

502 Selecting a Meeting Time and Location

Meeting Time

Most FDOT-sponsored public meetings are held on Tuesday or Thursday in the late afternoon/early evening starting at 5:00 p.m. and lasting for 1 ½ to 2 hours. Typically, Mondays and Fridays are avoided as some people may be taking an extended weekend, and Wednesday nights may be avoided due to religious services. Consider the age of the anticipated audience, transportation availability, location access, distance, etc., when determining the time of the meeting. For example, if the project study area includes a large population of retirees, it may be beneficial to hold the public meeting during the morning or afternoon. Similarly, if the community or audience includes individuals with regular working hours (such as 8 AM to 5 PM), holding meetings at night or on weekends may better fit their schedules, especially if they have school-aged children. In contrast, if the project affects a facility that relies on shift workers, such as a hospital or industrial factory, it may be more appropriate to hold the meetings at times that accommodate these schedules. In this case, meetings should be longer and extend across the break of two shifts.

Meeting Location

It is important, but not always easy, to find a meeting venue that is in the project area, easy to reach (on a public transit route, if possible), complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), complies with the Department's policy on the Jessica Lunsford Act (avoid public K-12 schools), has sufficient parking, and is appropriate to the meeting purpose and format.

Public venues are preferred over privately-owned facilities. If the nearest public facility is not reasonable due to either insufficient space or is located too far from the project area, then a privately-owned facility can be used. Document the site selection process in the project file.

Before selecting a facility, estimate the size required based on the expected number of attendees and the number and size of display boards. Prepare a room layout plan that shows the arrangement of the sign-in tables, display materials, tables, chairs, and space for attendees to confirm that the facility can accommodate your needs. It is important to visit the facility, take pictures and measurements and check the audio/visual equipment. Ask to meet the person who will be on duty at the facility during the meeting. Consider the following when selecting a meeting location:

- If a sound system is needed, does the facility provide such equipment?
- Will the facility allow entry into the space early enough for set up? Likewise, is there a closing time that restricts breakdown time?
- Are there enough tables and chairs available?
- Is there plenty of parking and is handicapped parking available?
- Are the restrooms handicap accessible?
- Is the parking lot well-lit for a night meeting?
- Is there a place for signage directing people to the correct room?
- Can people walk easily from transit?
- Is there a property manager on duty at the time of the meeting for emergency purposes?
- Are there local sign regulations that require permits for way-finding signs?

Public Engagement Resource Guide

Also make sure all of the following are considered before final approval of a location.

ADA Compliance: All public meetings must be held at a site that provides reasonable accommodation and access to disabled persons wishing to attend and participate. When notified at least seven days in advance, the Department must reasonably accommodate a person's disability to provide an equal opportunity for participation. While the Department cannot provide transportation for disabled persons, every effort should be made to accommodate special needs, such as wheelchair access and seating, materials for visual impairment (through the use of large print materials, for example), or referral to a transportation service that may suit their needs.

Jessica Lunsford Act: Public school facilities for grades K-12 should not be used for public meetings. School facilities may be used, however, if there are no other feasible options in the area, and with approval from the Department's Assistant Secretary of Engineering and Operations. Alternate educational facilities to consider include colleges, universities, and private schools.

Green Lodging Hotels: Any hotel used by the Department for a public meeting must be designated by the FDEP as a Green Lodging hotel. More information about Green Lodging hotels is available on the FDEP website at <https://floridadep.gov/osi/green-lodging>.

