

Chapter 1. INFORMING PEOPLE THROUGH ORGANIZATION AND OUTREACH

What distinguishes an amorphous, overly-general public involvement effort from one that is purposeful, grounded, specific, and productive is good organization and well-planned outreach. In initiating public involvement in transportation, agencies must begin with clearly-defined, project-related goals that focus on the specific issues to be addressed, the specific kinds of input needed, and the specific “public” that needs to be involved. The more specific a public involvement plan, the greater its chances of producing input an agency can actually use in decision-making.

Why is organization crucial?

Participation doesn’t just happen. Once the “what” of an overall strategy is in place, an agency has to determine the “how.” Staff needs to carefully orchestrate ways to contact people, give them the needed information, hear their views, respond to their comments, and incorporate their concerns into plans and decisions. Organization establishes a systematic, planned approach to working with people, so that an agency gets the kinds of information it needs when it needs them. At the same time, good organization allows room for flexibility and openness as needed.

Why is outreach essential?

Outreach to all potential participants reaps broad and varied representation. Often, an initial list of “given” participants unintentionally omits important segments of the population. These include people who are not usually well-represented in the process of planning or project development, such as minorities, ethnic groups, individuals with low incomes, the poorly educated, and people with disabilities. In the past, freight interests did not often participate in planning and project development. Extra effort may be needed to elicit involvement by people unaccustomed to participating, because they often have different needs and perspectives than the majority.

What are appropriate kinds of organization and outreach?

Organization and outreach are project-specific. An agency chooses judiciously from a varied menu of methods to reach people and bring them together on the issues. This chapter provides a guide to several ways to structure an approach:

- A. Including people who are underserved by transportation;**
- B. Bringing a core participation group together;**
- C. Providing substantive information and establishing methods of communication; and**
- D. Taking initial action step**