

AASHTO PRACTITIONER'S HANDBOOK

05

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UTILIZING COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR NEPA STUDIES

A Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is a public participation technique that can be employed to gain stakeholder feedback, identify and resolve local concerns, and build community support during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision-making process. Although not required, a CAC can be an effective means of addressing specific issues and hearing a variety of stakeholder views. A CAC can also be used in pre-NEPA planning studies.

Issues covered in this Handbook include:

- Deciding whether to establish a CAC
- Defining the role of the CAC
- Selecting CAC members and organizing the CAC
- Preparing for and facilitating CAC meetings
- Providing for public access to CAC meetings and meeting materials

The Practitioner's Handbooks are produced by the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence. The Handbooks provide practical advice on a range of environmental issues that arise during the planning, development, and operation of transportation projects.

The Handbooks are primarily intended for use by project managers and others who are responsible for coordinating compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements. With their needs in mind, each Handbook includes:

- key issues to consider;
- a background briefing;
- practical tips for achieving compliance.

In addition, key regulations, guidance materials, and sample documents for each Handbook is posted on the Center's web site at <http://environment.transportation.org>



AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence



American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

Overview



A CAC is a group of stakeholders that meets regularly to discuss study-related issues or concerns during project development. CAC members serve as liaisons between the community they represent and the study team. A CAC can take many forms and may be designed for a variety of purposes. CACs may be organized for a group of projects, long-range plans, policy initiatives, or other programs.

This Handbook outlines the role of a CAC in the NEPA decision-making process and provides recommendations for a successful CAC. The recommendations in this Handbook may also be helpful for CACs that are used in pre-NEPA planning studies, such as a corridor study. For advice regarding the implementation of a CAC for a specific study, agency officials are encouraged to consult with a trained facilitator or public involvement specialist.

Key Issues to Consider

Determining Whether to Establish a CAC

- What can a CAC contribute that cannot be accomplished any other way?
- What makes a CAC a good fit with this study?
- At what point in the study will a CAC be beneficial?

Defining the CAC's Role

- What is the CAC's role in the overall public involvement process, including any public involvement required under Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU?
- What responsibilities are expected of CAC members?
- How long will the CAC continue to meet?
- Are there any Context-Sensitive Solutions (CSS) initiatives or policies that need to be taken into account in defining the role of the CAC?

Selecting CAC Members

- What interests need to be represented on the CAC?
- How large should the committee be?
- How will CAC members be selected and/or replaced?

Organizing the CAC

- Who will organize and run meetings?
- How often should meetings be held?
- How will the study team interact with the CAC?

Preparing for CAC Meetings

- What preparation is needed for a successful first meeting?

- How will study information be provided to CAC members?
- What meeting format will be used to ensure that all CAC members have an opportunity for meaningful participation?
- What logistical issues need to be addressed?

Following Up on CAC Meetings

- How will CAC meeting discussions be documented?
- Has enough time been budgeted to respond to requests from the CAC?

Public Access to the CAC

- How will CAC meeting materials be made available to the public?
- What are the ground rules for attendance by non-members at CAC meetings?

Background Briefing

Role of Public Involvement in the NEPA Process. Public involvement is the process of communicating with the public early and continuously throughout a NEPA study in order to understand local conditions and community values that contribute to effective and sustainable project decisions. A variety of public involvement techniques may be used to inform and involve project stakeholders during the NEPA process. In this Handbook, stakeholder refers to any individual or group who may be affected by, or has interest in, the NEPA decision-making process or outcome.

Role of a CAC. A CAC is typically organized by a NEPA study team as a method to gain stakeholder input to the NEPA process. A CAC may operate under different names and may fulfill different purposes based on study needs and how the CAC fits into the overall public involvement plan. Other commonly used names include Civic Advisory Committee, Stakeholder Working Group, Public Information Committee, Stakeholder Task Force and other variations that best capture the purpose and membership of the specific CAC. The defining feature of a CAC (or similar group) is that it involves a representative group of project stakeholders from the community who meet regularly with the study team in a forum that allows for interactive discussions.

Potential Benefits of a CAC. A CAC is only one of a variety of public involvement techniques to gain stakeholder input and build community support during the NEPA process. A CAC provides a forum for educating stakeholders, building understanding, and engaging in discussion of study issues with a variety of stakeholders, which in turn builds project credibility. A CAC can also be a conduit for getting information out to the community. Potential benefits of a CAC include:

- **Continuity.** A CAC provides the opportunity to meet with the same group of people over time. This consistency enables the study team to build relationships with stakeholder representatives and understand stakeholder issues and concerns in greater detail.
- **Detailed discussion of key issues.** The continuity of a CAC provides the opportunity to invest in training and education that will equip CAC members to engage in meaningful discussion and provide valuable feedback to the study team.
- **Opportunity for participants to hear differing views.** A CAC can help stakeholders recognize the variety of viewpoints within the community.
- **Opportunity for collaborative problem solving.** A CAC provides a forum for community members to work together and, in some cases, to come up with new ideas or to resolve differences. CACs are often used as part of a State's effort to develop Context-Sensitive Solutions (CSS).

Keys to Success. For a successful CAC, the study team should work to:

- **Clearly define the CAC's purpose and the project sponsor's commitment to fulfill that purpose.** The study team should be in agreement about the purpose of the CAC and how CAC input will be used. The team should

clarify the CAC's role in the NEPA process and outline procedures for implementing CAC input. CAC members should clearly understand their role in the NEPA decision-making process. Agreed-upon CAC responsibilities and expected outcomes may be documented in meeting notes, committee by-laws, or a CAC charter.

- **Adapt the CAC to the community.** The CAC should reflect the range of views from various stakeholder groups within the community. The membership, meeting times, meeting locations, presentation formats, and other features of a CAC should be tailored to the needs of the community. For example, if a community includes a substantial number of residents with limited English proficiency, it may be necessary to accommodate those residents at CAC meetings.
- **Provide alternative opportunities for involvement.** Regardless of the CAC approach used, some community members may feel that their interests are not well represented. For this reason, it is often helpful to provide alternative avenues for public input to the study team, such as public workshops, open houses, and websites.
- **Provide regular updates to the CAC on the overall NEPA decision-making process.** The study team should show CAC members that their input is being seriously considered and let them know how their ideas have contributed to decisions. Communication may occur via e-mail, letter, website, or newsletter directed to CAC members or during CAC meetings. "Closing the loop" in this manner is important to ensure that CAC members continue to feel their time is well spent.

Legal Requirements. While the study team has substantial flexibility in setting up a CAC, the following legal requirements should be considered:

- **NEPA.** The NEPA process does not require the use of a CAC. If a CAC is used, it should be conducted in a manner consistent with basic NEPA principles. This means that CAC meetings should be open to the public; materials from the CAC process should be available to non-CAC members; input received from the CAC should be documented in the project file; and substantive issues raised by CAC members should be addressed in the NEPA document or elsewhere in the project file. It is important to make clear to all CAC members that the CAC itself is not a decision-making body: project decisions are made within the NEPA process by the FHWA, the project sponsor, and regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over the project. However, CAC discussions are brought forth to team meetings as citizen input and thus aid in the decision-making process.
- **SAFETEA-LU.** Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) established an environmental review process that is required for any environmental impact statement (EIS) that is initiated by FHWA or FTA after August 10, 2005. Section 6002 requires an "opportunity for involvement" by the public in developing purpose and need and in determining the range of alternatives for a project. Section 6002 also requires preparation of a coordination plan that describes the process for agency and public involvement in a project. A CAC can be used as one element of a State's efforts to meet the public involvement requirements of Section 6002.
- **Title VI/Environmental Justice.** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination by the recipients of federal funding on grounds of race, color, or national origin. Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to promote environmental justice by taking into account impacts on minority and low-income communities. These requirements should be considered in all aspects of the NEPA process, including the use of CACs. For example, environmental justice considerations will help determine the membership, meeting locations and formats, and other aspects of a CAC.
- **Public Records and Open Meetings Laws.** The federal Freedom of Information Act requires federal agencies to disclose public records; states have similar public records disclosure laws. These laws apply to most materials generated as part of a CAC process, such as meeting summaries. In addition, many states have "open meetings" laws that may apply to a CAC. If applicable, these laws may affect the procedures used for announcing and conducting CAC meetings.
- **Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).** The FACA establishes requirements that apply to some advisory committees established by federal agencies. If a committee is subject to FACA, the committee must comply with requirements that can limit the flexibility and effectiveness of a CAC. Therefore, the potential applicability of FACA is an important issue to consider when establishing a CAC. A CAC is unlikely to be subject to FACA if the CAC is created by, and provides advice to, a non-federal agency, such as a state or local transportation agency.

Conversely, if a federal agency (such as the FHWA) is directly involved in selecting CAC members, determining CAC agendas, and otherwise running the CAC, the CAC is more likely to be subject to FACA. Study teams should consult with their local FHWA office and/or assigned legal counsel to determine the applicability of FACA.

Practical Tips

1. | Deciding Whether to Establish a CAC

Several factors should be considered in determining whether a CAC is a good fit for a particular NEPA study. Consider the study history, the range of stakeholder groups affected by or interested in the NEPA outcome, the geographic size of the study area, public perceptions of the study or NEPA process or both, and other planned public involvement activities. One way to get a sense of project history and past public perceptions is to review previous media reports and previous planning studies that included a public process, as well as the records from any CACs (or similar groups) that may have been used in previous studies.

Need for a CAC. A CAC can be particularly effective when:

- Stakeholders are skeptical of technical data or processes or both. To build credibility, a CAC is a method to share detailed information and be transparent with stakeholders about data and processes.
- The study history or context requires community buy-in. A CAC is an opportunity to educate stakeholders, facilitate open dialogue about project-related community needs and potential solutions, and gather meaningful stakeholder input to improve the decision-making outcome.
- Conflicting stakeholder views and opinions could delay the NEPA process. A CAC provides a setting in which differing views can be voiced and discussed. Conflict resolution strategies may be implemented as part of the CAC purpose and structure. Addressing differing opinions early in the process and getting to the core values behind those opinions may lead to creative solutions and prevent delays in the NEPA process.

Logistics. A CAC may be more difficult to implement for large, complex studies that span large geographic areas or several years of time, or both. A CAC may benefit such studies, but raise logistical challenges associated with time and distance, such as maintaining continuity in membership.

Cost. A CAC demands a considerable investment of staff time for initial member recruitment, meeting preparations, communications, and technical support. A poorly supported CAC process will not provide for effective participation and may result in stakeholder frustration. For many studies, the time required to maintain a CAC is worthwhile and necessary. In some instances, public meetings, workshops, conferences or retreats may be more cost-effective in accomplishing similar goals. Note that public meetings are still a crucial part of public involvement when a CAC is utilized.

2. | Defining the CAC's Role

The success of a CAC depends on establishing a clear understanding among all study participants of the role that the CAC will play in the NEPA process. The decisions regarding the CAC's role are made by the agencies that create the CAC and should be documented in meeting notes, committee by-laws, or a CAC charter. The following issues should be considered when making those decisions:

Timing and Scope of CAC Involvement. A CAC may be organized to support the entire NEPA process, or only a portion of it. When an environmental impact statement (EIS) is being prepared, a CAC is typically organized early in the process and continues through the end of the study. Meetings are commonly held around milestones such as scoping, alternatives development, alternatives screening and refinement, and selection of a preferred alternative. A CAC also can be used in pre-NEPA planning studies, such as corridor studies.

Relationship of CAC to Study Team. The nature of the CAC’s input can vary from project to project. Potential roles for the CAC include:

- **Providing feedback.** A CAC can be used as a “sounding board” for the study team by providing feedback on study information and choices, particularly at study milestones. The study team may present information and describe the decision-making process for the CAC members, who then can provide comments, ask for clarification, request further information, and offer suggestions. This feedback role does not require the CAC to adopt a formal position or form an internal consensus since the focus is on generating stakeholders’ ideas to further refine the study.
- **Collaborative problem solving.** A CAC can provide a forum for collaborative discussions of specific project issues. Collaborative approaches are increasingly common among agencies that use a context-sensitive solutions (CSS) approach to project development. In a collaborative CAC, members may be actively involved in crafting and refining NEPA alternatives and mitigation measures. This approach typically requires more frequent meetings and benefits from having a smaller CAC membership. It also is more likely to require the use of a skilled facilitator.
- **Links to the community.** CAC members can provide links to wider constituencies by transmitting information about the project to the groups that they represent. In this role, CAC members can help to disseminate information about the study to the general public; they also can help bring information from the general public to the study team. CAC members should be representative of their community and should not put forth a personal agenda.

3. | Selecting CAC Members

Balanced stakeholder representation is necessary in order for a CAC to be effective. This means that a breadth of stakeholder views and opinions should be represented. Determining what constitutes “balanced stakeholder representation” depends on study area demographics and the range of stakeholder groups that might be affected.

Potential Members. Potential CAC members are identified in the early stages of the project. Minority and low-income populations in particular should be identified early to make sure they are represented on the CAC. A wide range of viewpoints should be sought in the selection of members to enable officials to gain an understanding of the general community. The following groups constitute potential CAC members:

- Local jurisdictions
- Civic organizations
- Businesses
- Large employers
- Indian tribes
- Minority and low-income groups
- Interest groups
- Residents
- Facility users, including freight providers, bicyclists, and pedestrians
- Environmental groups
- Elected representatives
- Neighborhood representatives/leaders
- Religious leaders
- Educational leaders
- Emergency services representatives

Size. Once the range of stakeholder interests is identified, the size of the group should be determined. Some factors to consider in determining the size of the CAC include:

- A collaborative CAC – that is, a CAC designed for collaborative, problem-solving discussions among CAC members – works best with fewer than 20 members. A CAC designed for disseminating information, obtaining feedback, and/or creating links to the community can be successful with 30 or more members.
- If a large number of stakeholder groups must be accommodated in the study process, it may be necessary to re-evaluate the format of the CAC. Various stakeholder groups might be combined into broader categories to ensure that the CAC does not exceed a manageable size. Alternatively, more than one CAC could be organized if it fits the study needs.
- The CAC could be composed of a small core group, with other stakeholders asked to participate on topical subcommittees. Another approach is for the CAC to host an occasional public workshop or conference that provides the opportunity for other stakeholders to participate.

Selection Process. A variety of methods may be used to recruit and select CAC members. These include:

- **Invitation.** Some groups are formed by invitation based on interviews and recommendations. This approach requires researching potential members by talking with elected officials, municipal staff, school officials, clergy, chambers of commerce, or other organized community groups. Community leaders are consulted with the assumption that they have knowledge of neighborhoods, communities, or stakeholder groups who may be affected by or interested in the NEPA study. It is important to interview several leaders with different perspectives and roles within the community. If looking for input from a particular organized group, the study team may invite that group to appoint someone to represent them on the CAC.
- **Application.** An application process may help to ensure the level of commitment needed for CAC participation and reinforce the representative role of CAC members. For an application process to be successful, the study team should publicize the CAC purpose and responsibilities and be prepared to ask specific individuals to apply. An application might ask potential members to state why they want to participate in the CAC, what they believe they can contribute, and how they plan to gain input from others within their stakeholder group. An application could ask for references, endorsements, or letters of recommendation from others within the stakeholder group.¹ If an application process is used, the study team will need to review the applications and select CAC members.

Regardless of the selection process used, potential CAC members should be aware of the purpose, responsibilities, anticipated time commitment, and duration of the CAC.

Replacing Members. CAC members may occasionally need to be replaced due to resignations, especially if the CAC is active for several years. Replacements may also occur at the request of the study team or facilitator if a member fails to meet CAC responsibilities such as meeting attendance. Members may need to be added if a stakeholder group was overlooked or a new one emerges during the NEPA process.

4. | Organizing the CAC

Carefully planning how the CAC will be organized is critical to fulfilling its purpose and ensuring that the group will meaningfully contribute to the NEPA process. Organization includes meeting facilitation, interaction with the study team, and meeting format and frequency.

Name of the CAC. “Community Advisory Committee” is a general reference that may not fit the purpose of your group. It is important that the group have a name that reflects its purpose and description. Note that some project sponsors avoid using “advisory” in the title and may prefer terms like feedback, input, or information committee. “Committee” may inadequately describe how the group functions; terms like working group, focus group, task force, panel, board, or other group organization titles may be more appropriate. Take note of potential acronyms of the group name to ensure that it is not offensive or already associated with a different high-profile group.

¹ It is preferable to have the state or local agency make decisions about CAC membership rather than the FHWA. If a Federal agency is running the CAC, it is more likely to be subject to FACA requirements (see explanation of FACA in Background Briefing).

Responsibilities of CAC Members. The responsibilities of CAC members should be clearly defined and communicated to potential members. Defined responsibilities should include stakeholder group representation (versus representing only one's personal opinions), the CAC's role in the project, estimated number and frequency of meetings, anticipated "homework" or research, and participation in public involvement activities. Responsibilities might be expressed in terms of hours per month or quarter and the duration of the commitment in terms of months or years. Responsibilities may be documented in meeting notes, committee by-laws, or a CAC charter.

Ground Rules for Participation. It is helpful to establish some basic ground rules for participation in CAC meetings. Ground rules can help to ensure that all members have an opportunity to be heard and that the meeting time is used efficiently. Allowing CAC members to participate in developing the ground rules for CAC meetings can help create a sense of ownership, which increases the commitment to follow and enforce the ground rules. Potential ground rules include "Turn off cell phones," "Speak one person at a time," "Allow everyone the opportunity to speak," and "Start and end on time." Ground rules may be documented in meeting notes, committee by-laws, or a CAC charter.

Process for CAC Deliberation and Input. The study team should provide direction to the CAC regarding the type of input that the CAC is being asked to provide. Typically, input is provided informally, with individual CAC members providing comments to the study team in CAC meetings. If more formal methods are proposed (e.g., voting), the study team should carefully consider whether those methods are compatible with the purpose and composition of the CAC. The study team should also make sure that all CAC members understand that the CAC is not a decision-making body; the members of the CAC are providing input, along with other agency and public input, which is all considered by the lead agencies in the decision-making process.

Use of Facilitators. A skilled facilitator can play an important role in a CAC by keeping the discussion focused, ensuring that all members have an opportunity to express their views, and ensuring that technical information is communicated in language understandable by the CAC members. The study team should establish facilitator roles and responsibilities and determine the level of CAC involvement in determining the method of facilitation. Three basic models of facilitation may be considered:

- **Study team facilitates.** The study team can successfully facilitate the CAC as long as CAC members are given a sense of ownership in the meeting. When the study team facilitates, one person, such as the project manager or public involvement specialist should be designated to run the meetings.
- **Appointed CAC member facilitates.** A CAC member acting as facilitator, typically called a committee chair, can be successful if the appointed chair has a strong commitment to the CAC purpose and identified process. When a committee member is facilitating, the study team should offer administrative assistance in terms of preparing meeting agendas, meeting notes, and committee correspondence at the chair's request. A committee chair should be prepared to work closely with the study team and be willing to invest time in preparing for meetings and following up with CAC members. A chair may be invited by the study team or may be selected by CAC members.
- **Third party facilitates.** A third-party facilitator may be used, and can be especially helpful if there is distrust of the sponsoring agency, a controversial project, or heated stakeholder disagreements. A third-party facilitator may also be useful if conflict resolution is anticipated to be part of the CAC's purpose. Third party facilitators can be useful in non-controversial situations, as well. They allow all CAC members to participate in discussions without the added responsibility of facilitation and they avoid the perception that the project sponsor is directing the meeting outcome. The third-party facilitator should set meeting agendas, prepare meeting notes, and prepare member correspondence with input from both the study team and CAC members. The study team may provide administrative support or choose to remain separate from the facilitator's work with the CAC.² If a third-party facilitator is used, the cost of the facilitator should be considered in establishing the project budget.

Training for CAC Members. In order for the CAC to fulfill its purpose, the study team may need to provide training or education so that CAC input is meaningful. Training is also more likely to be needed if the project is technically complex. Training can range from simple briefings or background information during regular meetings to full-day orientation sessions for groups that

² Neutral, third-party facilitators may be found through some state agencies or by contacting professional associations such as the International Association of Facilitators. The U.S. Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution also maintains a roster of facilitators with experience in transportation projects, and the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Public Involvement maintains a directory of public involvement practitioners with transportation experience. Links to these resources are available on the Center's web site, <http://environment.transportation.org/>.

may be collaborating with the study team. Training topics may include:

- Terminology and acronyms
- NEPA process
- Context-Sensitive Solutions (CSS)
- Local issues
- Regulatory issues
- Study history
- Technical data
- Study constraints

Depending on the background and experience of the CAC facilitator, similar training or additional collaboration with the study team may be needed.

Alternate Meeting Formats. In order for the CAC to achieve its purpose, alternate meeting formats such as retreats, workshops, or site tours may be appropriate. The study team should consider these and other alternate forums to provide information and venues for discussion. Work outside regular CAC meetings may also need to be assigned such as conducting surveys, researching specific topics, and talking with other stakeholders. The use of alternate meeting formats or CAC assignments may be determined with input from the study team, facilitator, and/or CAC membership, and with the project budget in mind.

Sub-Committees/Multiple CACs. In some situations, a single CAC may not adequately involve all stakeholder groups. If this is the case, consider tailoring CAC membership to fit the purpose of the group and the type of stakeholder input needed for the study. If the study area covers a large region, it may be necessary to create either multiple CACs or regional subgroups that report to an overall CAC. Another challenge of CAC membership is gaining commitment for the length of the study, typically three to five years for an EIS. Consider whether the project can sustain one group over time, or if another format for gaining stakeholder input at project milestones would be more suitable.

5. | Preparing for CAC Meetings

Each CAC meeting will require substantial preparation by the study team. The need for preparation should be taken into account when scheduling meetings and developing staffing and budget plans for the NEPA process. Some issues to consider in planning for a CAC meeting include:

Meeting Dates. In order to avoid conflicts and ensure reliable attendance, CAC members should be consulted about the time of day and day of week that works best for them. The meeting schedule should be consistent so that meetings can be on members' calendars months in advance. It is easier to hold a meeting time open and then cancel it if the meeting is not necessary than not to schedule the meeting at all. The importance of CAC member attendance at every meeting should be emphasized. For lengthy studies, members may be asked to identify an alternate in the event they cannot attend. Alternates should receive study communications in order to stay informed. Another approach for lengthy studies is to gain the group's input on the CAC duration to which they can commit. This gives the group ownership of the length of commitment and makes them more apt to fulfill their commitment.

Meeting Locations. CAC meetings should take place in a convenient and accessible location as a courtesy to the members and to encourage attendance. Important considerations are the ability to consistently schedule the meeting space, budget (if room rental is required), transit accessibility, parking, and physical accessibility such as the availability of ramps and elevators. A quiet room (with appropriate sound system), tables, chairs, adequate lighting, and comfortable room temperature are also requirements for productive meetings. Meeting locations send subtle messages to group members. Public libraries or other civic buildings are perceived as "neutral ground." Consistency in meeting location will help avoid confusion; changes in location should be immediately communicated to the group.

Meeting Announcements. Even if a regular meeting schedule is set well in advance, it is advisable to remind CAC members of upcoming meetings via letter, e-mail, or telephone call. The extra reminder helps reinforce the importance of each CAC member's attendance and the value placed on their participation. The study team also should decide whether to provide public notice of CAC meetings – for example, by listing CAC meeting dates on the project web site. If the CAC is organized

by a federal agency and subject to FACA, additional notice requirements would apply. (See Background Briefing for more information about FACA.)

Meeting Materials and Logistics. Required meeting materials will depend on the CAC purpose and individual meeting agendas. At a minimum, participants should be provided with a meeting agenda in advance; meeting notes; handouts related to agenda items; flip charts for taking notes; presentation equipment such as a data projector, overhead projector, and screen; name tags; and table tents. They should also have a folder or three-ring notebook to keep agendas, notes, and other handouts. If using a three-ring notebook, materials should be three-hole punched. It also can be helpful to provide food at meetings, as a convenience for attendees and as a way of encouraging attendance.

Media Relations. CAC meetings may be considered a newsworthy event to the local media. Media presence can influence the group's discussion and hinder candid conversation. Alternatives to having reporters attend the CAC meeting include offering an interview opportunity or press briefing separate from the meeting. In addition, meeting materials and notes may be made available to the media after the meeting.

6. | Follow-Up to CAC Meetings

Meeting Summaries. Summaries of CAC meetings should be prepared for the benefit of members who could not attend and for purposes of public disclosure. There is no required format, and the level of detail can be determined on a case-by-case basis. The key is to maintain some record of the proceedings of the CAC. The study team, facilitator and CAC members should come to agreement on how and when meeting summaries are made available to committee members and the public.

Action Items. CAC members are likely to raise technical questions and may occasionally request information from the study team that is not readily available. In some cases, members may need more information to fully understand the project alternatives or their implications. However, responding to these requests can be time consuming and may limit the team's ability to handle other responsibilities in the NEPA process. The study team should consider ahead of time how to respond to requests for new data or analyses, and should avoid making commitments that may not be feasible to keep.

Communication between Meetings. It is a good idea to stay in contact with CAC members between meetings. Depending on the purpose, size, duration, and meeting frequency, the team should plan for interaction with individual CAC members and their stakeholder groups outside of CAC meetings. A CAC budget should allow time to accommodate unknowns, such as the need for additional meetings or the investment of more time in CAC training or study team technical research. A contact list of CAC members should be provided so that members can communicate with each other between meetings, as well.

7. | Public Access to CAC Proceedings

Meeting Materials. There is rarely, if ever, a basis for treating CAC materials as confidential documents. This means that CAC materials generally must be released if requested by a member of the public. In addition, CAC materials generally should be included in the project files and environmental document. CAC materials should also be part of the administrative record for a study if a lawsuit is filed. Since CAC materials are public, it is worth considering posting them on the project website or through other means. The study team and facilitator should take care to maintain professionalism in meeting materials to ensure integrity of the CAC, project sponsor, and the study process.

Attendance at Meetings. Non members may be interested in CAC proceedings and should be allowed to attend, to the extent that space is available in the meeting room. If visitors are in attendance, the facilitator should acknowledge their presence, clarify their role at the meeting, and review relevant ground rules. For example, non-member attendees may be invited to attend as observers, with the understanding that there will be a period set aside at the end of the meeting for them to raise questions or submit comments. Including a defined public comment period at the end of each CAC meeting ensures that non-members have an opportunity to be heard, while also allowing discussion during the meeting itself to be limited to CAC members.

Reference Materials

Statutes, regulations, and guidance documents cited in this Handbook, along with additional materials and sample documents, are available on the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence website, <http://environment.transportation.org>.

The AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence's Technical Experts are available to provide strategic environmental and focused environmental management technical advice. For more information the Center Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) please visit: http://environment.transportation.org/center/tech_experts/

Glossary

AASHTO	American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
CAC	Community Advisory Committee
CSS	Context Sensitive Solutions
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FACA	Federal Advisory Committee Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PRACTITIONER'S GUIDES AVAILABLE FROM AASHTO CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE:

- 01 Maintaining a Project File and Preparing an Administrative Record for a NEPA Study
- 02 Responding to Comments on an Environmental Impact Statement
- 03 Managing the NEPA Process for Toll Lanes and Toll Roads
- 04 Tracking Compliance with Environmental Commitments/Use of Environmental Monitors
- 05 Utilizing Community Advisory Committees for NEPA Studies
- 06 Consulting Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

For additional Practitioner's Handbooks, please visit the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence web site at: <http://environment.transportation.org>

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