

EDC Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects

Stakeholder
Partnering



PROGRAM CASE STUDY

This Program Case Study highlights Arizona's efforts to use Stakeholder Partnering as a platform for communication, coordination, and cooperation in streamlining and improving project delivery and compliance. This is just one example of how stakeholder partnering can operate within the realm of possibilities for each state. It is meant as an aid to those who are refining similar activities or enhancing existing programs.



Arizona's Local Public Agency Stakeholder Council

The Arizona Local Public Agency (LPA) Stakeholder Council is a recently established partnership designed to enhance communication among the state's local public agencies. The Council members represent a broad cross-section of public entities, bringing a variety of local perspectives to the table to open dialogs on topics important to LPAs concerning federally funded transportation projects and program delivery.

The Arizona Model

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) chose stakeholder partnering as one of the strategies to pursue under the Every Day Counts (EDC) effort on locally administered Federal-Aid projects. Following an EDC Summit in November 2012, staff from ADOT's Local Public Agency Section and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Arizona Division formed a deployment team to begin the preliminary planning. They started with a peer exchange on the topic with staff from the Nebraska DOT, who had established an LPA Council in 2011.

"We wanted to find out how other states were doing this," said Bahram Dariush, ADOT Local Public Agency Manager, "so we participated in a video conference with Nebraska, and they briefly went over how they set up their council. Then our team had a brainstorming session to determine the best way to form a council that would represent the entire state of Arizona."

"We looked across the state and at the regions and decided which areas we needed representation from in order to get the widest coverage,"

BENEFITS OF ARIZONA'S LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY STAKEHOLDER COUNCIL

Communication

- ▶ Council representatives learn from each other and share ideas during meetings, then disseminate this information to and from their networks.

Coordination

- ▶ Meetings allow for concerns to be brought up, questions to be asked, and clarification to be provided.

Cooperation

- ▶ Members work together toward continuous program improvement.

said Dariush. “Also, since Arizona has eight certified agencies, in the urban areas we wanted to have one member from a certified agency and one from a non-certified agency.”

The team also looked at urban versus rural and community size. They sent requests to Councils of Governments (COGs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), asking them to identify appropriate representation to be on the council. The final list of 26 members represents Local Agencies, MPOs, COGs, ADOT and FHWA. Membership on the Council is for one year, after which time, the plan is to add another person from the same region.

The Council does not have a formal charter. They use a set of basic rules and guidelines and maintain a more informal relationship.

“We did not want the Council to have a formal setting,” said Dariush. “We set it up informally on purpose, because we wanted to work as a team; we did not want to dictate to the LPAs on how the council would interact. We wanted communication to flow both ways. Also, an informal setting is what fits the culture within Arizona.”

Since the Council is primarily considered a communication initiative, the team’s next step was to determine what to discuss at the first meeting. To do this, they requested input from all of the state’s LPAs.

“Before our first meeting, as soon as we had the members established, we sent a survey out to all of Arizona’s local agencies and asked them to participate,” said Dariush. “The survey was sent to 124 local agencies, and we had about 36 agencies respond. Their responses helped us determine what was most critical to work on.”

The Council is currently convening quarterly. Members used the initial meetings, beginning in

Keys to Success

- ▶ Seek broad representation to get all voices at the table.
- ▶ Involve partners in setting the agenda, so there is ownership.
- ▶ Set ground rules for meetings that encourage both participation and consideration.

December 2013, to review the LPA survey responses, separate them into categories, and pinpoint four specific topics to discuss and focus on for the upcoming meetings. They also divided into four teams to work on each one.

The topic selected to focus on first, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), was the subject of the Council’s September 2014 meeting. Staff from FHWA and ADOT’s Environmental Planning Group were on hand to join in an open discussion with members on the NEPA process and changes resulting from the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21).

Other topics selected for future meetings are right-of-way processes, consultant procurement—the difference between using ADOT’s on-call list versus procuring consultants on their own, and review fees—how to program projects appropriately and estimate time and budget.

The technical experts are on-hand for discussion and to respond to Council members’ questions, and if there are any issues that need to be further addressed, ADOT and FHWA staff will take it back to their office to get the answer and pass it on. ADOT’s LPA Section monitors any concerns brought forward by the group to identify prevalent issues and formulate a plan for addressing them.

The Council members take information back to the regions they represent and communicate it through their networks. As they reach out to the broader groups they are involved with, they are asked to bring back information, examples, problems, potential solutions and innovative ideas related to

Initial LPA Stakeholder Council Focus Items

- **NEPA**
- **Right of Way**
- **Review Fees**
- **Consultant Procurement**

implementing local government projects through the Federal-Aid process.

“That is a key part of the way this Council works,” said Dariush, “it is not just a meeting with the Council members. They pass down the information from the discussions to others in their network who are not at the meetings.”

ADOT has sought to increase this type of awareness and participation through presentations to local transportation organizations, where the audience is encouraged to present their ideas or concerns through their Council representative.

Challenges and Solutions

With a large and diverse membership representing a broad cross-section of public agencies, one challenge that the deployment team addressed at the start was how to prevent meetings from being dominated by one or two groups. ADOT’s Communications staff was on-hand to facilitate the Council’s initial gathering, but the lasting solution was to have each person agree to an established set of ground rules meant to encourage participation, cooperation and respect for fellow members. Dariush said that this has proven effective for keeping the meetings on track.

“We have a list of ground rules that are agreed to by every member who attends,” said Dariush. “At the first meeting, we went around the room and asked every single member if they agreed with the rules or if there

was any rule they disagreed with. We made sure that the rules were acceptable to everyone attending. Then we asked them, one by one, to agree to them. “

Another consideration in organizing the Council was that, since representatives come from locations throughout the state, they needed a meeting location and times that would make travel as convenient and inexpensive as possible. So far, meetings have been held in Phoenix, which is fairly central to the state, and they last for half a day, allowing time for members to travel both before and afterward.

“Our meetings start at 11 a.m. and end at 3 p.m., working through lunch. This gives most of the members ample time to drive to and from the meetings in Phoenix. There are a few who have a longer distance to drive,” said Dariush.

ADOT’s LPA Section handles all of the meeting arrangements with some assistance from the Communications staff, and the Council members cover their own travel expenses.

“In our invitation to the COGs and MPOs, we let them know in advance that members serving on the Council would not be compensated for any travel expenses,” said Dariush. “Some members have asked us to look in to using different locations or incorporating teleconferencing in order to eliminate some of the travel.”

LPA Stakeholder Council Meeting Ground Rules:

- **Be on time**
- **Come prepared**
- **Work as a team**
- **Have a positive attitude**
- **Help provide a safe and professional environment**
- **Turn off cell phones or turn to silent**
- **Ask questions**
- **Everybody participates**
- **No one dominates**

Summary of Benefits

While still in its first year, the Arizona LPA Stakeholder Council has impressed ADOT staff as a platform for sharing information among their partners in the Federal-Aid Highway Program.

"It has definitely helped with communication," said Susan Anderson, ADOT Programmatic Oversight and Monitoring Manager. "I think at the first meeting, people were a little more tentative about speaking up, but by the second meeting, they were on board with 'let's share information and let's get ideas out on the table,' which was very exciting. That was the purpose ADOT had behind creating this Council: getting everyone to the table so that the dialog can happen all the way from FHWA through ADOT through the local agencies."

Dariush agreed that everyone has been receptive to the Council's purpose.

"Members are sharing the concerns they have with other members and, to us, it was important to let everyone have a voice," said Dariush. "It is an open discussion, and everyone can speak what is on their mind, but we are working as a team. We feel as though the Council members are as anxious as we are to learn from each other. So it is working well so far."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ The July/August 2014 issue of the FHWA Innovator features an article on Arizona's Local Public Agency Stakeholder Council called "Outside the Box." http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hfl/innovator/e-version/issue_43/
- ▶ The EDC-3 Stakeholder Partnering Web page includes links to additional information and case studies: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/edc-3/partnering.cfm>
- ▶ EDC-2 Local Public Agency Exchange on Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects Initiatives: What's in it for You? The recorded Exchange can be found on the FHWA's Accelerating Innovation website: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/edctwo/2012/localaid_131124.cfm
- ▶ Federal-aid Essentials is a resource of online videos on Federal-aid regulations and requirements applicable to States and Local Public Agencies: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials/>
- ▶ The FHWA Federal-aid Program Administration Local Public Agency Web page provides links to Federal-aid reference guides, training resources, and field contacts: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/lpa/index.cfm>

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Every Day Counts (EDC), a State-based initiative of FHWA's Center for Accelerating Innovation, works with State, local and private sector partners to encourage the adoption of proven technologies and innovations aimed at shortening and enhancing project delivery



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