

AASHTO Meaningful Community Engagement Webinar

November 17, 2017 Notes

AASHTO's Center for Environmental Excellence, Environmental Justice Community of Practice task hosted a "Meaningful Community Engagement" webinar on November 17, 2017. The webinar was designed to provide specific examples and best practices around how to engage community members in environmental justice assessments and projects. The webinar had 104 participants, just over half represented State DOTs. The webinar built on key concepts from the 2016 Peer Exchange Meeting which resulted in a [roadmap](#) that documents strategies and efforts for MPO's and DOT's. The webinar speakers included Jody McCullough discussed Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) public involvement resources and guides. Amy Luft provided an example of public involvement strategies from an MPO perspective for a planning project in Idaho. Ohio DOT's Erica L. Schneider and Veronica Trecuzzi discussed how EJ outreach case study in Cleveland Opportunity corridor project. Last, Irene Kawanabe with the National Conference of State Legislatures provided lessons learned from the Native Hawaiian Project Self-Governance Project. A peer exchange discussion concluded the webinar to discuss what training tools and resources are helpful in reaching communities.

Jody McCullough, Community Planner, Office of Planning FHWA

Jody's presentation highlighted Federal Highway Administration Public Involvement product and resources. As well as resources that FHWA are currently developing or updating: A Guide to Transportation Decision-making. These resources are helpful to identify the development process and the best way to approach development. The [Transportation Planning Briefing Book](#) is the most popular document. Elected officials, MPO staff but also reaching others. The briefing book highlights public development process and planning, talks about everything that is being impacted...environmental issues, EJ, transportation, etc.

Another resources includes the **Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-making:** updating currently. National highways training course included in.

-Engaging people, who is the public. Who are the traditionally underserved. Values, interests and needs.

-Techniques for involving the public: venues, approaches', obstacles,

-Generating feedback: How to engage low-literacy and limited English proficiency populations: best practices for engaging in transportation planning. This included telephone interviews with individuals across 30 states.

NHI/NTI Course. Being converted to a web based course -early spring 2018, accompany with a 1 day technical assistance, opportunity for practioners to practice

Public Involvement reference tool also being updated. Scanned all state DOT websites. Provide links to the each of the resources available. Updating the link. found it useful because you can look at specific topics and see what other states are doing to address issues or these topics.

Under Development: techniques for improved engagement in public participation: Case study videos. Series. Public involvement. Normally through meetings but studies are showing that the use of

technology in large numbers can be another way to reach communities. In addition to typical in-person meetings, etc. Tool to share information across states

Public involvement case studies and notable practices: traditional practices, some unusual as well.

Plan Works: Online tool. More about collaboration. To identify who to use to get the community involved.

Links are available on the last slide to each document.

Amy Luft, Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho

COMPASS represents 1 of 5 MPOs in the state of ID---serve 2 most populated counties.

Project really focused on laying the groundwork. Part of the outreach included marketing to let people know who they are so people recognize the name and feel comfortable providing feedback. The next key piece was education and getting public feedback. Lessons learned from understanding the audience.

Simply the idea of asking for input from a focus group was a shift for many of those involvement. Some communities didn't understand that culturally feedback from government was new. The goal of community engagement became not only how to get people involved in project feedback, but also get better quality feedback.

The lesson learned is the importance for the entire team to understand the importance of outreach and communication so the responsibility falls on all programs not just the communications team. The other lesson learned was related to understanding the audience. How do people want to hear information? What would impact them and reach them? It's important for people to understand that they have participation on the board. Letting people know they have access to services and what's helpful to them. It's also key to review how successful efforts have been to measure success and improve. Ability to measure success from data (surveys) or just comments from the public.

Take-Aways: Learn what you can about the community? Apply what you learn. Do it everywhere, it's not just a communication effort but an all-around effort so all staff are on board with the message making needed connections. Measure success and improve.

Erica Synder and Veronica, Ohio DOT.

The Cleveland Opportunity Corridor Project experienced steady level of decline over recent years. Over time, this decline isolated residents, incompatible land use. The case study was to improve these conditions through a City of Cleveland revitalization to improve the roadwork, system linkage. Develop good ways to get from one place of project to another. The goal was to improve public transportation connection and pedestrian walkways.

Environmental studies identified that the community consisted of a high percentage of low income 26.5% to 65% percent depending on project area. Minorities 42% to 100% to the rest of the project area. To engage the community they held stakeholder meetings reader friendly formats for EJ documents. Using community to develop best strategies to improve roadways and access.

Lessons learned: Avoid Using technical jargon, overlap with business coordination meeting, importance of representation from the board at public meetings, positive reviews for NEPA project.

Irene Kawanabe-NCSL Hawaiian Self-Governance Project

This project held 25 meetings throughout the state of Hawaii to get community input. The meetings were led by elected-officials who are also community leaders.

Some key steps included: Identifying the key issues they are trying to address, staff prep meetings, research history of community to have a better understanding, identify challenges and issues in the community that may arise, contracting with local non-profit and local legislators.

Key Take-Aways: Along the way some lessons learned included being flexible and re-evaluating strategy where needed. Debrief as a team, all hands-on deck with same outcome in mind and to collect information, as needed. Adjusting for community needs and being responsive, flexible, and adapt to whatever is needed. The locations of meetings matter, it's important to meet people where they are and being very strategic in the details to execute a meeting, even in having appropriate snacks, etc. Last, it was important to be clear about follow-up strategies and how these will be conducted and then do them so community members feel heard and establishes strong relationships for future feedback.