

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Public Meetings

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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
- Educational
- Promotional

Description

Public meetings are gatherings of large or small groups of people for the purpose of sharing and receiving information. They can be customized to discuss specific issues or to address the needs of different community groups. Agencies use public meetings to disseminate information, create public discussion, and obtain feedback from the community. Unlike public hearings, public meetings can be formal or informal. ¹

Special Uses

Public meetings can be used to:²

- Provide a forum for community comments and concerns
- Obtain ideas
- Create dialogue
- Build consensus

When to Use

Public meetings can be held any time it is important to convene the public. In the early stages of a plan or project, they can be used set goals and objectives, explore new ideas, and consider alternative action plans. They are also used throughout the planning process in order to keep the public informed and monitor public opinion. Public meetings can also be used to address complicated or controversial subjects, and to establish communication with specific target groups in the community. ³

Cost

**** Moderate (\$1000 to \$9999)**

The cost of a public meeting can vary substantially depending on the size of the meeting, the venue where the event is held, the amount of displays to be used, and the use of outside facilitators or presenters. For the most part, however, the cost of holding a public meeting is generally moderate. Expenses include staff time, advertising, printing costs, meeting materials, and location rental. Agencies can reduce some of these expenses by seeking donated space and asking meeting facilitators to provide their service pro-bono.

Low (up to \$999)

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Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

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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**

A public meeting can be organized in a relatively short amount of time, depending on the complexity of the event. The most time consuming aspect of holding a public meeting is the preparation phase. Sufficient time needs to be set aside to identify the venue, coordinate the speakers, prepare the agenda, invite the participants, and publicize the meeting. In

general, it can take one to three months to coordinate and hold a public meeting.

1 to 3 months
6 months to a year
Multiyear

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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 organizing a public meeting:

- **Determine the purpose of the public meeting, the format for the meeting, and who will be invited to attend.** One of the most important steps in organizing a public meeting is to determine the purpose of the meeting. This will inform all aspects of the event, including the format of the meeting and who will be invited to attend. Below is a list of various types of meeting formats that can be used to engage the public:⁴
 - [One-on-one Meetings/Key Person Interviews](#)
 - [Small Group Meetings](#)
 - [Workshops](#)
 - [Open House Events](#) and [Transportation Fairs](#)
 - [Visioning Meetings](#) and Charettes
- **Determine the date and time of the public meeting.** It is recommended that public meetings be scheduled during weekday evenings or weekends in order to accommodate people who do not have flexible working schedules. Agencies may consider holding multiple events at different times and locations to encourage as much participation as possible.
- **Identify the meeting team and assign responsibilities.** It is important to identify early the team who will be responsible for planning and coordinating the meeting. Specific tasks should be assigned with clear deadlines. The following include some of the basic planning tasks that need to be assigned:⁵
 - Inviting speakers and special guests
 - Reserving meeting space and equipment
 - Coordinating transportation, if needed
 - Organizing and overseeing the registration process, if needed
 - Coordinating volunteers, if needed
 - Marketing and publicizing the event
 - Overseeing room set-up
- **Select the meeting facilitator and invite guest speakers, if any.** Depending on the type of meeting that will be held, agencies need to determine if they will use agency staff to facilitate the meeting or an outside facilitator. It is also important to decide early if special guest speakers will be invited. The earlier the invitation is sent, the more likely they will be able to attend. Special care should be given to selecting speakers who are good presenters and who can engage the audience.
- **Select meeting location.** The location should comfortably accommodate all of the participants and the equipment needed for the presentations. Below is a checklist that can be used for site selection:⁶
 - Sufficient room capacity
 - Accessible to persons with disabilities and meets ADA requirements
 - Near public transportation
 - Adequate and convenient parking
 - Easy to find
 - Suitable floor plan for meeting format
 - Sufficient chairs and tables
 - Audio-visual availability
 - Power sources
 - Lighting
 - Sufficient bathrooms
 - Break-out rooms (if needed)
 - Proximity to project area (if applicable)
 - Certificate of insurance and/or Hold Harmless Agreement requirements (if required)
 - Cost of site rental
- **Create an agenda and prepare the discussion points, activities, handouts, equipment, and visual aids for**

the meeting. The agenda should include the purpose of the meeting, the name of the facilitator and any key speakers, as well as the time available for each discussion point. Determine if handouts and visual aids will be needed and how the material will be used. The more planning that is done up front, the more likely the meeting will run on schedule and achieve its objective. Below is a checklist of meeting materials and supplies that should be made available at all public meetings:⁷

Printed Materials

- Directional Signs
- Sign-in Sheets
- Agendas
- Evaluation Forms
- Comment Cards
- Displays, maps, posters, and other visual aids
- Informational brochures or handouts

Supplies

- Name tags for staff
 - Pens/pencils/markers
 - Duct tape
 - Easels
 - Pushpins
 - Paper clips
 - Extension cord(s)
 - Tape recorder and tapes
 - Portable microphone and speakers (if needed)
 - Projector and screen
 - Computer equipment
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- **Publicize the meeting.** Ensure the public meeting has adequate publicity and make sure that all potential stakeholders are invited. Invitations should be sent several weeks in advance. Information about the public meeting should be publicized to the media, special interest blogs, community leaders, civic clubs and organizations, and special interest groups. Information of the public meeting should also be included on the agency website and any newsletters that are disseminated.
 - **Make arrangements to ensure that translation services and assistance for persons with disabilities will be provided at the meeting.** In addition, all meeting notices should inform the public that such services will be available upon request.
 - **Prior to the event, hold a briefing meeting with staff and volunteers to review logistics and everyone's responsibilities.** Assign sufficient staff on the day of the meeting to greet participants, conduct registration, set-up meeting room, take notes, and oversee general logistics. Prior to the event, a briefing should be held to go over the meeting logistics and timeline. All staff should be easy to identify and should have sufficient information to be able to answer questions and address problems.
 - **Soon after the public meeting, hold a debriefing with staff and analyze meeting evaluations.** Understanding what worked and what did not work will help public agencies to improve the quality of their public meetings. Therefore, it is important to review evaluations and obtain feedback from staff and volunteers.
 - **Provide a meeting summary and follow up with participants after the event in order to maintain momentum and continuity.** Soon after the event, participants should receive a summary of what was discussed at the public meeting. If it is not possible to send participants the information, the meeting summary should be posted on the agency's website and be made available for the public to review. The information should outline next steps, proposed timelines, future tasks, and assignments, if any.

Recommended Target Demographics

Public meetings can be used as a public involvement tool among all demographic groups. Unlike public hearings, which need to follow a formal structure, public meetings can be informal and can be organized to meet the needs of specific groups. The goal of most public meetings is to engage the public and encourage participation. As such, agencies can hold public meetings in the community that is being targeted for outreach and schedule public meetings during times

that are convenient for the target audience.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when coordinating a public meeting: ⁸

- Publicize the event early in order to encourage greater participation. Sufficient notice must be given to the public to generate interest and allow those who want to participate to make arrangements to attend the event.
- Agencies should not rely on newspaper ads alone to inform the public of the meetings. Agencies should provide notices of the public meetings to community groups and interested stakeholders. They should also post the information on their website and publicize the meeting on different media outlets. ⁶
- Maintain contact with the community between meetings. The more agencies are involved with the community and establish relationships with key stakeholders, the more likely that members of the community will engage in public involvement efforts.
- Do not allow meetings to stray too far from the agenda or to be too long. People will tend to lose interest or get tired if the meetings are not focused.

Case Studies

The New York State DOT conducted a "virtual meeting" online to determine if a website, as a medium of communication, would serve as a good tool for public involvement. The online virtual public meeting engaged eleven times the participants compared to the regular public meetings held a year prior. In addition, the on-line meeting provided an equitable format for individuals to voice their opinions and proved to be highly cost-effective (http://trb-appcon.org/trb2011papers/s19/s19_04_120.pdf).⁹

The City of Portland, Oregon held a series of innovative public meetings in order to encourage public participation for the Portland Plan. They organized community fairs, held employer brown bag lunch presentations at major corporations, hosted a series of meetings where experts shared information regarding innovative strategies, and partnered with organizations to conduct targeted outreach in Portland's diverse communities. At the conclusion of their outreach effort, they evaluated the activities and provided recommendations for the next phase of the public involvement campaign. These efforts show how public meetings can be used to facilitate public involvement and how agencies can learn from their activities through evaluation (<http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan/index.cfm?c=54642&a=368019>).¹⁰

For Further Information

How to Plan and Implement Effective Public Meetings: Provides a guide for organizing a public meeting and includes checklists for various phases of the planning process (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/training/module4.pdf>).¹¹

Effective Public Meetings: Provides a series of articles on how to hold an effective public meeting, including articles on dealing with difficult people and facilitating meetings (<http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/governance/participation/fofeedback.aspx#EffectiveM>).¹²

Sources

1 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Public Meetings/Hearings," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 August 2011 (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>).

2 FHWA, "Public Meetings/Hearings."

3 FHWA, "Public Meetings/Hearings."

4 Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), "Module 4: How to Plan & Implement, Effective Public Meetings," 1998, FDOT, 20 December 2011, (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/training/module4.pdf>).

5 FHWA, "Public Meetings/Hearings."

6 FDOT, "Module 4: How to Plan & Implement, Effective Public Meetings."

7 FDOT, "Module 4: How to Plan & Implement, Effective Public Meetings."

8 FDOT, "Module 4: How to Plan & Implement, Effective Public Meetings."

9 Kleinberg, Joel, New York State Department of Transportation, New York State Department of Transportation, Region 10 - Long Island, 20 December 2011, (http://trb-appcon.org/trb2011papers/s19/s19_04_120.pdf).

10 City of Portland, "Portland Plan Public Participation Phase 3 Progress Report," September 2011, (<http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan/index.cfm?c=54642&a=368019>).¹⁰

11 FDOT, "Module 4: How to Plan & Implement, Effective Public Meetings."

12 Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington, "Approaches for Obtaining Citizen Feedback: Effective Public Meetings," December 2010, MRSC, 20 December 2011, (<http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/governance/participation/fofeedback.aspx#EffectiveM>).