

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

### **A. INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDERSERVED<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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) 424-4220
- 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](http://www.ch2m.com/TRB_PI/default.asp)
- Concept Mapping, [www.conceptsystems.com](http://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 interfere 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know your agency's responsibility to provide accessibility to persons' with disabilities?</li> </ul>		
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the facility/meeting location accessible by public transportation?</li> <li>If yes, is public transportation available at the time of your meeting/training?</li> </ul>		
Evacuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know the emergency evacuation plans for the meeting/training location?</li> </ul>		
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the building have accessible (handicap) parking spaces?</li> <li>If yes, are they at least 8' wide and have 5' aisles next to them?</li> </ul>		
Sidewalk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there <u>unobstructed</u> curb ramps leading to the sidewalk (walkway)?</li> </ul>		
Walkway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a walkway from the parking lot to the building, at least 36" wide?</li> <li>Does the walkway have a stable and firm surface?</li> <li>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?</li> <li>Is the walkway level and free of steps?</li> <li>If no, is there a ramp at least 36" wide?</li> <li>If there is a ramp, does it have a gentle slope (1" rise to 12" length)?</li> </ul>		
Entrance/Doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the door at least 32" wide (wide enough for a wheelchair)?</li> <li>Can the hardware be operated with one hand (level, push plate, etc.) with a minimum of twisting or grasping)?</li> <li>Are the handles low enough to reach? (maximum 48" high)</li> <li>Can the door be pushed open easily?</li> <li>Is the threshold no more than 1/2" high and beveled?</li> <li>When a vestibule, is there a minimum of 48" between the sets of doors?</li> </ul>		
Floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the floors hard and not slippery?</li> <li>Is there a floor mat to dry feet and crutch tips to prevent slipping?</li> </ul>		
Corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a 36" corridor, from the entrance to where the meeting/training is held?</li> <li>Is the path free of objects projecting 4" maximum into the corridor?</li> </ul>		
Elevators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there an elevator in the facility where the meeting/training is located?</li> <li>If yes, is it a working one that is large enough for a wheelchair?</li> <li>Are the controls within reach? (maximum 48")</li> </ul>		

Element	Accommodation Area	Yes	No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do the controls have Braille?</li> <li>Is there an audible signal ringing at each floor?</li> <li>Is there an audible two-way emergency communication system in the elevator?</li> </ul>		
Meeting/Training Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there enough clearance around the table for a wheelchair to move?</li> <li>Can the wheelchair pull under the edge of the table to sit close?</li> </ul>		
Restrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a wide, accessible path to the restroom?</li> <li>Is there a toilet stall wide enough that a wheelchair can enter and close the door behind? Interior space to turn around?</li> <li>Is the water closet (toilet) 17-19 inches high to the rim?</li> <li>Can the wheelchair roll under the sink (29 inches to the bottom)?</li> <li>Can the faucets be reached and turned on easily?</li> <li>Are the dispensers (soap, towel, etc) reachable? (maximum 48" high)</li> <li>Is there a mirror at an accessible height (bottom of the mirror 44" above the floor)</li> </ul>		
Interpreters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know how to arrange for sign language interpreters?</li> <li>(You must ask the participant the type of interpretation needed)</li> </ul>		
Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there a Teletype unit (TTY) in your facility/agency?</li> <li>If yes, is the number published on the announcements alongside the phone number?</li> <li>Is the staff in your agency trained to use the TTY?</li> <li>Can the TTY be used by those attending your meeting/training?</li> <li>Does the staff know how to use the Virginia Relay Center?</li> </ul>		
Assistive Listening System (ALS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does your facility have permanent assistive listening system?</li> <li>If yes, do you know how to use it?</li> <li>Do you know how to arrange for an ALS (permanent, portable, and rental)?</li> <li>(You must ask the participant the type of system and listening accessory needed)</li> </ul>		
Captioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you know how to arrange for captioning or computer assisted note-taking services?</li> </ul>		
Videotapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do the videotapes or other broadcast programming materials that you may be using during your meeting/ training carry captioning?</li> </ul>		
Fire Alarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there flash fire alarm signals in the building? In the meeting/training room?</li> </ul>		
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you provide clear, detailed directions to the facility and/or the meeting room?</li> <li>Is there a receptionist to offer assistance? (If not, can someone be available to help?)</li> </ul>		
Handouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you provide the meeting/training materials in alternative formats if requested?</li> <li>(You must ask the participant what format is needed)</li> </ul>		
Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there Braille text in the signage at the facility?</li> </ul>		
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there adequate lighting in the elevators, hallways, stairwells, etc?</li> </ul>		

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.adata.org)
- Resources for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: [www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov); [www.section508.gov](http://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