

## 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.