How to Organize a Public Meeting

HOW TO ORGANIZE A PUBLIC MEETING

Public meetings are not the same as public hearings. Public meetings are generally informal meetings used by ADOT to assess public response on highway projects, often at an early stage. They help identify and clarify issues, and may provide useful input for project location and design decisions. Public meetings can reduce misunderstandings and conflicts that might arise later at a formal public hearing. Hearings have requirements specified by regulations. Meetings at which ADOT is an invited speaker or presenter, such as Neighborhood Association meetings or Kiwanis Club meetings do not fall under the public meeting category.

Listed below are the steps necessary to conduct a public meeting to satisfy the environmental requirements and policies for the ADOT development process. **Note: Examples of the documents listed in this section are contained in the appendices.**

I. **Define objectives** – Before the actual public meeting, determine the specific purpose and objectives. What information does ADOT want to collect from the public or communicate to the public?

II. **Set a date and time**

A. Directions/Suggestions:

1. Designate a person to ensure everything is complete – this person may assign tasks to others. This may be the EEG NEPA planner or a consultant. If the consultant is designated, the NEPA planner is still responsible for oversight and final decision-making.

2. Check the availability of all project team members, especially anyone who will be speaking during the presentation.

3. Identify the public or local officials who either might be interested in participating or whose participation is necessary in order to achieve the objective and check their availability.

4. Avoid scheduling meetings on Mondays, Fridays, preceding or following a holiday or during key holiday periods such as Thanksgiving or Christmas. Also, take seasonal

visitors into consideration – i.e. consider if the majority of residents living in the affected area aren't there during the summer when scheduling the date of a public meeting. If many residents aren't available during the week, a weekend meeting may be appropriate. In areas where public transit is available, be aware of the schedule and consider it to the extent possible (see #8).

5. Let the community's schedule dictate your start, stop and presentation time. For example: a meeting in a retirement community may begin and end earlier in the day, but in other areas, meetings may begin after 5:30 p.m. to allow for traffic as well as work schedules. Two presentation times may be appropriate if there is a mix of work schedules and age groups in the population.

6. Schedule an event for no less than 1 ½ hours.

7. Consider travel and weather conditions, such as winter snowstorms.

8. Consider activities and meetings in the community that may conflict with the meeting such as city council or government meetings, PTO or other school meetings, church meetings/events, elections, sports, concerts, other hearings, etc.

9. Consider the composition of the neighborhood – do the majority of people have access to vehicles? Childcare? How many people work non-traditional hours? Are translators needed?

10. Hearings must be scheduled at least 15 days after the first day of the availability of the draft document (Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft Environmental Impact Statement). Note: A total public comment period of 30 days is required for the DEA and 45 days for the DEIS.

III. Identify a facility

A. Directions/Suggestions:

1. Choose the facility based on the size, location, ADA accessibility parking and other characteristics of the community. You may need to schedule more than one meeting/hearing per project if the affected area is part of a large corridor project.

   a) Location should be convenient. Many city, municipal or county buildings have facilities suitable for public meetings. Other alternatives are community fire stations, homeowners associations, or hotel/motel meeting rooms.

   b) Examine the meeting site – investigate parking, seating, display areas (can display items be taped or pinned to the walls?), rest rooms, lighting, sound equipment, etc.

2. Obtain and complete the application/contract for the facility. Please note that if the facility has a "hold harmless or indemnity" clause, the facility will need to waive, delete, or revise that clause before Risk Management will accept the application.

   a) Determine if a facility use fee applies and confirm the fee is within the project budget. Determine equipment provided by facility and any remaining equipment needs

      1) Depending on format: include tables, chairs, electrical power, podium, microphones (at least two), audio-visual equipment, screen, water, etc.

   b) Confirm room set-up with facility manager

      1) Lighting, room temperature, contact person on day of event, restrooms, rules for cleaning and locking-up, etc.

         a) Based on level of project controversy and expected number of attendees, evaluate security needs and arrange if needed

         b) Arrange insurance with the facility (EEG NEPA planner responsibility). Verification of insurance – many organizations and school districts require ADOT to provide liability insurance for public meetings held on their property. The application form to be submitted to Risk Management to obtain certification is attached. Risk Management requires ten working days to process the insurance request application (See Appendix A, sample # 1)

3. Conducting the public meeting

   a) Designate a moderator if there is a presentation.

   b) Designate an individual to ensure the meeting is set up on time, conducted in a timely and professional manner and special circumstances are handled (i.e. coordinate staff attendees, disruptions, technical glitches).

IV. Prepare advertisement

A. Things to include:

1. Date (month, day, year), start and stop time of event with a.m. / p.m.

2. Identify specific presentation time near top of advertisement

3. Name and complete address of facility, including zip code

4. Map of facility and immediate surrounding area with north arrow

5. Brief scope and purpose of /need for project

6. Describe the format of the meeting/hearing (presentation, open house, combination format, etc.)

7. Comment due date (received by, NOT postmarked by)

8. Facility names, addresses and phone numbers for locations where Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) is available for public review (hearing only)

9. Special accommodations wording (See Appendix A, sample # 5 for specific wording)

10. List project hotline, if applicable

11. List EEG Web site address, and a project Web site address if applicable

12. Names of the ADOT District Engineer, Project Manager and State Engineer

13. Project TRACS Number (ADOT tracking purposes)

V. Prepare memorandum

A. An internal memo announcing a public meeting is prepared and distributed, with a copy of the meeting advertisement attached, for ADOT personnel, FHWA (if the project is federally funded) and Department of Administration.

1. These memos should be posted in the ADOT Administration Building, 206 S. 17th Ave, on the bulletin board (under glass) in the hall near the south entrance. They should also be provided to the EEG Web master as an electronic file for posting on the EEG Web site.

VI. Publish advertisement

A. Directions/Suggestions:

Note: For all newspapers, contact the paper for submittal deadlines, ad specifications, and cost. When contacting the newspaper(s), ask if ADOT has an account established and if so, speak with the ADOT account manager at the paper (s), (see 4a).

1. Directions/Suggestions:

a) Based on the demographic make-up of the affected community, determine if notices need to be placed in publications that publish in different languages (See Appendix C for a list of newspapers in Arizona that print in different languages)

b) Place advertisement in local community or regional newspaper(s) with widest distribution within and near the affected community. There are various sources that list local and statewide publications, along with contact information. One such reference is the Finder Binder, available at most public libraries or for purchase at www.finderbinder.com. In addition, a guide to newspapers in Arizona is located in the EEG main office. For a quick list of daily newspapers and publications that reach out to specific nationalities, please see appendix B.

c) Place advertisement(s) within the affected communities'/towns'/city's zone of the paper.

2. Publish advertisements at least twice in all publications

   a) By law, ads must begin running at least 15 days prior to the public hearing. The goal is to run the ad 15 days prior to any public meeting.

   b) Publish the last advertisement between four and seven calendar days prior to the meeting (a weekend paper is preferable).

   c) Have a hard copy of each advertisement at the meeting/hearing as proof that an advertisement was published.

3. Request tear sheet and affidavit from each publication (usually sent with invoice to EEG)

   a) If the bill is to be paid by ADOT EEG, give the publication the EEG address and request tear sheets to be included with the invoice.

   b) If the bill is to be paid by the consultant through the project budget monthly billing, they must provide a tear sheet and affidavit to EEG for project files.

4. If EEG is to be billed directly

   a) ADOT has an account with most publications and can receive discounts that are not available to consultants.

   b) If ADOT has no account, a payment arrangement should be made with EEG administrative staff.

5. If translation is needed, allow a minimum of two weeks for EEG to complete (a consultant may complete the translation as well). Include review time as part of this process.

VII. Place an advertisement on the EEG Web site (adotenvironmental.com)

A. Must be in PDF format

B. Allow time for the ad to be added to the Web site (provide to the EEG Webmaster concurrent with the submittal to the newspapers. Materials are posted on Fridays and must be received with adequate time for review and submittal for Friday posting.

VIII. **Select suitable notifications technique(s) for reaching the desired public with desired information** – consider using media announcements, radio ads, neighborhood newsletters, mailings, flyers, door hangers, posters, emails, newsletters, meetings with neighborhood associations, etc. For flyers, brochures, posters and other leave-behinds, ask libraries, community centers and schools to display these items as well. Please note, some neighborhoods or gated communities do not allow fliers and door hangers.

IX. **Distribute notice to project mailing list** – (i.e. people who have commented in the past and/or signed in at previous meetings, governmental representatives, special interest groups, homeowners associations, internal staff, etc.). A mailing list will need to be prepared for the first public scoping meeting.

X. **Prepare informational items for attendees – some of these preparations should occur simultaneously with placing ad, notifying attendees, etc.**

A. DO NOT include consultant logos on any public meeting materials

B. Presentation boards

1. Design consultant firms typically create boards with figures/plans

2. Environmental consultant might prepare the following as needed:

   a) Explanation of the environmental process

   b) Project purpose and need

3. Presentation speeches/PowerPoint

4. Agenda (can be used for handout or internal use)

5. List of staff in attendance and their area of responsibility

6. Frequently asked questions (can be used for handout or internal use)

7. Question cards (hearing only) if a large attendance is likely

8. Speaker sign-up list (hearing only)

9. Flip charts for staff to capture verbal comments from attendees

a) **Important Note: ADOT representatives at a public hearing must write down comments/input they receive from the public during the open house portion of the hearing in order to ensure the open house format is legally defensible. It is EEG's position that this approach should be adhered to for all environmental public meetings for consistency.**

10. Hand-outs

    a) Language other than English if needed

    b) Make ample copies

    c) Include project name and date

    d) Print on colored paper to distinguish from other handouts

11. Prepare nametags for staff, speakers and government officials in attendance. Community members in attendance can create nametags upon sign-in if you wish

12. For directional signs, the PA system, and additional flip charts with stands please see the EEG administrative staff

XI. Arrange for a court reporter (hearing only)

1. Check with EEG Administrative Staff for a list of procurement approved vendors.

XII. Arrange for translator to be present at the meeting, if necessary

XIII. Arrange with ADOT to bring ADOT signs and PA system with two microphones, if necessary. Produce paper signs if needed.

1. Meeting location should be well signed so the public is able to easily find the building and the room.
2. Allow lead-time to set up and test PA system.

XV. Ensure there will be enough easels at the meeting.

XV. Prepare tracking materials – at a public meeting, sign-in sheets and comment forms should always be available. A tracking material is anything that shows people are receiving information and responding. For example, if there's a hotline in place, track how many calls are received. If there's a project Web site, track how many hits are received on the site.

A. Sign-in sheets

    1. Language other than English if needed

    2. Make ample copies

3. Refer to Appendix A, for the correct public record wording

B. Comment forms (See Appendix)

1. May want to print on colored paper to distinguish from other handouts

XVI. Hold team preparation meetings

A. Refer to the section entitled "The Public Meeting Format - What is the Right Format to Use" in the first chapter of this Guidance document.

In addition, please note that for a public hearing for a federally funded project, requirements in 23 CFR 771.111 (h)(v) are in force. These state, in part, that the public hearing procedures must provide for an explanation of the following information as appropriate: purpose, need, consistency with goals and objectives of any urban planning, alternatives, major design features, social, economic, environmental and other impacts, relocation assistance and R/W acquisition process, procedures for receiving both oral and written statements from the public.

One suggestion from FHWA for taking questions is that passing out note cards for people to write questions on tends to be a manageable way to take questions, and allows those who might not be comfortable speaking in front of a group of people/neighbors to ask a question or make a statement.

Again, ADOT representatives at a hearing should be taking notes during the open house portion of the hearing. This is extremely important if it is a strictly open house format. Proper note taking provides legal sufficiency as well as a record of the meeting, as the court reporter is not capturing the one on one conversations that occur during an open house or the open house portion of a hearing.

If it appears a strictly open house format is desired for a hearing or information meeting for a project utilizing federal funds, this should be discussed with FHWA prior to proceeding with hearing/meeting plans.

B. Discussions to include:

1. Who will attend

2. Review of handouts and display materials

3. Review of presentations, Presenters should have an outline for review and comment

4. Agreement regarding roles and responsibilities of ADOT and consultant staff

5. Discussion of possible questions and appropriate responses

6. Identify who will moderate the presentation

7. Determine room set up – direction of flow, where to enter, where boards are located, video tape locations, sign in table, comment boxes.

XVII. Distribute the DEA/DEIS – hearing only

A. Directions/Suggestions:

1. EEG Web site link to consultant Web site

2. Libraries

3. Visitor Centers

4. Chambers of Commerce

5. Town/City Hall

6. EEG Phoenix and ADOT District office, etc.

(Please Note: there is a 30 day required public comment period for the Final EIS).

XVIII. To ensure everything was taken care of, go over full public involvement checklist in Appendix C.

XIX. Conduct post mortem meeting to discuss outcomes, lessons learned, review distribution of comments and who is responsible for addressing which type of comments (e.g., design, Right of Way, environmental, etc.).

1. Prepare a meeting summary. Include who what when where of the meeting estimated attendance and general discussion of questions/concerns expressed.

For copies of forms and additional samples, visit www.adotenvironmental.com