Transportation Outreach Planner

Public Outreach Strategies

Role Playing

Quick Links
Toolbox Navigation

- Recommended Target Groups
- Strategy Class
- Strategy Types
- Description
- Special Uses
- When to Use
- Cost
- Time
- Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions
- Lesson Learned/Challenges
- Case Studies
- For Further Information
- Sources
- Provide Feedback

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

- Innovation

Strategy Types

- Educational
- Civic Engagement

Description

Role playing is a technique that allows people to assume the role of fictitious characters in hypothetical situations. It helps participants to understand the positions and concerns held by other people, and to recognize the challenges and limitations of the planning and project development process. Role playing also assists in negotiation and consensus building by enabling participants to test possible areas where they may be able to agree. Also referred to as simulated discussions, role playing has various characteristics: [1]

- A hypothetical "situation" is presented
- Participants are assigned "roles" (characters) and provided the description of each character in writing
- Goals for the session are established
- A trained small-group leader/facilitator is assigned to facilitate the process
- Sufficient time is given to each participant to speak
- A time limit is established for the session
- An evaluation period is set aside at the end to discuss what people observed and experienced

Special Uses

Agencies can use role playing to: [2]

- Help people see a problem from different perspectives
- Train or educate employees, volunteers, or the public
- Break down barriers or reduce conflict or tension
- Encourage interaction among participants in a meeting
- Develop recommendations for action

When to Use

Role playing can be used early in a process to provide the public with a broad understanding of the challenges and alternative strategies being considered. Agencies can also use role playing to bring together different groups and help everyone understand the various perspectives and interests related to the issue being discussed.? It is also possible to use role playing as an ice-breaker at planning meetings, such as charrettes. [3]

Cost

* Low (up to $999)

Preparation time for developing the roles and the situation can take up to three months, depending on the complexity of the hypothetical situation. Several dry runs and revisions may be necessary to ensure the role play is effective. The most time consuming aspects of organizing a role playing exercise involve creating or identifying the hypothetical situation and the characters and determining who will participate in the process.

Low (up to $999)	*	*Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a
Moderate ($1,000 to $9,999)	* *	guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature
High ($10,000 to $50,000)	* * *	of the project.
Very High (Above $50,000)	* * * *	

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Preparation time for developing the roles and the situation can take up to three months, depending on the complexity of the hypothetical situation. Several dry runs and revisions may be necessary to ensure the role play is effective. The most time consuming aspects of organizing a role playing exercise involve creating or identifying the hypothetical situation and the characters and determining who will participate in the process.

1 to 3 months	*	*Disclaimer:* The time estimates are approximations. The
6 months to a year	* *	duration of a project may vary depending on various factors,
Multiyear	* * *	including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for using role playing techniques: [4]

- **Assign a trained leader to oversee the role playing exercise**. The leader should be knowledgeable about areas of discussion and be able to guide the group. The person must also be able to lead the evaluation and engage participants in discussing the process, the lessons learned, and the relevance of what they experienced.

- **Develop the scenario and the roles**. Determine the length of time for role playing, and create a hypothetical situation. Effective role-playing games are relatively short in duration, and generally involve from 7 to 15 people. The position and interest of each character should be well-defined.

- **Consult community residents on the hypothetical situation, the characters, and the persons who should participate**. Such consultation helps to mitigate possible distrust and any questions of motives that may arise during the role playing exercise.

- **Ensure full representation of key stakeholders in the process**. A broad representation of interests should be invited to participate. It is possible to team people with others to allow for greater participation.

- **Establish clear and achievable goals**. Possible goals may include consensus building, increasing awareness of various perspectives, and identifying alternative solutions.

- **Determine if observers or non-players will be invited to follow the action and participate in the evaluation period**. Agencies may allow people to observe the proceedings and comment on the process. However, observers may affect participation or cause discussions to be less open.

- **Make sure the leader understands the basic responsibilities in overseeing a role playing exercise**. The leader's responsibilities include explaining the process and providing participants with a written description of the situation, the setting, and the characters involved. The leader should also read the hypothetical situation, set the time limit, assign roles, and instruct all participants to speak with the "voice" or viewpoint of the character. The leader is also responsible for facilitating the evaluation discussion.

- **Evaluate the outcomes of the role playing exercise**. The leader should help the participants evaluate their experience. The discussion should focus on the outcome of the role playing exercise, as well as the issues raised by participants. The leader should ask probing questions regarding the stands that people took and the decisions that were made. Participants should also be asked to explain what they learned from the process.

RECOMMENDED TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS

Role playing techniques can be used on any demographic group. They can be customized to any group and can be organized to respond to specific issues. When using such techniques, agencies should strive to have representation from various backgrounds and viewpoints in order to ensure a wide group of people benefit from exploring different

perspectives. [5]

Lessons Learned/Challenges
Below are key points to keep in mind when utilizing role playing exercises: [6]

- **Role playing requires research in order to prepare realistic scenarios and roles**.
- **Participants may be uncomfortable playing roles that are opposite of their true feelings**. In such cases, the leader must provide reassurance, support, and suggestions.
- **The outcomes of role playing activities can be unpredictable, and can create new situations that were not planned**. If this happens, a trained leader can help keep the activity in focus.
- **For a role playing activity to be successful, agencies need to show the links between the role play and the real issues at stake**.

Case Studies
Digital role-playing offer agencies a way to apply role-playing techniques using computer technology. One example is Participatory Chinatown—a 3D, multiplayer game which was designed to be played as part of a master planning meeting in Boston's Chinatown. Through game simulations, participants are able to graphically see how their actions affect the outcomes. Such technology provides another way to engage participants and create interactivity (http://placeofsocialmedia.com/reading/GordonSchirra2011_empathy.pdf). [7]

The New Jersey Department of Transportation used role playing as part of its Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan Education Program. The intent of the program was to help students understand the state's transportation issues and the transportation planning process. The program used role playing to explore the various facets of transportation planning.
(http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/njchoices/pdf/TransActionPowerPointPresentation.pdf). [8]

For Further Information
Role Play on Rural Transport Planning: Provides a sample role play scenario, including background information and a description of seven character roles (http://www.transport-links.org/rtkb/english/Module%205%5C5_6b%20Case%20Study%20-%20Role%20Play.pdf). [9]

Role Playing, Preparing for Difficult Conversations and Situations: Provides a brief description of role playing and examples of how the technique can be used (http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/RolePlaying.htm). [10]

United Nations Environment Programme Resources: Role Play: The site includes tips on role playing, and provides links to additional information on group dynamics, preparing materials, and other useful information (http://www.unep.org/ieacp/iea/training/guide/default.aspx?id=1198). [11]

Sources
[1] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Role Playing," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 August 2011 <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>.
[2] FHWA, "Role Playing."
[3] FHWA, "Role Playing."
[4] FHWA, "Role Playing."
[5] FHWA, "Role Playing."
[6] FHWA, "Role Playing."
[7] Gordon, Eric, and Steven Schirra, "Playing with Empathy: Digital Role-Playing Games in Public Meetings," Engagement Game Lab Department of Visual & Media Arts, Emerson College, 31 October 2011, <http://placeofsocialmedia.com/reading/GordonSchirra2011_empathy.pdf>.
[8] New Jersey Department of Transportation, "Transportation Choices 2030: New Jersey's Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Jersey's Long-Education Program, 31 October 2011, "<http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/njchoices/pdf/TransActionPowerPointPresentation.pdf>.
[9] P. Fernando, "Role Play on Rural Transport Planning," Role-Play on Transport Planning, 31 October 2011, http://www.transport-links.org/rtkb/english/Module%205%5C5_6b%20Case%20Study%20-%20Role%20Play.pdf. 7
[10] "Toolkit: Role Playing, Preparing for Difficult Conversations and Situations," MindTools, <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/RolePlaying.htm>.

[11] United Nations Environment Programme, "Resources: Role Play," 31 October 2011, <http://www.unep.org/ieacp/iea/training/guide/default.aspx?id=1198>.