

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Public Deliberation

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age
Seniors
Working Age Adults
Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement

Description

Public Deliberation is a process that encourages public discussion and decision making. It facilitates conversations among key stakeholders, the public, and decision makers with the goal of working through issues, identifying common interests, and making difficult choices. Below are the key characteristics of public deliberation: ¹

- All participants are considered equal; experts and public officials do not have special treatment.
- Participants are asked to weigh all the views that are presented and consider all consequences and trade-offs.
- The focus is on finding “common ground” (actions or policies that are acceptable to all).
- Representation from diverse groups in the community is required.

Special Uses

Public deliberation can be used to: ²

- Empower residents to voice their opinion about projects and issues that affect them.
- Bring together polarized groups to find mutual solutions.
- Encourage engagement in policy making
- Strengthen agency relationships with the community.

When to Use

Agencies can use public deliberation when they are faced with difficult problems or controversial issues and need to engage the public to address their concerns. It is also possible to use the public deliberation process during the early stages of a project or plan to ascertain which solutions may be acceptable and not acceptable to the public. Such a process helps to empower the community and gives those involved ownership over the decision-making process. ³ Indeed, it important to note that public deliberation is a process and not a one-time event.

Cost

* Low (up to \$999)

Public deliberation is a relatively low cost public involvement strategy. The costs associated with public deliberation efforts include advertising, staff time, and location rental. These are similar to the costs associated with public hearings.

Low (up to \$999)	*
Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)	**
High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Time

* 1 to 3 months

The time required to organize a public deliberation meeting is similar to that of a public hearing. Such an event can be organized in one to three months.

1 to 3 months
6 months to a year
Multiyear

*
**

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for implementing a public deliberation effort: ⁴

- **Make sure the deliberation includes key stakeholders and public representatives from diverse backgrounds.** Participants should represent the community in terms of race, gender, education, age, and income.
- **Identify a neutral, professional facilitator to help participants work through the agenda.** It is important to have a person who can help participants discuss difficult issues and maintain order while going through the various stages of the public deliberation process.
- **Start the public deliberation process by identifying and framing the problem.** All the participants need to have a clear understanding of the nature of the problem from the perspective of different points of views. By defining the problem, participants develop a joint understanding of the issues.
- **Provide participants with accurate and objective information about the issue.** Participants need to be made aware of timelines, budgets, and any other information related to the issue of discussion. This helps to establish realistic expectations of what may be possible in terms of solutions.
- **Ask participants to identify options for addressing the problem and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option.** Participants should be encouraged to provide several options for addressing the problem being discussed. They also need to evaluate the pros and cons of each option, including community tensions that may result from implementation.
- **Encourage participants to establish a common ground agreement on what is and is not acceptable as a solution and provide recommendations for action based on that common ground.** After reviewing the options, participants need to determine which solutions are acceptable and not acceptable. The solutions that are deemed acceptable are considered the “common ground.” Agencies can use the “common ground” recommendations as the basis for policy changes or project modifications.
- **Publicize the results of the deliberation and provide periodic updates on the implementation process in order to maintain on-going public support for recommendations.**

Recommended Demographics

Since the focus of public deliberation is to foster public dialogue among diverse groups, the process can be particularly useful for ensuring that underserved groups, persons with disabilities, the elderly, non-English speaking populations, and hard to reach populations are included in the process. However, public deliberation techniques can be applied to any demographic group. The key is to ensure that participants represent the target demographic and a mix of viewpoints.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when organizing a public deliberation process: ⁵

- **Representation from diverse groups is important.** Careful attention should be given to ensure that participants in the public deliberation process represent a variety of different people and opinions so that the discussion is not one-sided.
- **Public representatives and decision makers should be invited to participate in the deliberation.** This gives public officials a better understanding of the public’s concerns and creates trust with community members.
- **Participants need to receive periodic updates on how their recommendations are being implemented in order to foster on-going support and engagement.**

Case Studies

Voices & Choices was one of the largest public deliberation efforts in the United States. Public deliberation was used to engage the public in the creation of Northeast Ohio’ long-term regional plan. More than 20,000 people participated in the process. The outcome was greater public awareness of the issues and shared priorities for the region’s future (<http://americaspeaks.org/projects/case-studies/voices-choices/>). ⁶

Riley County Planning Office used public deliberation techniques to engage community members in developing a comprehensive land-use plan regarding the restoration of the Missouri river basin. Through public deliberation, the

public was encouraged to voice their questions, identify common interests and develop a future vision for the river. The process helped to create greater public awareness of the issues and stronger communication between the public and agencies responsible for implementing restoration activities (<http://icdd.k-state.edu/files/icdd/casestudies/CSmrrerp.pdf>).

For Further Information

Kettering Foundation: Kettering provides a variety of publications and resources regarding citizen participation in government and public deliberation (<http://www.kettering.org/>).⁸

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD): The site serves as a national collective for those interested in public deliberation (<http://ncdd.org/>).⁹

Public Deliberation: A Manager's Guide to Citizen Engagement: Provides detailed information on public deliberation efforts (http://www.whitehouse.gov/files/documents/ostp/opengov_inbox/ibmpubdelib.pdf).¹⁰

Sources

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³ Williams, Abby and Archon Fung, "Public Deliberation: Where We Are and Where Can We Go," Winter 2004, National Civic Review, 20 August 2011, <
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⁵ Williams, Abby and Archon Fung, "Public Deliberation: Where We Are and Where Can We Go."

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⁸ "The Kettering Foundation," 20 August 2011, <
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¹⁰ Lukensmeyer, Carolyn J. and Lars Hasselblad Torres, Collaboration Series: Public Deliberation: A Manager's Guide to Citizen Engagement, 2006, IBM Center for Business and Government, 20 August 2011, <
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