

Chapter 4. USING SPECIAL TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

Public involvement programs aim to involve the largest possible segment of the population. Yet traditional methods such as meetings and hearings frequently interest only a small group of people. Capturing the attention of a larger, more representative group requires careful planning and often substantial effort. Maintaining that attention level is even more of a challenge.

How does an agency know when its public involvement program needs enhancement?

Gradually declining attendance or static membership among participants is a major signal that a program is not engaging. Another signal is a dearth of questions from participants or expressions of concern that progress is not being made.

Why are special techniques useful?

An enjoyable and productive public involvement experience gets people talking and enhances an agency's image in their minds. If agency efforts are unique and stimulating, people more readily spread the word about them. Agencies themselves renew their enthusiasm and take more pride in their efforts to involve the public. Communication often improves. And the best result is a more effective and extensive collaboration between an agency and the public in transportation planning and project development.

How does an agency attract people who do not usually participate?

Special techniques are available to attract both new and existing participants or give a jump-start to a lackluster public participation program. These techniques, best used occasionally rather than regularly, may not guarantee continued interest, but they do hold promise for more interesting and varied participation and feedback. Several options are described on the following pages:

- A. Holding special events;**
- B. Changing a meeting approach;**
- C. Finding new ways to communicate; and**
- D. Taking initial action steps.**