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

Chapter 1. INFORMING PEOPLE THROUGH OUTREACH AND ORGANIZATION

A. INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDERSERVED[1] BY TRANSPORTATION

Public involvement needs to encompass the full range of community interests, yet people underserved by transportation often do not participate. They not only have greater difficulty getting to jobs, schools, recreation, and shopping than the population at large, but often they are also unaware of transportation proposals that could dramatically change their lives. Many lack experience with public involvement, even though they have important, unspoken issues that should be heard.

These groups are a rich source of ideas that can improve transportation not only for themselves but also for the entire community. Agencies must assume responsibility for reaching out and including them in the decision-making process – which requires strategic thinking and tailoring public involvement efforts to these communities and their needs. Techniques are grouped here under two headings:

- Ethnic, minority, and low-income groups; and
- People with disabilities.

[1] Underserved is a term found in 23 CFR Section 450 and includes low-income households and minority households.

ETHNIC, MINORITY, AND LOW-INCOME GROUPS

What does this mean?

Individuals from minority and ethnic groups and low-income households often find participation difficult and are also traditionally underserved by transportation. While these groups form a growing portion of the population, particularly in urban areas, historically they have experienced barriers to participation in the public decision-making process and are therefore underrepresented. These barriers arise both from the historical nature of the public involvement process and from cultural, linguistic, and economic differences. Recent efforts to include many different cultural or disadvantaged groups in this process have been designed to assure basic, equitable access rather than to favor one group over another.

Although America prides itself on being a melting pot of many peoples, deep differences in culture or income often impede participation. Language differences are only the most immediate hurdle to overcome in order to work effectively with various cultural groups. Economic barriers such as the costs of child care or transportation to meetings also hinder participation. More importantly, understanding and accommodating the various ways people interact with one another to make decisions, or their belief in their own power to do so, is the major challenge of getting people to work together successfully toward common goals. A starting point in effective interaction is addressing groups by the names they want to be called at the time. For example, at the time of this publication, American Indians prefer to be called that rather than Native Americans, a term that includes non-Indian Native Americans. Preferences change over time.

Today, agencies work to empower people to help define the *kinds of processes* they need to participate effectively. Thoughtful consultation with minority, ethnic, and low-income people enables agencies to identify specific barriers and find effective ways to overcome them. In Orange County, California, attendance at a series of introductory open houses for a major investment study was high for all sectors of the affected population except Mexican-Americans. In subsequent meetings with leaders from this community, county planners learned that these constituents were uncomfortable with the open-house format and intimidated by one-to-one interaction. Supplementary, informal, small-group meetings in Latino neighborhoods eventually brought increased participation.

Governments at various levels have played a significant role in protecting the rights of underserved populations. Presidential Executive Order 12898 of 1994 requires Federal agencies to identify programs, policies, and regulations with a disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations. The order directs Federal agencies to conduct their programs, policies, and activities so as to ensure that they do not have the effect of excluding persons from participation in or benefits of the programs. This can usually be done by modifying existing participatory programs.

Federal transportation law requires transportation plans to avoid a disproportionate impact of transportation policies or investments on traditionally-underserved communities. The Final Rule on Metropolitan and Statewide Planning requires MPOs and states to "seek out and consider" the needs of the transportation-disadvantaged.

Outreach to minorities and ethnic groups has several objectives in addition to the basic aims of public involvement:

- Convey issues in ways that are meaningful to various cultural groups;
- Bridge cultural and economic differences that affect participation;
- Use communication techniques that enable people to interact with other participants;
- Develop partnerships on a one-to-one or small group basis to assure representation; and
- Increase participation by underrepresented groups so they have an impact on decisions.

Why is it useful?

Outreach to traditionally-underserved groups helps assure that all constituents have opportunities to affect the decision-making process. These efforts are particularly useful because they:

- Provide fresh perspectives;
- Give first-hand information about community-specific issues and concerns of which an agency may not have been aware;
- Flag potential controversies;
- Provide feedback on how to get these communities involved; and
- Provide solutions to problems that best meet their needs.

These efforts widen the basis of consensus on an implementable plan or project. The greater the consensus among all community members, the more likely a plan or project will succeed.

Agencies can address issues specific to minority, ethnic, or other underserved groups. At the inception of its long-range plan, the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) had special forums for minorities so the planning process could address their concerns from the outset.

Local leadership may become more active. For the past fifteen years, the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County in Houston, Texas has had a good working relationship with all segments of the community, especially underserved populations. As a result, their leaders have been very active in the decision-making process.

Participation establishes trust and openness in the decision-making process. The St. Louis, Missouri, MPO works in close collaboration with minority, ethnic, and low-income groups from the beginning of planning and throughout the process, fostering a sense of ownership of the outcome.

How do underrepresented groups participate?

Community organizations and their leaders are invaluable in building communication between agencies and underrepresented groups. Canvassing key community leaders individually may help determine the best ways to conduct outreach within their communities. Often low-income people, for instance, are so busy working many hours in several jobs that they do not have time for grass roots participation; they rely on their community leaders to represent them in the process. The Albany, New York, MPO uses the Albany Service Corps (a job-training program for disadvantaged youth that is part of the national Americorps group) to distribute information to low-income communities. In many cases, agency staff can easily identify and reach out to community leaders as a first point of contact. The Virginia DOT distributes materials through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to reach minorities. Working with leaders also increases the credibility of the participatory planning process. Respecting ethnic tradition, the Alaska DOT has found it helpful to meet first with Alaskan native elders to establish a rapport prior to presenting projects to whole communities.

Community groups provide access to individuals and can serve as forums for participation. Agencies sometimes focus initial attention on active community groups to prepare for later approaches to the general public. Community groups, like Civic Advisory Committees, can provide an underserved community with a meaningful way to participate, as well as a sense of empowerment. MPOs in Portland, Oregon, and in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, work through established neighborhood organizations. Often, community organizations reflect community-wide concerns and can advise an agency on useful strategies for interaction. In Arizona, Tucson's MPO involved several Mexican-American neighborhood associations in updating its long-range transportation plan. In Chicago, Illinois, the Center for Neighborhood Technology brought minority groups into the existing regional citizen coalitions. Cooperation with community groups follows the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" principle. If working through an established organization serves the purpose, an agency wastes effort by creating a new forum that probably will not work as well. Agencies need to be cautious, however, about presuming that any one group represents an entire community.

Religious organizations in particular are an effective way to reach minority and ethnic groups. Most of them have civic as well as religious activities and interests, along with a strong geographic base. They have broad constituencies and often have a strong ethnic or cultural focus. They are particularly good avenues for reaching people who are not active in the community in other ways. The Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has established communication links with African-American, Latino, and Asian religious institutions in order to increase participation of underrepresented groups. The Little Rock, Arkansas, MPO, works to establish good relations with, among others, the African-American Ministerial Alliance in its region.

Agencies need to consider the times at which members of minority, low-income, and underserved communities are available to participate in the transportation decision-making process. Agencies often do not take into account the varying working hours of individuals who are not in typical occupations. In addition, issues of child and elder care can impact an individual's schedule. In winter months, many elderly people can be reluctant to drive when it is dark outside. It is important, therefore, to consider expanding hours of operation for public meetings and other functions that might be typically held in the evening. Expanding hours of operation can consist simply of manning a desk with informational materials, perhaps even showing a short informational video or slide presentation on the project, and offering an opportunity for individuals to ask questions and provide oral and/or written statements. In addition, individuals can be offered an opportunity to put their names on a mailing list for additional information, or to be included in the formal review process for a particular project. A more formal public meeting can be held in addition to these open hours, however all input taken during the open hours would be considered.

Agencies need to make special efforts to communicate with people who use languages other than English. For example, of the approximately 2.5 million households in Los Angeles County, 40 percent speak a language other than English as their first language, and 13 percent speak no English. Thus, translations and bilingual speakers are often necessary. The Alaska DOT has produced radio spots in indigenous languages. In addition, translations to other languages, logos, and project terminology need to be carefully reviewed from a cultural perspective. A leading car manufacturer found that although a particular model sold well among the general population, it did not sell well among Latinos, because "no va" in Spanish means "doesn't go."

Understanding a culture is often critical. The Dallas, Texas, transit agency (DART) finds it helpful to research an ethnic group's customs and language. Changing demographics in East Dallas led DART to accommodate the language needs of Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Arab, Iranian, Ethiopian, and Nigerian communities. This outreach identified a need to provide training in several English-as-a-second-language programs on how to use the transit system. The custom of bus travel was unfamiliar to some participants and practiced very differently by others.

Agencies also need to recognize varied styles of communication derived from ethnic or minority cultures. In some cultures, for example, it is considered improper to disagree with authority. As a result, agency staff people attempting to assess community response to different alternatives have found it difficult to move beyond polite agreement with all alternatives. In other cultures, discussion with the entire community precedes decisions by its leaders, and elders may have a particular role in decision-making. In some groups, speaking up is interpreted as "making trouble." Agency staff members can learn about traditions and behavioral patterns by careful observation or by tactfully and privately asking group members what is going on. Group members familiar with mainstream culture are particularly good sources of such information. The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department reports getting a cool reception to its initial attempts at outreach through local churches. Research discovered that this was because its spokesperson addressed local congregations from the main pulpit – a place of honor reserved for the ministry. In subsequent visits, the representative moved to the regular platform, the audience relaxed, and constructive dialogue took place. In communities where there is reluctance to disagree or criticize, opinions may only be expressed after prolonged consideration or in very indirect ways.

American Indian tribal governments are considered domestic sovereign nations; i.e., they have a direct and special relationship with the Federal government as a result of treaties and are independent of individual States. For example, tribes deal directly with the Federal government in securing funding for Indian reservation roads if they are tribes on a reservation, even within an MPO. Agencies need to identify issues regarding American Indians and transportation needs, plans, projects, and outreach early in the process. Expert guidance (for example, from members of the Governor's Interstate Indian Council) should be sought in developing relationships with tribes, reservations, and individuals. Since tribes are eligible to apply for and be awarded separate funding, transportation practitioners need to consult with both Federal transportation agencies and local tribes to coordinate plans and projects.

How do agencies use the output?

Understanding the full range of a community's needs enables an agency to create more responsive and even innovative plans. Interacting with community members yields insight into the reasons why they support or disagree with proposed plans or projects. The perspective of traditionally-underrepresented groups can cast a whole new light on the goals and outcomes of planning and project development. Ethnic and minority group members suggest fresh approaches to transportation issues that otherwise would not be raised. However, input from underserved groups is not "separate" from other input or given more weight; rather, to be most useful, it is integrated with and balanced by the needs and concerns of all interests.

Agencies may discern new or improved transportation options. Input from predominantly Mexican-American communities led to a hybrid option for transit in the Los Angeles Metro Red Line Eastside Corridor. In a mid-range of cost, the new option has the highest potential ridership and offers significant service advantages. The region's leadership and project planners agree that the new alternative is the best solution and readily admit it would not have been identified without the help of ethnic constituents.

Agencies also use community input to assure equity in the distribution of services and impacts. In order to do this, they must use a variety of techniques to solicit public input from the traditionally under-represented population – particularly minority and low-income groups as identified in the Executive Order on Environmental Justice. Typical meeting announcements in newspapers and on radio, for example, may not reach these populations. Agencies need to understand how these populations get information. This could be, for example, in church bulletins, on grocery store or laundromat bulletin boards, and in community meeting places. (See **Public Information Materials**; **Media Strategies**.)

Who leads outreach to these groups?

Existing staff may lead, provided they have the appropriate skills or training. To be successful, they need to have an open-minded attitude, process skills, and sensitivity to cultural differences. They also must be committed to encouraging minority and ethnic group participation, not only because it takes persistence and creative thinking to foster inclusion of people who have historically been outsiders, but also because lack of such commitment is easily perceived and undermines trust and credibility.

To enhance the effectiveness of interaction, staff should come from a variety of backgrounds. As the Oregon-based Sensible Transportation Options for People (STOP) suggests, "Don't use all white men in suits" to interact with traditionally-underserved communities.

Special outreach coordinators can provide particularly strong leadership and demonstrate an agency's sincere commitment to responding to ethnic and minority concerns. A number of agencies hire staff specifically charged with outreach to the traditionally underserved. MPOs in Madison, Wisconsin, Seattle, Washington, and Twin Cities, Minnesota all have a minority affairs coordinator. The

Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Commission has two positions for minorities and one for American Indians. To enhance communication, Pennsylvania DOT uses an intermediary when addressing Amish communities, because this is their traditional way of dealing with outsiders. Only elders are allowed to speak with an intermediary. By communicating with an intermediary, DOT staff better understands the community's culture, dress code, language, and beliefs, as well as their specific transportation needs and concerns.

Consultants with special expertise or skills can also enhance the process. For a major investment study in transit, South Sacramento, California, utilized consultants with experience working in the affected ethnic neighborhoods. The St. Louis, Missouri, MPO regularly contracts with the Urban League for focus groups and information dissemination.

Translators or interpreters are essential to reach non-English-speaking groups. Many agencies now provide interpreters when needed, as well as translations of some or all of their information materials. Florida DOT has a bilingual affairs staff and a bilingual newsletter. The Los Angeles, California, MPO has "foreign language teams" for its region. The transit agency in Houston, Texas, prints information in up to five languages. For large meetings, the University of Massachusetts has tear-off pads saying "I need an interpreter" and provides translators in six different languages. In California, Orange County transit agency staff members wear blue dots on their name tags at open houses if they are bilingual. Alaska DOT has local residents volunteer to interpret for Eskimo communities.

Translations must take into account the fact that often minority people who do not speak English well also do not speak literary or standard forms of their native languages. Agencies need to make sure that translations are clear, easily understandable, and in an idiom native to the group to be reached. A Portuguese translation, for instance, must recognize that people from Portugal have difficulty understanding Brazilian Portuguese speakers, and vice versa.

What are the costs?

Costs are linked to the complexity of an issue. A large minority or ethnic community can be reached in traditional ways, through news media, literature, and informal meetings. However, when an issue is highly controversial, the need for participation intensifies, and agencies may need to use more varied and innovative techniques – resulting in higher costs in staff time and funding. Eliciting participation may involve translations and interpreters, advertising, and other special efforts.

Costs climb when a large number of underrepresented people need to be reached. Encouraging disadvantaged groups to participate is time- and energy-consuming for agency staff. Some groups are typically more difficult to draw into transportation planning processes than mainstream participants. For the Miami East-West Corridor Major Investment Study, Florida DOT held an average of 30 meetings per month over a two-year period to reach the varied populations within the 22-mile study area. Communities, particularly the ethnic communities, continuously requested meetings and invited project staff to attend numerous meetings sponsored by neighborhood organizations. The agency estimates that staff participated in approximately 1,000 meetings on the project, ranging from one-on-one discussions to larger meetings.

Costs may be minimized by using electronic media and by locating meeting spaces that are convenient and free of charge to the public. For example, for a local meeting on a transportation project in Washington DC, an auditorium at the National Zoo was used for an informational public meeting. Not only was the space accessible by public transportation, but it was also a well-known location for individuals in the project area. Access to electronic media should be considered before employing it as a cost-minimizer. Schools, community centers, and libraries may be able to help provide services to people who do not have electronic access at home or at work.

How is such outreach organized?

A basic task is to identify which minority and ethnic groups require special attention for a transportation plan or project because of its impact on them. Careful research about the communities potentially affected by a plan or project may be necessary to determine a diverse group of community leaders. This can be done by contacting local governments to determine the "players" in the community, through word of mouth, conducting key-person interviews, and by being alert to advertisements/fliers for community activities. It is important for practitioners to maintain up-to-date contact lists for community-based organizations and key individuals in the community who can be tapped for discussions. Human service coalitions, like the United Way, colleges and universities, and national organizations often maintain contact lists.

Agencies draw from the full array of formal techniques to involve minority and ethnic groups, along with others. Formal techniques are inclusion on committees, task forces, and other official advisory and/or decision bodies; participation in meetings and conferences; focus groups; surveys; and working through recognized neighborhood groups. In San Francisco, California, the MPO created a special Minority Citizen Advisory Committee as a result of a lawsuit in the mid-70s. It includes African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. The Wisconsin DOT created focus groups for American Indians, African-Americans, and Latinos. As part of its long-range planning effort, the Nevada DOT sponsored meetings in which surveys were used to make initial contacts. These contacts were used to identify representatives of American Indian nations and to administer a more comprehensive survey of transportation needs and concerns in the reservations. The questions covered the condition of roads and access to public transportation, as well as services for the elderly and handicapped. Representatives from each of the 24 Indian nations in Nevada responded, as did the executive director of the Nevada Association of Nations.

Informal techniques are especially useful. They include developing relationships with underrepresented groups and networking within communities. During a corridor study in East Los Angeles, the transit agency's Spanish-speaking staff walked through the neighborhood, personally inviting people to attend – which resulted in high turnout. Creating partnerships between DOT staff and community members helps increase access and familiarity on both sides. Working together, they can develop strategies for outreach, anticipate the issues and concerns people are likely to raise, identify appropriate locations for meetings, and jointly sponsor ways for the community to get transportation information.

Many minority, ethnic, and low-income groups prefer small meetings. They are less intimidating and more conducive to interaction. Agencies that have turned to small groups for involving ethnic populations include DOTs and FHWA Division Offices in Alaska, Idaho, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. For example, the FHWA Division Office in Oklahoma found that Native American Tribes in the state were poorly informed as to what the highway trust fund meant and what services were available. The Division Office worked with the Oklahoma Tribal Transportation Council and state partners to establish a platform to bring consistent information to the 37 recognized Oklahoma Tribes. The end result was three workshops conducted to explain the highway trust fund and to gain cooperation, coordination, and communication between the tribes; state, county, and city officials; and the federal agencies (FHWA/Bureau of Indian Affairs). (See **Small Group Techniques**.)

Agencies can hold meetings where ethnic or minority groups cluster in the community. New Jersey Transit holds meetings in many unconventional places, including shopping malls, housing developments, senior centers, and work places. The Boise, Idaho, MPO reaches the underserved through group homes and head start centers. (See **Non-traditional Meeting Places and Events**; **Media Strategies**.)

Announcements in minority or ethnic news media can heighten interest in a process. In Seattle, Washington, the transit authority advertises in different languages in minority newspapers to obtain increased participation and greater trust in the agency's good will. The Twin Cities MPO in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, interests the owners of minority media in an upcoming transportation process or project and, through them, the broader community. The MPO not only places advertisements but also receives much free public interest coverage from such personal contacts. The St. Louis MPO aggressively promotes public service announcements in minority media. Because radio is often preferred over newspapers, many agencies spend more funds and energy on this medium. The Sacramento, California, transit agency featured an interview and call-in show on a Spanish radio station. (See **Improving Meeting Attendance**; **Focus Groups**.)

Financial and other incentives may be used to improve attendance. The St. Louis MPO paid unemployed people to participate in focus groups. The Albany, New York, MPO provides scholarships for low-income people to participate in its conferences. The Alaska DOT paid airfare for some Alaska natives to attend meetings. In Montana, Blackfeet Community College offers American Indians college credits for attending community meetings. Agencies sometimes provide day care and/or transportation to help low-income people participate. The Portland, Oregon, MPO provides child care at large meetings, as does New Jersey Transit.

Outside financial assistance may be available. In connection with the New Mexico DOT's long- range planning, the Alliance for Transportation Research obtained a grant for a two-day conference for people not traditionally involved in transportation.

How is it used with other techniques?

Outreach to underrepresented groups is integral to an effective, overall public involvement program. The initial contact with minority, ethnic, or low-income communities not only helps reach a wider audience but also sets the tone for the subsequent process or project activities. Outreach promotes a spirit of inclusion for those communities that have been outside of the decision-making process.

Traditional public involvement techniques, i.e., formal meetings, may not be effective with underserved populations. A variety of public involvement techniques may be needed when working with underserved populations. In order to get participation, it is valuable to hold meetings and conduct outreach in the community itself. Practitioners can research activity centers as meeting locations and venues for informal outreach. When disseminating information to the public, agencies must recognize the need to communicate with others who speak other languages. Announcements in minority or ethnic news media can heighten interest in a process.

Minority, ethnic, and low-income groups are empowered to help make transportation decisions. Concept mapping is a technique that involves mapping the ideas of residents and using those results in strategic plans. It includes a brainstorming activity and is very inclusive in the sense that no idea or input is excluded or "edited" in the final result. Minority, ethnic, and low-income groups can be invited to participate in civic advisory committees, task forces, and other policy bodies. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**; **Community Members on Decision and Policy Bodies**.) Such inclusion empowers these groups and provides access to the whole participatory effort. Many agencies have one or more seats for minority or ethnic members, including the Green Bay, Wisconsin, MPO; Portland, Oregon, Metro; and the Cleveland, Ohio, MPO.

What are the drawbacks?

Staff time and resources may be significant. One-to-one contact requires substantial staff time and energy. Administering an outreach program involves monitoring inquiries and responses, as well as documenting and answering numerous requests for meetings or briefings. Many ethnic groups lack a tradition of participation in government and require extra urging. For example, Miami's Cuban-Americans were reluctant to participate in planning for a new rail system in the mid-70s because public participation was not part of their cultural heritage. Planners turned to the Catholic Church and the Latin chamber of commerce to obtain the perspectives of the public. Now assimilated, two decades later, this ethnic group participates vigorously. In fostering grass roots involvement, agencies need to assess carefully the cultures of each specific community, for there may be significant differences, even within an ethnic group.

Special efforts can encounter institutional resistance. Many innovative, creative techniques are different from past practices and may be initially uncomfortable for some agency staff. In some cases, this generates backlash. Local laws prohibiting expenditure of public funds to prepare material in languages other than English are one example. Planners who face misgivings about “special treatment” might note that techniques tailored to individual segments of the public such as business communities have long been common to effective public involvement programs.

Reaching out to one community may exclude others. For example, while canvassing leaders of community groups may allow agencies to reach certain populations, these leaders may not represent the entire community. Using a CAC to target participation toward specific groups could run the risk of excluding others whose voice would be equally as important. In addition, CACs are more effective when working on a project scale, and depending on circumstances, may not be as beneficial for a large scale planning process.

Is such outreach flexible?

Outreach to minority, ethnic, and low-income groups needs to be inherently flexible. Agencies must constantly monitor and adjust their approaches to discover and capitalize on what works. During the project development phase of a new light rail transit system, the Denver, Colorado, transit agency disseminated information widely. One low-income neighborhood requested more information on the project. As a result, the agency established a neighborhood drop-in center both to provide more information to the community and to gather input about its concerns. (See **Drop-in Centers**.)

To be most effective, techniques may need to be altered or augmented, because styles of communication and behavioral patterns differ from culture to culture. Early, informal consultation with members of target groups about what barriers to participation exist and how to surmount them is essential. Often a more personal, direct dialogue is needed between agency staff members and individuals from ethnic or minority groups. When dealing with such groups, the Twin Cities MPO finds it useful to modify its meeting format to draw out the participants. It addresses the issues one-to-one by directly asking each participant his or her opinion. The Montana Native American Technology Transfer Technology Center phones individual members of the American Indian community to remind them that their attendance at an upcoming meeting is vital to assure a sound and responsive plan or program. For its project planning process, an Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department representative attends as many as four different church services on Sunday mornings to invite people to participate. In rural areas, he goes to people working in the fields, before or after their shifts.

How is a technique for working with one low-income/minority group vs. another low-income minority group chosen?

Ideally transportation practitioners would work with all groups affected by a program or project, but if time and staff resources are limited, they would probably want to focus their energies on a group that would reach a broader group of people. If there are particular social or cultural implications of a program or project, groups to address them would need to be included.

The transportation agency must determine what is an effective communication technique in reaching the community. A variety of techniques may need to be employed to reach more than one low-income/minority group. Agencies may need to research the groups with which they would be dealing, both in general (e.g., Vietnamese people), and more specifically about the cultural/minority group in a specific location (e.g., how many are recent immigrants). Agencies should also talk with community leaders to find out the best techniques for working with the particular low-income or minority group (e.g., which approaches to use, where to hold events, how to recruit people, what to avoid doing).

When is it used most effectively?

Outreach efforts to the underrepresented start early and extend throughout the process and are integrated with other public involvement efforts insofar as possible. Informing communities of events and providing status reports help to establish a good working relationship. This approach is also very effective in diffusing potentially controversial issues by addressing concerns early.

The advantages for early outreach in both project development and long-range planning include:

- Diffusing potentially controversial issues;
- Allowing more people to understand a process or project;
- Broadening the range of project alternatives;
- Enhancing opportunities for creative solutions for transportation needs;
- Reducing the potential need to re-do an environmental analysis;
- Establishing good relationships with underserved groups;
- Getting people to help in the planning;
- Breaking down historical barriers; and
- Increasing chances for obtaining consensus.

Public and staff education can begin even before a process or project planning effort is initiated. The Denver Transit Agency sends out meeting notices to schools for children to take to their parents. It also provides bilingual, educational coloring books as an incentive to attract children who, in turn, involve their parents. A key pre-initiation activity for agency staff is self-education about the culture of the affected communities. Reflecting his people's fear of vulnerability through public involvement, a participant at the National Congress of American Indians revealed, "Once I allow you to capture my concern that way, you can trade it off against other concerns, and I will lose." Clearly, transportation planners and project managers need to be aware of such issues as they attempt to establish good-faith communication and trust.

For further information:

- Alaska Department of Transportation, Statewide Planning Chief, (907) 465-2171
- Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, Environmental Division, (501) 569-2281
- Florida Department Of Transportation, West Project Field Office, (305) 262-7033
- Houston, Texas, Transit, Capital and Long-range Planning, (713) 739-4000
- Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Public Affairs Manager, (213) 244-6891
- Nevada Department of Transportation, Carson City, Nevada, (702) 687-3463
- New Jersey Transit, Executive Director of External Affairs, (201) 491-7130
- Sacramento, California, Regional Transit District, Project Manager, (916) 261-4785
- St. Louis, Missouri, MPO, Director of Policy and Programming, (314) 4241-4220
- South Carolina DOT, (803) 737-1395
- South Carolina Route 72 Case Study, http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ejustice/case/case10.htm
- Federal Highway Administration, Oklahoma Division (Proactive Outreach Process with Oklahoma's Native American population). Lubin Quinones, (405) 605-6170
- Center for Neighborhood Technology, http://www.cnt.org/
- TRB Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation, http://www.ch2m.com/TRB_PI/default.asp
- Concept Mapping, www.conceptsystems.com

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Who are people with disabilities?

The disability community encompasses many people. The Census 2000 Supplementary Survey estimates that approximately 17% of the American household population aged five and over has a disability. This can include functional limitations (blindness, deafness, severe vision or hearing impairments, physical mobility limitations), developmental limitations, self-care limitations, and work limitations. In addition, many other Americans are temporarily disabled during part of their lives – whether aged, infirm, or recuperating. In identifying and consulting with the disability community, agencies find a wide range of strikingly different needs. Ideas and input from people with disabilities provide insight about their needs in using the programs or facilities being developed. Additionally, people with disabilities participate as interested members of the community.

What guidelines apply to the accessibility of public involvement activities for people with disabilities?

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stipulates involving the community, particularly those with disabilities, in the development and improvement of services. For example, in rail transit planning, participation by the disability community is essential for a key station plan. People with disabilities – in particular those who have vision impairments – rely on pedestrian and transit modes for independent mobility. Accessible sidewalks, street crossings, and accessible vehicles are effective ways of reducing community use of costly paratransit options.

Self-evaluation and transition plans required under the ADA (1990) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also require consultation with people who have disabilities. Many transportation agencies rely on the advice of committees of disabled users. Also, sites of public involvement activities as well as the information presented must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

The ADA requires specific participation activities – particularly for paratransit plans. These include:

- Outreach (developing contacts, mailing lists, and other means of notification to participate);
- Consultation with individuals with disabilities;
- Opportunity for public comment;
- Information in accessible formats;
- Public hearings in accessible facilities;
- Summaries of significant issues raised during the public comment period; and
- Ongoing efforts to involve the disability community in planning.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1998, requires that Federal agencies make electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Inaccessible technology can interview with an individual’s ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage the development of technologies that will achieve these goals. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic information technology. Its standards provide criteria specific to various types of technologies, including:

- Software applications and operating systems;
- Web-based information or applications;
- Telecommunication products;

- Video and multimedia products;
- Self contained, closed products (e.g., information kiosks, fax machines); and
- Desktop and portable computers.

Under Section 508, Federal agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

Section 508 applies to the Federal government, but there may be implications at the state level. Many states have also passed legislation requiring electronic and information technology accessibility.

Who participates? And how?

People who have disabilities in sight, hearing, or mobility participate. People with disabilities may be pedestrians, transit riders, or drivers. They share many characteristics with other users of transportation facilities – children, older Americans, and traveling with packages, suitcase, strollers, and carts. A broadened view of user characteristics in the design of transportation facilities will build support from all facets of the community. The Spokane, Washington, Transit Authority solicited disability community involvement through a "Rider Alert" program. Orange County, California, Transportation Authority scheduled one-on-one meetings with representatives of individual groups to obtain input to its planning effort. In Juneau, Alaska, public workshops were held to discuss compliance with ADA's transportation requirements.

Does involving people with disabilities have special requirements?

Both facilities and information must be accessible. All events held for programs or projects with Federal aid and open to the general public must be made accessible to everyone, including the disability community. Meeting notices should state that the meeting is accessible and that services are provided for interpretation (based on national and state civil rights laws for public meetings). Special efforts are needed to comply with the statutory requirements of the Federal transportation legislation, and ADA, and the Section 508 of Rehabilitation Act.

Sign language interpreters may be required. They must be hired early, since they are in scarce supply. Two interpreters are necessary for meetings longer than one hour, to provide breaks for each other. Public notices for a meeting should state that sign language interpreters will be made available upon request, as was done by the Sacramento and San Mateo County, California, Regional Transit Districts and the Johnson City, Tennessee, Transit System. An individual who is both blind and deaf can be accommodated by a deaf/blind interpreter, who uses sign language in direct contact with that person's hands.

Listening assistance may be required, depending on the meeting place. For example, small devices are available to amplify speakers' voices via an FM, infrared, or inductive loop system. It is possible to rent or borrow them from a State commission for the deaf. In Massachusetts, the Guild for the Hard of Hearing offers them on loan. Many meeting rooms in newer buildings have embedded in the floor an inductive loop to be used for transmission. A State commission for the deaf may have Computer-Aided Real Time (CART) reporting in which the reporter transcribes proceedings onto a screen during the meeting. Cable television stations covering meetings should provide interpretation or captioning in rebroadcasting.

A text telephone (TTY) is essential for communicating with people who are deaf or have communications impairment over the telephone. Under the ADA, all public agencies should have this inexpensive, modem-like device for a telephone with a keyboard into which messages are typed rather than spoken. A small light-emitting diode (LED) screen on each machine shows the message. In some machines the message may also be recorded on paper tape. Many telephone systems can now be connected to utilize the computer screen and keyboard as a TTY.

People with disabilities require materials in accessible format. Prior to meetings, the Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Bureau of Transportation advertises the availability of its plan in large print, tape, Braille, and computer diskette formats. The Delaware Administration for Specialized Transportation certifies that plans are available in accessible formats, either in large print or on cassette tape. For people with sight impairments, documents are prepared in large (22 point) print in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Meeting announcements are prepared in large print in Wheeling, West Virginia. The Phoenix, Arizona, Regional Public Transportation Authority used large, bold, sans serif typefaces in its questionnaire on a plan update. Whichever formats are chosen, the person making the request must be able to use them. Many consumers with vision impairments now rely on electronic files, especially for larger texts.

Many states, local agencies, and organizations have developed checklists for planning accessible events. Below is a sample created by the Office of Equity Programs and the Fairfax Disability Service Board for Fairfax County, VA.

Element	Accommodation Area	Yes	No
General	• Do you know your agency's responsibility to provide accessibility to persons' with disabilities?		
Transportation	• Is the facility/meeting location accessible by public transportation? • If yes, is public transportation available at the time of your meeting/training?		
Evacuation	• Do you know the emergency evacuation plans for the meeting/training location?		
Parking	• Does the building have accessible (handicap) parking spaces? • **If yes, are they at least 8' wide and have 5'aisles next to them?**		
Sidewalk	• Are there <u>unobstructed</u> curb ramps leading to the sidewalk (walkway)?		
Walkway	• Is there a walkway from the parking lot to the building, at least 36" wide? • Does the walkway have a stable and firm surface? • If the accessible route is different from the primary route to and through the building, can you post signs with the wheelchair symbol that show the route? • Is the walkway level and free of steps? • If no, is there a ramp at least 36" wide? • If there is a ramp, does it have a gentle slope (1" rise to 12" length)?		
Entrance/Doors	• Is the door at least 32" wide (wide enough for a wheelchair)? • Can the hardware be operated with one hand (level, push plate, etc.) with a minimum of twisting or grasping)? • Are the handles low enough to reach? (maximum 48" high) • Can the door be pushed open easily? • Is the threshold no more than ½" high and beveled? • When a vestibule, is there a minimum of 48" between the sets of doors?		
Floors	• Are the floors hard and not slippery? • Is there a floor mat to dry feet and crutch tips to prevent slipping?		
Corridors	• Is there a 36" corridor, from the entrance to where the meeting/training is held? • Is the path free of objects projecting 4" maximum into the corridor?		
Elevators	• Is there an elevator in the facility where the meeting/training is located? • If yes, is it a working one that is large enough for a wheelchair?		

Element	Accommodation Area	Yes	No
	• Are the controls within reach? (maximum 48”) • Do the controls have Braille? • Is there an audible signal ringing at each floor? • Is there an audible two-way emergency communication system in the elevator?		
Meeting/Training Rooms	• Is there enough clearance around the table for a wheelchair to move? • Can the wheelchair pull under the edge of the table to sit close?		
Restrooms	• Is there a wide, accessible path to the restroom? • Is there a toilet stall wide enough that a wheelchair can enter and close the door behind? Interior space to turn around? • Is the water closet (toilet) 17-19 inches high to the rim? • Can the wheelchair roll under the sink (29 inches to the bottom)? • Can the faucets be reached and turned on easily? • Are the dispensers (soap, towel, etc) reachable? (maximum 48” high) • Is there a mirror at an accessible height (bottom of the mirror 44” above the floor)		
Interpreters	• Do you know how to arrange for sign language interpreters? • (You must ask the participant the type of interpretation needed)		
Telephone	• Is there a Teletype unit (TTY) in your facility/agency? • If yes, is the number published on the announcements alongside the phone number? • Is the staff in your agency trained to use the TTY? • Can the TTY be used by those attending your meeting/training? • Does the staff know how to use the Virginia Relay Center?		
Assistive Listening System (ALS)	• Does your facility have permanent assistive listening system? • If yes, do you know how to use it? • Do you know how to arrange for an ALS (permanent, portable, and rental)? • (You must ask the participant the type of system and listening accessory needed)		
Captioning	• Do you know how to arrange for captioning or computer assisted note-taking services?		
Videotapes	• Do the videotapes or other broadcast programming materials that you may be using during your meeting/ training carry captioning?		
Fire Alarm	• Are there flash fire alarm signals in the building? In the meeting/training room?		
Directions	• Can you provide clear, detailed directions to the facility and/or the meeting room? • Is there a receptionist to offer assistance? (If not, can someone be available to help?)		
Handouts	• Can you provide the meeting/training materials in alternative formats if requested? • (You must ask the participant what format is needed)		
Signage	• Is there Braille text in the signage at the facility?		
Lighting	• Is there adequate lighting in the elevators, hallways, stairwells, etc?		

Source: Fairfax County Virginia, Office of Equity Programs, http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/service/dsb/Meetacc.htm

Additional examples of checklists for planning accessible events can be found at:

- ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings: An ERIC/OSEP Information Brief for Conference Planners, http://www.eric.org/digests/e735.html
- Loudoun County, Virginia, Meeting Accessibility Checklist, www.co.loudoun.va.us/services/dsb/checklist.htm
- City and County of San Francisco, Accessible Meetings or Event Policy – Checklist, www.ci.sf.ca.us/sfmod/html/accessible_meeting_or_event_poli.htm
- State of Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, Checklist for Ensuring Accessible Events, www.state.ct.us/opapd/publicatio/site_access.htm

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies' efforts are not fully inclusive of everyone's ideas until they include people with disabilities. This requires an expansive approach to accommodate the population that is disabled.

Who leads the process?

Every State and MPO must make events accessible to people with disabilities. Information on accessibility needs is offered by State commissions dealing with disabilities, deafness, rehabilitation, or blindness, as well as by local agencies or advocacy groups. Many of these groups assist in doing outreach for transportation processes.

State agencies should be a central focus for information for individuals with disabilities. In Massachusetts, for example, the Commission on the Blind, the Association for the Blind, and the Vision Foundation record information about dates or events and provide it to telephone callers .

What does it cost?

Costs may include investigating meeting facilities for accessibility, creating/providing accessible formats of outreach materials, websites, and other information tools, and arranging for interpreters, assisted listening systems, and captioning.

How does it relate to other techniques?

All meetings or hearings must be accessible to comply with ADA, if they are open to the general public. (See **Public Meetings/Hearings**; **Open Houses/Open Forum Hearings**.) This includes most public meetings or hearings, as well as charrettes, brainstorming sessions, and visioning meetings. (See **Brainstorming**; **Charettes**; **Visioning**.) Civic advisory committees can serve the interests of persons with disabilities with appropriate representation of them. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.)

When is it most effective?

All events may attract people with disabilities. Special efforts and events are useful to attract people with disabilities and to encourage their participation in the process. When the expertise of the disability community is used to make an event accessible, it is likely to be more effective. (See **Non-traditional Meeting Places and Events**.)

For further information:

- Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs) – provide information, materials, technical assistance and training on the ADA, (800)-949-4232, www.adata.org
- Resources for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: www.access-board.gov; www.section508.gov
- Kailes, June Issacson and Daniel Jones, *A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings*, Houston: ILRU Program. (Available from ILRU program for $25 plus P+H, 713-520-0232, TDD 713-520-5785, FAX 713-520-5785)
- Capitol Transit, Juneau, Alaska, (907) 789-6901
- Massachusetts Assistive Technology Partnership Center, Voice (617) 735-7820, TDD (617) 735-7301
- Project ACTION, *ADA Public Participation Handbook,* (202) 347-3066, (800) 659-NIAT (Voice/TTY)
- RESNA Technical Assistance Project, *Technical Assistance Personnel Directory,* (202) 857-1140

B. BRINGING A CORE PARTICIPATING GROUP TOGETHER

People want to have a voice in transportation decision-making for their communities, and agencies must have public involvement to create a successful planning or project development process. But where does an agency begin? One approach is to start with a core group of participants—people the agency knows are likely to have a strong interest—and then broaden the public involvement program based on work with the core group. This section presents three different approaches to establishing a core group of participants:

- Community-based organizations;
- Civic advisory committees;
- Citizens on decision and policy bodies; and
- Collaborative task forces.

Agencies form core groups for either a limited or an extended period of time, depending on the issues at hand. Core groups usually meet regularly and are sometimes assigned the tasks of reaching out and informing others who may want to participate. Membership of a core group should reflect the range of affected interests. To encourage people to participate, it is sometimes essential to provide support to offset out-of-pocket expenses or training to improve people's communication and problem-solving skills and enhance their knowledge of planning methods and terms.

A core group helps agencies establish a working relationship with the community and take its pulse as a plan or project moves forward. Agencies often use core groups as key participants in decision-making; for example, in selecting evaluation criteria or narrowing a set of possible alternatives.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

What is a community-based organization?

A community-based organization is a group of individuals organized by and for a particular community of people based on shared interests and/or attributes. The community could be defined geographically (e.g. a neighborhood), could contain members from diverse backgrounds, and/or could be defined on the basis of something like religious beliefs or a shared condition. Members may include various stakeholders, such as the public, elected officials, advocacy groups, and business leaders.

A community-based organization focuses on issues and concerns at the local level (e.g. neighborhood, layperson, city, county), not on a national scale. They are often organized around a particular purpose or cause and tend to be grass roots in nature, working from the ground level upward to address issues. Community-based organizations may also participate in regional coalitions with similar groups in support of an issue such as affordable housing, water quality, or connection of open space.

Community-based organizations use a number of names to describe themselves, including association, alliance, and commission. Many community-based organizations will hold regular meetings for a specific period of time where they discuss the issues of common concern. Participation on community-based organizations is generally voluntary and open to any individuals with interest in the particular issue.

One example of a community-based organization, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs), function as an integral part of major decisions made in the District of Columbia. ANCs are composed of elected neighborhood residents who advise the Washington, DC government of particular issues affecting their areas including such topics as planning, transportation, safety, sanitation, and social services. There are 37 ANCs in Washington, DC's eight Wards.

Another type of community-based organization found nationwide is a Transportation Management Association (TMA). For example, Transportation Solutions in Denver, CO is a public-private partnership deigned to manage transportation demand by providing and promoting programs to improve accessibility and mobility in the service area. Transportation Solutions has two full-time staff members and 20 individuals who serve on the Board of Directors. Membership consists of employers, property owners, municipalities, and neighborhood representatives who are committed to better managing transportation demand.

Why are community-based organizations useful?

Working with these community-based groups allows transportation professionals to tap into key community players and an organizational structure that has already been created. Regularly scheduled meetings of community-based organizations can be used as a forum for disseminating information and gathering input on transportation plans, programs, and projects at a grass-roots level.

Community-based organizations work directly with the public and are aware of their basic goals, needs, issues, and concerns. If the public has an issue that needs to be addressed, more people would tend to go to the local level for assistance than a regional, state, or national level. In addition, the public may trust representatives from a community-based organization more than someone from a transportation agency. Community-based organizations provide a common visible entity with which community members can identify and rally around community issues as a unit. They also give "outsiders" or "supporters" a venue with which to participate in community issues in an organized fashion. Because community-based groups are created by the public; they can exhibit power in numbers and have strong credibility and standing and well-developed connections within the community.

Working with community-based organizations can assist agencies in hearing issues that are important to the community and in presenting and resolving complex issues. Being involved with community-based organizations allows practitioners and agencies to develop an information network that can extend beyond transportation issues. If the community-based organization is geographically focused, it also can provide an opportunity to address a broad range of issues.

Does a community-based organization have special uses?

Not only do communities-based organizations represent the public at the local level, they can also be the voice for a particular community or neighborhood regarding regional, statewide, or national issues.

Community-based organizations can encourage participation and involve members of the community who may not otherwise participate. For example, at the Magnolia Tree Earth Center in the Bedford Stuyvesant community in Brooklyn, NY, children in the community generated involvement from the community as they surveyed neighborhood residents door-to-door and participated in segments of community meetings. More parents and guardians became involved than might ordinarily have in the past because of the children's involvement.

Community-based organizations can also be used to gain consensus about an issue or a project. They can be used to identify and investigate particular issues in more depth (i.e., strategies for reaching the vision of a plan, development of environmental mitigation strategies, the minimization of environmental impacts). They can also be used to gain community-level information (e.g., assessing sidewalk conditions, local land use or lighting at bus stops). Community-based organizations can be of particular use in a community impact assessment.

Community-based organizations may be particularly useful in situations when transportation agencies encountering apathy or a lack of interest about a particular issue (e.g., long range planning). They might also be useful in situations where there are environmental justice concerns. Low-income or minority persons may be more accessible as members of community-based organizations than in other ways.

Who participates? And how?

Community-based organizations are typically organized at a grassroots level, so participation tends to be broad-based. Virtually anyone can be active in such a group, so they provide an effective mechanism for working with the general public, as opposed to specific publics. Some examples of community-based organization members include: individual members of the public, representatives of community and advocacy groups, church leaders, representatives of the business community, and elected officials. Depending on the organization, members may volunteer or may be nominated, appointed, or elected.

Many community-based organizations do not have professional staff and some do not have formal office space or equipment. This can limit their ability with professional transportation staff during typical business hours.

The demands of participation may influence who can participate. These might include how often the group interacts and the timing of interaction (mid-day, evening, weekend). Participation can take a range of forms, including face-to-face gatherings and e-mail exchanges.

How do agencies get involved with community-based organizations?

To get involved with community-based organizations, practitioners should research what groups are in existence in the area they are serving. This can be done by contacting local governments to determine the "players" in the community, through word of mouth, and by being alert to advertisements/fliers for specific community-based organization activities. It is important for practitioners to maintain up-to-date contact lists for community-based organizations and key individuals in the community who can be tapped for discussions. Human service coalitions, like the United Way, colleges and universities, and national organizations often maintain contact lists.

Practitioners could then begin attending meetings and interacting with leaders to learn more about the organizations and their members, contact the organizations directly to discuss a particular issue, and develop presentations and materials for use with community-based groups. The practitioner may ask organization representatives what public involvement techniques would work best in getting the community engaged in the decision-making process. In addition, before interacting with community-based organizations it is important for the practitioner to clearly define what needs to be communicated to the organizations and what is hoped to be gained from establishing a relationship with them.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies can use the output from community-based organizations in several ways. These include:

- Gauging the reaction of the larger population that the community-based organization was established to represent.
- Identifying the concerns or issues of members of the community.
- Incorporating the output into in community visioning exercises, visual preference surveys, goal setting, and policy development.
- Establishing a pattern of continuing communications with the community until the culmination of a process (e.g., when the plan is developed, when the decision is made).
- Developing plans, programs, projects, goals, policies, strategies, and alternatives and to resolve conflicts.

What are the costs?

Costs of working with community-based organizations are variable. Monetary costs for the agency may be very little, unless the organization requires technical assistance (e.g., resources, funding). Possible monetary costs include outreach materials, food and beverages at meetings, and facility charges.

The majority of costs to the agency would be staff time to attend community meetings, work with group leaders, prepare agendas and meeting minutes, and schedule meetings and facilities. This may differ based on location or setting. A great deal of time and effort may be needed initially to work with community-based organizations in areas where people are not participating in many existing community groups, especially if there are trust or apathy issues.

The major cost to individuals in community-based organizations is time to contact community members about, and participate in, meetings and events.

Neighborhood or geography-based organizations often have multiple commitments; housing or crime, rather than transportation, may be a priority. However, an agency can help build more capacity, for example, by training community leaders. In this situation awareness is needed with regard to local politics and the willingness of community representatives to share their knowledge of "how to get things accomplished" with others.

How are community-based organizations used with other techniques?

Community based organizations can be used with other public involvement techniques easily, including **charrettes**, **open houses**, **video**, and **public information materials**. Community-based organizations can be used with **brainstorming** to develop ideas about how to proceed with a particular project. **Visioning** can be used to determine where a community wants to go in the future. Community-based organizations can be included on **mailing lists** for surveys, meeting notices, and special activities, so that information can be disseminated through them to the individuals in the community. Often, TMAs are linked into the planning process and designated to disseminate information to all interested parties. Community based group representatives could also be selected for or elect to participate in a **civic advisory committee**.

What are the drawbacks?

Community-based organizations may not be representative of the overall community. If members are nominated, the overall community may not agree with the composition of the group and may not feel these members have their best interest in mind.

Working with community-based organizations for public involvement can sometimes attract "professional community participants," i.e., those members of the community who have strong interest in an issue or high availability and can always be counted upon to attend group activities. Suggestions for broadening community participating in these instances include:

- Asking the community to identify their leaders. This may render different leaders than those that are frequently tapped. The community may not identify leaders that are frequently-tapped as representing their interest.
- Thinking about demographics (e.g., number of single parents, number of elderly who may not want to drive to a meeting in the evening) and the history of agency-public relationships in the area. Local planning and economic develop agencies, colleges and universities often maintain current demographic information.
- Seeking out and identifying the affected and targeted group first. Finding out what a group's ideas, views, likes, and dislikes are and targeting more advertisements in the affected area to make sure the right people are getting the message.
- Going directly to the group to broaden the participation. It might be best to start out by doing this at a project level, as the project may be something more concrete that the public can relate to (as opposed to the more abstract and nebulous planning process).
- Using the "buddy system;" ask each person who attends a meeting to return next time with one other person. For the ones who don't attend, try to find out why, then try to see if there's a way to utilize their talents in a different way. For example, if the community participation is voluntary and individuals have to work during the hours of the meeting, they may be able to perform background research or some other task through which the information obtained could then be funneled to the group as a whole or incorporated into the greater project at hand.

The agency can sometimes influence the decisions of the community-based organization. In addition, sometimes community-based organizations are not taken seriously and are considered to be trouble and a lot of unwanted "noise".

Working with such groups can be very time consuming. Community-based groups tend to be small and focused on a particular geographic area or issue. If a broader level of input and participation is desired, transportation professionals may have to interact with several organizations. It would time to build credible relationships and to adequately educate each group on the transportation process, particularly if there is a history of mistrust. Substantial initial time and effort may be required in forming a new community-based group if one goes beyond the most interested/most available people.

Generally, the benefits of working with these groups outweigh the drawbacks because community-based groups are an effective way to get directly to those impacted by transportation decisions.

For further information:

- South Carolina DOT, (803) 737-1395
- Washington, DC (Neighborhood Action), http://neighborhoodaction.dc.gov/main.htm
- Transportation Solutions, Denver, CO, http://www.transolutions.org/
- TRB Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation, http://www.ch2m.com/TRB_PI/default.asp
- Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, MPO's Best Practices, http://www.ampo.org/programs/best_practices/

CIVIC ADVISORY COMMITTEES

What is a civic advisory committee?

A civic advisory committee is a representative group of stakeholders that meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While these groups are often called *citizens'* advisory committees, the term *civic* is used here, since citizenship is not a requirement for participation. Civic advisory committees (CACs) have been used for many years and are not in themselves innovative, yet they can be used very creatively. For example, a CAC was used in Louisiana to find consensus on environmental issues for input to public agencies. In Florida a CAC advised on designs for deployment of a traffic information system.

Representation of agencies on a CAC is highly desirable as a means of interaction between local residents and their government. For example, in Portland, Maine, a 35-member CAC developed a long-range transportation plan with agency help. Because it can be used either alone or in conjunction with other techniques, a CAC is widely used to achieve a basic level of local input to transportation planning and development.

A CAC has these basic features:

- Interest groups from throughout a State or region are represented;
- Meetings are held regularly;
- Comments and points of view of participants are recorded;
- Consensus on issues is sought but not required; and
- A CAC is assigned an important role in the process.

Why is it useful?

A CAC is a forum for hearing peoples' ideas. It is a place where agencies present goals and proposed programs. It provides a continuing forum for bringing peoples' ideas directly into the process and a known opportunity for people to participate. In the San Francisco Bay area, special efforts have been made to include representatives of disabled residents and minorities, including people who speak languages other than English.

A CAC molds participants into a working group. It is democratic and representative of opposing points of view, with equal status for each participant in presenting and deliberating views and in being heard. It is a place for finding out stances of participants on issues. It is a place where people become educated on technical issues, over several meetings if necessary. It gives a better understanding of the effort and milestones of public agency progress. Its members feel freer to ask agencies for assistance, clarification of points, and follow-up on questions.

Does a CAC have special uses?

A CAC demonstrates commitment to participation. Its existence demonstrates progress toward involving people in projects and programs. It helps find common ground for consensus about a solution. If consensus cannot be reached, a CAC provides a forum for identifying positions, exploring them in depth and reporting the divergences of opinion to the agencies.

A CAC is flexible. It can be part of regional or State planning or of a single project, with community participants' assistance in anticipating construction and identifying measures to reduce potential disruption. It can be subdivided. In the St. Louis area, three CACs were formed to develop the regional long-range plan.

Who participates? And how?

Representatives of community groups or stakeholders are selected in one of two ways: 1) an agency carefully identifies all stakeholders, including the general public; and 2) the public self-selects CAC memberships; i.e., those who are interested attend. If membership is not fully representative, an agency should encourage groups not represented to attend or seek their input in some other way. San Francisco County Transit Authority appoints 11 CAC members, drawing upon a pool of self-selected candidates who submit resumes. People who attend meetings are asked if they would like to be considered for CAC membership. In appointing members, the Authority proactively seeks diversity and balance of representation by race, gender, neighborhood activists, business interests, the disability community, bicycle proponents, et al. The CAC is used as a sounding board by the Authority on a wide variety of transportation issues.

Diversity in viewpoints is a plus, to ensure full discussion. Though no special training is required, attendees typically have a broad, long-term view in discussing issues within a geographic area—not a specific, single project. In many areas, such as the San Francisco Bay area, agencies make targeted efforts to involve freight interests.

People participate by examining and discussing issues with others. Mailings prior to a meeting help participants understand issues and form questions. Major points of discussion are typically recorded; in some instances substantial detail on issues is desirable.

How do agencies use the output?

A CAC helps monitor community reactions to agency policy, proposals, and progress. Observing interactions at the periodic sessions of a CAC, agencies become aware of opinions and stances at an early point in the process—often before they become solidified or difficult to modify. Working with a CAC, an agency crafts compromise positions through give-and-take and over a relatively short period of time. For example, in Pennsylvania a CAC helped determine the extent to which a highway project would affect a rapidly developing area in the Pocono Mountains.

Who leads a CAC?

A CAC elects its own leader. Dynamic and firm community leadership is effective in enlivening a CAC. In Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia, a charismatic leader strengthened the CAC's role in planning. Typically, CAC members select a leader who can deal with agencies in an open and friendly manner and who is sensitive to group dynamics and able to effectively lead the discussion and draw opinions and positions from participants.

What does a CAC cost?

A CAC requires support staff within an agency, and the work can be substantial. Meeting minutes must be taken. Background information, minutes, and agendas must be sent out before meetings. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives must attend to provide resources for CAC questions and response preparation. A CAC may want to sponsor a special meeting on transportation's role in the community, as was done in Pittsburgh. Additional assistance may be required in some instances. For example, in Washington State a CAC led by a facilitator helped plan a highway bypass on the Olympic peninsula.

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is essential. Written materials may be needed at hand to supplement or give depth to the notes mailed prior to the meeting. In many cases, an agency needs to carefully explain its position or analysis, requiring staff and materials at hand.

How is a CAC organized?

Ideally, a CAC has limits on its size to encourage discussion. However, flexibility is needed. Rigid limits exclude people who could provide valuable input; they also discourage future participation. If an overall size limit is undesirable, a large CAC can be divided into subgroups. However, this curtails interaction among interests. Recognizing this, a CAC and the sponsoring agency should investigate overcoming these limitations through other means. For example, conferences can be used to expose CAC members to interaction with interests not represented on the CAC.

A CAC usually has officers, with a chairperson or director, an assistant director to chair meetings in the absence of the chairperson, and a secretary to record minutes (this person is sometimes on an agency staff). Elected officers may serve for a year or more.

CAC meetings are managed by the elected officers with assistance from agency staff. Formal parliamentary procedures, if oriented toward voting, are less useful than informal rules and consensus-building techniques. Meetings are usually held on a regular basis.

Pre-meetings help plan the regular sessions and draft policy goals. CAC officers and agency staff work together to bring substantive issues before the larger group. Subcommittees are established to explore details of issues, with meetings held between the regular sessions of the CAC.

A typical CAC agenda covers the following items:

- Introductions, if attendees vary each time;
- Welcome to newcomers;
- Discussion of agenda, seeking potential changes;
- Discussion of items on agenda in order unless change is requested;
- Presentations of information as necessary for clarification; and
- Determination of whether a consensus on each issue exists.

How is a CAC used with other techniques?

An established CAC is a forum for many public involvement techniques. A CAC leader can use brainstorming to establish consensus on a project. (See **Brainstorming**.) Facilitation by an outside specialist is used within a CAC to establish or resolve a particular or pressing problem. (See **Facilitation**.) A CAC uses the visioning technique to establish long-range policy goals. (See **Visioning**.) A CAC should be able to consider the special issues of people with disabilities. (See **People with Disabilities**.) Video techniques can illustrate specific points. (See **Video Techniques**.)

What are the drawbacks?

A CAC can seem to be manipulated by an agency unless information from governmental sources is fully shared. The CAC may feel it is outclassed or overwhelmed by technical information if care is not taken by agencies to explain essential facts or features. In such cases, a CAC may become inactive.

A CAC is most useful on a project or regional scale. A statewide CAC or one for a very large region can be unwieldy when a large number of people are involved and travel is required of both staff and participants. A CAC's effectiveness depends on being able to hear and decide on the issues in an efficient and fair manner. Thus, effective leadership is essential.

A CAC does not encompass all points of view. By virtue of being representative, it is never all-inclusive. A CAC's voice may be skewed if it does not represent all stakeholders and the general public. It may be difficult to represent minority interests.

Opponents may refuse to consider each other's ideas. People who feel they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw from full participation. Agency staff members who feel that the process is leading nowhere may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

For further information:

- Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia, (912) 236-9523
- E–W Gateway Coordinating Council, St. Louis, Missouri, (314) 421-4220
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Francisco Bay area, (510) 464-7700
- Phoenix, Arizona, Regional Transportation Authority, (602) 262-7242
- Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee, (207) 724-9891
- San Francisco County Transit Authority, (415) 557-6850
- Southwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, Pittsburgh, (412) 391-5590

CITIZENS ON DECISION AND POLICY BODIES

Who are citizens on decision and policy boards?

Community people serve on policy and decision-making committees and boards. They represent groups organized around civic, environmental, business, or community interests, or specific geographic areas, or they serve as individual experts in a field. They need not be elected officials or agency staff. The Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) appointed a community committee to develop and recommend alternatives for reconstruction of a large I–95 bridge.

Some boards make decisions; others help formulate policy. Regional residents sit on the decision-making Great Falls City/County Planning Board in Montana, and on Washington's Puget Sound Regional Council. The head of Georgia's Chatham County–Savannah Metropolitan Planning Committee sits on the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Project Committee. Citizens on such boards are distinct from purely advisory groups, such as civic advisory committees, that are often part of planning and project development. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.)

These boards are established by statute, regulation, or political decision. Ad hoc committees are set up by legislative acts or executive decision to investigate specific subjects. They may be temporary or permanent. In Portland, Oregon, a committee of community members works with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff to develop scopes of service for projects and to review and select consultants. For the U.S. 301 corridor study, Maryland's Governor created a 76-member task force to address regional transportation issues, develop and evaluate possible transportation and land-use solutions, and recommend public policies. The majority of members were private citizens.

The composition of a board varies, depending on its assigned task. A board may include citizens and elected or appointed officials or be composed entirely of citizens. It may be assisted in its task by staff members assigned from elected officials or agency representatives. The Airport Policy Committee of the San Diego, California, MPO has a mixed representation of citizens and professionals. The Metro Council, MPO for Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota, has both citizens and elected officials on its 30-member Transportation Board, including 10 municipal elected officials, 7 elected county officials, 9 private citizens (including the chair), and 4 representatives of State or regional agencies.

People are appointed to boards in a variety of ways. They are nominated or appointed to these positions by public officials, or they volunteer or are elected by their peers. The ways they come to serve depend on the rules and nature of the policy body.

The board's role establishes the amount of influence these citizens wield. The 76-member task force overseeing the U.S. 301 Corridor Planning Study in Maryland has virtually total decision-making power. Composed entirely of citizens appointed by the Governor, Arizona DOT's Transportation Board has final say on the State's five-year plan, the transportation improvement program, and State transportation planning projects.

Why are they useful?

Community people bring new points of view, new ideas, and a community perspective directly into the decision-making process. Little Rock, Arkansas, MPO found that people were able to integrate political and technical engineering issues in solving problems. They focused on whether an idea made sense to them, their neighbors, and the people most affected by the decision.

Ad hoc committees help local people participate in decision-making. For the Albuquerque, New Mexico, MPO's Urban Area Truck Route Task Group, membership was solicited through more than 300 letters to neighborhood, advocacy, and business groups. Volunteers worked with technical staff from the city and a neighboring county to develop a commercial vehicle network plan processed as though it were an agency-prepared plan.

Decisions have greater legitimacy if residents are involved. Including local people in decision-making demonstrates an agency's commitment to participatory planning. At the contaminated U.S. Department of Energy site in Rocky Flats, Colorado, a community committee directed the planning of an off-site hazardous waste sampling program. In essence, such empowerment validates the principle that people want—and should be able—to decide what is best for their community.

Do they have special uses?

Citizen committees oversee specific aspects of complicated programs. For the Hudson River Waterfront Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement in New Jersey, local residents directed agency staff in implementing air quality monitoring.

Community representatives work directly with project design consultants. For proposed construction of I–70 through Glenwood Canyon in Colorado, the Governor appointed area residents to work with the State's highway planners and the principal design consultants to address public concerns from the beginning of preliminary engineering and highway design. Along with frequent public hearings, local representation served to satisfy public demand for a greater voice in the project.

Local people facilitate communication between decision-making bodies. The Airport Policy Committee of the San Diego, California, MPO worked with officials to forge consensus on several controversial issues. These people provided a free flow of ideas, unconstrained by concerns for existing policies, and were able to help overcome political deadlock.

Community representatives serve as informed spokespersons for an agency's programs. Individuals from the Boise, Idaho, MPO citizen committee host public meetings, speak to other organizations, and attend neighborhood events. They use non-technical language to make citizens more comfortable and willing to participate in discussion.

Residents help achieve an agency's goals. For the Dade County, Florida, rail system, a decision-making committee was appointed, composed of elected officials and neighborhood representatives. These citizens subsequently provided leadership on two referenda supporting funding for the new rail system.

Civic outreach committees assist with public involvement programs and provide advice based on what they hear in their own discussions with the public. Seattle's Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) appointed a group of people to assist in developing a ballot proposal for regional transit.

Who participates on these boards?

People who serve on policy boards are drawn from many sources. They include community and business leaders, leaders from special interest groups, and interested individuals. Length of tenure varies, depending on tasks, but is generally one to five years.

It is important to recognize special interests. The Hartford, Connecticut, MPO agency-wide technical committee includes representatives of four private groups: the American Lung Association, the Chamber of Commerce, a construction industry association, and a ridesharing corporation. The board of the Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, has long included representatives from the Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters.

What are the costs?

Monetary costs are usually nominal. Local people appointed to policy boards are seldom paid. Costs to support their participation include agency staff time, postage, transportation, and occasional meals. Many agencies economize by sending the same information packages to both elected officials and boards that include citizens. Costs of including community people on existing boards are likely to be lower than those of forming an entirely new board or committee such as a collaborative task force.

Staffing requirements may be very small. A 1995 nationwide survey of transit agency policy committees showed that staff support to the committees averaged 12.4 hours per month. Full-time staff members with assignments including support to these committees averaged 1.2 people. However, even modest requirements of staff time may pose a challenge to small MPOs.

How is this organized?

The first step is to determine the need for local representation. Agencies may be aware of the need because of comment or criticism from local people. The media sometimes call for local representation when an agency undertakes a specific task. An agency also becomes aware through discussions with peers in other areas.

Another step is to research legal requirements. State laws may specify whether individuals may sit on MPO boards. Participation may be limited by an organization's by-laws.

An agency devises a strategy for local representation, designing community positions to suit the board's functions and objectives. The Albany, New York, Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC)—all elected officials—puts local people on many task forces, along with local agency representatives and institutional and business leaders.

An agency solicits local interest in a variety of ways. The media help by opening the issue to public discussion. A letter soliciting interest in participation on boards or committees might be sent in a general mailing. For a long-range planning effort, the Albany CDTC took a sample survey of local people to determine potential interests in participating on planning and policy committees.

An agency seeks a balance of various viewpoints. The nature of a task may draw volunteers who represent only one side of an issue, yet a board should encompass many stances.

A formal appointment process is established. A simple letter or a more formal event lends legitimacy to the process and gives satisfaction and encouragement to an appointee. A written document formalizes the time frame, responsibilities, and the expected products. It is also important to point out the extent of the powers that accompany the appointment and how the results of the task will affect further agency actions.

Agencies involve elected officials and keep them informed. Officials are often able to provide helpful insight. They may also want to be apprised of the board's progress.

Agencies determine the nature of their involvement on boards. It may take the form of representation, usually in an ad hoc and non-voting capacity. It may involve board support, in the form of staff services, meeting space, and use of equipment for presentations and recording of proceedings. In some instances, agencies supply meals, especially if participants travel long distances or a meeting is held during a conventional meal hour.

A method of selecting a committee chair is determined. Often a board selects its own chair, or the chair is appointed. If elections are to take place, introductions of board member candidates are appropriate, so that an informed selection is made. Introductions can be informal or take a more formal approach, such as written position papers that define an individual's expectations and goals for the processes and products.

Meeting frequency is derived from the size of the task and its deadlines. In order to accomplish an assignment, a board may need to meet frequently. Many citizen committees meet monthly, but specific projects or responsibilities may dictate different schedules. Board members should play a major role in determining meeting frequency.

Communication is maintained between meetings. Minutes of each meeting are kept for the record and distributed to remind participants of past events and decisions. Issue papers are distributed prior to meetings to help people prepare and to aid discussions. Many agencies keep local representatives informed with periodic status reports.

Decision-making bodies need time to adjust to the dynamics of public involvement. In some cases, important informal communication occurs during breaks or outside formal meeting hours. For effective communication among policy board members, the sponsoring agency may take time to foster a positive atmosphere or use familiar procedures. For guidance, many MPOs, such as those in Portland, San Diego, and Phoenix, employ the commonly-understood meeting procedures outlined in *Robert's Rules of Order.*

Ethical issues must be considered. Public agencies frequently have established rules of professional ethics, and these rules extend to community participants. For example, potential conflicts of interest need to be identified and addressed immediately.

How is this used with other techniques?

Community representatives are important components of a public involvement program and complement almost any other technique. However, local representation cannot be the sole method an agency uses to involve the public in the planning process. Community representatives are most effective if they relate continuously with their constituent groups and participate in an agency's other public involvement outreach techniques.

Local representatives are ideal speakers. They are generally well-informed and usually have extensive experience and exposure to issues. They are good candidates for a speakers' bureau, but agencies must remain considerate of demands placed on their time. (See **Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers**.)

What are the drawbacks?

The selection and appointment process may be criticized, especially if the appointee's qualifications are questioned or if the process is seen as closed or unfair. To counter such charges, an agency can develop a strategy for the process that is comprehensive and well-understood.

Board members may not be fully representative. Selected representatives may not share the prevailing opinions of the communities they represent. An agency sometimes needs to expand the number of representatives to bring in underrepresented interests.

Balanced representation of interest groups is crucial in avoiding controversy. Disputes over representation require skillful diplomacy to maintain the legitimacy of the process.

Agency culture sometimes presents barriers. Agencies that perceive themselves as empowered with sole decision-making responsibility are reluctant to share authority with non-elected citizens. An agency's traditional organization or decision-making style may block efforts to increase the influence of private citizens on decision or policy bodies.

For further information:

- Alaska Department of Transportation, Juneau, Alaska, (907) 465-2171
- Capital District Transportation Committee, Albany, New York, (518) 458-2161
- Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1357
- Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, Connecticut, (860) 594-2939
- Little Rock Metropolitan Planning Organization—Metroplan, Little Rock, Arkansas, (501) 372-3300
- Maryland State Highway Administration, Baltimore, Maryland, (410) 333-6431
- Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Study, (207) 774-9891
- San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, California, (619) 595-5300

COLLABORATIVE TASK FORCES

What is a collaborative task force?

A collaborative task force is a group assigned a specific task, with a time limit for reaching a conclusion and resolving a difficult issue, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. Its membership usually includes local people or representatives from interest groups, appointed by elected officials or agency executives. Agency staff people are frequently assigned to provide technical support. Collaborative task forces have been used on a project level and for resolving issues within a project.

A collaborative task force differs from a civic advisory committee and citizens on decision and policy bodies. While they focus on similar issues, each plays a different role in the decision-making process. A civic advisory committee acts primarily in an advisory role, studying issues and presenting a mosaic of opinion to the agency; consensus is not required. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) Citizens on decision and policy bodies are local community people appointed, along with other representatives, to boards or agencies that make decisions or propose recommendations to elected officials. (See **Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies**.) By contrast, a collaborative task force usually helps solve a specific problem, working strenuously toward consensus and presenting a strong and unified voice.

A collaborative task force has these basic features:

- A sponsoring agency committed to the process;
- A broad range of representative interests;
- Emphasis on resolving an assigned issue through consensus;
- Detailed presentations of material and technical assistance for complete understanding of context and subject matter; and
- Serial meetings to understand and deliberate the issues.

Why is it useful?

A collaborative task force can extend community input for decision-making and enhance self-governance. Task force discussions help agencies understand participants' qualitative values and reactions to proposals. They can aid in development of policies, programs, and services and in allocation of resources. A collaborative task force was used to explore alternatives for the Charles River crossing of Boston's proposed depressed Central Artery and to recommend a preference to the Massachusetts Highway Department..

A collaborative task force helps resolve impasses through a participatory process. Following a difficult process or unsettled controversy, it involves people in solving a problem. In Fort Worth, Texas, the issue of a controversial widening of a downtown interstate freeway was assigned to a collaborative task force.

Decisions can be expected to have broad (although not universal) community support. Task force members represent a broad cross-section of interests. This helps legitimate the process and decisions. The views expressed are typically exhaustive. Often the group begins by making small and specific decisions early in the process; later group decisions become somewhat easier.

Does it have special uses?

A collaborative task force deals with high-profile issues that have generated significant public or media attention and community polarization. It can be used productively at any time in a complex project or planning study, but because of time and cost commitments it is often used to resolve an impasse. If some participants or the agency itself take intractable positions, consensus is very difficult or impossible to achieve. (See **Facilitation; Negotiation and Mediation**.)

It can bring together a wide range of opinions to assist in exploring issues. The breadth of representation is accompanied by depth of probing. In a collaborative task force, a great depth of discussion is expected and can be accommodated. For example, in Maine a group of 58 community people and agencies worked together to explore Turnpike widening and alternative modes of transit in implementing an initiative approved by the voters.

Who participates? And how?

Participant groups are invited by the sponsor, with the groups selecting their representatives. Representatives are selected from affected interests, but the collaborative task force may add new representatives to round out its membership.

A broad cross-section of interests is desirable and may include local governments, transportation or environmental groups, civic or business groups, and consumer organizations. Other people are involved through outreach and participation programs, including open house presentations or newsletters. (See **Public Information Materials**.)

People participate by engaging in the discussion. Members of the group react to each other's opinions and bring up alternative ideas. The facilitator guides discussion to cover all agenda items that the group determines it wants to cover. Coaching and training of participants in the process and in conflict resolution is sometimes necessary.

How do agencies use the output?

A collaborative task force helps resolve a difficult issue or problem. Such a group is used primarily when an agency can seriously commit to incorporating the group's decision into ongoing work. Because of the important role of a collaborative task force, the sponsor may agree to ratify its findings, if not too costly or unimplementable. For example, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) formed a collaborative task force to deal with the difficult issues of rebuilding an interstate highway bridge and its approaches in downtown New Haven and agreed to accept the task force's consensus recommendations among alternatives if technically feasible and within the budget.

The sponsor sets broad limits on issues to be explored. A mission statement for the task force is clearly identified before it begins its work. The schedule reflects the complexity of the issue and the time required to come to a resolution within the task force.

Many sponsors observe groups in a non-participatory role without assuming any leadership function. Representatives of the sponsor respond to questions from the group and provide technical assistance while retaining a neutral position. Expressions of support for the process from high-level agency leaders also help sustain commitment and progress, especially when a task force is wrestling with difficult issues.

Who leads a collaborative task force?

A collaborative task force needs a facilitator to maintain the agenda and schedule and assure that all participants are heard. The facilitator assists participants in verbalizing or crafting positions and in developing a constructive process for group decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

The facilitator plays a special role in the task force. Feedback and encouragement to the group are required to maintain progress in the development of issues and steps toward resolution. Facilitators need to tell the group when the process is doing well and warn them if a dead end or irresolvable conflict is approaching. They may need to coach and instruct task force members in methods of conflict resolution.

The facilitator must be viewed as neutral to the process but supportive of the goals and outcomes determined by the group. The chosen person may be from inside an agency but is typically an outsider provided by the sponsor. The group can dismiss the facilitator if it perceives that the person is not serving their interests.

What does a collaborative task force cost?

Significant resources are required. A facilitator experienced in group processes and conflict resolution is mandatory, and staff technical support required. Graphics—and in some cases, presentations by technical experts in language geared to lay people—are necessary to understand technical issues. Modeling of anticipated impacts, structural and engineering issues, and traffic simulations need to be explained. Each meeting can consume several hours.

Specialized consultants may be needed to provide a neutral facilitator or technical support for complex projects. Schedules are tailored to fit the needs of participants and the sponsor. Meetings may be held in the evening to allow participants to attend without interfering with daytime jobs. The time required for preparation is substantial, because each meeting must be tailored to the agenda determined by the group.

Policy support within an agency is required. Staff follow the course of discussions and respond to the need for information. A neutral meeting site not associated with the agency or any stakeholder must be selected. Staff work is essential for preparation of meeting minutes, notices of upcoming meetings, correspondence, newsletters, press releases, or advertisements about outreach events.

How is it used with other techniques?

A collaborative task force uses other techniques as needed. Brainstorming or a charrette can be integral to a task force's work as it seeks solutions to difficult problems. (See **Brainstorming; Charrettes**.) Visioning may establish a desirable goal to work towards. (See **Visioning**.) Facilitation is essential early in the process, when goal-setting helps establish a means to measure progress. (See **Facilitation**.)

A task force can sponsor its own events to apprise the community of issues and potential solutions. These events are useful ways to elicit and review community comments and to find responses as appropriate.

How is it organized?

The sponsor determines the interests to be represented on the task force and selects a facilitator. Typically, a cross-section of organizations is invited to participate, and each selects its representative to the group. The task force then identifies additional participants essential for broad representation. On two rapid transit lines in Boston, task forces were assembled for design of each individual station. The Federal Transit Administration has a current project to develop collaborative decision-making processes.

A collaborative task force has a target date determined by the sponsor to provide a framework for and guide scheduling. For example, in Canada a task force of 24 interest groups met over an extended period to plan a light-rail transit facility for Calgary, Alberta. A task force's mission may be defined by the sponsor in broad terms, but the group usually determines its own approach to problem-solving. It is self-governing, and its work is usually based on a consensus process rather than voting.

The sponsor sets an overall schedule, leaving detailed scheduling to the task force itself. The sponsor provides technical support, either from within the agency or from consultants familiar with the topic. To retain neutrality, the technical staff should not be co-workers of the facilitator.

The task force determines the need for a chairperson. The group develops its own norms or rules to guide the process over time. These may be explicit or implicit; in some instances they are prepared in written form to remind participants of their expressed intent.

The task force monitors its own progress. Where appropriate, the facilitator reminds the group of the agenda and schedule and makes suggestions to keep the work moving toward resolution.

What are the drawbacks?

The process is long and expensive. To achieve a full understanding of all issues, an extensive number of meetings and presentations is required. This long process demands patience, good will, and a commitment of continued funding. Participants must make an extensive commitment to the process. Staying with the program over a long period of time may be difficult for many individuals. Similarly, agency commitment is critical; the process can be long and wrenching.

A high degree of facilitation skill is required to keep the task force on course. Technical support is needed to respond to questions and prepare responses to unforeseen work that may be requested.

For further information:

- Calgary, Alberta (Canada) (Light-rail study), (403) 268-1612
- Connecticut Department of Transportation, Environmental Planning Division (Q Bridge Study), (860) 594-2939
- Federal Transit Administration Collaborative Decision-Making, (202) 366-4060
- Massachusetts Highway Department (Charles River Crossing Design Review Committee), (617) 973-7000
- Texas Department of Transportation (Ft. Worth study), (871) 370-6542

C. PROVIDING SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION AND ESTABLISHING METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

Public involvement is a two-way street. In order to participate effectively in transportation project development and planning, people need ways to both get information from an agency and give information back to it.

On the one hand, then, agencies need to provide attractive, eye-catching materials that convey the appropriate "message." Desktop publishing and ever-changing communication technologies offer agencies new, faster, and more varied ways to capture the public's interest and give them the information they need to understand what is being proposed. This variety allows agencies to tailor public information pieces to specific purposes, media, audiences, projects, or plans and to update them quickly and easily.

On the other hand, agencies need to offer people effective, easy ways to communicate so that the ideas and concerns of the community are heard and attended to.

The following section describes some techniques that help agencies provide information and establish communication with the public:

- Mailing lists;
- Public information materials;
- Key person interviews;
- Briefings;
- Video techniques;
- Telephone techniques;
- Media strategies; and
- Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers.

MAILING LISTS

What are mailing lists?

Computer technology has revolutionized the process of compiling and updating mailing lists—a staple of most public involvement programs. Simplicity, ease, flexibility, and speed now characterize the once-cumbersome process of maintaining and using collections of names of those affected by or interested in a project or plan—including organizations, residents, media, elected officials, abutters, agency personnel, interest groups, and others. Agencies use mailing lists throughout planning and project development to keep a thumb on the pulse of the community and other key people. Lists include addresses but may also include telephone and FAX numbers or other information to aid in contacting people in a variety of ways. Using mailing lists, a transportation agency reaches an audience with announcements of upcoming events, meeting invitations, newsletters, summary reports, and other information about its activities.

List size is affected by a number of factors, including stakeholder population and the scope of the project, study, or plan for which names are being collected. The Atlanta Regional Commission's Family of Partners has 1,200 names. Some organizations maintain larger lists; Portland, Oregon, Metro's list comprises 60,000 names. The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) retains an outside list-management firm to handle its large master list, while smaller, more frequently used lists are maintained in-house.

Why are they useful?

Mailing lists help an agency organize its public communications, particularly when lists are kept up-to-date on computer. New Jersey Transit, with approximately 1,000 names on its Monmouth–Ocean–Middlesex Counties mailing list, identifies names and addresses, group affiliation, municipality, county, facsimile number, and committee membership. It can assemble a mailing to specific groups or committees by using computerized search and sort capabilities. The master mailing list of the Portland, Oregon, Metro includes names gathered by several of its divisions. These lists are combined and sorted by computer to avoid duplicates when the agency wishes to contact the entire group.

Mailing lists demonstrate an agency's outreach efforts. A large mailing list shows that an agency has tried to reach many people. A list demonstrates that an agency has worked diligently to justify funding for a project or to involve or interest the public in its work.

Mailing lists allow agencies to provide updated information quickly. As agencies become more active in reaching out to communities, people expect to receive continual updates on meetings.

Mailing lists can focus on a targeted group of people. Those most affected by a proposal want to receive information on an agency's intentions and on the progress of the work. Special efforts should be made to include names of those who should be interested in what the agency is doing.

Computerization maximizes the flexibility and usefulness of mailing lists. From a database list, computers can generate mailing labels or customize the greeting in form letters. This "merging" of names with form letters allows personalization of each letter, rather than addressing a generic "Resident" or "To Whom it May Concern." Computers generate lists and sort according to specific criteria, such as zip codes. They also facilitate updates of information.

Computerized mailing lists form records of persons an agency has contacted. They can contain information gleaned from sign-in sheets, phone-call logs, and correspondence. New Jersey Transit uses its list as a record of meetings and events attended by individuals, as well as of their individual issues and concerns.

Agencies analyze mailing list information to evaluate programs. Agencies examine the effectiveness of a public involvement program by comparing the names on its mailing list with the names of people who have responded or participated. Areas where the population has not responded can be targeted for special attention.

Do they have special uses?

Mailing lists provide an off-the-shelf pool of potential committee and task force members, particularly if they comprise names of people who have signed in at meetings, called in to a hotline, or expressed interest in an issue—in other words, people who may want to serve in an advisory capacity. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**; **Collaborative Task Forces**; **Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies**; **Hotlines**.) In Georgia, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)—a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)—developed a Transportation Resource Bank of over 1,200 names of people who signed in at its planning meetings. For a subsequent major investment study, ARC contacted people on the list to develop a set of committee representatives with a variety of perspectives.

Agencies can reach all property owners who are affected by a project or program. New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) uses tax maps to identify holders of property within a certain distance of a project. The DOT then sends them mailings about the project and associated hearings.

Mailing lists are used as a basis for surveys. Larger lists are better in this respect, since they take a larger sample of a population. Lists comprising registered voters provide a random sample, while lists of people who are interested in a project define a self-selected group. A survey to this type of group is still useful, since the respondents are more likely to be well-informed. However, such a survey should not be regarded as statistically valid (i.e., it does not represent the opinion of a representative sample of the population). (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

How are mailing lists compiled?

Agency staff develops a list of people who want to receive information. A small, active list of people begins the process and then grows over time as more people become involved. Additions to a list are often keyed into agency actions or specific milestones in a project or planning effort.

People get on a list by signing in at a meeting. People also participate when they phone in comments or suggestions to an agency, if the agency makes a record of the caller's name and address. Agencies offer mail-in coupons in newsletters or local newspapers to encourage people to get information by joining the mailing list.

Mailing lists can and should be shared among offices within an agency and perhaps with other agencies and organizations. Outreach is enhanced as the number of names increases, and sharing information helps keep the costs of list maintenance reasonable. The Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC)—the Albany, New York, MPO—has assembled lists from other groups, including New York State DOT, New York State Thruway Authority, freight industry organizations, the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS), the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), the American Planning Association (APA), and Delta Nu Alpha (a fraternal organization of transportation professionals). For 10 projects along San Francisco's waterfront, the City established a shared mailing list of more than 3,000 participants with interests of individuals coded by project.

How are they organized and maintained?

The most basic task is to assess needs and expectations for the list. What information does an agency want to distribute? What methods will be used to package the information? How frequently will the list be used? How much effort can be put into its maintenance? What resources are available?

A second step is to structure the information to be maintained. On computer, each individual's information constitutes a separate record, which is organized in categories called fields. A basic set of fields might include:

- Name
- Street number
- Street name
- Post office
- State
- Zip code
- Municipality (often different from Post Office)
- County
- Phone number
- Facsimile number

Optional information could include:

- E-mail address
- Occupation
- Household size
- Adults in household
- Affiliation (government official, interest group, etc.)
- Meetings attended
- Mailings sent
- Statements or other responses made
- Membership on committees
- Source of information if names are an assemblage of other mailing lists

Some fields may remain blank for some individuals. Most records include only names and addresses. A new field may be added at any time when a mailing list is used for a specific purpose, such as keeping track of attendance at a particular meeting.

A third step is to gather names and addresses. A variety of information-gathering methods allows an agency to reach a large portion of the population. Organizations use hotlines to build their mailing lists by having callers leave names, addresses, phone numbers, and other useful pieces of information. (See **Hotlines**.) Agencies might work with an organization that reaches most or all of the population via services such as motor vehicle registration, voter registration, tax returns, or utility billing. The Minnesota DOT cooperates with utilities to send mailings out via utility bills. Albany's CDTC used the local phone book to identify stakeholders and interest groups for a survey of the freight community. The Portland, Oregon, Metro linked tax assessor's information and addresses for all property owners in the region to its geographic information system (GIS). Metro uses this program to inform people within a specific geographic area, municipality, street, or census tract.

A fourth step is to enter the data onto the list. This is a continuous process as new people attend meetings or use hotlines, addresses change, or an agency takes steps to broaden its constituency. Again, computerization greatly facilitates this process. Albany's CDTC and the San Diego Association of Governments send out return-mail postcards to people on its list. Recipients are asked to return the cards, updating the information if they wish to remain on the list. Those who do not return the card are dropped from the list, thus making it more cost-effective.

A fifth step is to use the list for mailings. A list can be printed out directly on envelopes or on labels for newsletters, announcements, and flyers. It can be merged with a form letter for personalized contact. Specialized lists may be developed from a master list by sorting the records according to a parameter within a single field. To conserve expenditures in agency staff time and energy, private services such as mailing houses can handle large mailings.

These steps constitute an ongoing process. As the list expands and changes, it can be reassessed for its value to the agency. New names and information are added to keep a list up-to-date. The Alaska DOT has kept a mailing list for 30 years. It includes members of the public but changes over time to reflect new elected officials and representatives from neighborhood and Alaskan native groups.

How are they used by agencies?

Agencies send out information in a variety of ways. General information, such as newsletters, meeting announcements, or invitations, can go out to an entire list. (See **Public Information Materials**.) When sending specialized reports and other documents, the Central Puget Sound RTA, the Southwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and Albany's CDTC all sort their lists to target specific stakeholders. For a transportation improvement program, an agency may send a summary to an entire mailing list, along with a notice that the complete report is available, while sending the full document to a selected group.

Agencies disseminate information and keep a record of interested parties. Agencies can keep records of comments received as well as personal profiles. Records of comments give agencies access to the opinions of a segment of their constituents. The San Diego, California, Association of Governments uses its mailing lists to keep track of the memberships of over 40 committees.

Agencies maintain a master list, with subsets to contact on specific issues. Agencies add names collected during all outreach activities and sort the list for people interested in a particular issue for a targeted mailing. In Washington State, the Central Puget Sound RTA maintains a master list of all names and a priority list of people with a greater level of responsibility. If an agency is about to make a presentation to the governing body of a town, people from that town can be selected to receive notices or invitations.

Who leads?

Agency staff leads in setting up a mailing list. The effort of building and maintaining mailing lists is often significant and requires the support and commitment of an agency's senior management.

Mailing lists need an organizer and caretaker to determine the fields to be included and to keep the list up-to-date. A skilled and creative clerical person with good computer skills and attention to detail can easily execute the work. Organizers of meetings and other public events can be enlisted to collect names and addresses of participants.

What are the costs?

Building and maintaining a large mailing list is a labor-intensive process that can be fairly expensive. Albany's CDTC allocates about 5 hours per week to maintenance of its database (approximately 900 names). Additional time is needed during peak periods when a large number of names is received or if a large mailing is underway. The San Diego Association of Governments dedicates approximately 10–15 staff hours per week to administration of its list (approximately 11,000 names). A Portland Metro staff person dedicates virtually all of her time to maintaining its 60,000-name mailing list.

Mailing lists are labor-saving devices, particularly if computerized. They allow an agency to contact many people at one time with individualized letters or other materials. They save staff time on phone calls. A well-organized, computerized list simplifies clerical tasks related to correspondence, which can lead to a reduced clerical workload and an associated cost reduction.

Equipment requirements are fairly modest. Most data management software packages can run on a desktop computer and are available for under $300. Data storage is an issue if a list becomes especially large, but a large list can be stored on a computer's hard drive or cartridge and backed up on floppy disks. Mailing labels or envelopes can be printed out on most standard printers.

Large lists incur significant mailing and printing costs, but there are economies of scale. A typical newsletter is cheaper to print after the first 1,000 copies. Bulk mail costs vary, depending on the number of pieces sent to each zip code. If an agency wants to blanket a community, newspaper inserts are a good alternative to bulk mailings. New Jersey Transit recently used newspaper inserts to distribute 50,000 newsletters to key communities in the Burlington–Gloucester major investment study area and 25,000 newsletters to its Monmouth–Ocean–Middlesex major investment study corridor. For smaller mailing lists, other options may be more attractive. Bulletins from San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) reach a list of about 500–600 businesses via facsimile machines.

How are mailing lists used with other techniques?

A mailing list is a basic building block of a good public involvement program. It allows an agency to stay in direct touch with people who have an interest in its planning and projects. Used periodically throughout a process to distribute information, mailing lists require and contribute to a record of people interested in transportation.

Mailing lists are used to structure information from other techniques for gathering names. These include hotlines, other telephone logs, and communications logs. (See **Hotlines**.)

Mailing lists are used to send out newsletters or other publications. Newsletters, pamphlets, or other printed matter update people on the progress and major milestones of a project or planning process. Announcements of public meetings, open houses, and other events are facilitated by a well-maintained mailing list. (See **Public Information Materials**.)

Mailing lists are a basis for on-line contacts with participants. Kansas City, Missouri's MPO, the Mid-America Regional Council, is developing its mailing list into a civic advisory network to reach people on the Internet as well as through postal services. (See **On-line Services**.)

Mailing lists help set up civic advisory committees or other groups. The New Jersey DOT, the Atlanta Regional Commission, and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission in Pittsburgh use mailing lists to look for potential members of Community Advisory Committees, focus groups, or ad hoc task forces. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**; **Collaborative Task Forces**; **Focus Groups**; **Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies**.)

Mailing lists help in administering community surveys. Washington State DOT has used its mailing lists to distribute surveys. The Portland, Oregon, Metro mailed a survey to 400,000 people (60 percent of households in the metro area) and received 20,000 returns, a 5-percent response rate. As part of its Transportation Policy Plan Study, Pennsylvania DOT sent out a survey attached to its newsletter and received approximately 400 responses. It should be noted that mailing lists are usually not a statistically valid method of surveying. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

Mailing lists help in setting up speakers' bureaus. The Atlanta Regional Commission has used its mailing list to develop a speakers' bureau that consists of a number of volunteers who meet with interested groups to discuss transportation issues. This "Family of Partners" (a concept also being explored by Georgia DOT) was developed using ARC's list of meeting sign-ins. (See **Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers**.)

What are the drawbacks?

The principal drawback is the amount of time needed to set up a list. This time commitment entails a significant labor cost. Postage and printing costs for large lists also put great strain on a budget.

To be cost-effective, mailing lists must be kept current. Albany's CDTC and the San Diego Association of Governments send return postcards to help weed out names of people who are not interested in being kept on the lists.

Mailing lists can exclude a segment of the population. Traditionally-underserved populations, such as immigrants or poor people, are particularly vulnerable to being excluded. These people frequently do not come into contact with an agency until a direct impact becomes an issue. Special efforts can broaden the reach of an agency's mailing list. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**; **People with Disabilities**.)

Trading names and addresses with other agencies is an issue. Some people are concerned about their privacy when agencies trade their addresses. Agencies need to inform people that lists will not be used for commercial purposes but for keeping people abreast of recent developments.

Mailing lists are not a statistically-valid basis for surveys. Agencies should be cautious when using data received from surveys, particularly those from small lists. A list built from sign-in sheets and committee memberships represents a self-selected group, not a methodically-selected random sample of the population. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

Sometimes agencies rely excessively on mailing lists to maintain contact with the public. Often, the public treats bulk mailings as junk mail and ignores them. Agencies need to remember that mailings cannot replace direct contact through meetings, focus groups, drop-in centers, etc.

Are mailing lists flexible?

Mailing lists are applied to a multitude of tasks, including the building of committees, focus groups, and task forces, distribution of surveys, and of course the distribution of notices, newsletters, and reports. They can be tailored to contain virtually any informational category. Lists can be sorted to make sub-lists of people based on location, occupation, issues, interests, or other criteria.

When are they used most effectively?

Mailing lists are used throughout a process and for many purposes, but they should be linked to other public involvement activities. A mailing list is meaningless unless an agency has newsletters, announcements, invitations, or other printed materials to send to the public. (See **Public Information Materials**.)

For further information:

- Alaska Department of Transportation, Juneau, Alaska, (907) 465-6971
- Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, Georgia, (404) 364-2575
- City of San Francisco Chief Administrative Office, (415) 554-5782
- Mid-America Regional Council, Kansas City, Missouri, (816) 474-4240
- New Jersey Transit, Newark, New Jersey, (201) 491-8077
- San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, California, (619) 595-5300
- Washington State Department of Transportation, Olympia, Washington, (206) 705-7958

PUBLIC INFORMATION MATERIALS

What are public information materials?

Public information materials are materials that provide information about a transportation investment that is underway or in the planning stage. They are usually printed but sometimes are video or tactile. Public information materials are an essential form of communication in any public involvement process. The substance of the materials can be factual, present a point of view, or in some instances be legally required and thus need special drafting.

Public information materials communicate quickly. They are often visually appealing, and many need not include a great deal of detail. Some materials are quite small and contain a single item of information, like a logo for a metropolitan planning effort or a telephone number for more information. Some are geared to individual recipients, while others such as billboards reach out to a mass audience. Public information materials can summarize large amounts of information simply and in straightforward fashion. A sample range of public information materials includes:

- Advertisements—display and legal notices
- Badges and buttons
- Billboards
- Brochures
- Display boards
- Electronic media
- Fact sheets
- Fast-food placemats
- Fliers
- Grocery bags
- Magnets
- Models
- News articles
- Newsletters
- Newspaper inserts and articles
- Notices
- On-line home page
- Posters
- Press releases
- Progress bulletins
- Public service announcements (paper, video, radio)
- Slides and overheads
- Summaries of reports
- Utility bill stuffers
- Videotapes

Why are they useful?

Public information materials provide basic information about a process, project, or document in a fast, concise, and clear way. They often summarize or capsulize the overall thrust of a process. They provide information on what to do to respond, comment, get more involved, or get on a mailing list for a project or study. (See **Mailing Lists**.)

Public information materials are an easy way to update information periodically for people who aren't actively involved in an issue but who are curious or interested about its status. Often this is a very large group with fewer information needs than those who are intensely involved and need information frequently and in more depth.

Public information materials make it easy for people to find information. They are widely distributed to many people for maximum effect. Public information materials increase the chances that people actually get the information, because distribution can be extensive and less reliance is placed on press releases, word of mouth, or memory.

Information can be presented in graphic, non-technical, and non-verbal ways. Renderings, simplified diagrams, models, and cartoons communicate information different ways. An Idaho Department of Transportation (DOT) poster featured a cartoon map of a construction project. San Francisco's Municipal Transit System (MUNI) used models to show how key stations would be adapted to accommodate disabled people.

Public information materials target a broad public beyond those who attend meetings. They expand the number and geographic distribution of those who can become informed and participate. (See **Media Strategies**; **Improving Meeting Attendance**.) The city of Worcester, Massachusetts, distributed pin-on buttons saying "Route 146 and a Piker, too!" to promote a new turnpike interchange and highway expansion project; the pins were distributed throughout the region. As part of its "Open Market Plan," the Rochester, New York, Telephone Company inserted information and a survey with a billing to all of its 340,000 residential customers.

Public information materials can be tailored to a specific aspect of a project or plan. They can focus on a geographic area, a particular mode of transportation, or one element of a plan, such as evaluation criteria. The Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Council of Governments produced brochures on specific transportation modes, including one on bicycle access.

Public information materials can be fun, interesting, and attention-getting. They engage people casually. Under its "One Percent for the Arts" program, the Regional Transit Project in Seattle, Washington, used a host of amusing, non-technical materials during its planning process, including posters, badges, public service announcements based on interesting conversations, transit music, and video art performances. TV and newspaper ads highlighted the transit planning activities underway by using a character called "avoidance man," an everyday citizen who attempted to ignore messages about the worsening state of transportation in the Puget Sound Region.

Do they have special uses?

Public information materials help people decide to participate. Attractive, well-illustrated, easy-to-understand materials make it easy for people to comprehend a process or a proposal. If they highlight ways for people to participate, community members may decide to get involved.

Public information materials get children involved. Games, placemats, and posters have been used to attract children to transportation projects. The Denver, Colorado, Regional Transit District created coloring books to teach children about light rail and safety. Amtrak and the Chicago Rapid Transit Authority prepared paper engineer's hats for children. Amtrak distributed placemats with drawings that challenged children to find an engineer and other rail personnel hidden in a crowd. The Federal Aviation Administration prepared a connect-the-dots game and an activities book highlighting the life of the first black airplane captain, August Martin. For Portland, Maine, Comprehensive Transportation Study, materials were sent home with elementary and junior high school children.

Public information materials can be multilingual. Extensive or even moderate use of multilingual materials can create goodwill and demonstrate that an agency is trying to reach out to all groups. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.) In Denver, Colorado, billboards in English and Spanish were used to inform people about an upcoming light rail project.

Public information materials encourage people to seek more information. The design of a piece can attract attention and encourage questioning. It can become a symbol of a process or project.

Who participates?

Nearly everyone can use public information materials. An emphasis on visual presentations makes it possible to reach people who are busy and have only a few moments to catch the message; they appreciate concise informative messages. The visual element makes it possible to reach people who may have difficulties in reading, such as the elderly and children. Visual information should be supplemented by materials designed to reach those with sight impairments. (See **People with Disabilities**.)

Even technical and planning staff can benefit from the brevity of public information materials. In the New England Transportation Initiative (NETI) regional study, a newsletter describing alternative investment scenarios was often used and cited by the Policy Committee. Although the full document of the scenarios was relatively short, the two-page description had icons for visual cues, making it easier to read and comprehend.

And how?

People read or view public information materials in a variety of locations. They read it in print, see it on television, or hear it on radio. They review brochures or other printed material at home. They view displays in public buildings or at meetings. Libraries, state DOT offices, transit stations, or city halls are good locations to lend videotapes, provide summaries of reports, and distribute other public information materials. In San Francisco, information on transit service and joint development activities was placed in prominent locations on turnstiles.

People request information materials. In instances where wide distribution is impractical, agencies can make materials available on request. This is particularly true of reports, report summaries, slide shows, or videos. Pennsylvania DOT produced several videotapes to lend to residents on request. (See **Video Techniques**.)

Community residents can participate in preparing public information materials. Members of the Citizen Planning Committee of the San Francisco, California, Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) wrote articles for a newsletter for a joint development planning study newsletter.

Public information materials reach people at restaurants and stores. Restaurant or fast-food placemats with information about a project are seen by people who may not read news articles about transportation projects or listen to public service announcements. The Portland, Oregon, Tri-Met combined grocery shopping with information about transit. Working with a grocery vendor, Tri-Met printed messages on grocery bags, printed its logo on grocery advertisements, stuffed a flier in each grocery bag, and handed out magnets printed with a logo at the cash register.

Public information materials show that an agency understands and values communication with people other than technicians and bureaucrats. For the Central Artery North Area project in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, the Massachusetts Highway Department produced a two-sided color poster, "Charlestown in 1999." The poster described community development goals, illustrated by an artist's view of neighborhood development after the highway was depressed. This poster touched lightly upon the engineering feats needed to depress the highway, reflecting the interests and concerns of the community about the future.

Who leads production of public information materials?

Experienced staff with communication, public involvement, desktop publishing, graphics, and writing skills lead the production process. Staff members need knowledge of community issues. The leader must be able to translate technical information into terms that lay people can easily understand. Denver, Colorado's transit district uses non-engineering personnel to direct the public information process to be certain that technical issues are stated in simple, easy-to-understand language.

Other agency staff get involved, including the public relations staff. Policy staff members review material for consistency with an agency's mission and other activities. People skilled in graphic design and production are key to well-prepared information materials. To save money, people skilled in desktop publishing can make changes and updates quickly and efficiently. A desktop-published product usually is more effective than a simple, word-processed piece, because it incorporates graphics, columns, and illustrations in an attractive and easy-to-comprehend way.

Private companies and institutions can assist in the production process. This may involve donating billboard or exhibit space, paying for printing, producing public service announcements (PSAs), or helping get editorials printed or aired. During the Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Commission's Vision 2020, local business and civic leaders wrote seven guest editorials for the area's biggest newspaper.

How do agencies use public information materials?

Public information materials can test concepts or policies for agencies. A fact sheet on a proposed policy position generates comments and objections. Agencies use public information materials to explain a policy position or invite public comments. By presenting information in an uncluttered way, without a great deal of detail and technical information about options and alternatives, an agency's message becomes clearer. The NETI Policy Committee issued a newsletter asking people to comment on potential policy shifts in transportation infrastructure investment, airport planning, and growth management planning, among other issues, before it voted to adopt any new policies.

Public information materials can focus on issues that affect a given area or subarea, highlighting concerns about alignment, noise, travel time, etc. For Boston's Central Artery/Tunnel project, a project-wide newsletter included neighborhood-specific news bulletins to keep people up-to-date with local happenings.

Public information materials improve awareness of a planning process. They provide information on how to get involved. The Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation updates people on the North Central Expressway reconstruction project through a quarterly newsletter.

Public information materials offer opportunities for private-sector involvement. Public-private partnerships are forged through donations of billboard spaces, newspaper inserts, or utility bill stuffers to help reach more people with information about a process.

Agencies form useful links with the media. Newspapers, especially those in local communities, are not as constrained for space as radio and television and are thus more likely to print articles, graphics, newspaper inserts, and calendar listings. Progress bulletins and press releases give reporters ideas and factual information for articles about a project. (See **Media Strategies**.) In Boston, a neighborhood newspaper periodically printed articles and graphics submitted by the Massachusetts Highway Department to prepare people for upcoming meetings.

What do they cost?

The cost of public information materials varies widely, depending on complexity and volume. Small ones, such as brochures, fliers, or newsletters, are relatively inexpensive to produce, even on a large scale. Materials are expensive to produce if they require four-color printing, large display panels, models, or billboards. Costs are less per unit in volume printings: not counting staff time, printing 1,500 copies of a newsletter might cost 35 cents each, while 5,000 copies might cost less than 20 cents each.

Desktop publishing produces public information materials relatively inexpensively. Brochures, one-page progress bulletins, and fact sheets with simple graphics can be produced on a personal computer. Use of color grabs attention and enhances the attractiveness of a public information piece but also increases the costs to produce it. The Maryland DOT produced a five-page booklet describing the State's approach to a program of transportation enhancements. In a simple, straightforward way, the booklet provides details on a relatively new and unknown program, along with telephone numbers for more information. The Iowa DOT's "Need Answers?" pamphlet has staff names and telephone numbers accompanied by a map of districts.

Private-sector donations cut costs, as do cooperative efforts with other agencies. Private organizations may distribute printed information materials in grocery bags or utility bill inserts. Media organizations may run meeting notices and PSAs free. Transit agencies may display free advertisements in transit vehicles. Literature might be distributed at toll booths. Billing agencies might include information materials with their mailings.

Costs are incurred for staff time spent in production. Written information, such as PSAs and news articles, takes time to produce. Designing and developing graphics can be expensive, and the process from concept to development to camera-ready can be lengthy. Outside consultants are sometimes needed for major items such as displays or models.

Costs are closely related to the visual quality of public information materials, but quality is crucial. A piece that is visually bland, cluttered, dull to read, or otherwise unattractive obscures the message. As in advertising, attracting people and getting them to read or look at materials requires eye-catching, good-looking designs. The Arizona DOT's Mt. Lemmon highway reconstruction project in Tucson used the slogan "Lemmon Aid" in bright yellow on black in its eye-catching brochures and posters.

Costs are incurred in distribution. Bulk rates are available to help reduce mailing costs. An alternative is door-to-door distribution by volunteers. (See **Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers**; **Drop-in Centers**.) The Houston, Texas, transit agency reaches apartment dwellers by hanging materials on their doorknobs.

How is production organized?

Public information materials are conceived at the beginning of a plan or project. They can be oriented to support key goals and milestones of the participation and technical planning processes. A time line for production and distribution is prepared. Materials are planned to coincide with major events and give periodic updates throughout the program. It is often a good idea to schedule periodic communication throughout the process for general updating or "keeping in touch" with people in the community. Scheduled dissemination helps remind agencies of activities that should be communicated to the public.

The target audience is identified. In most cases, the general public will be the recipient. However, an agency may need to target and customize materials to different groups. A local community heavily affected by a proposed project may need special publications or explanations to address its concerns. Soliciting funding for specific purposes requires materials targeted to business or industrial interests.

General information about a process or project is made available. Information that will remain constant throughout a process or project is made available for repeated use. Pennsylvania DOT videotapes illustrating the planning process are shown at meetings to newcomers who need to know the overall background before they know the details.

Public information materials highlight an event or milestone, such as the start-up of process, a major meeting, the release of a report, the start of a new phase, or the conclusion of a project. The Wisconsin DOT's first newsletter at the start of long-range planning introduced the in-depth study process and the people involved. The Puget Sound Regional Council in Seattle, Washington, mails a newsletter several times a year to review events and announce upcoming dates of meetings.

Public information materials can survey a wide audience. Typically used in printed materials, survey materials describe facts and include a tear-off sheet to be sent to an agency. They also may list a toll-free or local telephone number to call with comments or a FAX number to encourage immediate response. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**; **Media Strategies**.) The Little Rock, Arkansas, Metroplan MPO issued its report summary as a newspaper insert and included a tear-off form for reactions and comments through phone, mail, or FAX. Dallas, Texas, Area Rapid Transit mails comment cards to people in the community to solicit input on how DART is doing in a number of areas.

Updates and progress bulletins can be disseminated periodically. The Little Rock, Arkansas, Metroplan used progress bulletins to keep people informed of current issues. San Francisco's BART periodically sent FAXes to 500 to 600 businesses to keep them abreast of happenings in its joint development planning process. The Orange County, California, transit district sent “Fast FAXes” to 100 companies for immediate information. New Mexico’s Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments updates information in an annual report it distributes to the public.

Press releases serve as input to future media coverage. Reporters who are following the process may use each new detail of a proposal as the basis of a story. Basic facts are provided to help reporters assemble articles and avoid mistakes or misleading information that could cause difficulty or awkwardness for an agency. (See **Media Strategies**.)

How are they used with other techniques?

Public information materials are used with almost any other technique of public involvement. They give basic information for open houses and open hearings, media strategies, on-line services, drop-in centers, and briefings. (See **Open Houses/Open Forum Hearings**; **Media Strategies**; **On-line Services**; **Drop-in Centers**; **Briefings**.) They are used to announce meetings, charrettes, conferences, workshops, and retreats. (See **Charrettes**; **Public Meetings/Hearings**; **Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats**.) They contribute names for mailing lists by soliciting interest from community residents. The Seattle area’s Puget Sound Regional Council produced a videotape that was made into a public service announcement and shown repeatedly. (See **Video Techniques**.)

Transportation fairs are excellent places to distribute public information materials, particularly fun items such as buttons, magnets, posters, and literature. (See **Transportation Fairs**.) A Washington, D.C., ridesharing organization supplied many giveaways at its transportation fair.

Games and contests mesh with public information in creative ways. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) held an art contest for children on the theme of “Flying Saves Lives.” The FAA also published a bilingual book, “A Visit to the Airport—Un Viaje al Aeropuerto,” that included several games, some also in two languages. (See **Games and Contests**.)

Public information materials reach out to minority, ethnic, and low-income groups. Reaching out with basic information and facts presented with visuals brings people into the process who might otherwise feel uncomfortable participating. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.) The Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission prepared illustrated glossaries of transportation terms to help people understand the planning process. Boston’s Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority prepared a transit design kit that showed drawings of different transit vehicles, answered basic questions about the study, and was printed in Spanish and English.

What are the drawbacks?

Public information materials require wide distribution to reach a maximum number of people. They are an essential part of any public involvement program. Failure to provide periodic basic information can severely hurt a public involvement program and could cripple a project.

Finding ways to get information out takes creativity. Demand on staff time and resources can be intensive. Staff members must know ways people can obtain information about a variety of topics. They should be skilled in examining needs and producing appropriate materials to meet them.

Published or written materials are not usually interactive. Public information materials cannot substitute for other forms of public involvement, because they are one-way communication, unless a mail-back coupon is included. People who see them must take further, individualized steps to get more information or to participate. An agency should make the steps simple to take, and respond promptly when community people call. (See **On-line Services**; **Computer Presentations and Simulations**; **Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks**.)

Events can overtake public information materials. Needs can be determined by default, even with prior planning. An agency might have to prepare public information materials to respond to editorial criticism, counter negative publicity, compensate for difficult-to-read technical reports, or respond to issues that have arisen naturally during the project. In Denver, Colorado, the transit agency broke its long-standing rule of not allowing advertising on shuttle buses in order to promote businesses affected by the transit line construction and inform people about the project.

Production time is significant if materials are to be done well. Production costs can be high, depending on levels of detail and numbers of illustrations to be included. Increased volume of printed matter also raises costs, but unit costs diminish as volume increases. Producing a small number of customized materials is expensive and labor-intensive.

Public information materials may be perceived as public relations and not public involvement. Materials that are too general and add no new substantial information are often regarded negatively or ignored. Public suspicions may also result from high-end advertising agency slickness. Many people feel it is inappropriate for public agencies to spend a lot of money on fancy public information material when other efforts or programs are being cut back. To gain optimal response, materials should be straight-forward in design and content, especially if input from participants is desired and if it needs to be made clear that plans or projects are not yet finished.

Public information materials may fall flat if the information is too technical and difficult for lay people to grasp. Where possible, agencies should avoid intimidating or technical language and formats. If materials are not comprehensible to an average person, good will is lost, and potential participants may become suspicions about an agency's motives. An outside person can be asked to review the piece to make sure it is understandable to the average person and not too technical or obscure.

Information is prepared in a form that will reach the target audience. Press releases might not reach the intended audience, because they have been placed in an inappropriate section of a newspaper or relegated to a "lame duck" spot on a newscast. Pamphlets containing technical material may not be read by local residents. Brochures or flyers that are discarded as litter could have a negative effect on the community's perception of an agency. To counter these problems, an agency designs materials for specific uses and audiences and chooses the appropriate distribution technique.

Are they flexible?

Public information materials can be sent through the mail to a project mailing list or an acquired list, or be inserted in another group's mailing. They can be included in bills sent out by public or private organizations. (See **Mailing Lists**.)

Public information materials can be sent electronically. They can be put on a home page to be available on-line. (See **On-line Services**.) Public service announcements provide information via radio or television. They can include announcements of meetings, due dates for comments, recent activities, upcoming events, and more. (See **Media Strategies**.) The Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Commission's Vision 2020 process used PSAs to inform people of the opportunity to voice their opinions through questionnaires inserted in Sunday newspapers.

Public information materials can be used in displays. They can be positioned to be seen from a sidewalk, highway, or rail line—for example, on a billboard. They can be illustrations on window cards. They can be posted in interiors of transit vehicles on car cards. The Houston, Texas, Transit Authority uses cards in its buses to announce upcoming events.

Public information materials can be distributed at meetings. They help get a meeting started or as a basis for a presentation or discussion. They can be exhibits, videos, fact sheets, slides and overheads, models, or progress bulletins. (See **Video Techniques**; **Computer Presentations and Simulations**.)

Timing is flexible for most public information materials, except meeting notices, newspaper deadlines, and materials relevant to public hearings and official comment periods, where exact timing is crucial. Staff commitments for producing public information materials is flexible except for deadlines for production, printing, mailing, or presentation.

The format for producing public information is flexible. Options relate to individual budgets, information dissemination needs, topics, and audiences. A variety of types of public information materials can be selected. Many public involvement programs mix and match materials.

When are they used most effectively?

An overall strategy for public information materials is developed early in a process, before beginning to involve community residents. At that point, an agency can strategize about what audiences need to be targeted, what types of materials are needed, and when they will be most effective. General materials on, for instance, the nature of the project serve as background information that remains relevant throughout the process. Materials can highlight important events or decisions. Timing must be carefully considered, and materials scheduled so they are available in advance of an event, meeting, close of comment period, or articles in the media. (See **Media Strategies**.)

For further information:

- Arizona Department of Transportation, Phoenix, Arizona, (602) 255-8143
- Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, Georgia (404) 364-2575
- Boston Central Artery/Tunnel project, Boston, Massachusetts (617) 973-7000
- Denver Transit Authority, Denver, Colorado, (303) 299-2401
- Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames, Iowa, (515) 239-1137
- Maryland Department of Transportation, Baltimore, Maryland, (410) 859-7367
- Puget Sound Regional Council, Seattle, Washington, (206) 464-7090
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (412) 391-5591

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

What is a key person interview?

A key person interview is a one-on-one talk about a specific topic or issue with an individual recognized or designated as a community leader. A key person might be an opinion leader, a spokesperson for the community, an elected official, the head of an organization, or a representative of local media.

The main purpose is to obtain information. While basic information is provided to set the stage for discussion, interviews are designed primarily to elicit the interviewee's reactions and suggestions. The goal is to learn about the person's views and constituency, and his/her perceptions of the agency, the planning or development process, and the political setting in which work is being done. Key individuals are likely to have knowledge, wisdom, and insight that can help an agency. In Texas, during the South Oak Cliff study by Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), key person interviews led to a delineation of significant issues within the community. A bond issue that had major support was being implemented slowly. Though not directly related to DART's work on the transit proposal, it was clearly identifiable as an issue.

Interviews start early in the process to learn about the area and the issues and concerns to be addressed. An agency may ask for names of other individuals who should be contacted for interviews or be involved in the participation process. It may want guidance on organizing a public involvement process that includes essential, interested people, and that reaches out and includes people traditionally underrepresented.

Key person interviews also are held just prior to decision-making. The Maryland Transit Administration found that positions evolved from beginning to end of a study and thus began to hold interviews near the end of a process but before decisions were made.

Customarily, interviews are face-to-face events. Frequently, a key person feels more comfortable if an interview takes place on "home turf" such as his/her office or neighborhood. Although usually conducted in person, key person interviews are also done on the telephone. (See **Telephone Techniques**.)

Why are such interviews useful?

Information is transmitted informally outside of a larger meeting that may be inhibiting. Key people often provide more detail on political or emotional aspects of an issue that are difficult to discuss in a public meeting. Liaison staff for a master plan study in Boston's South End interviewed community and business leaders to learn about potential developments that would not have been revealed in a large public setting. Interviews also elicited input about ongoing concerns to help create a vision of the character of redevelopment for the area.

Interviews help identify issues, concerns, and desired agendas. They are helpful in rapidly getting details on the community and in understanding residents' priorities. They also help establish points that must be covered in meetings.

Key person interviews help target potential participants in the process. They identify stakeholders who may be involved and interested in a project or proposal.

Interviews elicit ideas for structuring a public involvement program. They help set a framework for discussion by identifying potential members for an advisory committee or meeting places perceived as neutral. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) The Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Commission received advice on structuring its public involvement program from its key person interviews. For a Newark subway rehabilitation project, interviews led New Jersey Transit to set up several station task forces rather than a single advisory committee, as originally proposed. The Newark interviews also identified safety as the overwhelming issue of community concern, which led to changes in the work undertaken by consultants.

Key person interviews enhance an agency's credibility. They show interest in the community and in understanding the concerns of a leader's constituents. Conducting interviews sets a positive tone for subsequent public involvement activities.

Do they have special uses?

Key person interviews are useful when a project affects a small group in a unique way—for example, a block of businesses, a neighborhood, or a specific institution. The group may be concerned about impacts of a proposal and welcome early contact. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.)

Interviews are a good way to introduce agency personnel to the community before beginning a public participation process.

One-on-one interviews can defuse a potentially confrontational situation. Parties to disagreements want to be heard. Listening to key individuals' views is rewarding to both parties, as well as to the larger community. This is particularly important if the key person has been antagonistic in the past, since it enhances an agency's understanding of opposing viewpoints and gets them stated more clearly for the record.

Who participates? And how?

Key people are individuals who work with or represent other people. They are crucial in understanding a constituency. Key people include community group presidents, officers, former officers, and representatives. They can be elected officials, respected people involved in community activities, and officers or active members of clubs, agencies, organizations, and interest groups. Key people can be active business people and practicing professionals, or representatives of professional societies, such as chapters of the American Institute of Architects and the American Public Transportation Association. The Metropolitan Council in Minnesota interviewed the Minority Media Coalition by telephone to find out key issues in the minority community prior to a larger meeting to discuss overall media strategy. It is important to note, however, that in some areas such as minority communities, American Indian areas, small towns, and rural settings, opinion leaders are likely *not* to be office-holders. In these areas, an agency should pay special attention to finding out who the real leaders are. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.)

A key person meets with an interviewer via telephone or face-to-face.

Usually, the key person chooses the interview site. This may be a home or office, or the location may be neutral to both parties. Informal interviews can be held over coffee or lunch. The choice of setting should reflect potential issues of security and confidentiality.

An on-site interview helps people point out specific issues. In the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) Replacement/Transit Improvement Study, agency staff talked with key community people on-site in Dudley Square, a busy transit node and the focal point of the study. Community leaders pointed out specific locations of concern about traffic, pedestrian crossings, and land development. (See **Site Visits**.)

How do agencies use these interviews?

Interviews demonstrate that an agency wants to learn about the issues. This is particularly true if an agency seeks out key people early in a process. Credibility is also enhanced if an agency seeks advice on design of a public involvement program. For the State Route 15 Vision Study in San Diego, California, the City Heights Community Development Corporation conducted interviews with agency officials, opinion leaders, residents, and others to help plan the highway's future. The interviews were useful not only for finding out about the issues but also for broadening the list of potential contacts.

Key person interviews are a quick, personal way to learn a neighborhood's concerns. They help identify players such as elected officials, other agencies, opinion leaders, and other groups, as well as revealing issues and interests in a project or plan.

Interviews help identify the "real" actors in a process. Often, they are the fastest way to find out who in the community is perceived as credible, who is difficult to communicate with, and who is a potential ally.

Through interviews, an agency finds out what key people think of its policies. The Little Rock, Arkansas, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) used interviews to discover the degree to which past policies were out of favor. As a result, its Vision 2020 plan reflected the need to replace past policies with proposed new strategies.

Key people help develop a list of contacts who can distribute information. Interviews help build a network of critical people to contact. (See **Mailing Lists**.) They even assist in locating the best bulletin boards for advertising meetings and opportunities for participation.

Interviews with key people establish lines of communication between community members and agencies. Local people contact their leaders to obtain information or to register opinions, concerns, and complaints. This may fit with traditional methods of quick and easy communication. (See **Improving Meeting Attendance**.)

Making one-to-one contact helps break down barriers that might prevent sharing information and opinions. The Dane County Regional Planning Agency in Madison, Wisconsin, learned about the concerns of many groups through individual key person interviews.

Who conducts key person interviews?

Staff members usually conduct key person interviews. The staff person conducting a meeting should be comfortable with one-on-one contact, personable, open, a good listener, good at probing for details, and able to respond to key questions.

Sometimes senior staff are more appropriate. On certain occasions, senior agency personnel need to meet with key people. For example, it might be more appropriate and effective for a senior official rather than a junior-level staffer to meet with the vice president of a major corporation. The head of the Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Commission talks with key business leaders on a regular basis. The director of the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, MPO holds regular visits with key people in the media.

Sometimes a well-briefed outsider is the appropriate person to contact ethnic or minority members or polarized groups. The interviewer must be well-briefed on issues important to the community and to the person being interviewed. (See **Ethnic, Minority, & Low-income Groups**; **Negotiation & Mediation**.)

What do they cost?

Costs vary, but interviews can be relatively cheap if the work is local. Staff time is intensive and the most expensive item. It is particularly significant if a large number of key people from various locations are involved and travel is extensive. Also, long-distance telephone calls add quickly to the costs.

Costs are closely tied to the number of interviews conducted. A sampling of 10–20 leaders is effective for certain purposes, while a more broad-based outreach may necessitate 100 or more interviews.

How are they organized?

An initial step is identifying the key people in a community. It is important to undertake a wide range of efforts to learn who the real leaders are, particularly in minority and ethnic communities. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.) One approach is to use indirect methods; for example,

- Review old and current mailing lists;
- Review newspaper clippings;
- Review meeting notes from related projects or earlier planning processes;
- Review impact reports, environmental documents, and project-related testimony;
- Get copies of sign-in sheets from meetings held by others;
- Observe neighborhood meetings for other issues/projects;
- Talk to people knowledgeable about local leadership; and
- Ask around at professional association meetings.

A more direct means to build a list of names is linked-chain research or personal contact and networking. In this approach, people are asked to name leaders, and the process continues until nominations repeat earlier names and the agency is reasonably confident most key participants have been found. Some initial ways to do this by telephone include:

- Contacting local officials;
- Asking action groups and churches who the respected leaders are;
- Asking neighborhood groups and agencies who the respected community leaders are;
- Contacting friends who live in the area or consultants who have done work in the area; and
- Sending out a "community audit" survey that includes a question on community leadership.

Interviews are arranged in several ways. To set up an interview, an agency staffer can establish initial contact by telephone. Ideally, an interview is face-to-face and at a time convenient to the person. This may be after work hours, since many people find it difficult to meet during the normal work day. In Dallas, DART always conducts key person interviews as informally as possible so that the person feels comfortable. A letter of invitation may be sent if someone is particularly difficult to reach or if a formal tone is desired. Often, a follow-up confirmation call is useful and courteous.

It is often important to meet key people in their own community. Frequently, key people view their neighborhoods as neutral, comfortable, and non-threatening places. (See **Non-traditional Meeting Places and Events**.) The Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Study (PACTS) conducted interviews in key people's offices on the impacts of a proposed connector on a school and county jail along the alignment.

Many interviews are conducted by telephone. Phone interviews are very informal and immediate, but less personal. They sometimes are done while the key person is at work and can be very focused. (See **Telephone Techniques**.) Although phone interviews lack the personal contact of face-to-face talk, they are easier to do impromptu. They are often revealing, because the call seems more casual, immediate, and unrehearsed. A face-to-face meeting encourages better preparation, perhaps by consulting with others. During project development on the I–93/Route 1 interchange in Charlestown, Massachusetts, agency staff regularly called key people in the community to report project events, then to converse about their activities and reactions to the highway project's current status.

The purpose and topic of the interview is communicated in advance. The general topic is introduced immediately. The interviewer stresses the importance and goal of the interview and states that several key people are being interviewed. This lets the interviewee know that his/her ideas will be considered along with others. It is useful to explain that the agency wants to listen and learn rather than lecture on the proposed project or process. A short description of the planning effort with maps, drawings, or photos is useful, along with brief written materials.

An interview begins with stating a specific proposal or issue. Details should be available in case the interviewee requests them. A series of questions prepared by the agency might be the next step. An interview may be informal and free-form, with a brief statement of a proposal, followed by questions and answers that guide the interview. The interviewer makes it clear that the opinions expressed are primarily for the agency's internal use in planning and project development.

An interviewer should be able to piece together connections and links that make up the mosaic of relationships within the community. An agency should avoid alienating potential participants or people who have views that might not be fully understood.

The interviewer documents the interview in writing. Documentation frequently maintains the anonymity of the interviewee. At times, it is important to be able to cite the interview as authoritative, but permission should be obtained before quoting people who have been interviewed. To maintain anonymity, individual interviews can be summarized with other interviews. In summaries, the key people's names may be listed, but most comments are not attributed to specific individuals. Interviews for the Portland, Maine, I–295 Connector were summarized according to several themes: comments on transportation issues in general and pros and cons about the proposed connector. Only when it was essential to identify the person who made a statement—such as a concern about the alignment's effect on a specific property—were ideas attributed to individuals.

Telephone numbers are exchanged. The key person should be made aware of the desirability of frequent contact and an agency's willingness to respond to calls. To enhance contact, an agency can compile a list of interviewees' work and home phone numbers and FAX numbers, if available and if people are willing to take calls at home. The goal is to demonstrate accessibility and the need for key people to call when they want to deliver opinions and comments.

Follow-up is essential. Depending on the intensity of the planning process and schedule, weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly follow-up contacts, either by telephone or face-to-face, are critical. Follow-up keeps key people and agency staff up-to-date on what is happening. Follow-up can be based on initial interviews early in the process to create and maintain a channel of communication. In Dallas, the DART community affairs staff regularly contacts key people—by visiting, telephoning, or sending information—to keep them up-to-date and knowledgeable about the agency's work.

How are they used with other techniques?

Key person interviews help identify participants. Interviews with leaders help identify potential members of a neighborhood planning council. They help increase and improve outreach to traditionally underserved groups, ethnic groups, minorities, elderly, and children. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.) A civic advisory committee or task force can grow from suggestions made in leader interviews. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**; **Collaborative Task Forces**.) In a transit study in Burlington, Vermont, representatives of a new civic advisory committee were identified through interviews.

Interviews can help set goals and objectives for a task. A civic planning committee working with San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) on a joint development project conducted interviews with the heads of newly-formed groups to help determine the extent and goals of the organization and its constituency.

What are the drawbacks?

Key people may not represent the total range of community values. Interviews must be used with other techniques that help validate the information gleaned from the interviews. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

A variety of methods to reach people are essential to obtain a full range of opinions. Heavy reliance on meeting notes and sign-in sheets from public meetings tell an agency who the visible public leaders are, but key people who work behind the scenes are easily missed.

Key person interviews do not replace direct talks with interested or affected groups. Such interviews do not substitute for direct public involvement.

Community members may be alienated if their key people are not interviewed. If some people are misidentified as key people, community residents may accuse the agency of ignorance or malice. In Portland, Maine, a school principal identified as a key person turned out not to be as knowledgeable and helpful as had been anticipated. In Dallas, certain community groups felt that the transit agency gave equal credence to comments from individuals and from their organizations. DART then encouraged the individuals who were outspoken to join others in forming a new organization or to join an existing group.

Interviews should include a full range of people, including opponents. The Sioux City, Iowa, MPO used its district directors to help identify people to interview. It was careful to include people who in the past had been critical of some of its activities or policies.

Many agencies interview only public officials such as the town manager, aldermen, or planners. Although these interviews represent one segment of key people to contact, they must be done in combination with interviews and talks with representatives of interest groups, opinion leaders, neighborhood associations, individual residents, users, and more.

Are key person interviews flexible?

Timing and structure of key person interviews are flexible. They can take place at any time, cover a variety of topics, and be structured or open-ended. However, it is best to do interviews before negative news gets out. Staffing is flexible, but interviewers must be good listeners, open rather than defensive, and knowledgeable about whom to probe and how.

When are they used most effectively?

Key person interviews are useful both at the start of a process and just prior to decision-making. Of course, it may be necessary and desirable to continue the contacts throughout the process. Follow-up interviews are done in the same manner as initial interviews. To save time and staff resources, follow-up may be done by phone. If an agency does not follow up the interviews or maintain contact with key people, credibility suffers.

Interviews help evaluate projects or proposals or the process itself. In many cases, key people are well aware of a former process that went awry. Their willingness to discuss it saves an agency many steps. In addition, they have a sense of how a project or proposal will be received within their community. This information aids an agency in modifying plans to be more responsive to community concerns and to present to the public.

For further information:

- Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, Georgia, (404) 364-2575
- City Heights Community Development Corporation, (619) 584-1535
- Dallas Area Rapid Transit Authority, Dallas, Texas, (214) 749-2581
- Little Rock Metroplan, Little Rock, Arkansas, (501) 372-3300
- Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Study, Portland, Maine, (207) 774-9891
- Sioux City Planning Department, Sioux City, Iowa, (712) 279-6344

BRIEFINGS

What are briefings?

Briefings are information meetings with a community group or leader. Elected officials, business leaders, the media, regional groups, or special interest groups can participate. Briefings usually involve issue-focused communication between agency administrators, project managers, board members, or other staff and a specific group or part of the community. They are organized in several ways:

- **Some briefings are one-on-one meetings with key individuals**—for instance, between an agency representative and a specific community representative or leader.

- **Others are held for key groups** to help establish rapport between agencies and the community and lead to a free discussion to clarify issues. The Burlington, Vermont, Tri-Center Transit Study held a briefing for local business leaders to discuss their concerns about alternatives for transportation improvements, including high-occupancy vehicle lanes, transportation system management, and a new light rail system.

- **Briefings are held at critical times** in a program application or project schedule—either at the beginning of a project or planning effort or at regular intervals to keep leaders or the media informed.

- **They are used for either one-way or two-way communication.** Often, agencies use them solely to convey information, but the format can include a question-and-answer session or two-way discussion as well. If an agency chooses two-way communication, it should organize the briefing accordingly. Notices should make clear what format will be followed. For its Regional Blueprint for Growth and Development, Minnesota's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) met with government associations to brief them and generate feedback.

- **Either an agency or the public initiates briefings.** When communities or individuals want information, they may request that an agency hold a briefing.

Why are they useful?

Briefings provide immediate opportunities for focused communication. They can be scheduled quickly to allow project leaders to communicate with key community groups or leaders. Portland, Oregon, Metro tailors its presentations to the interest of the group at hand, whether students, a chamber of commerce, or a homeowners' association.

The community gets advance notice of an important event. By providing an opportunity for questions, briefings help allay doubts or fears. An agency can "test the waters" with a subset of the community concerning a specific issue. Within the narrow focus of a briefing, community residents give an agency the feedback and direction it needs to be fair and equitable. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection held a series of briefings for companies to inform them how to comply with new employee trip reduction regulations. The three-hour meetings provided a range of information about requirements such as surveying employees and implementing ridesharing programs.

Briefings are a good way to establish communication links with affected groups. They help clarify issues and demonstrate an agency's sensitivity to local concerns. Because any project affects different segments of the public, an agency should discuss the impacts and services with the people most affected. The Portland, Oregon, Metro holds periodic briefings for geographic areas and neighborhoods that are affected by a specific alternative.

Briefings help get candid feedback from the community. Community people can comment off the record. Since they are not recorded, these comments are relatively unrestrained—and therefore may provide a truer picture of people's opinions.

Do they have special uses?

Briefings break through temporary barriers to full public participation. In circumstances where the communication process is difficult or complicated, they help an agency reach specific groups. In Wisconsin, the Dane County Regional Planning Commission held a series of briefings with representatives of each town to discuss the preparation of its 2020 Plan.

Briefings give critics a better understanding of a project. They also give critics a chance to respond in detail, away from larger meetings that dilute their participation.

Briefings repair damage. A misunderstood or misrepresented agency uses briefings to get back on track. Briefings on critical portions of a proposal are useful to open discussions. An agency may signal its need for advice from community groups on ways to build greater understanding or future cooperation. Poor communication is improved if agency staff talks briefly and then listens attentively to the responses.

They demonstrate agency initiative. Opening a process with a series of briefings shows that the agency is organized and eager to get the word out. When an agency targets specific groups, it shows that it both recognizes their existence and values their participation. To get more people involved, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota, recruited other agencies to serve as co-hosts during its series of briefings.

Briefings help establish trust and credibility between an agency and community groups. In Newark, New Jersey, elected officials attended the Newark Transit Agency briefings on rehabilitation of the light rail system to demonstrate their support.

Who participates? And how?

Briefings can involve any interested group—elected officials, organization heads, appointed officials, community groups or associations, business leaders, or professional associations. When an agency initiates a briefing, it asks for participation by specific individuals. When a community group requests a briefing, an agency should ascertain the group's interests and send appropriate, knowledgeable staff. Community groups may want a personalized presentation of a proposal in relation to their neighborhood.

A briefing is usually a simple gathering held around a small table, in an office, or in a conference room. Alternatively, it is a conference call between appropriate people to discuss a particular issue. Agency representatives should be well-informed about the issues to be addressed, particularly as they affect the participants.

Participants ask questions. The format should address their communications needs. Often, a briefing includes a presentation on a plan's status, followed by a discussion. Its design should facilitate communication between an agency and participants.

How do agencies use the output?

Briefings reveal whether an agency is effectively communicating with stakeholders. Agencies get feedback on the effectiveness of their public involvement program. Before formal announcement of an event, input from briefings helps agencies assess its potential effectiveness and adjust plans accordingly to better meet the needs of the community.

Briefings help prevent misunderstandings by the public by supplying accurate information and helping to get a message out. They also help prevent agencies from misunderstanding the viewpoints of the target groups.

Briefings allow an agency to convey a message to the community. By briefing a specific geographic, social, or professional group, an agency reiterates a message or clarifies an issue. Planners for New York's Long Island Expressway high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane held briefings with local businesses to assess different elements of the design.

Who leads briefings?

Well-informed, articulate agency staff people lead briefings. Since a briefing is an opportunity to improve communication, agencies send senior staff or others who know the project or program thoroughly and are aware of participants' interests or concerns. For discussion of technical aspects, experts may be needed as well.

Agency staff may share responsibility with a community leader. The agency need not lead a briefing alone. Community groups may participate more freely if a community leader leads the discussion. In such an instance, an agency representative participates both to satisfy the group's need for information and to get its input. Agency representatives should be prepared to lead a briefing if a community group has no designated leader. In some situations, elected officials or agency board members may take charge.

What do they cost?

A briefing is relatively inexpensive. The primary cost is preparation time, travel (if necessary), and the meeting itself. Research or presentation materials may be needed.

Special preparation costs may be limited. It is often possible to use pre-existing presentation materials. An agency may use project-specific presentation materials to maintain continuity. Staff may offer refreshments at a small meeting as an icebreaker.

How are they organized?

Arrangements for a briefing are initiated by either party. An agency offers a briefing to improve communication, or a community group requests a meeting with the agency.

An agency must respond quickly to a request for a briefing. Response time reflects an agency's commitment. Having to wait several months to meet with staff seriously damages a group's trust in the agency's sincerity. Every effort should be made to provide a timely response. If an agency has no time to organize a briefing, it may share documents, videotapes, or phone calls as a substitute strategy. (See **Video Techniques**; **Telephone Techniques**.)

Briefings are customized for each specific situation. The particular characteristics or concerns of a group suggest the best structure. An agency must be sensitive to the group's needs, nature, and purpose, and identify key people. (See **Key Person Interviews**.) As a sponsor of the briefing, an agency determines where the group would be most comfortable and what approach should govern the meeting. Any good public involvement program includes constant monitoring of the press, meeting feedback, and other sources of intelligence about the community. When an agency knows a community group well—why it exists and where its interests lie—it can prepare well for a briefing and organize it accordingly. New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) officials met with owners of local newspapers and broadcast stations to generate media interest in an HOV lane project.

An agency sends its best representatives to briefings—perhaps a team of people with complementary presentation skills. A high-ranking staff member or technical specialist can answer questions and demonstrate an agency's commitment to participation. An agency should exercise care in appointing briefing staff. Not all staff members make good public speakers, and good speakers may not function well in small discussion groups.

Agency leaders make certain that unanswered questions receive a response. Such records also help form the basis for subsequent meetings with other groups or the community at large. Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority representatives met with municipal officials in each of eight cities and towns through which its proposed New Bedford/Fall River Commuter Rail Project would pass to inform them about the project and flag local concerns prior to holding a series of open public meetings.

Communication between an agency and the community is continuous. While either party initiates a briefing, an agency should continue the communication process beyond a single session. An agency may approach a briefing as the first in a potential series of meetings. The Portland, Oregon, Metro has a policy of returning periodically to neighborhoods to report on changes or findings since the initial briefing.

How are they used with other techniques?

Briefings are only one part of a larger public involvement program. They supplement official and public interaction between community groups and a public agency. Briefings should not be the only means of communication, nor should they result from a group's frustration due to lack of other opportunities for dialogue. Briefings are very important supplements to larger public meetings, but they cannot replace them. (See **Public Meetings/Hearings**.)

Briefings augment other public education efforts. Briefings are a good way to introduce a new program or delineate project principles to a community already familiar with an existing project. They also help assuage concerns about a project.

Briefings generate additional public involvement. After a briefing, a community group may be willing to work with an agency as the project or program advances. A community may want to participate in subsequent meetings to safeguard its own stake in an agency's proposals.

What are the drawbacks?

Over-reliance on briefings lends an appearance of "back-room deals" and therefore should be strenuously avoided. Holding small, seemingly controlled briefings only in times of crisis or when actions are critical to an agency may alienate a community.

Briefings may be viewed as an agency tool of little benefit to the community. Community people may perceive that agencies do not listen and do not absorb feedback.

Extensive use of briefings can consume agency staff time.

Are briefings flexible?

Briefings are held at nearly any time. Good timing helps make a briefing successful. Agency staff must be flexible, since community groups may request briefings on the spur of the moment. An agency may find it beneficial to hold briefings at specific points in a process of planning or project development; for example:

- Immediately before a major event or decision;
- After a crisis;
- After an especially unsuccessful agency effort; and
- Before introducing new strategies.

For further information:

- Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, Georgia, (404) 364-2575
- Dane County Regional Planning Commission, Madison, Wisconsin, (608) 266-4317
- Orange County Transportation Authority, Orange, California, (714) 560-5725
- Portland Metro, Portland, Oregon, (503) 797-1746
- Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, St. Paul, Minnesota, (612) 291-6423

VIDEO TECHNIQUES

What are video techniques?

Video techniques use recorded visual and oral messages to present information to the public, primarily via tapes or laser disks. Although many people now prefer video as a means of getting information, public agencies are just starting to tap its potential use. During preparation of its statewide transportation plan, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) opened its regional forums with introductory videos.

Why are they useful?

A video is worth a thousand words. An easily-understood video is more useful to some people than reading or hearing about transportation. With the nearly universal availability of television and the emphasis on visuals in today's society, videos have a role in transportation planning and project development that has yet to be fully explored.

Videotapes provide an additional medium for reaching people. Although videotapes are widely used in this country for entertainment, they are also used for education and the dissemination of information about transportation. Videos can describe the steps in a process. They are geared to a group or an individual, depending on an agency's purposes, and enliven the presentation of a potentially dull subject. The Connecticut DOT, for example, prepared videos to enhance public understanding of incident management on an interstate highway. Agencies make videos available through local television stations, public libraries, and video stores or distribute them door-to-door, as has been done in recent political campaigns. The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA) produced a short video at each major milestone during development of its regional transit ballot proposal and sent it to public libraries as well as interest groups.

Videos are used to introduce people to meetings and hearings. Set to replay endlessly, videos present the same message each time without variation. Because these repeated messages are "canned," they should be presented in an informative, lively, and friendly manner. This may be extremely important when used with, say, a formal public hearing. (See **Public Meetings/Hearings**; **Open Houses/Open Forum Meetings**.) The Virginia DOT, for example, used videotapes to introduce and describe an open house public hearing process.

Agencies use videos to document a planning process. They can document proceedings of events in a public participation process. Viewers are thus exposed to a wide range of participants and their concerns. Focus group proceedings are frequently recorded on video for later replay and analysis.

Videos illustrate different planning scenarios or project alternatives and help people visualize a situation before, during, and after construction. Many incorporate computer simulations, such as a ride on a transportation facility before it is built. (See **Computer Presentations and Simulations**) For example, a New York State DOT video illustrating the impacts of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes was shown to elected officials, the business community, and the general public. A separate video simulated the experience of driving a car on both 10- and 12-foot-wide HOV lanes.

Videos help ensure that a consistent message is conveyed during a series of meetings or other events, particularly when different staff members are in charge. San Francisco's Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Regional Planning Commission both produced videos on their long-range plans and showed them at meetings to make sure the same information was provided to all participants.

How do agencies use the output?

Videotapes reach a broad audience for participation. People who cannot be reached in any other way often respond to videotapes. Presentation software is now available to provide viewers with information they can play on their VCRs. Currently, this technique often uses stationary images similar to slides, but in the near future video presentations for television will include live action as well as stationary and animated material.

Dry runs of presentations are often videotaped. Presenters rehearse a presentation, review it on tape, critique elements such as substance, voice modulation, posture, body language, jargon, and use of visual materials, then make changes accordingly.

Agencies often distribute videotapes over a large geographic area and in more than one language. They frequently clarify a complex process to supplement an oral presentation. For example, Boston's Central Artery/Tunnel project uses videos to simulate driving through a tunnel and along a surface street during various stages of the project. Videos also update the community on construction staging plans and mitigation proposals.

What do video techniques cost?

Costs of producing videotapes vary. Simple videos produced in-house are inexpensive but may not be successful in reaching the target audience with the right message. An amateurish production may alienate people from an agency's approach or goals, because its unprofessional quality reflects on the caliber of the project itself. A more professional production is expensive initially but more cost-effective in the long run. Reproduction of tapes is relatively cheap.

Length varies in accordance with the message to be delivered: videotapes are prepared with a brief message or with more substantive content. For example, in Missoula, Montana, a four-minute videotape was used to introduce people to the principal issue of a meeting—the improvement of a single, complicated intersection.

Video production demands a high level of staff expertise. Even with donated video equipment, it is often difficult for agency staff to produce a good video. Staff may be available to record highway or transit rights-of-way, but these rudimentary skills fall short when a video must be credible and informative about complex issues. If the in-house staff does not have sophisticated production skills, outside assistance is required to produce a high-quality, cost-effective videotape.

Who develops these techniques?

Video usage requires a lead person within an agency—a creative and adventuresome person interested in trying new techniques for involving the public in transportation. This can be an existing staff person or a staffer hired for the purpose. Agency staff people are the best resource to draft a video script and ensure that it is consistent with written materials and the particular goals the agency is aiming to achieve.

Production frequently requires outside assistance. Although personal recorders are widely used, videotapes to portray public activities should be professionally and competently produced, using professional-quality equipment.

How do they relate to other techniques?

Video techniques are often part of a media strategy. A video can be released for use on television as camera-ready copy. An agency thus provides the news media with an accurate portrayal of a process or project to be shown as part of regular programming. Videos are a good means of providing information about meetings or ongoing planning processes. (See **Media Strategies**.) Seattle's Regional Transit Project, for example, used videotapes for 30-second advertising spots broadcast more than 300 times on five local television stations.

Videos reach people who would not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including people with disabilities. Special efforts should be made to accommodate hearing disabilities. TDD (Telephone Devices for the Deaf) phones are available with small screens and keyboards to aid people who are deaf or have hearing disabilities. (See **People with Disabilities**.)

A video is always part of a larger process and closely related to other techniques. Because a videotape is a one-way device, suitable for disseminating information, it has many potential applications. It can be an element for discussion in a focus group or charrette. (See **Focus Groups**; **Charrettes**.) It can record the points of view expressed at public meetings and hearings. (See **Public Meetings/Hearings**.) It can document positions established at civic advisory committee meetings. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) It can report on agency progress at a transportation fair. (See **Transportation Fairs**.) A video should not be used in isolation from other techniques. It cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff. Public involvement participants should always be fully informed if they are being recorded.

Videotapes can substitute for field trips. A video can illustrate the characteristics of a region or a corridor, alternative modes of transportation, alignments and adjacent neighborhoods, potential impacts, mitigating measures, and methods of participation. (See **Site Visits**.)

How are they produced?

Videotapes incorporate a variety of technologies such as live action, computer images, graphics, maps, and charts. They can be produced incrementally. Slide shows can be augmented by scripts. Scripts can be recorded and slides shown at pre-determined intervals. A finished script and storyboard (picture sequence) can be developed and turned into a video. Special equipment and processes are required to transfer computer information onto tapes, and the level of quality varies.

Who participates? And how?

Any community member can use videotapes. The only requirements are a television set and a playback machine. Printed materials such as brochures often complement the information presented graphically in a video. It is also important to provide telephone contacts for access to agency personnel for further information.

What are the drawbacks?

Videotapes are not two-way. Unless special provision is made for an individual to respond, the viewer watches a message without being able to give feedback and without hearing opposing views. Thus, a tape should include a means of contacting staff or obtaining additional information. Some cable television stations use interactive techniques, including playing a video and allowing responses from viewers by telephone. (See **Interactive Television; Interactive Video Displays and Kiosks**.)

Video viewers are basically self-selected. Access is limited to viewers with a playback machine. Special attention should be given to the needs of people with disabilities. Interpreters may be needed to make the information available to individuals with hearing disabilities. Text must be sufficiently large so people with sight disabilities are able to read it. For the blind, narration should be sufficient to explain the material even though it cannot be seen.

Video techniques are rapidly changing. While videos are available now principally via home rentals or scheduled programming, in some localities it is already feasible for viewers to call in to view non-scheduled material immediately or at a viewer-chosen hour on a specific channel. Increasingly interactive techniques are being developed in the media. For example, in a few years, it will be possible for agencies to compose videotapes with information about specific processes to be broadcast on television, with community residents able to register opinions in a poll immediately following the presentation.

Agencies sometimes over-estimate viewers' attention spans, making videos too detailed or too long. A good norm is probably 5 to 15 minutes. Agencies should seek sound professional advice about how to define their message succinctly and with an appropriate level of detail. For easy comprehension and retention, a good video strikes a balance between substantive information and simplicity.

For further information:

- Central Artery/Tunnel Project, Boston, Massachusetts, (617) 951-6448
- Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1357
- Missoula, Montana, Department of Transportation, (406) 549-6491
- New Jersey Department of Transportation Long-Range Plan, (609) 530-2866
- New York Department of Transportation Region 10, (518) 360-6006
- Puget Sound Regional Council, Seattle, Washington, (206) 464-7090

TELEPHONE TECHNIQUES

What are telephone techniques?

The telephone offers a unique, two-way medium for public involvement. It can be used to obtain information and to give opinions. Its use has entered a new era of potential applications to community participation, going beyond question-and-answer techniques toward the evolving new multi-media connections with television and computers.

Telephones have long been used for community involvement. However, innovations are available for expanding telephone use. For example, Iowa City, Iowa, offers telephone contact to an information television channel, which includes bus routes and transit information, a route finder to specific streets and points of interest, transportation for the elderly and persons with disabilities, and a "tow list" of all license plate numbers that have more than $15 in accumulated parking fees.

Potential telephone techniques for public involvement include:

- ***Auto attendant***—a series of tiered recordings leading an inquirer to a recorded answer or the appropriate staff person;
- ***Information bureau***—a staff person responds orally to a broad variety of standard queries, such as bus schedules or meeting dates;
- ***E-mail***—a staff person responds to computer queries; (See **On-line Services**.)
- ***Hotline or voice bulletin boards***—a staff person or recording answers questions about a specific project or program; (See **Hotlines**.)
- ***FAX-on-demand***—a recorded message provides a menu of documents available by FAX and how to obtain them;
- ***Telethon***—a telephone call-in for comments during a television program; (See **Interactive Television**.)
- ***Electronic town meeting***—a telephone call-in combined with a scheduled television program, which shows results of public calls; (See **Interactive Television**.)
- ***Interactive voice response system***—information retrieval from a main computer using telephones or terminals; and
- ***Interactive cable television information***—a series of information boards or videos that can be called up by phone to a television screen. (See **Interactive Television**.)

Why are they useful?

Telephone techniques are basically interactive. The telephone is used to initiate a conversation or a query, and a response of some kind is made to advance the action. Responses can vary from pre-recorded messages to staff responses on specific topics. For example, a toll-free hotline number was provided for public information during the Washington, D.C., Bypass Study, which covered an area of 6,600 square miles in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. (See **Hotlines**.)

Telephone techniques reach out to a broad variety of people who might not otherwise participate in transportation processes, including people with disabilities. (See **People with Disabilities**.) They are used in community surveys to reach a statistically viable sample of the general population. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.) When combined with television, telephone techniques potentially open a new audience for public involvement. (See **Interactive Television**.) For example, in Savannah–Chatham County, Georgia, a local television station presented a VISION 2020 program, process, and critical issues, followed by an invitation to give opinions by telephone; results were tabulated and shown later on the same station like election night returns.

Do telephone techniques have special uses?

Agency use of telephones can cover many topics. An audio text service can be programmed to give answers to many pieces of information, including times and dates of community meetings. For example, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, a municipal telephone service is capable of answering 700 commonly asked questions; after receiving information, people leave messages and respond to survey questions.

Agency use of telephones covers a large geographic area and shows a desire to communicate with the general public. Telephones can be available around the clock for messages and can be programmed to respond in more than one language. They can be used to poll community opinions. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

Telephone techniques are easily understood. Special training for participants to get involved or express ideas is not required. For example, to introduce new users to its municipal service telephone information system, Colleyville, Texas, provides refrigerator magnets as a telephone directory to three-digit subcategories for guidance when calling about specific topics, including transportation.

Telephone techniques can combine several applications. For example, in Diamond Bar, California, an aggressive telecommunications project is enhancing public communications and reducing vehicle trips by combining an electronic bulletin board, optical imaging technology, geographic information systems, electronic and voice mail, and FAX systems.

A FAX-on-demand system can deliver documents in response to queries. These documents can be works-in-progress or final results of a process. Costs can be covered through use of a 900 number (the call is charged to the caller's phone bill) or a credit card billing. In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the State House of Representatives uses a FAX-modem system to provide documents to its members.

Who participates? And how?

Any community resident can participate in most telephone techniques—the exception being the structured telephone survey, which requires specific individuals as part of statistical sampling techniques. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.) In using the telephone, it is important for an agency to provide background information to participants to bolster the ability to understand the subject matter and this method of participation. Agencies need to make special efforts to accommodate people who do not speak English. (See **Ethnic, Minority, and Low-income Groups**.)

People participate by phoning their queries or ideas to an agency. The agency is responsible for noting and recording ideas presented in this way and for informing inquirers of how their comments are being recorded and considered. Participation is further encouraged if results of telephone interactions can be displayed and distributed to participants.

How do agencies use the output?

Telephone survey results are especially useful in sampling public opinion. They demonstrate the degree of public support for an agency's proposals and thus shape the results. They show potential political difficulties, becoming useful in developing policy.

Hotlines help people reach the right staff person to give out information about a program. They help an agency receive and disseminate accurate information. (See **Hotlines**.) For example, Fort Collins, Colorado, offers a pothole hotline in its City-Line telephone service for people to report pothole locations. Fort Collins also offers information on right-of-way permits, highway access, excavations and construction activities, signal problems, bike lanes, and buses and carpools as well as city council and neighborhood meeting dates and subjects.

How are they organized?

Highly technical telephone techniques require outside assistance from specialized agencies or firms. The evolving relationships with cable television are likely to require expertise and specific programs or equipment.

Telephone techniques need a lead person within an agency—a person who is vitally interested in trying new techniques for reaching people. The Loveland, Colorado, interactive telephone/cable television service was initiated by the City Manager.

How do they relate to other techniques?

Telephone techniques can be part of a media strategy. They can provide information about meetings or ongoing planning processes. (See **Media Strategies**.) For example, nine cities in the Dayton, Ohio, area provide a community calendar of upcoming events, accessible by phoning a local cable television station.

Community surveys are sometimes made by phone. Telephone surveys or opinion polls are frequently used to obtain information that is not otherwise available to an agency. They are also used during a process when a specific piece of information is required. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.)

Results of telephone polls are used in many other situations. They can be part of a focus group—as an element for discussion; they can be part of a charrette—to establish the points of view of the community at large; they can be used in civic advisory committees—to deal with community feedback on a program or project. (See **Focus Groups**; **Charrettes**; **Civic Advisory Committees**.)

Special efforts should be made to accommodate hearing disabilities. Text telephones such as TDD (Telephone Devices for the Deaf) phones are available with small screens and keyboards to aid people who have hearing disabilities. (See **People with Disabilities**.)

Telephone techniques are not used in isolation from other techniques such as public meetings or hearings. (See **Public Meetings/Hearings**.) They are especially useful in obtaining community reactions after programs or proposals have been adequately explained. They cannot replace face-to-face encounters with other participants and agency staff. (See **Open Forum Hearings/Open Houses**.)

What do telephone techniques cost?

Costs of telephone techniques depend on the extent of a program. Simple answering devices are inexpensive but not interactive. Staff assignments may be necessary in nearly all other techniques.

Telephone surveys are often inexpensive but in all cases involve a sampling technique that should be statistically valid for subsequent use and for credibility.

Basic interactive machines for cable television use are becoming less expensive, and some channels donate air time as a public service. The expense of producing a telethon or cable television program depends on the extent of information to be presented. Live action and animation are the most expensive portions of a presentation. (See **Interactive Television**.)

What are the drawbacks?

In recorded messages, participation is strictly limited unless a means of contacting staff or obtaining additional information is offered. Information is frequently disseminated without a means for people to offer opinions or to reach appropriate staff people for further queries.

Telephone techniques may not be democratic, if a large part of the population has no phone. This reduces the possibility of all participants having an equal status and an equal opportunity to participate.

Telephones do not always allow people to hear other opinions. A hotline provides agency information only. In telephone surveys, participants must wait until the results are posted for them to read. However, in electronic town meetings the results are posted shortly after polling is completed.

For further information:

- Colleyville, Texas, (817) 281-4044
- Diamond Bar, California, (909) 396-5689
- Fort Collins, Colorado, (303) 221-6522
- Miami Valley Cable Council, Dayton, Ohio, (513) 438-8887
- Pennsylvania House of Representatives, (717) 783-6430
- Virginia Beach, Virginia, City-Line, (804) 427-4068
- Washington Bypass Study, Virginia Department of Transportation, (807) 786-2935

MEDIA STRATEGIES

What are media strategies?

Media strategies inform customers about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, billboards, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of fliers. Working with the media, an agency takes an active role in disseminating information. For example, the San Francisco area's annual "Beat the Backup" program during California Rideshare Week promotes ridesharing in partnership with a full range of the media.

Media strategies take a variety of forms. The simplest examples are fliers about projects within a corridor (a targeted market area) or variable message signs on highways that inform motorists (a targeted market) of delays ahead or of alternate routes. (See **Public Information Materials**.) Promotional brochures are used in direct mail campaigns or—as in Portland, Maine—through a full-size newspaper supplement explaining the regional transportation plan. Briefing reporters and editorial boards of both newspaper and broadcast media with in-depth background on a project or program prepares them to analyze an agency's approach and report on aspects of an issue in an even-handed way. (See Briefings.) In New Jersey, media executives were briefed on high-occupancy vehicle HOV lane proposals at the outset of planning for the project.

Why are they useful?

An agency proactively frames the message, rather than allowing the media to do it. Framing the message takes thought and attention about all aspects of a program or process. Media strategies are routinely incorporated into projects that need public focus, consensus, and understanding in order to move forward. In Idaho, the Department of Transportation uses video to introduce programs to the public and to provide news stories accompanying press releases.

Effective media strategies deliver a uniform message to alleviate the spread of misinformation that often becomes a barrier to understanding or implementation. Strategies can be styled to meet varying levels of interest. For Seattle's regional transit plan, a detailed program of media coverage was integrated with other forms of community outreach.

Many people rely heavily on the media for information about events, plans, or projects that affect them. The media are an important resource for people who have little time to attend meetings or participate in public involvement activities.

Do they have special uses?

Media coverage helps generate interest in a project or program. In any program, the critical first step is to develop a central message addressing such questions as: What is the plan or project? What does the public need to know in order to participate effectively? Who is the audience? Once these questions have been addressed, the specific media to carry the message are defined—the kinds of media that will best serve the need of encouraging public participation.

The media disseminate information widely. This includes informing and educating the public via major articles and profiles on television and in print as well as eye-catching ads to supplement the more formal, required legal notices. Specific transportation projects typically reach out to community residents along the affected corridor, to interest groups, and to municipal officials. A media strategy for these kinds of projects involves many activities. For example, in Washington, D.C., a media program to encourage ridesharing ranges from mall banners and decals for shop windows to an education program in elementary schools called "It's Cool to Pool."

Cable television is particularly useful as a tool for getting the word out. It is much cheaper than paid network advertising and has a more local flavor. Public access channels often videotape public meetings and other forums and play them repeatedly over a period of time. (See **Video Techniques**.) In addition, local cable channels have news programs, guest editorials, and interviews where project issues can be highlighted. For assurance of broad outreach to people who do not watch cable channels, programming on regular stations and networks is an effective alternative.

Who participates? And how?

Stakeholders and agencies often cooperate in a media program for a project. Civic advisory committees or other community representatives help identify the best way to get the word out. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) As individuals directly affected by a particular project or program, or through past experience, they may know the best way to reach the public. Agencies use community residents as part of speakers' bureaus that send representatives out to promote a project at meetings of organizations such as Rotary or Lions' Clubs and chambers of commerce.

How do agencies use the output?

Agencies monitor reactions to a media plan. Random surveys test market penetration and determine whether the message is meeting a targeted population.

A media plan elicits community responses. Mass mailings can include simple questionnaires to be returned to the agency. (See **Public Opinion Surveys**.) A television presentation can suggest that reactions be mailed to the agency. On two-way talk shows, agency staff interact with community callers to answer questions directly. As programs and projects evolve and progress, media activities are adjusted to reflect their status and to introduce new information.

The key is to put together a plan that informs and educates the public by delivering the central message, no matter which type or types of media strategies are identified.

Who leads media strategies?

Media strategies are led by agency staff, either the staff members most closely identified with the project or the public affairs officer. The involvement of local people is particularly important to a successful media campaign. Community input and feedback help to "take the pulse" of a program to be sure the media chosen are appropriate and effective.

What do media strategies cost?

Because media strategies are often expensive, they must be used carefully and efficiently. A minimum strategy includes a central message, perhaps contained in a basic press kit with maps, fact sheets, and other background information, supplemented by a media tour of the project site. Complex projects call for a more elaborate strategy. For example, in New Jersey a strategic media plan was developed for outreach to print and electronic media to support the long-range transportation plan.

Time involved is often substantial over the life of a project or program. Some strategies are relatively low-cost. Briefings with editorial boards of both print and electronic media, as well as regular low-key contact with reporters and other media staff, are low-cost ways to deliver a message. (See **Briefings**.) A public service announcement is usually a low-cost activity.

Costs rise with the kind of media used. A television/radio or newspaper campaign can be costly, involving air time and production/printing costs. Costs vary by project complexity and length. There are low, moderate, and high levels of investment for utilizing the media. Depending on the needs of the project, a media strategy ranges from relatively simple placards or videos to a high-profile media campaign involving radio and television ads in prime time.

Although costs of a paid media campaign are high, the investment pays off , particularly when:

- An agency wants to guarantee that an announcement, information, or meeting date is published or broadcast;
- An audience probably will not be reached in any other way, or maximum exposure is needed;
- An agency wants a say in the placement of the material; for example, requesting a certain page location for a paid ad or a certain time slot for radio/television;
- A map, graphic, logo, slogan, or written material needs to be shown in a certain format or with a certain design that identifies the project or plan;
- An agency wants to assure that its message goes out exactly as written—paid advertising is not edited;
- The media are likely to give an agency better *free* coverage if it is already known as a paying client.

How are they organized?

Media strategies should be comprehensive. Strategies need to be evaluated as they are being assembled and after implementation. Questions to ask include:

- Breadth of techniques to use—How many and what kind of techniques are appropriate?
- Effectiveness—How many people were reached and how did they react to particular media?
- Ease of implementation—How easy or difficult is it for the agency to implement the various elements? Is an outside consultant needed? and
- Cost—What are the cost-effective benefits in view of constrained resources?

How do they relate to other techniques?

Media strategies are used in conjunction with other techniques. For example, televising civic advisory committee meetings enhances the participation process by giving it a wider audience. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) Results of brainstorming, visioning, charrettes, and community surveys can be reported in the media. (See **Brainstorming**; **Visioning**; **Charrettes**; **Public Opinion Surveys**.) News stories can promote a telephone hot line for answering questions. (See **Hotlines**.) A visioning process in Atlanta included televised town hall meetings, newspaper editorials, and a six-newspaper survey of public opinion that produced 10,000 responses.

Are they flexible?

Media strategies are extremely flexible. A wide range of techniques is used, depending on the project, its budget, and the complexity of the message. In Los Angeles, a commuter newsletter bulletin was prepared for widespread distribution to inform commuters about ride options and programs.

Preparation and monitoring is crucial. Advance work is essential for staff to prepare the overall program and central message and to identify the targeted audience. In New York, for example, a range of media has been designed to promote the new HOV lane on the Long Island Expressway: a video on ridesharing for businesses to use at their companies; posters in the workplace on carpools and vanpools; local cable channels for advertising spots; and variable message signs along the corridor. All these target a specific audience—either residents or employers in the corridor or daily expressway users.

What are the drawbacks?

Media outlets may outpace an agency by looking for a scoop and framing the message without agency or community input. Public agencies have little control over stories before publication or broadcast. Agencies frequently spend valuable resources to explain a message or to try to reshape public opinion rather than framing the message in the first place.

Media strategies take a high level of commitment sustained over time to be successful. Strategic planning starts at the outset of a project with the development of a detailed central message.

When are they most effective?

Media strategies should be developed early and sustained over time. In this way, the public is well-informed and aware from the beginning, thus enhancing the public participation process and creating greater opportunity for successful implementation of the project or program.

For further information:

- Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority, Seattle, Washington, (206) 684-1730
- Idaho Department of Transportation, (208) 334-4444
- New Jersey Department of Transportation, Communications, (609) 530-4280
- Rides (Commuter Services), San Francisco, California, (415) 861-7665
- Washington, D.C., Council of Governments Ride-finders Network, (202) 962-3327

SPEAKERS' BUREAUS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT VOLUNTEERS

What are speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers?

Speakers' bureaus are groups of specially-trained representatives who can speak about a process or program. They can be community people or agency staff. Bureau members meet with public and private organizations and groups on behalf of a project, program, or planning activity. Members of a speakers' bureau provide information about planning or project activities, listen to people's concerns, answer questions, and seek continued participation and input from the public. Agencies sometimes call them "listeners' bureaus" to emphasize two-way communication and the intention to listen to the public.

Public involvement volunteers are people from the community temporarily enlisted to assist an agency in developing and implementing a public involvement program. In Georgia, the Atlanta Regional Commission's Family of Partners' nearly 800 volunteers work with the commission on designing and implementing its public involvement program. The Family of Partners trains its volunteers to run meetings with local groups and neighborhoods and to move agency planning information down to the grass roots level.

Public involvement volunteers add to the capabilities of a speakers' bureau. Volunteer programs and speakers' bureaus may be used together or separately. Speakers can be either community volunteers or agency staff.

Why are they useful?

Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers serve a variety of community groups. Speakers can be organized to address civic groups, social clubs, professional organizations, neighborhood associations, and other groups, but they have other uses as well. The Maryland State Highway Administration created a speakers' bureau to cover the five-county U.S. 301 corridor project study area. Speakers addressed county chambers of commerce, county commissioners, local Rotary clubs, neighborhood associations, building industry associations, churches, political clubs, city councils, local planning commissions, the regional delegation of the State legislature, the regional council of governments, the State association of counties, the regional transportation association, the professional engineering society, and real estate firms.

They expand possibilities for community participation. Speaking to community groups at a place of their choice increases the number of participants in a planning process. (See **Improving Meeting Attendance**.) Local groups involving people on their own terms and issues enhances interest and thus helps broaden participation. Groups such as business or professional organizations welcome community issues to the table at their own meetings, where they focus on specific issues and concerns.

They help the agency understand community viewpoints. Community representatives value the opportunity to present their concerns directly to an agency representative who has come to speak with and listen to them. They expect the representative to carry their comments back to the agency for incorporation into plans or programs.

They help the community understand an agency and its work. Speakers and volunteers help an agency establish closer relationships with various organizations, facilitating communication and involvement in its planning efforts. Working with several groups, they help develop a base of support for implementation of the agency's efforts. The League of Women Voters worked with the Port Authority of Allegheny County on the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Light Rail Transit project.

They add vigor to the public involvement process. Speakers and public involvement volunteers help agencies respond quickly to requests from local organizations for an agency representative to attend a community meeting. The Missouri Highway and Transportation Department established a public involvement strategy team made up of mayors, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) heads, and other local leaders for speaking in transportation districts throughout the State. This arrangement stimulated many creative efforts, including school curricula on transportation, writing contests, information tents at football games, and a variety of open houses. (See **Games and Contests**; **Open Forum Hearings/Open Houses**.)

Do they have special uses?

Public involvement volunteers can help assemble a community perspective on a project or program. Volunteers who live in the community offer special insight into a process or project. They understand its potential benefits and impacts and have a well-defined perspective an agency staff member might lack.

Speakers' bureau presentations can be tailored to address specific concerns. Presentations can address the special interests of business, environment, or local neighborhood groups. An agency can receive details of the concerns and amplify its understanding of the perspectives of different constituencies. An improved understanding helps an agency incorporate community points of view into its products.

Public involvement speakers and volunteers are useful at events like open houses, where person-to-person communication is a focus. (See **Open Forum Hearings/Open Houses**.) They also represent agencies at transportation fairs or events sponsored by other agencies. (See **Transportation Fairs**.) For the New Haven, Connecticut, Q Bridge project, members of the project advisory committee staffed an open house.

Public involvement volunteers can distribute information in meetings or door-to-door. In Boise, Idaho, the highway district pays groups to distribute materials such as reports and other documents. These public involvement volunteers disseminate information on the streets or in other public places; in some cases, they are prepared to answer simple questions as well. (See **Public Information Materials**.)

Public involvement speakers and volunteers help bridge communication gaps. Multi-lingual speakers serve as interpreters at events with a sizable non-English-speaking representation. During its statewide planning process, the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) used community volunteers as Inuit interpreters for meetings in rural areas. When DOT planners were on the agenda at traditional council meetings, where many elders do not speak English, they took along Inuit interpreters to translate their long-range plan presentations and facilitate question-and-answer sessions.

Public involvement volunteers serve functions in addition to speaking. As part of an agency's public involvement program, volunteers serve as assistants and auxiliary staff, or they may actually lead or assist in organizing large events such as transportation fairs or agency open houses. (See **Transportation Fairs**; **Open Forum Hearings/Open Houses**.)

Who participates?

A variety of people serve as speakers or volunteers—members of partnership agencies, consultants, agency board members, elected officials, or community residents. Speakers from civic and technical advisory committees have the advantage of being already familiar with a planning effort. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) Agency representatives (including public involvement and technical specialists) serve as a nucleus to help in training. The Maryland State Highway Administration called on people from its staff, the consultant team, and a State-appointed civic task force to create a speakers' bureau for the U.S. 301 corridor project.

Many groups of people are reached by speakers, including homeowner organizations and neighborhood associations, chambers of commerce, regional environmental and civic organizations, labor unions, professional associations, religious groups, fraternal and philanthropic organizations, and educational institutions.

How do agencies use speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers?

A speakers' bureau functions as an on-call service. Once a public agency selects and trains speakers, it relies on them as an on-call resource to respond to requests by community groups for agency presentations. The Puget Sound Regional Council in Washington State has established a speakers' bureau to improve understanding of freight movement as the circulatory system of its economy. The Council works with volunteers from the private sector's Regional Freight Mobility Roundtable to set up its speakers' bureau calendar.

Public involvement volunteers have an advantage in eliciting concerns and issues. Community volunteers genuinely portray themselves as part of the general public. They are often seen as more neutral than agency staff.

Speakers and public involvement volunteers contribute to an agency's written communications. The San Francisco, California, Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) encourages its speakers and public involvement volunteers to write newsletter articles. People who have served as members of the agency outreach team can help establish a rounded perspective in the agency's written communications. (See **Public Information Materials**; **Media Strategies**.)

A public involvement volunteer program helps identify people for leadership positions. Volunteers frequently include interested individuals or stakeholders. If they are effective speakers with well-developed interpersonal skills, they may be candidates for further leadership in the community. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**; **Collaborative Task Forces**; **Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies**.)

Who leads?

An agency appoints a staff person to coordinate speakers and volunteers. Project managers often control staffing for their projects, and they may be equipped to select and manage speakers and volunteers. Alternatively, an agency's speakers' bureau can coordinate the speakers or public involvement volunteers for all projects and programs of the agency.

Agency staff must provide training to help speakers and volunteers be most effective. For speakers and volunteers, training should be simple and continuous. Volunteers with public speaking experience may need instruction on technical issues or a political context. Other volunteers and agency staff may need coaching in the art of speaking. Training should be available to speakers from the beginning of their involvement, and periodic refresher sessions should be worked into the program.

Leadership is sometimes found outside an agency. As speakers and volunteers address organizations and associations, people are drawn into the process. This widening pool of individuals may include many dynamic and influential people who, as they become interested in an agency's work, may be tapped for additional outreach efforts. If they are community group leaders, they may become key players in mobilizing their organizations to assist an agency with its program or a specific project.

What are the costs?

Speakers' bureaus are relatively inexpensive. Basic costs are incurred in sending speakers to a public meeting, whether they are volunteers or not, including travel, handout materials, feedback cards, presentation equipment, and (possibly) refreshments. Some agencies reimburse volunteers for travel costs, including meals.

Public involvement volunteers can stretch a limited outreach budget. An agency keeps public involvement costs down by making efficient use of volunteers. Volunteers also enable an agency to greatly expand the scope and intensity of its outreach program. Volunteer speakers provide assistance to agency staff that lets the agency hold more meetings and reach more people on a limited budget.

Even volunteer bureaus have a cost to the agency. Start-up costs are associated with organizing the bureau and recruiting and training speakers. Staff time costs are associated with debriefing speakers after their meetings and with necessary record-keeping and meeting follow-up. The Atlanta, Georgia, Regional Commission trains volunteers to be speakers and sends a junior staff person to every meeting led by a public involvement volunteer to take notes and ensure agency follow-up.

Public involvement volunteers and speakers are sometimes paid for temporary work. For special events, projects, or programs, it is useful for an agency to pay its volunteers and speakers a nominal sum for their efforts. The use of speakers and volunteers extends staff capabilities for a brief period or for an extended period of planning or development.

How are speakers' bureaus and volunteers organized?

Speakers' bureaus are initiated before or after community requests. Agencies that are pro-active create a speakers' bureaus first, then solicit invitations for speakers to come to meetings of community groups.

Agencies recruit representative candidates for their speakers' bureaus. Since speakers are perceived as representatives of an agency, it is imperative that the agency recruit people qualified and willing to do the job. Speakers function as ambassadors, and their work should represent an agency's best efforts.

Agencies train and equip the speakers for their work. People frequently need help preparing for the role. Basic training includes tips on posture, elocution, diction, and timing. While practice sessions and role playing help in training, new speakers can attend presentations by veteran speakers to see what the work entails.

Speakers need adequate materials and preparation. A core presentation can be devised for speakers to use, including handouts, maps, videos, or presentation boards. Prior to meetings, agency staff can assist a speaker in tailoring the presentation to the host group's special interests. Many speakers' bureaus also distribute questionnaires to the host groups and prepare a list of specific questions to be discussed at meetings. Speakers should be given an easy method of reporting back to the agency.

Speakers rely on agency staff for support and assistance. Junior staff people accompany speakers to meetings to take notes, help with materials or equipment, and assist with follow-up and reporting. Written records of all meetings are prepared, with special attention given to major comments, perspectives, and concerns. Agency staff helps speakers follow through on responses to questions or requests that cannot be immediately addressed at a meeting.

Speakers and public involvement volunteers are matched to community group needs so their particular backgrounds and skills are effectively employed. In a large-scale project, many organizations learn of the agency's efforts and seek additional information. The agency speaker/helper coordinator then works to assign appropriate speakers to the various host groups.

Agencies offer the speakers' bureau as a special public service. The initial task is to let groups and organizations know such services are available. An agency contacts the prominent civic and social organizations within a study area and offer speakers for future meetings. This arrangement allows the agency to distribute meetings over time to make the best use of time available to its speakers.

Speakers and volunteers focus on communication and follow-up. Within a speakers' bureau, the essential functions of communication and follow-up must be stressed throughout. Speakers and volunteers facilitate communication between an agency and its constituency and get the right information out to people who request it.

How are they used with other techniques?

Speakers' bureaus are used in conjunction with written material or videos and other graphic information pieces. They are also used to follow up mailings of brochures or fliers. (See **Public Information Materials**.) Rochester, New York's Genesee Transportation Committee includes in its basic outreach materials a brochure about its well-established speakers' bureau.

Speakers' bureaus and public involvement volunteers are integrated into a larger effort with a variety of other public involvement techniques. Although they are useful and relatively inexpensive, they cannot substitute for other methods of reaching and involving the public.

Civic Advisory Committee members are ideal candidates for speakers' bureaus. Since they are already actively involved in an agency's efforts, they can speak comfortably about the agency's project or program. (See **Civic Advisory Committees**.) The Governor of Maryland appointed 76 people to a task force to study the U.S. 301 corridor. Several qualified speakers from this task force volunteered to speak to community groups and to make presentations to their own organizations or societies.

At open houses, speakers and volunteers help explain an agency's work. Open houses can be labor-intensive, with many simultaneous one-on-one discussions. The support of volunteers makes the effort easier for an agency with limited full-time staff. Public involvement volunteers also assist staff in the variety of tasks involved in preparation and implementation of an open house. (See **Open Forum Hearings/Open Houses**.)

Public involvement volunteers staff drop-in centers or booths at transportation fairs. They direct people to displays or written literature and answer questions. If they cannot answer specific questions, they take names and addresses for follow-up by an appropriate agency staff member. (See **Transportation Fairs**; **Drop-in Centers**.)

Trained public involvement volunteers offer advice on program elements. With speaking experience and exposure to community groups, volunteers have useful perspectives on an agency's public involvement program. The League of Women Voters helped the Metro Transit Authority in Seattle, Washington, improve its public involvement program. The Austin, Texas, MPO enlisted community volunteers to help monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of an entire public involvement program for an alternatives analysis/draft environmental impact statement.

What are the drawbacks?

An agency has less control over unpaid volunteers. Unpaid volunteers, acting as speakers or volunteers, are not employees and are not entirely under the control of the agency. An agency may design the speaking program, but it cannot completely control the message the speakers give out. To minimize this difficulty, the leader of the speakers' bureau needs to select speakers carefully to match speaker with audience.

These techniques do not substitute for staff involvement. Speakers' bureaus volunteers are not shields between the public and agency officials. Agency heads, project managers, program coordinators, and technical staff still need some exposure to the community during the public involvement process.

Speakers and volunteers play an important role in the outreach process, but they must not be "fronts" for a distant agency.

An agency has a responsibility to volunteers and is aware of their best interests. An agency does not expect volunteers to put in the same hours or travel the same distance as paid staff. While an agency may not be able to pay its volunteers, it acknowledges their contributions and guards against demanding too much from them.

Volunteers lose credibility and standing in the community if things go awry. At a critical stage in a project, especially if there is a potential for confrontation, it is best to avoid using volunteers for presentations. They have more to lose in the local community than an agency does. Agency staff, however, may be seen as "only doing their jobs" during tough going.

Are speakers' bureaus and volunteer programs flexible?

Speakers and volunteer programs are shaped and modified as conditions change and requests come in for agency presentations at group meetings.

These techniques make an overall program more flexible. By creating a speakers' bureau or organizing volunteers, an agency adds flexibility to its outreach. Speakers and volunteers bring a variety of additional skills, contacts, and personal qualities to an agency's program or project that might otherwise not be found among agency staff.

When are they used most effectively?

Speakers' bureaus are effective when approaching a milestone event, a critical decision, or a program review. Getting the right speaker before the right group at the right time is very effective. Some speakers are considered "big guns"—people of high stature within the community. In addition to political influence, some individuals or groups may command greater respect within the community, and a well-timed endorsement or sign of support helps an agency's project.

For labor-intensive events, it is cost-effective to use volunteers (paid or unpaid) to augment staff or stand in for staff. A group of trained, informed volunteers helps agency staff do more in the time available. Volunteers staff information tables, collect names and addresses, and forward inquiries to staff for response.

For further information:

- Alaska Department of Transportation, Juneau, Alaska, (907) 465-2171
- Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta, Georgia, (404) 364-2500
- Austin Urban Transportation Study, Austin, Texas, (512) 472-7483
- Bay Area Rapid Transit, Oakland, California, (510) 464-6172
- Connecticut Department of Transportation, (860) 594-2000
- Genesee Transportation Committee, Rochester, New York, (716) 232-6240
- Georgia Department of Transportation, Atlanta, Georgia, (404) 656-5267
- Idaho Department of Transportation, Boise, Idaho, (208) 334-8300
- League of Women Voters, Washington, D.C., (202) 429-1965
- Maryland State Highway Administration, Baltimore, Maryland, (410) 333-6431
- Metro-Dade Transit Agency, Miami, Florida, (305) 375-5675
- Missouri Highway and Transportation Department, Jefferson City, Missouri, (314) 751-1685
- Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, (412) 237-7000

Chapter 1. INFORMING PEOPLE THROUGH OUTREACH AND ORGANIZATION

D. TAKING INITIAL ACTION STEPS

Getting started in public involvement need not be difficult. Here are some steps an agency can take to organize a process that involves people in transportation planning and project development:

1. **Determine what kinds of information are needed for and from the public, when, and why.**
   Clearly define the goals and objectives of the public involvement program—make them specific to the needs of the particular transportation project or plan. Ask: Who is the "public" for this venture? What information does the public need in order to understand it? What kinds of information does the agency need from the public? When in the process will this information be most timely? In what ways will it be used to develop the best possible project or plan?

2. **Meet with community members and key people to further refine the goals and objectives.**
   Make initial contacts with people known to be interested in or directly affected by an agency's proposal or planning process. Include residents and businesses from the general area where improvements are proposed. Include a representative sample of stakeholders from throughout the planning region as well as the transportation underserved and other hard-to-reach groups. Solicit initial comments on the proposal itself, on who the appropriate target audience is, and on how best to involve them in the process. These might be individuals, community representatives, or special interest groups (such as business, freight, and environmental organizations). Document the input and note the reasons for specific approaches.

3. **Scan for stakeholders and potential participants.**
   Identify potential participants from a list of people likely to be directly affected by a project or planning process. Include special interest groups, other agencies, freight interests, community leaders, the disability community, minorities and ethnic groups, low-income people, and the poorly educated. Ask people to recommend other potential participants or groups that represent the community or specific interests.

4. **Build a contact list and mail introductory information.**
   Set up a contact list of potential participants that includes their affiliations and notes their particular concerns. Welcome them to the participation process. Describe the purposes and goals of the project or planning program, provide an overview of the ways people can become involved, and give date, time, and agenda for initial meetings. Establish personal contact with those who are unable to read a mailing.

5. **Organize participants who are intensely interested into core groups, and establish means for others to participate as their input is needed.**
   Offer people ways to participate that match their level of commitment. Invite those who are highly involved to address specific tasks or issues on a regular basis. Offer an array of other participation options for people with less time or a lesser stake in the project or plan.

6. **Set up a first meeting.**
   Choose a date or dates convenient to the most participants. Consult community leaders for best times and places for meetings. Notify the public and the media; send a mailing to everyone on the contact list.

7. **Evaluate the approach with participant advisors.**
   Seek early feedback from community advisors to see if the public involvement approach is working. Identify needed changes. Determine the effectiveness of agency communication links.