# 508 Innovative Outreach

## Other Types of Engagement

Opportunities for two-way communication are most frequently provided through public meetings. Some additional ways of engaging the public in discussion about a project or providing outreach for a community engagement activity are identified below.

### Non-Traditional Methods

To maximize community engagement, it can be helpful to take project information to public events or find public places to disseminate information. The following are just a few examples of non-traditional ways in which the public can find out project information.

- **Shopping malls and other retail centers** are places where the team can reach out to a large number of people from diverse backgrounds.
- **Community fairs and sports events** offer opportunities for public information events to increase exposure of a project or plan. Booths can be set up or flyers can be handed out at these events.
- **Community focal points**, such as public libraries, parks, and community centers, are locations where teams can market project information.
- **Transportation hubs**, especially for transit projects, provide a particularly appropriate locale where the team can be stationed at major transfer centers or heavily used stops to distribute information about the project or upcoming community engagement activities.
- **Drive-thru project displays** can be a good way to distribute information to the motoring public.

- **Games** can be used in public meetings to motivate people to interact and to encourage collaboration. These are often used by MPOs and other planning groups to increase participation, to illustration transportation funding processes, and to identify and prioritize community issues.
- **Real-time polling** is an audience response system that allows a meeting facilitator to ask a series of questions and provide real-time results of the responses on presentation slides that everyone can see

### Surveys and Polls

Conducting periodic surveys and polls throughout the life of the project can help keep the public engaged and establish a baseline of public perceptions of a particular project. Surveys can collect both qualitative and quantitative information about public opinion concerning the project, and can be conducted via phone, online, text messaging, smartphone applications (apps) and at in-person meetings. User-friendly tools such as Poll Everywhere, and SurveyMonkey®, or others can be customized to fit the input sought. Non-monetary incentives, such as transit passes or event tickets, can motivate people to complete a public opinion survey.

Surveys can also be handed out in person and collected for analysis. Hardcopy surveys require significant staff time for printing, dissemination, collection, data entry, and analysis, whereas an online survey platform like those listed above automatically tally and cross tabulate responses and generate reports. Meetings provide an ideal opportunity to survey attendees on a variety of topics.

## Printed Materials and Maps

Printed materials, including display maps, can be posted on a website, uploaded to an online meeting platform for virtual meetings, and distributed/displayed at face-to-face meetings, to inform the public about the project and stimulate dialogue and feedback. Participants can indicate their preferences (or dislike) for specific solutions by putting marks or stickers on printed materials. Display maps are useful for engaging participants in the identification of existing community features and potential issues. Positioning a Where do you live? Where do you work? map with colored dots by the meeting sign-in-table is a good way to get participants interacting at the meeting and also learn something about the attendees.

Print media also includes any project-generated materials, such as fact sheets, newsletters, business cards or palm cards, brochures, and flyers. After obtaining necessary permission, these materials can be:

- Delivered to a project mailing list
- Posted at local gathering spots such as grocery stores, government offices, libraries, parks, community centers, or places of worship
- Distributed to transit riders by community engagement teams at transit stops or on transit vehicles
- Delivered to residences using door hangers
- Sent to property managers of rental communities and major employers for distribution
- Sent home with school children

## Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Every Day Counts Initiative

In 2009, the FHWA launched the "Every Day Counts" program to help state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and local public agencies advance practice-ready innovations into everyday use. In 2019-2020, the program showcased Virtual Public Involvement as one of the featured innovations: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/vpi.

The following virtual community engagement tools are located on FHWA's website.

- **Mobile applications** allow users to get information or submit their own text and images. An app can serve as a digital clearinghouse for project planning and development, community engagement opportunities, and contact information.
- **Project visualization** techniques include photo simulations, three-dimensional images, videos, aerial footage, and augmented reality, providing a mockup of what a proposed project would look like.
- **Do-it-yourself videos** shot with tablets, smartphones, and digital cameras are an affordable and accessible way to reach stakeholders with content about plans, projects, and events.
- **Digital crowdsourcing tools** gather suggestions and provide a forum for others to weigh in on ideas. They enable stakeholders to engage in the early stages of a project in a quick, easy way.
- **Mapping tools** communicate information in a visual format. Their interactive capabilities allow users to search, click, and query their way across a project site, neighborhood, or region to gather details not easily accessible in other formats.
- **All-in-one tools** combine crowdsourcing features, mapping, visualization, file sharing, and survey instruments, offering a one-stop-shop for information on a topic.
- **Digital tools** to enhance in-person events include live polling via mobile devices, collecting and sharing ideas with tablets, and using social media to stream public meetings in real time.