours for key stakeholders, elected officials, advisory group members and the media	• Know how many participants can be accommodated and make plans for overflow • Plan question/ answer session Consider providing refreshments Demonstrations work better than presentations	• Opportunity to develop rapport with key stakeholders • Reduces outrage by making choices more familiar	• Number of participants is limited by logistics • Potentially attractive to protestors
OPEN HOUSES			
An open house to allow the public to tour at their own pace. The facility should be set up with several stations, each addressing a separate issue. Resource people guide participants through the exhibits.	• Someone should explain format at the door • Have each participant fill out a comment sheet to document their participation • Be prepared for a crowd all at once - develop a meeting contingency plan • Encourage people to draw on maps to actively participate • Set up stations so that several people (6-10) can view at once	• Foster small group or one-on-one communications • Ability to draw on other team members to answer difficult questions • Less likely to receive media coverage • Builds credibility	• Difficult to document public input • Agitators may stage themselves at each display • Usually more staff intensive than a meeting
COMMUNITY FAIRS			
Central event with multiple activities to provide project information and raise awareness	• All issues, large and small must be considered • Make sure adequate resources and staff are available	• Focuses public attention on one element • Conducive to media coverage • Allows for different levels of information sharing	• Public must be motivated to attend • Usually expensive to do it well • Can damage image if not done well
COFFEE KLATCHES			
Small meetings within neighborhood usually at a person's home	• Make sure staff is very polite and appreciative	• Relaxed setting is conducive to effective dialogue • Maximizes two-way communication	• Can be costly and labor intensive

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MEETINGS WITH EXISTING GROUPS			
Small meetings with existing groups or in conjunction with another event	• Understand who the likely audience is to be • Make opportunities for one-on-one meetings	• Opportunity to get on the agenda • Provides opportunity for in-depth information exchange in non-threatening forum	• May be too selective and can leave out important groups
COMPUTER-FACILITATED WORKSHOP			
Any sized meeting when participants use interactive computer technology to register opinions	• Understand your audience, particularly the demographic categories • Design the inquiries to provide useful results • Use facilitator trained in the technique	• Immediate graphic results prompt focused discussion • Areas of agreement/disagreement easily portrayed • Minority views are honored • Responses are private • Levels the playing field	• Software limits design • Potential for placing too much emphasis on numbers • Technology failure
PUBLIC HEARINGS			
Formal meetings with scheduled presentations offered	• Avoid if possible	• Provides opportunity for public to speak without rebuttal	• Does not foster constructive dialogue • Can perpetuate an us vs. them feeling
DESIGN CHARRETTES			
Intensive session where participants re-design project features	• Best used to foster creative ideas • Be clear about how results will be used	• Promotes joint problem solving and creative thinking	• Participants may not be seen as representative by larger public
CONSENSUS BUILDING TECHNIQUES			
Techniques for building consensus on project decisions such as criteria and alternative selection. Often used with advisory committees. Techniques include Delphi, nominal group technique, public value assessment and many others.	• Use simplified methodology • Allow adequate time to reach consensus • Consider one of the computerized systems that are available • Define levels of consensus, i.e. a group does not have to agree entirely upon a decision but rather agree enough so the discussion can move forward	• Encourages compromise among different interests • Provides structured and trackable decision making	• Not appropriate for groups with no interest in compromise • Clever parties can skew results • Does not produce a statistically valid solution • Consensus may not be reached

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ADVISORY COMMITTEES			
A group of representative stakeholders assembled to provide public input to the planning process	• Define roles and responsibilities up front • Be forthcoming with information • Use a consistently credible process • Interview potential committee members in person before selection • Use third party facilitation	• Provides for detailed analyses for project issues • Participants gain understanding of other perspectives, leading toward compromise	• General public may not embrace committee's recommendations • Members may not achieve consensus • Sponsor must accept need for give-and-take • Time and labor intensive
TASK FORCES			
A group of experts or representative stakeholders formed to develop a specific product or policy recommendation	• Obtain strong leadership in advance • Make sure membership has credibility with the public	• Findings of a task force of independent or diverse interests will have greater credibility • Provides constructive opportunity for compromise	• Task force may not come to consensus or results may be too general to be meaningful • Time and labor intensive
PANELS			
A group assembled to debate or provide input on specific issues	• Most appropriate to show different news to public • Panelists must be credible with public	• Provides opportunity to dispel misinformation • Can build credibility if all sides are represented • May create wanted media attention	• May create unwanted media attention
CITIZEN JURIES			
Small group of ordinary citizens empanelled to learn about an issue, cross examine witnesses, make a recommendation. Always non-binding with no legal standing	• Requires skilled moderator • Commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why • Be clear about how results will be used	• Great opportunity to develop deep understanding of an issue • Public can identify with the "ordinary" citizens • Pinpoint fatal flaws or gauge public reaction	• Resource intensive
ROLE-PLAYING			
Participants act out characters in pre-defined situation followed by evaluation of the interaction	• Choose roles carefully. Ensure that all interests are represented. • People may need encouragement to play a role fully	• Allow people to take risk-free positions and view situation from other perspectives • Participants gain clearer understanding of issues	• People may not be able to actually achieve goal of seeing another's perspective
SAMOAN CIRCLE			
Leaderless meeting that stimulates active participation	• Set room up with center table surrounded by concentric circles • Need microphones • Requires several people to record discussion	• Can be used with 10 to 500 people • Works best with controversial issues	• Dialogue can stall or become monopolized

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OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY			
Participants offer topics and others participate according to interest	• Important to have a powerful theme or vision statement to generate topics • Need flexible facilities to accommodate numerous groups of different sizes • Groundrules and procedures must be carefully explained for success	• Provides structure for giving people opportunity and responsibility to create valuable product or experience • Includes immediate summary of discussion	• Most important issues could get lost in the shuffle • Can be difficult to get accurate reporting of results
WORKSHOPS			
An informal public meeting that may include a presentations and exhibits but ends with interactive working groups	• Know how you plan to use public input before the workshop • Conduct training in advance with small group facilitators. Each should receive a list of instructions, especially where procedures involve weighting/ ranking of factors or criteria	• Excellent for discussions on criteria or analysis of alternatives Fosters small group or one-to-one communication • Ability to draw on other team members to answer difficult questions • Builds credibility Maximizes feedback obtained from participants • Fosters public ownership in solving the problem	• Hostile participants may resist what they perceive to be the "divide and conquer" strategy of breaking into small groups • Several small-group facilitators are necessary
FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE			
Focuses on the future of an organization, a network of people, or community	• Hire a facilitator experienced in this technique	• Can involve hundreds of people simultaneously in major organizational change decisions • Individuals are experts • Can lead to substantial changes across entire organization	• Logistically challenging • May be difficult to gain complete commitment from all stakeholders • 2 — 3 day meeting

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FOOTNOTES

[i] International Association for Public Participation, IAP2's Foundations of Public Participation, Student Workbook, page 49.

[ii] Federal Highway Administration, Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making, available at www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/

[iii] International Association for Public Participation, IAP2's Foundations of Public Participation, Student Workbook, Public Participation Techniques Evaluation Worksheet, page 95