FDOT Public Engagement Interim Process During COVID-19 Emergency Management

To protect public health and to comply with Governor DeSantis' "Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery" during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Florida Department of Transportation has updated the interim process for conducting public engagement activities based on the Phases of Re-Opening. Public engagement activities should use appropriate approaches evaluated on a project-by-project basis, making sure that strategies are inclusive of all affected stakeholders.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public Meetings for Regions Identified in Phase 1
Virtual public meetings are encouraged if the format is appropriate for the project demographics and is approved by the District Secretary.

Public Meetings for Regions Identified in Phase 2 or 3
Public meetings can be virtual only or a hybrid of virtual and face-to-face and must be approved by the District Secretary. Public meetings with physical locations must use accommodations which allow for social distancing and following the Governor's Executive Order on social gathering limit and capacity limit of the venue.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public Hearings for Regions Identified in Phase 1
Public hearings shall be postponed until the region moves to Phase 2 or 3 due to current social distancing requirements that prohibit face-to-face meetings.

Public Hearings for Regions Identified in Phase 2 or Phase 3
Public hearings must be hybrid (combining virtual and face-to-face) and must be approved by the District Secretary. Physical locations must use accommodations which allow for social distancing and following the Governor's Executive Order on social gathering limit and capacity limit of the venue. A risk assessment should be used to determine whether to move forward with a hybrid hearing or to postpone, based on project schedule, impacts, complexity, controversy, and local support.

PHYSICAL LOCATIONS FOR HYBRID MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

Physical locations for hybrid public meetings and hearings must have adequate capacity to maintain appropriate social distancing. The District should poll or survey the affected and interested public to estimate how many participants would be willing to attend a face-to-face meeting, and then choose a location that would accommodate those numbers, including overflow rooms. Sanitizing protocols will be implemented to meet CDC guidance. All meetings must include a virtual component using GoToWebinar or GoToMeeting and a telephone number for calling in by those who do not have or use a computer. At this time, outdoor meetings will not be permitted.

The Office of Policy Planning provides technical assistance on how to conduct virtual and hybrid public meetings. The Office of Environmental Management should be contacted concerning NEPA PD&E hearings – jason.watts@dot.state.fl.us.

Contact: rusty.ennemoser@dot.state.fl.us or alison.stettner@dot.state.fl.us

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Guidance for Public Meetings and Hearings During Phase 2 of Florida's Reopening

As the state transitions using Governor DeSantis' [Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery](), this document provides guidance for holding a public meeting or hearing in areas of the State operating under Phase 2 of Florida's reopening. The public meeting or hearing will consist of a hybrid format with combined face-to-face and virtual components. This guidance is mindful of the need to provide a variety of methods for the public to receive information and provide input on plans and projects, while meeting public health guidelines and protecting vulnerable populations and civil liberties. The overall goal is to replicate the experience of the traditional public meeting or hearing in ways that foster participation for all interested parties.

The guiding principles for hybrid public meetings/hearings include:

- Incorporating safe social distancing practices as defined by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)]() and the Governor's "[Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery]()"
- Minimizing time of exposure for staff and the public in indoor spaces
- Using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and consideration of safety barriers
- Providing a touchless experience for staff and the public, to the greatest extent possible
- Following the practices of early, continuous, collaborative, and inclusive public engagement

Ongoing Communication
To keep the public informed and engaged with a current active project and to allow for an inclusive process, various methods can be employed, including but not limited to newsletters, brochures, flyers, factsheets, postcards, etc., which can be digital and distributed electronically. In addition, consider posting project presentations online. Please ensure that non-discrimination language is included on all publications. Work with your Communications Office to communicate this information through social media and other means.

- All online public engagement meetings must be approved by the District Secretary and must follow Department procedure, federal and state regulations for Americans with Disabilities Act, Title VI, and notification (Florida Administrative Register, Department Website, etc.) requirements.
- All materials must be reviewed and approved through normal channels.
- Meeting materials should be posted online concurrent with the meeting notification if feasible.
- All comments are public records, regardless of how they are received. The recordings of virtual meetings must be posted online for those who were unable to watch or participate in the live session.

For more detailed information about public meetings and hearings, please refer to the [FDOT Public Involvement webpage]().

About Hybrid Public Meetings and Hearings

A hybrid public meeting or hearing provides two ways for the public to participate: virtually and in-person at a physical location. Currently, GoToMeeting and GoToWebinar are available to Department staff and should be used as the online meeting platform. Additional platforms are being studied and may be added in the future. The virtual meeting must have telephone dial-in capabilities to provide a

way for people to participate in the manner that they feel most comfortable. Under current COVID guidelines, it is important to be diligent about providing multiple opportunities for people to participate, receive information, interact with staff, and provide comments.

There are times when a hybrid public meeting may be impractical due to the level of controversy or the inability to secure a venue large enough to accommodate potential attendees. Some meetings may need to be postponed until the Governor opens Phase 3. These types of meetings should be discussed with Central Office before scheduling.

The guidelines established in this document comply with:

- Conducting Proceedings by Communications Meeting Technology (CMT), Rule Chapter 28-109, Florida Administrative Code.
- Public Business: Miscellaneous Provisions (Government in the Sunshine), Section 286.011, Florida Statutes.
- Administrative Procedure Act, Section 120.525, Florida Statutes; and
- All other applicable Local, State, and Federal laws.

Facilities Requirements

Venue Planning

When considering venues and to ensure everyone can participate, the District should poll or survey the affected and interested public to estimate how many would be willing to attend a face-to-face meeting, participate online, or call in using a telephone. All meetings must provide for contingencies, including overflow rooms and AV equipment, to accommodate for unanticipated attendance. These contingencies are necessary to ensure that no one is turned away. At this time, outdoor meetings are not permitted.

A public meeting plan must be developed for Central Office approval that identifies a potential meeting venue, room layout, and contingencies for accommodating unanticipated attendance. Below is the process and timeline for planning a public meeting or hearing.

If you have already conducted public involvement in the past and already have a sense about your potential audience, then poll not required. If you don't have a sense, then consider doing a poll.

1 Develop plan (at least 150 days prior)

2 Seek approval for plan from District Secretary

3 Seek approval from Central Office

4 Conduct poll (at least 90 days prior, keep open for 7 days minimum)

5	Adjust plan based on poll results
6	Secure venue (at least 60 days prior)
7	Advertise meeting (14 to 21 days prior)
8	Hold meeting

How to Determine Potential Audience Size

To determine potential audience size, you should poll the affected community in advance of selecting a facility to determine venue size and space needs. There are a variety of ways to notify the community about participating in the poll such as:

1. Targeted outreach using social media (Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor) with a link to the poll (e.g., Survey Monkey)
2. Newsletters/letters/postcards/emails to the project list with a link to the poll
3. Project website with a link to the poll
4. Work with your communications office to solicit media coverage

Here is an example survey question for determining potential participation:

> Please indicate how you prefer to participate in the project meeting (please select one of the following):
>
> ❑ In-person
> ❑ On-line
> ❑ By telephone
> ❑ Not planning on participating
> ❑ Undecided

Be sure to include the project name, contact information, and any other questions you would like to ask the community.

Room Size/Capacity

The meeting room(s) should be large enough to accommodate the expected number of participants with the ability to keep people six feet apart as they view boards or presentation materials. The meeting facility may need to be significantly larger depending on the level of public interest in the project, the ability to adhere to social distancing guidelines, and the current guidance from the Governor. The capacity calculation should include the combination of staff and public participants.

According to the Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery, "all individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others in public, particularly in enclosed environments. Individuals should avoid socializing in groups of more than 50 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate social distancing of at least 6 feet."

Overflow Space

Overflow space should be provided to accommodate any unanticipated attendees. The overflow space requires sufficient AV equipment to broadcast the presentation. Examples of overflow space may

include additional meeting rooms, lobby areas, and breezeways. Ensure that overflow areas have adequate signage, staff, and the ability to see and hear primary meeting materials and comments.

Technology

Access to the internet will be required for the virtual broadcast. If the facility does not provide internet access, then a cellular mobile hot spot or booster can be used. Below is a summary of potential needs:

- Internet access
- Computer connected to GoToWebinar or GoToMeeting
- Projector and screen connected to computer running GoToWebinar or GoToMeeting
- Video camera connected to computer running GoToWebinar or GoToMeeting to broadcast proceedings
- Microphone for facilitator/presenter
- Microphone on stand for public comment period (if allowing public statements at a microphone)
- Speakers

ADA Compliance

All facilities used for public meetings or hearings must be ADA-compliant. This includes the meeting room, bathrooms, and parking areas.

Room Layout

A room layout should be developed that accommodates the meeting while following social distancing measures and providing a touchless experience to the maximum extent practical. At a minimum, the room layout should include the items listed below and use accurate measurements and dimensions. See Public Involvement webpage for sample room layouts.

1. Sign-in/registration
2. Displays and stations (size and placement)
3. Arrangement of chairs
4. Description of participant flow through the registration area and meeting room
5. Location of sanitation stations
6. Location of restrooms
7. Staff assignments

Restrooms

All facilities should have a fully stocked restroom.

Safety Measures

Sanitation Stations

Sanitation stations with hand sanitizer should be provided at all entry/exit points and at intermediate points throughout the facility. If available, an automated dispenser should be provided for a touch-free experience.

Masks/Face Coverings

All staff members are required to wear masks. Include a statement in the meeting notifications and advertisements encouraging attendees to wear a mask/face covering consistent with the Safe. Smart. Step-by-Step. Plan for Florida's Recovery on social distancing and to not attend the meeting if they are not feeling well. Provide face coverings for those who may want them, if feasible. Check local directives regarding masks.

Disinfectant

Bring disinfectant spray and/or wipes for regular for cleaning of high touch areas. For seating, plastic or metal chairs that can be sprayed and wiped down are preferred.

Protective Shields

Consider using protective shields in places where people may interact in close proximity or where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., registration, displays).

Safety Information (Boards/Signs)

Provide informational boards/signs with social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, and other safety guidance.

Touchless Registration/Sign-in Options

Consider methods for a touchless sign-in experience. Opportunities include:

1. Preregistration on the project website plus dial-in number (consider having appointment times to enter the meeting for larger audiences)
2. QR code check-in at meeting for pre-registrants
3. Text option to sign-in
4. For public without a phone and all others that need assistance, a staff member will record contact information/check people in, in a social distance setting
5. Sign-in sheet with give-away pens

Doors/Entry and Exit

If possible, provide separate entry and exit doors that are clearly marked. It may be necessary to have staff members open doors to maximize the touchless experience or leave the doors open if feasible.

Traffic Flow

As part of the room layout plan, participants should flow in one direction. Signs and floor markings should be available at the entry points and throughout the room to aid participants in maintaining social distancing, especially in areas where lines may form. Six-foot spacing should be marked off on the floor with tape and rope lines to assist people in maintaining proper distances.

Timers/Clicker Counters

Consider the use of timers and clicker counters to manage the number of people in the room and the time they spend at each display and station. Determine the amount of time people can spend at the displays depending on the type of display, the number of directly affected people, and the overall number of people waiting to enter the room. Remind people that the display materials are available

online or on a handout. Monitor the room to identify people clustering in groups and politely remind them to socially distance or take casual conversations outside.

Displays and Smart Boards

Two or more sets of displays and stations should be provided to allow for social distancing. Boards should be large enough so that social distancing can be maintained at each display and between displays. Smart Boards should be managed by staff only. Consider placing tables in front of boards to establish physical distance between staff and the public.

Presentation Seating

All seats should be placed six feet apart in all directions. Directional signage and floor markings should be provided to assist in maintaining social distancing as attendees take their seat. Seating can be rearranged for family members or others wanting to sit together. Space should be provided for wheelchair attendees.

Safe Use of Microphones

Consider the potential for virus spread associated with microphone use for public comments. Having multiple microphones would allow for sanitizing between uses. Disposable covers can be purchased for microphones and replaced after each use. Some microphones are strong enough to be placed at a safe distance from the commenter.

Comments Stations

Comments stations should be sanitized after each use. New pens should be provided to participants wishing to fill out a comment form. Pens should be discarded and not reused. Written comments can be placed in a comment box.

Handouts

To prevent virus spread, any paper handouts should be printed at least two days in advance and then carefully handled with gloves when handing out to meeting attendees. Handouts should not be re-used after distribution (i.e. collected and re-circulated to other attendees).

Display of Project Documents (PD&E Public Hearing)

PD&E documents must be displayed at the public hearing. A box of gloves and/or hand sanitizer can be placed on the table for those wishing to review the documents. In addition, a sign can be placed reminding participants that the documents are available online or can be accessed on their smart phone through a QR code.

Law Enforcement

Consider whether you need to have law enforcement present at the meeting depending on the project context and potential for controversy. Any law enforcement present will need to be counted toward the maximum number of attendees that can fit within the facility.

Water/Water Fountains

Water fountains have shared surfaces that may contribute to the spread of infection and may require additional sanitation needs.

Trash Cans

Provide trash cans throughout the venue, including at exits for disposal of PPEs.

Meeting/Hearing Logistics

All public meetings or hearings must follow Federal and State laws and Department procedures as documented in the FDOT Public Involvement Handbook; Part 1, Chapter 11 of the PD&E Manual; or Chapter 104 of the FDOT Design Manual. Below is additional guidance for the hybrid meeting format.

Advance Posting of Meeting Materials

To help reduce the number of in-person attendees, meeting materials should be posted online or otherwise made available to the public at the time of the public meeting advertisement.

Notifications

All meeting notifications should follow existing Department procedures and clearly describe:

1. Participation options (face-to-face and virtual)
2. How to register
3. Statement that all meeting materials are posted online at the time of advertisement
4. General safety measures (include statement that social distancing measures will be followed and encouraging people not to attend the face-to-face meeting if they are sick)
5. What to expect at the meeting (timeframe for meeting, potential waiting period to enter, how the project information will be presented, how to provide comments, etc.)

Managing Registrations and Space Limitations

Despite our best efforts, there will always be a concern that the number of people showing up to the face-to-face venue will exceed the space available under social distancing measures. It is expected that providing the ability to participate virtually will reduce the number of in-person attendees; however, the use and acceptance of virtual technology varies for each community. For this reason, it is important to know your affected community and plan ahead for these possibilities.

Assume the worst case: If expecting 300 people at the meeting or hearing, then plan for more (350 or 400 people). Accommodating 300 or 400 people at 6 feet apart requires a very large facility, one that may not be available within the study area. Consider holding multiple viewing times and asking people to register in advance. Provide multiple ways to register for the virtual and face-to-face meeting (for instance on the website, by email, or calling). If using pre-registration to manage the number of attendees, make sure to build in a buffer in case someone shows up who did not register. For example, if your facility can accommodate 100 people at a time, then only open 80 spots and hold the other 20 for walk-ins.

Staffing Needs, Roles, and Responsibilities

Depending on the meeting purpose, location, and layout, consider staffing needs to manage social distancing practices such as:

- Entry (counting people entering)
- Exits

- Sign-in
- Sanitizing stations
- Display boards
- Traffic flow

When developing the staffing plan, consider that some team members are vulnerable or taking care of vulnerable family members and should not be at the in-person location. Signage can be used to encourage social distancing practices rather than additional staff.

Accepting Comments

Consider extending the comment response period beyond 10 days.

August 3, 2020Virtual Meetings

Staff should be proficient in setting up and conducting virtual meetings within the GoToMeeting or GoToWebinar platform. Practice sessions should be held prior to the virtual meeting. Guidance on conducting virtual meetings are provided [here](#).

Additional resources including manuals and handbooks can be found here:
https://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/publicinvolvement/index