Chapter 4

Chapter 4:
Successful Public Meetings

This chapter is devoted specifically to public meetings, since public meetings and public hearings are some of the most frequently used and critical pieces of many outreach efforts. Public meetings can be dull and perfunctory or they can be interesting, effective and useful. Careful attention to detail will make the difference between a public meeting that is "just going through the motions" and one that is effective.

A successful public meeting requires careful attention to detail.
The little things DO mean a lot.

So, what are the things that will make a public meeting successful? First, let's explore some basic meeting formats. Public information meetings can be "presentation" style, "open house" style or a combination of both. Most public meetings sponsored by The Connecticut Department of Transportation are a combination of these two formats, providing for the greatest flexibility and the greatest level of outreach and input.

Public hearings are more formal than public informational meetings, as they must respond to legal requirements. Public hearings are primarily either presentation or combination style meetings and are usually recorded and transcribed. For each project, the Project Manager must seek Department approval when wishing to hold a public information meeting and not a formal public hearing.

Types of public meetings:

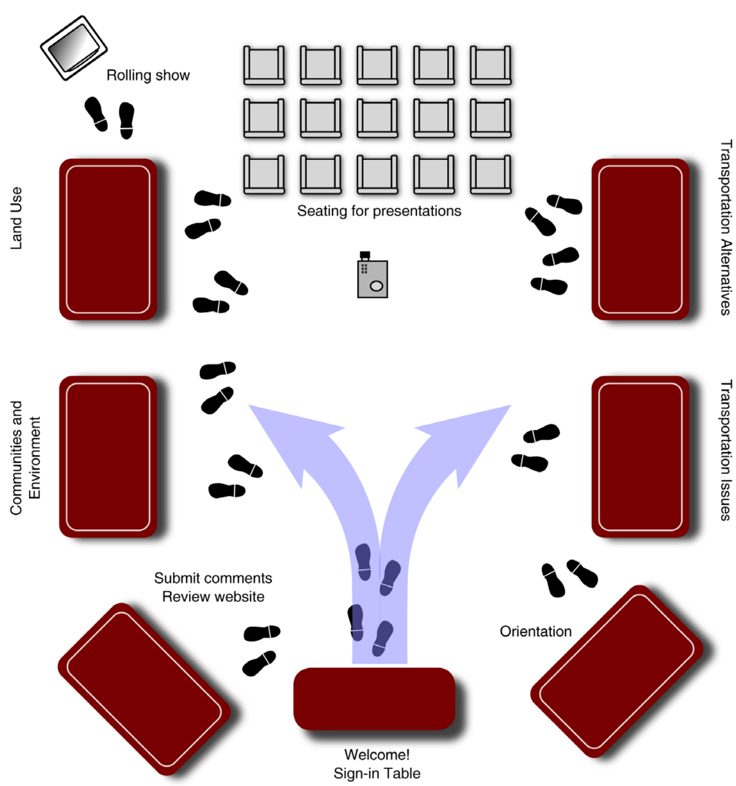
- **Public informational meeting**
    - **open house format**
    - **presentation format**
    - **combination open house/presentation**
- **Public hearing**

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

A public meeting with open house format is intended to exchange information with the public in a relatively informal setting. People come and go according to their own needs and schedule, unless a formal presentation is included in the program. This meeting format is preferred by people who want to be able to talk directly with project staff one-on-one, especially if they are reluctant to speak up in a large group. The open house meeting also gives the public a chance to carefully examine maps and exhibits. The project team may also convey concepts and obtain feedback from meeting attendees.

Open house meetings require careful planning to be successful.

Typically the layout of the meeting room for an open house has tables or stations that cover specific topics or geographical areas. Examples of topics could be: environmental resources, community and historic resources, traffic issues, etc. Alternatively in large projects, each information table may cover a geographical sub area.



Open house meetings require careful planning to be successful. Important considerations are:

- ***Building and room location:*** Will it be large enough to accommodate the people you expect to attend but not too big to lose a sense of community?

- ***Staffing:*** Each table or information station should be staffed with the number of people needed to comfortably talk with people without a long delay. Generally tables need 1-3 people to adequately respond to the public.

- ***Orientation:*** Orientation signs and banners listing the topic of tables are needed to help guide people through the room. Orientation should begin at the sign-in table. Here staff greeters should hand each attendee a map of the room that indicates what kind of information is available at the open house and where it is located. If heavy attendance is expected, a separate area next to the sign-in table and staffed with greeters is recommended.

- ***Visualization:*** Good graphics are a ***must*** for an open house meeting. Check with the Department Bureau of Engineering and Highway Operations about visualization aides such as three-dimensional figures, video streaming, etc. that they may be able to create for your project. Aerial maps are the best graphic to use when demonstrating a project area. These maps help people visualize the location of a project. Business owners and homeowners like to be able to locate their property, or (later in the process) see how it might be impacted by a project. GIS maps with multiple layers also provide useful information to the public if they are easy to interpret. Sometimes, later in a project, location maps showing alternative project concepts can be laid on a table with marking pens, and attendees can be invited to comment. If this is done, it is imperative that the table be staffed so that the concepts can be explained.

- ***Displays:*** Each information table should use well thought out displays to attract attention and convey key messages. These displays could be maps or charts on foam core boards set on easels, signs attached to the table top or on a wall directly behind the table. Using upright displays are another effective technique for visually "closing in" a large room such as a gymnasium or cafeteria to create a more intimate setting.

- ***Handouts:*** Sometimes handouts such as fact sheets and brochures are passed out at information tables at an open house. Not every person who attends an open house will stop at each information table. Therefore, handouts that explain the project purpose, potential impact and other vital data should be given to people as they enter the room at the sign-in table.

If your public meeting is going to have a presentation component (and, again, most public meetings DO include a presentation) it can be AFTER the public has had a chance to "wander" through the open house exhibits or BEFORE this happens. There are advantages to either approach. If the presentation is after the open house, people have had a chance to familiarize themselves with the project. However, the disadvantage is that some people get tired of waiting for the presentation and just leave, thus possibly missing some key information.

TIPS for managing people at an open house meeting:

- Orient people as they enter the room;
- Avoid table congestion by asking people to move along to another table;
- Use a large writing pad on a easel to record comments.

Presentations at public meetings need to be concise, interesting, informative, clear and include visualization. Most importantly, the public needs to be given adequate ***background*** and ***context*** for the meeting so that they can orient themselves to the project and this particular stage of the project. A very common error in public meeting presentation is that of failing to provide an adequate orientation of the background, context, and process within which the project is occurring.

Do not fail to provide adequate background and context for the project (i.e. what is the history, purpose and need for this project).

If the public does not understand the purpose and need for the project or the reason why a proposed alternative is selected, that failure of understanding may be one of communication.

People may disagree with the Department's proposal or conclusions, but failure to understand may signal poor communication or ineffective public outreach.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Unlike an informational or open house meeting where there is great flexibility in format, a public hearing is a scripted meeting designed to notify the public and to allow public comment prior to decision-making. The Department's Communications Office is responsible for providing assistance to conduct the hearing. See Chapter 3 for direction and tips on advertising for public meetings and hearings.

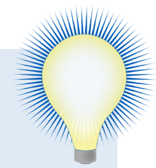
According to Federal regulations (23 USC 711.111(h)(2)), one or more public hearings, or the opportunity of public hearings, must be provided if a project meets one or more of the following tests:

- requires significant amounts of right-of-way;
- substantially changes the layout or functions of connecting roadways or of the facility being improved;
- has a substantial adverse impact on abutting property;
- otherwise has a significant social, economic, environmental or other effect; or
- the FHWA determines that a public hearing is in the public interest.

An appropriate explanation of the following information should be provided:

- the project's purpose, need, and consistency with the goals and objectives of any local urban planning initiatives;
- the project's alternatives and major design features;
- the social, economic, environmental, and other impacts of the project;
- the relocation assistance program and the right-of-way acquisition process; and
- the Department's procedures for receiving both oral and written statements from the public.

Typically the meeting will be run by an assigned Department moderator who will make introductions, explain the format of the meeting and oversee the gathering of public comments. The project manager or consultant will be expected to make a presentation about the project at the beginning of the hearing. Once completed, the moderator will begin taking comments from the public.



TIPS on public hearing manners:

- Pay attention to the speakers;
- Be careful not to communicate negative messages (yawning, slouching in seats, etc.);
- Do not speak out, or shake head in disapproval; and
- Avoid laughing, even at a speaker's joke, as your reaction may be misinterpreted.

People who want to speak at a public hearing are generally asked to put their names on a sign-in sheet, and they will be called upon in order by the moderator. Elected officials are often given the honor of speaking first, prior to the general public. Each speaker is given a time limit for their remarks, generally 3 minutes, but may be allowed to speak a second time after everyone else has been given an opportunity to be heard once. People may bring written testimony and have it included in the public record even though it may not be read out loud.

A public hearing does not end until all members of the public who wish to have a say have had the chance to voice their opinions or concerns.

Public hearings are recorded and transcribed for the official record. A transcription service must be hired to record and produce a written transcript of remarks. The names and addresses of people who speak are also noted in the transcript. The Communications Office has recording and sound equipment and supplies items such as sign-in sheets, blank tapes for hearings, etc. Usually the meeting transcript will be ready for review within two weeks of the hearing. Comments can then be distributed and addressed by project staff.

STAGING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETING

While each public meeting will have a unique purpose, location and players, there are common elements that set the stage for success. Meeting organizers must be careful to:

- Plan an agenda that supports the purpose of the meeting
- Provide notification for the meeting
- Select a good location with hospitable facilities
- Develop an effective presentation (with visualization) that engages attendees

- Develop effective handout materials
- Get people to attend (see Chapter 3)!!!

Planning The Agenda

Before setting the agenda for a meeting a project manager should be able to answer these questions:

- What is the purpose (message) of the meeting?
- What is the best way (meeting format) to convey the message?
- What types of material need to be prepared (maps, PowerPoint presentation, etc.)?
- Who (ConnDOT staff, consultant) should present to or communicate with the public?
- What do we want to find out? What type of feedback are we seeking?

The nature of a project and the stage it is in will often determine the agenda for a public meeting. There is a lot more flexibility in planning public meeting agendas in the early project development stages. Clearly the agenda for a project kick-off meeting will be vastly different from a meeting at the close of a planning project where alternatives have been identified for further study. A public hearing, unlike a public meeting, is generally a scripted meeting with legal requirements that must be met.

The Department's project manager should do a dry run of an agenda with the people who will be presenting at a public meeting. This allows the project team to fine-tune the materials and rehearse and time the presentation so that it may be revised as necessary.

TIPS for setting a meeting agenda:

- Public meetings usually do not start on time, so count on having 10 minutes less than scheduled;
- Keep the number of agenda items to a minimum. No more than three complex items or activities are recommended for a two-hour meeting;
- The maximum length of a Power Point presentation should be 15-20 minutes;
- Be sure to give adequate background and context - even at meetings later in the project time frame; and
- Be prepared to answer questions from the public, but do not let questions sidetrack getting through the agenda.

TIPS for keeping the agenda on track:

- Distribute agenda to people as they enter the meeting so they know how the meeting will be organized;
- Have a display board with the agenda prominently displayed to reinforce the message that there is a scripted order to the meeting that will be followed; and
- The meeting moderator should ask for people's help in focusing on agenda times and schedule.

CHOOSING A LOCATION

When selecting a site for a meeting, it's a good idea to ask people who live or work locally for a list of good meeting locations. Choose a well-known location with adequate parking. Confirm that handicapped accessibility is available but take a look at building-access specifics. Some buildings, especially older ones, offer handicapped access through a side door or long ramps, which can be less than ideal.

Access within a building should also be checked out in advance. A room that is close to the entry doors is preferred. Rooms in the interior of building that are accessed through a number of long corridors or turns are less desirable and will have to be adequately marked with signs.

Deciding if a room is the right size gets easier with experience. You want to make sure the room fits both the meeting's purpose and the image you want to project, (i.e., a cavernous room will not convey warmth or be conducive to a sense of community, but a room that is too small may indicate to participants that you are not aware of how important the project is to them).

When making arrangements for a room, be sure to consult a Meeting Room Checklist to ensure that nothing falls between the cracks. A sample checklist is included below. Also, remember to ask for a contact person who may be reached during the day or off-hours if you need assistance.

FIGURE 4.1: MEETING ROOM CHECKLIST

	yes	no	comments
Located along a transit (rail/bus) line			
Adequate parking (any competing events)			
Noise interference (from other activities)			
Rest room (how close to meeting room, always open, handicapped accessible)			
Room acoustics			
Projection screen			
Sound system			
Electrical outlets (location & adequacy)			
Lighting (right level for slide projection)			
Building access points (how many and where)			
Signs (how many needed, inside and outside building)			
Tables & chairs (count them)			
Podium			

Equipment			
Projector		Tacks	
Laptop		Pens/Pencils	
Screen		Name Tags	
Tape Recorder		Sign-in Sheets	
Extension cord		Agenda	
Powerstrip/3-way plug adapter		Handouts	
Easels		Duct Tape	
Easel Pad		Scotch Tape and/or Masking Tape	
Large Markers		Maps, Boards, Display Materials	

Refreshments			
Coffee urn		Spoons/stirring sticks	
Coffee/tea		Serving Plates	
Sugar/sweeteners		Serving Baskets, bowls	
Milk		Serving utensils	
Cold beverages		Tablecloth	
Ice		Paper napkins	
Cups		Cooler	
Plates (for individuals)		Food	

Other Items:

Setting Up The Room

How the room should be set up depends on the meeting format, the number of people you are expecting, and what you want to achieve. Do you want people to be comfortable milling around information tables? Do you want attendees to be seated around a table (e.g. an Advisory Committee)? Or are you having a more formal meeting (like a public hearing) where attention will be focused towards one area of the room, so people need to be seated facing one direction? Whatever your desires, the following are some room basics to keep in mind.

- The entrance to the meeting room is where the sign-in table should be placed. People entering the room should be able to scan it and quickly decide where they need to go. Make sure the meeting activity is away from the entrance so that late-comers and people leaving early aren't a distraction.
- Use tables and chairs to define where you want people to go within the room. If a room is on the large side, such as a large gymnasium, it's important to cluster activity in a section of the room. If attention needs to be focused on a presentation, then auditorium style is the best.

- If your meeting agenda calls for break-out groups, where attendees divide into sections for smaller group sessions, you will need to be able to provide separate spaces within one room where discussion can take place. If this is not possible because of noise interference, then it's best to arrange for smaller, separate rooms.

TIPS on directional signs:

- Identify all the areas of access to your meeting room so you can provide directional signs at every possible entry point – doors, parking lots, elevators, hallways.
- Use regular (8 1/2 x 11) size paper that identifies the name of the meeting and have arrows that point in the direction you want people to walk. This means you will need to have multiple copies of signs with arrows pointing left, right or straight ahead.
- It's good to print the signs on colored paper because they are easy to see on walls that are typically beige or glass, and people begin to "read" the color as well as the words on the sign.

Sign-In Table

The names and addresses (and e-mail addresses) of people attending all public meetings should be recorded. Sometimes documenting meeting attendance is required for the public record. Regardless of requirements, it is good practice to record names and add them to the project mailing list, especially if the project is on-going, so that you can compile contact information, and attendees can receive direct notice for future meetings.

The sign-in table is always placed at the main entrance to the room. If people can enter from more than one entrance, then plan for staffing additional entrances, each with sign-in sheets and handout materials. If it is not practical to have duplicate sign-in tables, especially if there are multiple entrances and space is limited, then direct people to the main sign-in area either with staff or signs that show where handout material is available.

Greeters who work the sign-in table should understand the meeting agenda and be able to answer questions about the meeting format. A minimum of two people should staff the sign-in table during the 20-minute period when most people arrive, beginning 10-20 minutes before the scheduled meeting time. Two people are needed because often one of the greeters has to leave the sign-in table to assist people who arrive at the door who need to be connected to someone on the project staff in another area of the room. For example, a member of the press or the public may ask to speak to a specific person or have a question to ask the project team.

The first impression people will have of a meeting will be at the entrance door, so it's important to be welcoming and efficient and to give people a clear idea where they should go or what will happen at the meeting.

To avoid having a back-up of people at the door, use 3-4 sign-in sheets at the same time. If the sign-in process is slow, people get irritated and starting the meeting will need to be delayed. Consolidating the names from several sign-in sheets can occur after the meeting. Handouts should be pre-assembled and ready to distribute when people arrive.

Refreshments

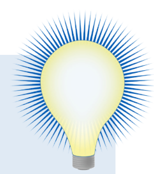
Whenever possible, provide refreshments for public meetings. It is a low cost item that yields big benefits. Food encourages mingling among people - the public and project team - that may not occur otherwise. There is a friendliness implied by sharing food with others. Also, people appreciate a drink or snack if they have rushed to get to the meeting.

Establish the location of the food serving area when planning the meeting – look for access to electrical outlets, water, and appropriate tables. Try to place refreshments close enough to the entrance area to attract people, but not too close to be cramped. And remember to plan time into the agenda for people to get refreshments before the formal part of the meeting starts.

Whenever possible serve refreshments at meetings.
There is a friendliness implied when sharing food with others.

The menu needs to be appropriate for the group, occasion and time of day. If an Advisory Committee is meeting through the lunch hour, then sandwiches are appropriate. But public meetings generally are in the evening, when light refreshments such as a drink (preferably a choice of hot or cold) and a snack is all that's needed.

Once you decide what refreshments you will serve, be sure to make a list of all the items you think you'll need to set up an attractive food service area.



TIPS on serving food:

- Meet the custodian or building manager before setting up. Custodians generally have the keys to all doors and will direct you to the facilities you need for room set up (deep sinks for filling up coffee pots with water, spare extension cords, etc.);
- Bring an extension cord for the coffee pot because there may not be an electrical outlet close by;
- Have a table cloth to cover table surfaces that are not in good condition; and
- Be sure to clean up at the close of the meeting!!!

Chapter 5

Chapter 5:
Working With Groups

When thinking about how to involve the public in your project, you will be faced with many choices. How do you decide what tools to use? One of the most important tools is your involvement with groups such as Advisory Committees, local representatives, or other key stakeholder groups. There is a wide range of meeting types and group techniques to choose from. Most public involvement processes will call for a variety of meetings throughout the course of the project, ranging from one-on-one meetings with key individuals to a formal public hearing. This chapter explores the various types of meeting and group tools, focusing on those which are used most frequently.

TYPES OF GROUPS & MEETING TECHNIQUES

Some of the types of groups or meeting techniques are used more often than others for reaching consensus on a transportation project. Several of the most frequently used types of groups or meeting techniques are explored in more detail, below.

Figure 5.1 identifies both the types of groups a project manager may work with and techniques that may be used to develop a collaborative relationship.

Figure 5.1: Group and Meeting Techniques

Group/ Technique	What it is	What it does	When it is used
Advisory Committee	A group of stakeholders that meets regularly to provide information and guidance, discuss issues of concern	Provides forum for an exchange of ideas and feedback on project development	Most effective in large or controversial projects. Provides project manager with local knowledge, opportunities for collaboration and public outreach support
Brainstorming	A meeting with free flowing discussions to generate ideas	Creates open atmosphere where a range of ideas can be discussed without prejudice	Useful at the beginning of projects to develop new ideas and get consensus on priorities
Charrette	An interactive workshop focused on creating design concepts or problem solving	Engages stakeholders in identifying their *vision* and *values* and gives an opportunity to voice ideas on solutions	An effective tool when trying to understand community vision and build consensus
Visioning/ Roundtable Discussions	A structured exercise that engages people in thinking about what they want their community to be	Clarifies what a community values and what it wants for the future	Best used early in the project development phase when the project and goals are being defined
Key Person Interview	Conversation with an individual who usually is vested in a project	Allows dialogue and information exchange in an informal setting	An effective means to get background information on a project and understand community values and sentiments. Also can build trust in a controversial project process
Collaborative Task Force	A group that works on a specific task with a deadline to complete its assignment	Brings together key stakeholders to resolve a problem or issue	Most effective when the group is dealing with an issue that can be resolved through dialogue and cooperative effort
Focus Groups	A small group meeting facilitated to gauge opinions from a representative sample of constituents	Allows in-depth discussion and exploration of views on issues	Helpful tool when seeking feedback on people's perceptions of problems and alternatives especially when holding a public meeting is impractical or intent is to understand opinions of a targeted group

Group/ Technique	What it is	What it does	When it is used
Briefing	A meeting with a limited agenda aimed at giving information	Provides focused communication on a particular topic	A good forum to transmit technical data and comprehensive data while avoiding getting sidetracked on other topics
Games & Contests	A device used to engage people	Gets people that might normally be "invisible" to think about issues and offer opinions	Effective at gatherings where people have time to "play", such as at community fairs and open house meetings or at meetings where this activity is a core part of the agenda
Facilitated Discussion	A facilitated disscussion with a group of 10-15 people focused on a topic	Creates atmosphere where people are more likely to participate in discussion, ask questions	Most effective in engaging the public in solving problems, receiving feedback on issues
Mediation	A method of resolving disputes using a person trained in helping settle disagreements	Enables people or agencies to work together to solve problems and end disagreements	Most effective when parties with differences want to end a dispute to save time and money or to move a project forward
Role Playing	An activity in which participants play the role of a person in a prescribed situation	Expands awarness of different points of view	A technique used to develop understanding and build consensus where there are diverse viewpoints
Site Visits	Visit by officials and community members to a project area	Familiarizes officials with local perceptions, concerns, physical and social elements of project area	A good way to build relationships with the community by meeting on their turf and trying to understand their concerns in context of place
Walking Audit	A written assessment or description of a site or corridor area	Describes or rates an area using specific criteria and observations	Helps people become more aware of their surroundings and provides measured qualitative feedback about a place
Conference or Issue Forum	A program, usually with keynote speakers, organized to educate and to seek input from the public on a specific topic	Provides widespread publicity for and public input on an issue or project	Most useful when seeking to draw public attention to a project or issue with a large public impact

MOST FREQUENTLY USED TECHNIQUES

Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee (AC) is one of the most frequently used group techniques in transportation projects. It provides an opportunity for a project manager to have public discussion and guidance on transportation needs and solutions in a working group setting. An effective Advisory Committee may be made up of people interested in working on transportation issues, representatives of key stakeholder agencies, those knowledgeable about the community or tied into community networks, those affected by the plan or project, and/or those representing diverse elements within the community.

Who should serve on an Advisory Committee? Its members could be planners, government officials, civic and neighborhood groups, historic and environmental preservation groups, key community leaders, project neighbors and business leaders. People who represent low-income or special needs groups, including the elderly and persons with disabilities, must not be overlooked.

Most Advisory Committees have the following as members:

- ☑ Federal agency representatives;
- ☑ State representatives;
- ☑ Local elected officials;
- ☑ Local technical representatives (town engineer, town planner);
- ☑ Regional representatives;
- ☑ Local citizen representatives;
- ☑ Business groups; and
- ☑ Neighborhood groups.

The role of an Advisory Committee is to review and discuss project goals, identify local or regional issues, explore and advise on solutions to transportation needs and assist with public outreach. It is not a decision-making body.

At the initial meeting of the Advisory Committee it is important to clarify the role of members, how many meetings will be held, when and where the group will meet, the issues the committee will review and what kind of feedback is expected. It is also good to establish ground rules for behavior

and to set expectations for committee involvement (e.g., attend meetings, be prepared, support the views of the committee as a whole, etc.)

Advisory Committees provide the most value when information is shared openly and in a timely manner. This means that documents, especially if they are voluminous, must be received in advance to be read before meetings. A facilitator is generally used to moderate the meetings, to keep the discussion on track and to allow members to comfortably discuss issues. Advisory Committee meetings ***may*** be open to the public but are generally not publicly advertised. Project staff should welcome questions or comments from the audience once the committee's agenda has been accomplished. Members of the press ***may*** drop in on these meetings.

The key for Advisory Committee success is to develop agendas and techniques that will *engage* the AC in the study process.

When a project manager decides an Advisory Committee will be an asset to a project, selection of membership should be carefully considered. Local and regional planning officials, as well as other ConnDOT staff familiar with the project area should be asked to recommend people who will positively contribute, being sure to include members of opposition groups, if any.

Sometimes a project spans numerous municipalities or several regions. The makeup of an Advisory Committee will depend on the type and the scope of the project. An Advisory Committee should be large enough to have broad representation, but should not be too large that it is unwieldy. An ideal Advisory Committee might be about 15 people and is best when it does not exceed 25 participants.

TIPS for encouraging dialogue:

- Choose a meeting location where committee members can comfortably sit around a table;
- Leave ample time for discussion of issues by members; and
- Engage members in active discussions where information is shown on maps or graphics and members are encouraged to give their own ideas.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an effective technique used to generate ideas and prioritize solutions to a problem. Led by a facilitator, a group of people (ideally 6-10, but could be much larger) is encouraged to bring their ideas on a specific topic to the table where they are received without judgment. Each idea is recorded on large sheets of paper until all views have been recorded.

Once all ideas have been presented, people may prioritize them by placing colored dots on the ideas they like the best. At the end of the brainstorming exercise, the group can see which ideas are most preferred. Brainstorming is an effective way to:

- ***Identify new ideas.*** This technique provides a free-thinking atmosphere and encourages creativity. Each idea is noted and accepted no matter how far fetched.
- ***Equalize participation.*** Each participant is viewed on the same level within the group. Persons with greater technical expertise or strong personalities are not allowed to dominate. As a result, every person may become engaged in problem-solving.
- ***Reduce conflict.*** Civility and listening to others is required. The exercise may help participants see other points of view.
- ***Lay groundwork for consensus.*** Although building consensus is usually not the purpose of brainstorming, it can be a by-product if there are particular viewpoints or solutions that are shared by the majority of participants.

TIPS for facilitating an effective brainstorming session:

- Be clear about the topic;
- Keep the group small (6-10 people) if possible;
- Explain the purpose of the exercise;
- Begin with a brief introduction by every participant;
- Have participants share their ideas and record them without comment;
- Ask clarifying questions if needed;
- Review and re-group ideas; and
- Present results to larger group.

Visioning

Visioning is a process of focused discussion and information gathering that leads to a goals or mission statement. The process can be used at an Advisory Committee meeting to clarify and define the purpose of a project. Or visioning may involve a series of community meetings and workshops that focus on long-range issues, such as developing a 20-year transportation plan. A comprehensive visioning process may include holding symposia, seeking public opinion through newspapers with mail-back inserts, surveys, open houses and public hearings.

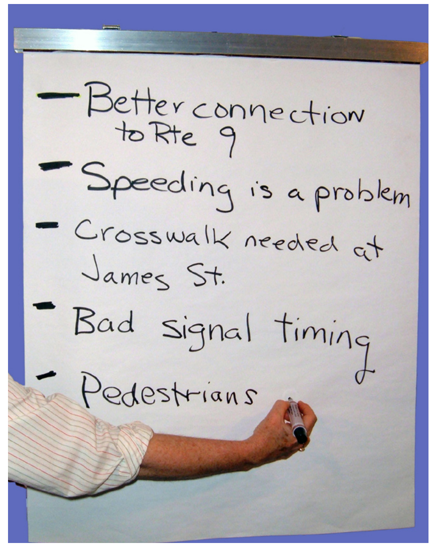
No matter what public involvement tools and techniques are used, visioning should involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders with different views and needs. If the purpose of visioning is to develop a long-term policy agenda for public investment in transportation, then a cross-section of participants for all parts of the region is needed, especially populations that are typically under-represented, such as the poor and elderly. The visioning process looks for common ground. The end product of visioning may be a broad view statement of what a community or agency wants the future to look like, with a road map of goals and objectives as to how to achieve it.

Meeting Local Officials

At the outset of any planning process or project, it is a good idea to meet with local officials to introduce the project team and the purpose of the project and to learn who the key players and concerns are in a region or municipality. Initial contact should be made to the chief administrator, elected official or both. These officials may want to include staff members such as their Director of Public Works, Town Engineer, Director of Planning and Development or representatives from other key departments, such as the Chief of Police.

The purpose of meeting with people is to listen and learn. It will be time well spent.

Taking the time to meet with representatives from each region and local government, even in a project involving multiple communities, will be time well spent. Problems and needs are most closely experienced or understood by people who live or work in a community. Gathering input from people with local knowledge will be very helpful in developing solutions to problems. Local officials will also appreciate the respect and courtesy shown.



Local officials can also help identify community and human resources. They know civic leaders, community assets and sensitive topics in their town. If your project will have an Advisory Committee (often an excellent tool for getting local input), ask local officials who they would recommend to serve on it.

WHEN YOU ARE THE FACILITATOR

A facilitator plays an important role in focussing discussion, keeping a meeting on track, affirming participants, listening and restating discussion points so that resolution and consensus is reached. Ideally the facilitator will guide discussion and will appoint a recorder (or ask for a volunteer) to write down comments made by the participants. The role of the facilitator is to get people to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and not have one or two people dominate. The recorder's job, which must be explained by the facilitator, is to write down the main points of what is said in a few words as possible. Usually the recorder will use a flip chart and magic markers so that participants can read what is being noted.

The facilitator should help the recorder by restating key points so that nothing important is missed.

A meeting recorder should:

- ☑ Keep focused on what's being said;
- ☑ Be brief;
- ☑ Check in with the person making the comment to be sure the meaning of their comment has been captured; and
- ☑ Make a check mark(s) next to repeat comments, showing more than one person shares a view.

If you find yourself acting as the facilitator of the group, there are some helpful remarks you may use to guide the discussion:

To get opinions:
- "How do you feel about…?"
- "What do you think about…?"

To summarize what's been said:
- What I am hearing is…Did I get that right?"
- "Let me see if I understand your comment. Are you saying that…?"

To encourage participation when one person is dominating discussion:
- "We haven't heard from others yet, let's see if someone else wants to add something…?" - If no one immediately volunteers, pick someone from the crowd, "How about the man in the plaid shirt, would you like to tell us …?"

To clarify a comment:
- "I'm not sure I'm clear about what you mean, are you thinking…"

To explore an idea in more detail:
- "Does anyone want to add to what we've just heard?"
- "Are there other ideas on how to approach this problem?"

To gauge if other people in the group share a viewpoint:
- "Could we see by a show of hands how many others agree with this?"

TIPS for listening:

- Make eye contact and keep your attention on the person;
- Stop talking;
- Really concentrate on what the person is saying;
- Ask questions to make sure you understand what the person is saying;
- Do not interject comments or your own opinion;
- Do not argue;
- Smile and nod appropriately; and
- Repeat the main points.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6:
Working With The Media

It is likely that the Department's project manager will have to deal with the media at some point in the development of a project. People are interested in transportation because it affects every resident of the state. Reporters also like to write about government. Interacting with the media does not have to create anxiety if you understand how the media works and how you can use it in a positive way to inform the public about your project.

MEDIA TOOLS

There are many opportunities for a project manager to utilize media resources to help get the public informed and involved. Pro-active action can be taken by a project manager to prepare press kits and to list project events on a community calendar, for example. Figure 6.1 lists some media tools and how they might be used.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

As the media (newspapers, radio and television) continues a trend of consolidating ownership and cutting back on local reporting, it becomes increasingly important to know how the media business works. You will be successful in getting the coverage you seek if you take the following steps:

- ***Learn who's in charge.*** Every newspaper, television or radio station will have a news editor or producer who makes decisions about what stories should be pursued. If you want to get news about your project aired, then this person needs to be contacted directly either by telephone or press release. At larger daily newspapers there may be a specific reporter who covers transportation stories for the geographic area where your project is located. This person should be identified and contacted when you have news to report.

- ***Learn about deadlines.*** All publications work under fixed deadlines. If you miss it, you won't get your story out. It is especially important to know the deadlines for the weekly or monthly newspapers because they require more lead time than the daily newspapers or television. Some reporters will refer to deadlines as "putting the issue to bed."

Figure 6.1: Media Tools

Tool	What it is	What it does	When it is used
Community Calendar	Listing of current community events	Free listing that gives notice of meetings and activities	Used to advertise upcoming public meetings
Interactive Radio	Live interview show where the public can call in questions	Allows two-way communication and educates viewing audience on an issue	A good method to increase public awarness on issues, especially among those who rely on radio and TV for getting news
Media Contact List	A list of key media personnel	A ready source of who and how to contact when seeking media coverage	Getting media coverage is more likely when material is sent to the right people in the press at the right time for publication (within deadline)
Press Kit	Package of materials prepared for the press	Provides key information to media to assist with reporting on a story	Prepared at key project milestones or events when media coverage is desired or expected
Press Release	Brief written description about a project for radio, TV, or newspapers	Gets information out using existing channels of communication	Coverage in the media is best around key project milestones and public meetings
Public Access Television	Locally controlled television stations mostly run by volunteers that focus on local government and public service programming	Often records public meetings and proceedings	May provide recording of public meetings; can produce its own program on a transportation project such as a panel discussion about the project

- ***Make your project newsworthy.*** Why does your story deserve to be printed? This is what every reporter and editor will ask themselves when presented with information, so you should be prepared to make a pitch they cannot resist. Be sure to explain the importance of a project and its impact on people or a region up front in a news release or when you speak with the media. This information may seem second nature to you, but it's necessary to spell it out if you want people to receive and understand your message. The media will not continue to write about your project unless there are significant new developments. Therefore, it's important to approach the media strategically so you generate news when it's to your best advantage.

- ***Make it easy to report.*** Reporters want to get the story right. Corrections are embarrassing and not good for career advancement. Sometimes it is hard for reporters to fully understand a complex project without assistance. Television reporters may walk into a public meeting and have as little as ten minutes to identify the key players and develop the story line for a 30-second story on the evening news. You will increase the likelihood the reporter will get the facts right if you have materials (press kit) prepared in advance and if you are accessible for follow-up questions. Being helpful may also leave a favorable impression with the reporter that may well be a consideration when the story is written.

- ***What's in a press kit?*** This will depend on the project, but here are a few items to consider:

    - Press release
    - Disk with graphics
    - Fact sheet on project or list of FAQ for background information
    - Project map
    - Schedule
    - Copy of Powerpoint presentation
    - Contact information

DEVELOPING A MEDIA STRATEGY

Thinking about how and when you want your project to appear in the media, is an integral part of developing your public outreach plan. Questions you should ask are:

- Is this a high profile or controversial project?
- What is the message the Department wants to convey?
- How do people get their news in the project area? Is there a daily newspaper with strong circulation or do people rely on weekly newspapers?
- What are the key project milestones?

- When is publicity desired?
- Who will be the media spokesperson?

The Department has a Director of Communications who oversees media outreach. All media outreach should be coordinated with this office. However, to effectively manage media relations, the project manager should identify what kind of media coverage is desired and should provide information on project scope, purpose, schedule, impact, etc. to the media coordinator.

CREATING A MEDIA CONTACT LIST

A media contact list should be created at the outset of a project. Sources to consult are:

- Connecticut Blue Book
- An internet search engine to obtain a list of Connecticut media
- Personal inspection – check out supermarkets, restaurants, community gathering places to see what circulars, or newspapers are available
- Ask local contacts how people get news

Information in the media contact list should include:

- Name and address of media outlet
- Name, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address of key contact person(s)– news editor, beat reporter, producer
- News deadline information
- Information on how media outlet likes to receive information – fax, e-mail or by mailed in press releases
- Circulation area (geographic location and household penetration or how many people are reached by the media outlet)

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

To place a public notice in a newspaper, on radio or television, a project manager should draft a press release and submit it to the Department's Communications Office. While this office will take responsibility for sending out the release, it is helpful if the project manager provides the following information in the draft:

- The five W's – who, what, when, where and why
- The date the information should be released
- Name and contact information of the Department's representation

A press release has a much greater chance of publication if you have made personal contact with the media representative and generated some interest in the project.

Press releases should be brief and to the point. If your project is complex, then consider including a fact sheet with more detailed information with the press release.

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

The phone rings, and it's a reporter on the line who wants to ask you a few questions about your project. Does your heart skip a beat? Here are some strategies you should use when talking with the media:

- Respond promptly.
- Ask what the reporter is looking for. If you don't fully understand, then ask for clarification.
- Don't say anything you would not want to read in print.
- Answer the questions you are asked. You do not have to volunteer information.
- You don't have to fill silences in the conversation. Wait for the next question.

**For many people, a call from a reporter produces anxiety.
It doesn't have to if you follow a few basic rules.**

In summary, if you follow a few simple rules, dealing with the media can be productive and beneficial to your project as well as stress-free. Identify the key contact and develop a relationship with this individual, so that they know you when you call. Know what it is that you want to gain publicity for, and prepare the appropriate material, so you are prepared when you call or write. Don't get discouraged -- reporters won't always do what you ask or conform to your schedule. Accept this gracefully. Seek advice from your contacts; they often are willing to help you maximize the opportunity for publicity. And relax; the press needs you as much as you need them.

TIPS for building good relations:

- Be honest.
- Return phone calls from the press. Avoidance is not a good strategy.
- It's okay to say you cannot comment.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. But tell the reporter you will find out and get back when you do.
- Be accessible. Give a reporter your cell phone number if you know they are working on deadline after your workday is over.
- Compliment a story well done.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7:

Building Trust and Rapport: Creating a Win-Win Atmosphere

BUILDING RAPPORT WITH THE PUBLIC

Every day Department staff work with the public in many different ways and under many different conditions. It would be ideal if we could operate at all times in a relationship of mutual respect and understanding, but there are going to be times when a hostile public must be faced. How did that happen? Can it be avoided?

One of the best ways to minimize conflict is to plan ahead. The Department's project manager should meet with local leaders and affected citizens to identify concerns and build relationships early in the project.

Proper planning, good communication and showing respect are the keys to building rapport with the public.

Before holding the first public meeting on a project, a project manager should:

- Have a plan. Know ***what message*** you want to get out, ***who*** the public should contact about the project and ***how*** the Department plans to communicate with the public.
- Familiarize yourself with the project location and context, and, later in the project, make sure you understand the potential physical impact of the project on the community, as well as the community's concerns.
- Anticipate community issues and concerns and understand how the project may or may not address them or exacerbate them.
- Learn how to pronounce the name of a town or street and refer to a road as the locals do. (Referring to a road by its state number when people know it as Main Street will undermine your efforts to establish rapport with the community).
- Meet with seriously affected parties in a small group setting or one-on-one, rather than having them learn about the project in a large, public setting.
- Listen to recommendations from the public and incorporate them into your project plan when possible.

Once contact has been made with the public, all the goodwill established at earlier meetings will be lost if you do not follow through on your commitments.

Trust is earned. It is your job to earn that trust from the public. A person can be hostile toward the project or the Department, but can still build a relationship, and build trust, with you. *Relationships are with people, not organizations.*

Communication Is A Two-Way Street

The best communication happens in two directions. The Department should provide the kind of information people need to know, when they need to know it. At the same time, Department staff should also be prepared to listen and respond to public concerns.

The following are a series of techniques to employ effective listening:

- If you want people to listen to you, you should **begin by first listening carefully** to them. Give them your complete attention. Do not interrupt unless you need to ask a clarifying question to make sure you understand what is being said.

- **Listen to what is *not* being said.** That could be just as important. Try to understand the meaning behind the question being asked. For example, if a person asks, "Why didn't I know about this meeting until a friend told me this afternoon?" what they may really be thinking is, "you did a lousy job letting people know about the meeting." A good response would be, "Well we're glad you are here with us tonight. We advertised in the local paper and sent out flyers. But we'd like your ideas on how we could do a better job getting the word out next time."

- **Watch for body language**, both yours and the people you are meeting with. You know things aren't going well when you see pointed fingers, rolled eyes, and shaking heads. You may want to acknowledge that you sense people are upset and focus discussion on the reasons people are unhappy. Similarly, your clenched fist, slouched position or lack of eye contact might send a message you would rather not communicate.

- Be sure to **speak in a way people can understand**. Avoid jargon and technical language. If the subject is complex, concentrate on explaining the major points and skip the more technical details.

Avoid jargon, technical language and acronyms.

- **Be personable.** Mingle with people before and after the meeting. Show an interest in getting to know people and an interest in understanding their concerns. The public is more likely to heap criticism on a transportation official who seems aloof and uncaring than someone whose approach is more personal and easier to connect with.

TIPS for listening:

DO:

- Stop talking.
- Make eye contact and be friendly.
- Ask questions when you're not sure you fully understand a point.
- Repeat the main points so the speaker knows you have his ideas right.
- Be aware of body language, voice tone and emphasis.
- Know your own feelings but set them aside.
- React to ideas, not to the person.

DON'T

- Think about your response while the person is still talking.
- Be distracted.
- Assume anything.

Perception Is Reality

Public perception is one of the most powerful forces you will encounter. If people believe a proposed road is wider than needed or that noise will increase to an intolerable level, do not assume people will let go of their perception just because you say that the road needs to be widened to accommodate expected increases in traffic volume and that noise increase will be "minimal". Simply presenting your assumptions and your technical data will not sway people to your point of view.

Why are People Hostile?

If you encounter hostility, it might be because:

- **People understand the project and have concerns about how the project will affect them or their environment.**
- **They are not familiar with the project or have misunderstandings about the project and/or fear the impact of the project.**
- **They distrust the Department or government in general either because of past broaches of trust or because of natural suspicion.**

Public perceptions can be both rational and emotional. Rational content can be addressed by examining data, undertaking technical study and doing a collaborative review of the problem. Changing the rational basis for perceptions is possible by involving the community through information sharing and discussion. These steps will help you work through changing public perceptions:

- **Listen carefully** so you thoroughly understand what people are thinking.
- **Let the community know** you have heard their concerns.
- **Have a dialogue** with the community about the project's purpose and need and see how it aligns with the community's vision for itself.
- **Develop strategies** (information sharing, modeling, field walks, etc.) to discuss the technical elements of a proposal.
- **Be flexible** and modify the plan or design if it will respond to community concerns while also meeting transportation needs. Can the cross section be reduced or fewer takings required? Are there other ways to mitigate impact while still satisfying the purpose and need for the project?

It is more difficult to address the emotional content of perceptions. People usually are unwilling to let go of strong feeling or beliefs. Most of us resist change unless we can clearly see a benefit. You may be managing a project with unavoidable negative impacts on people. If this is the case, the best thing you can do is be empathetic. Discover what the person thinks would be the best solution for them. There may be some flexibility to accommodate their interests. If possible, talk with the person about why a decision was made to go forward with a project. They may not like the result of the decision but understanding the reasons behind it may make it easier for them to accept.

Understand that listening to input and trying to find win-win solutions is NOT the same as jumping through every hoop, following every suggestion, collecting every piece of suggested data, or considering every alternative. What it DOES mean is making a conscientious effort to help the public understand the Department's position, the purpose and need of your project, and the transportation planning and design process.

When Emotions Run High...

Facing an angry audience is not easy. Dealing with upset people sometimes cannot be avoided, despite your best efforts at planning ahead, reaching out to local officials and affected people, and using excellent communication skills.

People will get emotional when they feel a loss of control, believe their quality of life will be negatively affected by a project, fear economic impact, or think they are being treated in an unfair or condescending manner.

If you find yourself in front of an angry group, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Be respectful at all times.** If rude behavior surfaces, immediately ask people to be polite and respectful. Do not engage in an argument, behave defensively, or raise your voice.

- Using a quiet voice, **ask people to speak one at a time.** Having people shouting out or interrupting may lead to a breakdown of civility.

- **Acknowledge people's feelings.** They are real. Dismissing them (even in your manner or gestures or attitude) will make things worse.

- **Answer questions honestly.** Resist the temptation to make points with an audience by telling them what they want to hear. The public respects honesty, even when they are angry.

- **Keep your answers brief.** This will be easy if in advance of the meeting you have prepared answers for the kinds of questions you expect. Remember the public is more likely to have a greater urge to speak to you than to listen (especially if they have a ready been given a formal presentation).

- **Respond to the questions that are asked.** If you do not know the answer, say so. Tell the person you will get back to them later (be sure to get contact information after the meeting so you can keep your word).

- **Speak in plain language** so that people can more readily understand you. If you need to use a technical term ask if people know what you mean.

- **Look for ways to involve people** in constructive participation. For example, if someone suggests that you don't know how local drivers behave, you might suggest that the community organize a field trip for you so they can show you the problem first hand.

More TIPS for responding to emotions:

- Listen to what's being said.
- Acknowledge that you've heard what was said.
- Don't downplay people's concerns.
- Don't be defensive. Don't argue or use data to try to convince them their views are "wrong" or your views are "right".
- Be open to looking at new approaches.
- Understand that community values and desires are as legitimate as the Department's values and desires–your job is to try to find a win-win solution that will allow the Department to meet the transportation need that has been identified.

Earning Trust and Building Credibility

You, as the Department's representative, will earn trust by being honest, caring and consistently competent. If you communicate honestly and deal with people fairly, the public will usually respond in kind. However, even if you involve the community in your project's decision-making process, there is no guarantee that people will agree with the Department's approach and be happy with you. Some members (thankfully not the majority) of the public will not trust you, regardless of how trustworthy you are.

Be genuine.
It is not enough to just go through the motions. People will see through an approach that is insincere and not real. Holding meetings and not listening to input can be worse than not holding the meetings in the first place.

Guidelines For Building Trust:

There are several guidelines to follow that will help you build trust and earn credibility. Remember always to keep these in mind:

- ☑ ***Share information early and openly:*** Early involvement of the public can lead to a cooperative effort. Conversely, failure to reach out to the public at the beginning may undermine the Department's credibility. This is **not** in the Department's best interests. Once trust is lost and the situation has deteriorated, it is very difficult to get back.

- ☑ ***Provide information that people can understand:*** Speak in plain English and provide for translation if the audience communicates in another language. Do not use technical jargon or terms that people can't understand.

Failure to reach out to the public and the resulting loss of credibility in NOT in the Department's best interests.

- ☑ ***Provide accurate information in a timely manner:*** Timeliness is important, and the quality of the information also matters. Give people adequate time and notice to review materials, especially if there are complex issues involved.

- ☑ ***Get the facts right:*** Make sure you present correct information and that all members of the Department are communicating the same message. If an error is made, acknowledge it, and correct it right away. Do not assume people won't notice. If an error is made and discovered later on, people will feel misled, undermining trust.

- ☑ ***Only make promises that you can keep:*** It is so tempting, especially if you are being pressured by the public, to make a commitment you know will be hard to deliver. Resist making a commitment you will need to break later on. A better strategy would be to promise things that you know you can provide (e.g. interim reports on progress or commit to looking into a particular course of action).

- ☑ ***Follow up:*** Do what you say you're going to do and get back to people when you have done it. Don't ask for input and then neglect to close the loop by failing to get back to people about what you heard. If you find it difficult to keep notes about commitments you make during a public meeting, have someone else keep minutes so commitments aren't forgotten. Lack of follow-through, even on items that may seem insignificant to you, will undermine trust.

- ☑ ***Process is important:*** How the Department makes a decision can be as important as what the decision is. If the public feels powerless to express its feelings in a meaningful way or that the Department is not listening, opposition and mistrust is likely to occur.

- ☑ ***Hear all groups and points of view:*** Views from all groups, including special interest and opposition groups, should be welcomed, otherwise the public participation effort will be seen as less than credible. Good public outreach efforts will be diminished if the Department has selective hearing.

- ☑ ***Don't hide:*** It is not a good strategy to avoid talking about bad news. You should be in the position of releasing bad news, not responding to it. Face it honestly and promptly. The public respects honesty even if the news is not good. Similarly, respond promptly to people who seek information.

- ☑ ***Learn the local customs:*** Try to learn as much about a project area as you can. The locals will appreciate your interest.

TIPS on what to do when trust is low:

- Identify the reasons for mistrust.
- Acknowledge that trust is low.
- Ask what you can do to restore trust.
- Say what you'll do to prevent mistrust and then do it.
- Be patient. Restoring trust will take time.

Connecticut Department of Transportation

Chapter 8

Chapter 8:

How Do I Know It's Working: Evaluating the Program

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation of public involvement effectiveness is required by various federal regulations. If public involvement strategies for a particular project are not effective, the desired outcome will not be realized. By assessing and evaluating past efforts, improvements to future public outreach plans can be made. Evaluation requirements are discussed in this Chapter, and sample techniques are presented to evaluate your public involvement program. The public involvement evaluation process should:

- Evaluate techniques used;
- Employ measures that will quantify success; and
- Provide new insight and ideas to improve the process.

REGULATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

Transportation projects are carried out in four phases:

- Phase I – Planning
- Phase 2 – Project Development/Design/NEPA
- Phase 3 – Construction
- Phase 4 – Operations and Operations Support

There are specific federal requirements for evaluating the effectiveness of public outreach during each of the first three phases. The following is a summary of these requirements:

Phase 1 – Planning: The FHWA/FTA regulations for evaluating the effectiveness of the MPO and RPO public involvement program is contained in 23CFR450. This regulation requires a periodic review by the MPO/RPO in conjunction with FHWA/FTA to ensure that full and open access is provided to the MPO decision making processes. The same applies to the Department's state-wide planning efforts. The intent is to determine:

- Which techniques are deemed ineffective; and
- Which innovative and new techniques can provide a better response and more feedback.

Phase 2 – Project Development, Design and NEPA: The joint FHWA/FTA "Interim Policy on Public Involvement," specifically requires FHWA/FTA evaluation of public involvement processes and procedures to assess their success at meeting the performance requirements specified in the regulations. The provision states that it is the policy of FHWA and FTA to aggressively support proactive public involvement at all stages of planning and project development. State Departments of Transportation, MPO's and transportation providers are required to develop effective involvement processes which are tailored to local conditions.

NEPA requires an effective and continuing public involvement process for all projects developed, designed and constructed with Federal funds. The process must ensure proactive public involvement with **early and continuous involvement;** public accessibility to project technical information; collaborative input for alternatives, evaluation criteria and mitigation needs; and full and open public access and meetings during the decision-making process prior to making final project determinations. In order to fulfill these objectives, the effectiveness of the public involvement must be evaluated.

Phase 3 – Construction: Regulation 23CFR630, Subpart J, "Traffic Safety in Highway and Street Work Zones" addresses the need for a transportation management plan which includes public information components. FHWA's "Work Zone Public Information and Outreach Strategies Guide" (November 2005) discusses the need to evaluate the effectiveness of public information and outreach campaigns to ultimately improve work zone safety and mobility. The Guide calls for periodic evaluation during significant, long-duration construction projects so that strategies and resources can be redirected if existing ones are not effective.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

At a recent joint FHWA/FTA conference, the question was asked *"What are the indicators of an effective public involvement process?"* The answer provides insight into the evaluation process: *"A good indicator of an effective public involvement process is a well informed public which feels it has opportunities to contribute input into transportation decision-making processes through a broad array of involvement opportunities at all stages* *of decision making. In contrast, an ineffective process is one that relies on one or two public meetings or hearings to obtain input immediately prior to decision-making on developed draft plans and programs. Public meetings that are well attended, frequent news coverage on transportation issues, public forums where a broad representation of diverse interests is in attendance, and plans, TIPs, alternatives, and designs which reflect an understanding and consideration of public input are all indicators that the public involvement process is effective."*

In order to effectively evaluate, monitor and improve public involvement strategies, an evaluation methodology is required. Four steps that may be considered in developing an evaluation methodology are:

- Develop performance measures for each public involvement technique used (eg., public hearing attendance, web-site use);
- Develop performance indicators or goals (evaluation measures) for each technique;
- Evaluate effectiveness of public involvement plans and tools through surveys and/or quantitative statistical analysis; and
- Analyze information collected and compare to performance parameters established in order to perform a quantitative and qualitative evaluation.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES & PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each project may utilize a different set of public involvement tools to achieve an optimum level of public input. For large, significant and long-duration projects, it is desirable to establish performance measures and indicators for evaluation before project completion. The measures and indicators should be based on prior experiences and satisfy the following criteria:

- Are they measurable? – Quantitative information should be specified but qualitative performance measures such as level of response, level of understanding, and development or status of relationships, should also be included for staff analysis;

- Are they verifiable? – The results obtained should be agreed upon by multiple, independent observers; and

- Are they cost effective? – The benefits of measuring and verifying an indicator should outweigh the cost to obtain the data. Simple data collection methods are best.

Figure 8.1, Performance Measures and Indicators, provides examples of public involvement tools, performance measures and indicators.

Figure 8.1: Performance Measures and Indicators

Public Information Tool	Performance Measure	Performance Indicator
Web Sites	Number of hits	Minimum (based on project size, completion, etc.) X number of hits/month with % increase each month
Public Hearings/ Information Meetings	Attendance, calls, letters	3-5% of affected population (study area) attending. Survey form at hearing to assess effectiveness
Direct Mailings	Number of people reached via calls and letters,	10-20% of meeting attendees received mailing. 85% (minimum) of affected persons reached
Surveys (released at Meetings, or by Mailings)	Number of responses, calls, letters, etc.	60% attendees submit form; 20% of mailed forms returned
Legal Notices	Calls, letters from public and/or media	None - Required by regulations

EVALUATION METHODS & ANALYSIS

Several methods can be used to collect the information needed to determine if the established performance measures are being met. These methods may include:

Surveys – Surveys can include in-person (at meetings, etc.), telephone, mail, or e-mail contacts using a standard survey form or questionnaire. The form and/or questionnaire should be specifically developed for the project and the particular tool being evaluated.

Quantitative Analysis – Actual data analysis can be used for many public involvement tools where statistics (number of attendees vs. those notified) are used as performance indicators. Quantitative analysis can indicate if the public involvement tools are reaching the affected audience and which tools provide a greater targeted response rate. Statistical analysis may also be used to compare survey results to evaluation criteria.

Quantitative criteria, for public hearings, for example, may include:

- **Attendance rates; and**
- **Productivity rates (based on hearing survey hand-out responsiveness) and percentage of questions answered by hearing participants who completed survey.**
- **Perception of effectiveness by survey respondents**

Qualitative Evaluation – In addition to quantitative methods for evaluation, a qualitative evaluation of the overall public involvement process should be done in-house by Department staff. Department staff familiar with the project, joined by others familiar with the public involvement process, can provide an objective evaluation of the public involvement effort The staff review and evaluation can focus on the public involvement tools used, such as websites, public hearings, and informational meetings. They may objectively evaluate the process by considering the following:

- ☑ Participation Level of the Project Community – Are all segments represented?
- ☑ Participant Continuity – Are interested parties understanding the process and following through on their concerns?
- ☑ Communication Techniques – Are the public's concerns being listened to?
- ☑ Public Comments are Relevant, Realistic and Appropriate – Does the affected public understand the project?
- ☑ Issues are being resolved – Is project opposition based on unresolved issues or unanswered questions that can be addressed?

Using this qualitative approach, the tools being used and their effectiveness can be self-evaluated by the Department. The results of the qualitative analysis can be summarized quantitatively, if desired, by assigning an agreed-upon score to the public involvement tools reviewed and to each of the major issues described above. The scale could be from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the most effective tool utilized for the public involvement effort. A sample Qualitative Evaluation Form is shown in Figure 8.2. The form may be used by Department staff to present an overall qualitative evaluation of the tools and public involvement program for the project (design or construction) or planning process. Evaluation will identify those areas where changes and/or improvements should be considered. Generally, if the evaluation is scored at 3 or below, some changes and/or improvement strategies should be considered. The ranking scale should reflect the following as a guide for qualitative evaluation:

1 – Not effective, severely lacking
2 – Not effective
3 – Somewhat effective, neutral
4 – Effective, consider some changes
5 – Highly effective, changes not required

The self-evaluation can then lead to the next important step of improving the public involvement effort.

After evaluations are conducted, areas in need of improvement should be highlighted and new, and perhaps more active techniques should be considered to replace those determined to be less effective. By capitalizing on lessons learned, the public involvement evaluation process may be just as valuable and informative as the actual public involvement program itself.

ConnDOT Public Outreach Qualitative Evaluation Form

Evaluation of ______________________________
(project description)

Planning ☐ NEPA ☐ Design ☐ Construction ☐

Time of Evaluation:
Study/Project Start ____________
Expected Study Completion ____________
Evaluation Date ____________

Qualitative Evaluation (by Department Staff)

Use guide below to determine Qualitative Evaluation Ranking (1-5)
1 – Not effective, severely lacking
2 – Not effective
3 – Somewhat effective, neutral
4 – Effective, consider some changes
5 – Highly effective, changes not required

Evaluate Public Involvement Tools

	Used: Yes	Used: No	Qualitative Evaluation (1-5)
Web Site	___	___	____
Newsletter	___	___	____
Public Information Meeting	___	___	____
Public Hearing	___	___	____
Direct Mailing	___	___	____
List all others:			
____________	___	___	____
____________	___	___	____
____________	___	___	____
____________	___	___	____

Evaluate Public Response

		Qualitative Evaluation (1-5)
a.	Participation Level	____
b.	Participant Continuity	____
c.	Communication Techniques	____
d.	Public Comments	____
e.	Issue Resolution	____

Comments:

____

Evaluation prepared by: ______________________________
Name (Print) Title Date

IMPROVING THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Public involvement program evaluations may be conducted at various stages of a project. Based on the evaluations completed, both quantitative and qualitative, the public outreach or plan may be reviewed to determine what improvements need to be made, if any. If the evaluations are completed at an early stage of project development, improvements and strategy changes may be made. Evaluations carried out later in the project can be useful for documenting pitfalls. That information should be passed on to others within the Department for consideration on future public involvement strategies.

It is recommended that public involvement plans be evaluated at early stages of the process, particularly after major milestones are achieved (i.e., public scoping meeting). If possible, continuing evaluations should be performed. Figure 8.3, "Evaluation Timing", provides some examples and guidance for performing evaluations at critical project milestones.

FIGURE 8.3: EVALUATION TIMING

Process/ Project Type	Project Task	Evaluation Frequency
Planning (TIP/STIP)	TIP development	As time, resources and need dictate
	Ongoing activities (i.e., web site, newsletter)	Semi-annually or as time, resources and need dictate
Project Development/Design/NEPA (significant, large projects)	Scoping Meeting	As time, resources and need dictate
	Ongoing activities (i.e., web site, newsletter)	As time, resources and need dictate
	Project completion	Once at completion, if no previous evaluations
Construction (significant, large projects/long duration)	Shortly after construction has started	Each construction season, if more than one year
	Ongoing activities (i.e., web site, PI office, media information)	As time, resources and need dictate