**Chapter 1.    INFORMING PEOPLE THROUGH OUTREACH AND ORGANIZATION**

**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 **charettes**, **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.

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**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.

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**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

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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

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**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