

DEVELOPING A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/RELATIONS PLAN

A public involvement (PI) plan designates how and when stakeholders and the public are given information and opportunities to participate. ***It is adjustable to fit the project's size and needs. It doesn't need to be fancy or complicated.*** A well thought out plan will provide a systematic approach that will maximize the use of available resources and reduce delays by ensuring PI activities are integrated as projects are developed and constructed. The plan will identify the purpose of the project and the PI goals to be achieved, as well as what criteria will be used to measure how those goals are achieved.

Developing a project specific public involvement plan is recommended not only to ensure the requirements of public involvement are met, but also to help MDT understand and meet the needs of the stakeholders and public. A project specific public involvement plan can guide communicating MDT's decisions and actions as well as, how input was considered in making these decisions. The following questions and tips can assist with developing a public involvement plan.

Purpose and Goals of Outreach and Involvement

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM	INFORM/EDUCATE	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Public Involvement Goal	Provide stakeholders and public with information to assist them in understanding the problem, reasons why, processes, etc...	Obtain feedback on analysis, alternative and/or decisions	Work directly with the stakeholders and public throughout the process to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Partner with the stakeholder and public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution
Assurance to the Public/ Stakeholders	Will keep you informed throughout the project	Will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public and stakeholder input influenced the decision	Will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision	Will look to stakeholders and public for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible
Tactics/Examples	Fact sheets Web pages Social Media Videos	Public comment Focus groups On-line surveys Public meetings Project hot line	Workshops Deliberative polling Crowd sourcing	Citizen advisory committees Consensus building Participatory decision-making Project forum

- Is the goal to inform or involve?
- What role will stakeholders and the public have in decision-making? They may have none if it is purely an informational plan.

- What information will stakeholders and the public want or need?
- What level of support is needed for this project to be successful?

Community/Area Impacted by the Project (situation analysis)

- What is the background/history of the project?
- What public involvement has already been done?
- What problems and opportunities exist?
- Does existing public opinion support or oppose the project?
- Does substantial controversy exist?
- Is new controversy anticipated?
- Did previous planning studies, projects, or PI (or lack thereof) influence public opinion?
- Were commitments made for previous projects broken?
- What issues and needs are the communities concerned about?
- Will the proposed project introduce a new element to the community's transportation system or change long-established traffic patterns/habits (roundabouts, turn lanes, controlled access)?
- What affect is this expect to have on the community, landowners, business owners, stakeholders – not limited to acquiring right-of-way?
- Will anything historic or dear to the community (bridges, landmarks, homes, parks) be changed?
- Will there be wildlife accommodation features?
- Are there any innovations or cost saving features to highlight?
- How are bike or pedestrian facilities involved in this project and what is the climate of the community regarding such facilities?
- What will be the consequences if this project is opposed or not supported by the community?
- Will there be substantial changes to layout or functions of connecting roadways?
- Will there be substantial social adverse impact on abutting property?
- Will there be significant social, economic, environmental, or other effect?

Stakeholders

- Who are interested parties?
- Whose support is needed?
- Who are the “movers” and “shakers” that can impact a project’s success?
- Who may be affected, positively or negatively, by the project?

Potential stakeholders may include the following:

- ✓ local government
- ✓ local elected officials
- ✓ state senators/representatives
- ✓ US senators/representatives
- ✓ tribal governments
- ✓ tribal leaders/officials
- ✓ state and federal agencies
- ✓ multi-cultural communities
- ✓ senior centers
- ✓ citizen advisory groups
- ✓ homeowner associations
- ✓ service organizations
- ✓ minority (ethnic/racial) groups
- ✓ community advisory boards
- ✓ local high schools and colleges/school districts
- ✓ general public
- ✓ businesses
- ✓ business associations
- ✓ community/neighborhood groups
- ✓ development associations
- ✓ disenfranchised groups
- ✓ educational facilities
- ✓ emergency services
- ✓ law enforcement
- ✓ health facilities
- ✓ major employers
- ✓ media
- ✓ non-profit organizations
- ✓ persons with disabilities
- ✓ safety agencies
- ✓ residents
- ✓ elderly
- ✓ sports/recreation groups
- ✓ transportation users
- ✓ utility companies
- ✓ youth
- ✓ local and statewide advocacy groups
- ✓ freight related
- ✓ low wage earners
- ✓ non-English speaking

Underserved Populations

- ✓ How will they be identified and engaged?
- ✓ Define methods and means to solicit information, ideas, and opinions

Timeline/Project Schedule

- What are the key project milestones, activities, and decision points when the public and stakeholders need to be informed/involved? Plan on updating at least once a year or more often depending on project development activities.
- When or what time is required to achieve the desired results for communicating with the public and stakeholders?
- What information is required for each milestone, activity, and decision point?

Outreach Efforts/Activities

- What segments of the community need to be involved?
- Who is not represented by traditional groups?
- Is input needed from those who would not otherwise be involved?
- What level of effort will be needed to inform and involve those identified as key stakeholders?
- What is available in the community (good/poor internet service, local broadcasting, community groups, supportive local government...anything, nothing)?
- What tools and techniques are going to be used to delivery information, educate or gather input?

Public Comments Use and Responses Tips

- *Provide timely responses to public comments (even when you don't know the answer- be sure to respond that you received their comment and will get back to them with an answer)*
- Recognize that all people are important and can contribute valuable perspectives
- Provide clear, definite responses to substantive comments; differentiate between philosophical and factual differences; and provide an explanation of why one approach or option was selected over others.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Ensure that all public comment becomes a part of the public record for any transportation project (Communication Log) by tracking and responding to (in a written format) comments and ensuring that all comments received from the public are available for public viewing during normal business hours.
- Demonstrate how comments were considered and incorporated into the project or not incorporated and why.

Sample PI Plan Outline

This outline can be followed to create a public involvement plan. If you address each of these categories using the public involvement worksheets, you should be able to successfully obtain your outreach and communications needs and requirements.

Project Name-

Project Description-

Introduction/Background- Have any concerns been raised about the project? Are there any innovative or interesting features? Is there inter-agency coordination, night work, unique educational opportunities, etc....?

Objectives- What do you want to do and why the PI for the project? Do you want to inform, educate or to gather feedback?

Stakeholders/Audience- The stakeholders, groups, public you want to reach. This is the project contact/e-list.

Messages/Information- The key points/information you want to convey. If gathering feedback be sure to specify what you are gathering for, what decision, and how you will inform after the decision.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategies- This is the tactics and tools you are going to use and when. What are you going to do? Open house, survey, one-on-one meetings, meetings, focus groups, press release, fact page, brochure, post cards, etc. (look at [Worksheet C](#)). Remember, if gathering feedback, have a way to convey the information gathered back to the stakeholders and the decisions made from the feedback, as well as, reason you made the decision.

Evaluation/re-evaluation- How and what will you look at to see if PI efforts are working? Are you getting similar questions/concern multiple time? Are you getting feedback?