

501 Public Meeting Planning and Preparation

Public meetings can take the form of a public information meeting, open house, workshop, or charrette. They are advertised and open to the public and held to share information and receive feedback with the ability for anyone to participate in person or virtually. For the in-person meeting, the typical format allows the public to view display materials at their own pace and have informal conversations with the project team. Virtual components of the meeting should include a presentation or review of meeting materials. Virtual opportunities may be live or recorded, during or

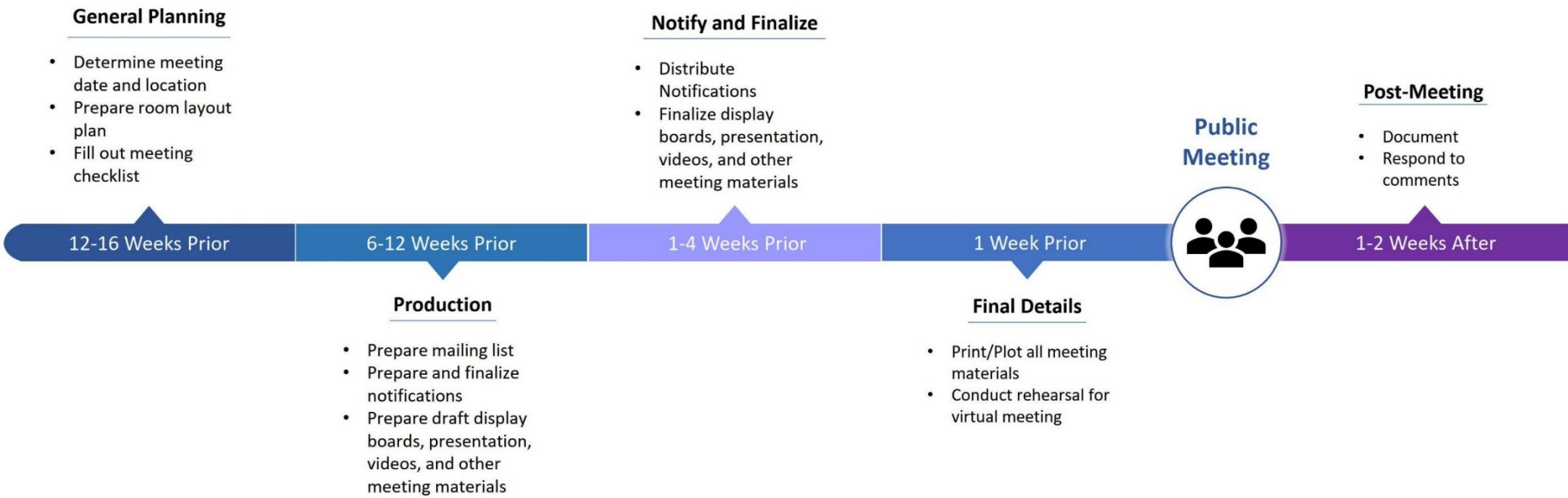
after the in-person meeting. Planning and preparation follows a multi-step process as noted below.



Meeting Checklist

Use a meeting checklist to ensure all meeting details are considered. A sample checklist is provided through this [link](#) and can be used to organize the activities related to planning for a public meeting and ensuring notifications are completed and distributed within the required time frames. See the Resources on the Public Engagement Resource Guide page for additional guidance.

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502 Selecting a Public Meeting Time and Location

Meeting Time

FDOT-sponsored public meetings should be scheduled during the work week, Monday through Friday, at a time most convenient and accessible for the affected community. As a best practice, most 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 needed, does the facility provide a sound system?
- Will the facility allow early access to set up? Likewise, is there a closing time that restricts breakdown time?

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- 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?
- Can people walk easily from transit?
- Are there local sign regulations that require permits for way-finding signs?

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.

503 Public Meeting Notification Requirements

There are a variety of methods for notifying the interested and affected community about an upcoming public meeting or workshop. Information regarding the meeting should be clearly conveyed in all notifications and must contain, at a minimum, the following:

- Purpose of the meeting
- Description of the project
- Date, time, and location of the public meeting (include meeting location map)
- Instructions on how to participate in the virtual option (if applicable)
- Nondiscrimination statement
- Information about ADA requests
- Notice of standard statement regarding FDOT assumption of FHWA NEPA responsibilities (Federal PD&E projects only)

The following nondiscrimination and ADA standard statements must be included for all notification methods:

- *Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status.*
- *Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation*

services (free of charge) should contact _____ at _____ at least seven days prior to the meeting.

Similarly, the following standard statement related to project development must be included for all PD&E projects with FHWA involvement:

- *The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried-out by FDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated May 26, 2022, and executed by FHWA and FDOT.*

Each notification method and corresponding requirement are discussed in the following sections. For more specific notification requirements, see the [PD&E Manual Part 1, Chapter 11](#).

Notification to Elected and Appointed Officials

Notify all elected and appointed officials with jurisdiction in the project area at least 25 but no more than 30 calendar days prior to the public meeting. Elected officials should receive the invitation before the public is notified. Invitations may be sent by standard mail or email and should include a copy of the newspaper advertisement or public invitation letter/newsletter.

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Notification to Property Owners and Tenants

Notify all property owners and tenants within at least 300 feet of the project centerline at least 20 days prior to the meeting. Those affected by the project may extend beyond 300 feet and should be contacted. The invitation can be sent by letter or as part of a newsletter. The addresses for this notification can be obtained from the county property appraiser. Because property owners may live elsewhere or tenants may occupy the property, be sure to include both the site address and property owner address if they differ.

Florida Administrative Register (FAR)

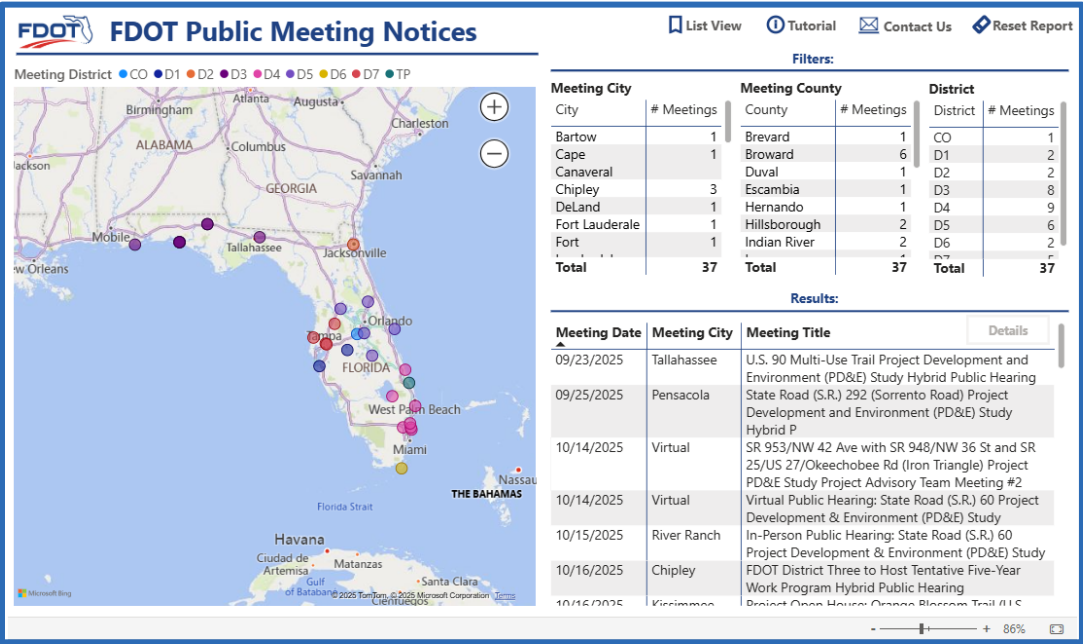
Section 120.525, F.S., requires that notices for all public hearings, workshops, and meetings must be published in the FAR at least seven calendar days prior to the event. All notices to be published in the FAR are submitted electronically through the Florida Department of State’s e-rulemaking website at www.flrules.org.

The FAR is published each weekday except on those days observed as official state holidays designated by Section 110.117, F.S. All materials to be published must be uploaded to the FAR website by 3:00 p.m. on the day prior to publication. For publication on Mondays, the ad must be uploaded to the website by 3:00 p.m. on the previous Friday. See the PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 11 for an example of a FAR notice.

FDOT Public Notices Website

To comply with Section 120.525, F.S., notices of all public hearings, workshops, and meetings must be published on [FDOT’s Public Meeting Notices website](#) at least seven days before the meeting. Meeting notices

are typically added to the website by the District Communications Office. The information to be provided to the District Communications Office includes the meeting title, District number, meeting type, meeting date and time, address of the in-person location, information on how to participate virtually (if applicable), project website, and contact names and contact information. Include the standard nondiscrimination statement, NEPA Assignment statement (if applicable) and information about ADA requests.



The form for publishing these notices is located on the [FDOT Intranet](#) under E-Forms and requires an FDOT account to access. Once the form is submitted online, the District Communications Office will review and publish it to the website if approved. A copy of the notice should also be

sent to the District Communications Office for their information and possible further distribution.

Project Website

If available, include information about the public meeting on the project website. Information should be posted at the same time that notifications to the public are sent out.

Newspaper Advertisement

Placement of a newspaper advertisement is not required but suggested for public meetings. If placed, the advertisement should be published 10 to 14 days prior to the meeting in a local newspaper with general circulation in the vicinity of the project.

Press Release

A press release may be sent to encourage media coverage about a scheduled public meeting. All press releases must be coordinated through the District Communications Office.

Social Media

FDOT uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube through the Central and District Communications offices. Social media can be helpful in expanding the reach of notifications in appropriate circumstances. All social media activity must be coordinated through the District Communications Office.

Reaching Affected Populations

Outreach to affected populations is critical. For distinct communities or groups, bringing information to their communities helps increase their awareness of public meetings. Further, engaging several of the community leaders (not necessarily elected leaders) and seeking their help to spread the word or provide ideas about how best to reach their community can be beneficial.

Translating meeting notifications may improve awareness for people for whom English is not their primary language. Consider posting the translated notice in a non-English language newspaper and on the project website.

504 Public Meeting Materials

Each public meeting should utilize a variety of display and meeting materials for communicating with the public. A typical in-person public meeting includes sign-in sheets, comment forms, project handouts, and display boards. A virtual component could include an informational website, a PowerPoint presentation, or a live question and answer session that walks participants through the project.



Sign-in Sheets

Sign-in sheets are used to capture a list of participants for record keeping. Sign-in sheets are considered to be part of the public record.

Comment Forms

Comment forms are the primary method for capturing comments at a public meeting. They should include plenty of space for the comment and an area for the person's contact information.

Comment forms can also be used for survey questions such as “How did you hear about this meeting?”

Handouts

Attendees should be given written handout material outlining the purpose of the project, proposed alternatives or design, and how to provide additional comments. Handouts may also be required in alternative formats to aid people with disabilities and in the predominant non- English language(s) in the project area.

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Title VI Information

A Title VI board or display is required for all public meetings. The Title VI board provides participants with the contact information for District and State Title VI coordinators if they wish to make a Title VI complaint. This information must also be provided to virtual participants.



Project Display Boards

Project display boards are used to convey information about the project to the public. Some meetings could include the following boards depending on the context of the project:

- Project location map
- Purpose and need summary
- Traffic summaries

- Typical sections (existing and proposed)
- Concept boards with aerial background
- Intersection/interchange concepts (if applicable)
- Alternatives impact matrix (more applicable for PD&E projects)
- Summary of noise impacts (if applicable)
- Section 4(f) information (if applicable)
- Other environmental summaries (if applicable)
- Funding
- Schedule

Project Video or Presentation

In addition to display boards, project information can also be presented through a pre-recorded informational video. The project video can be played at the public meeting on a running loop so that attendees can view at any time during the meeting. The same project video should also be used during any virtual meeting.

Although not typical, a live presentation can be given during a public meeting. Ensure that the presentation time is clearly stated in the meeting invitation.

Virtual Access to Display Materials

There are several ways to provide virtual access to project materials, including on the project website, in a virtual room, or on the virtual meeting platform. These are passive methods where the public can participate at any time from their own computer. They can be used to enhance and augment the virtual experience and to promote effective and efficient opportunities for communicating with the public.

505 Conducting the In-Person Public Meeting

Setting Up

Arrive at least two hours in advance of the published start time to set up. More time may be needed depending on the number and size of display materials. Aim to complete the setup at least 30 minutes prior to the start time to welcome those who arrive early.

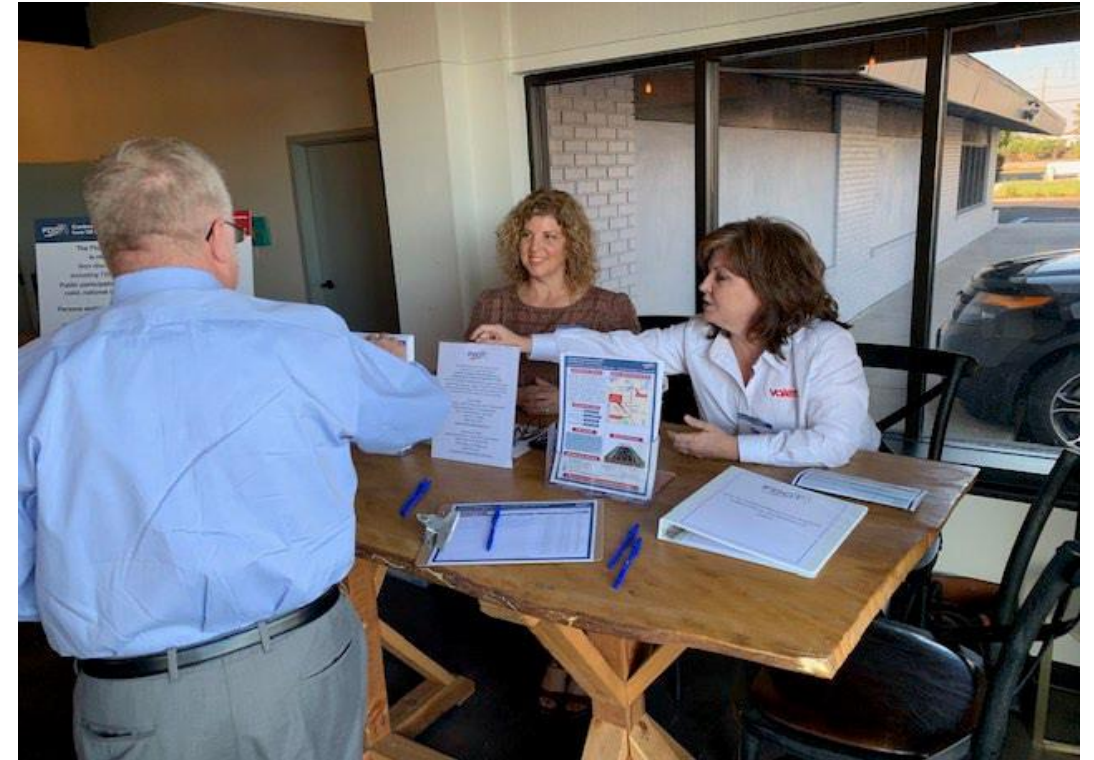
Staff Briefings

Prior to the start of the public meeting, a thorough briefing with staff will help eliminate the possibility of someone providing incorrect information. It is a best practice to gather the team and discuss roles, responsibilities, and anticipated questions from the public. Emphasize to staff that it's ok to say, "I don't know" and to find a team member who can answer the question. It's better to find someone to help rather than provide the wrong answer.

Welcome and Sign-in

As people walk into the meeting room, their first impression is the sign-in table and those who greet them. Welcome people as they enter and ask them to sign in. Having people sign in creates a record of who attended and provides a contact list in case additional follow-up is needed. If handouts are available, provide them at the sign-in table.

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Display Area

The display area is where the boards, videos, and/or presentation are provided for public review and input. This area is generally staffed by the FDOT PM, Consultant PM, facilitators (if applicable), subject matter experts, and community engagement support team.

Arrange the display boards in a logical order best suited to the project. Not every board needs a staff member assigned to it. However, assign multiple team members to high traffic areas (i.e., concept boards). As people enter, allow them to review the materials at their own pace. Identify several team members who can float and provide staff support where it's needed most.

The FDOT PM and Consultant PM should be free to roam the meeting room and dedicate their time to one-on-one conversations.

If a presentation or video is provided, assign a staff member to assist with operating the audio-visual equipment and with addressing technical problems.



Challenging Conversations

How staff handles conflict and objections from participants influences people's perception of both the project and the Department. People are more willing to collaborate and stay engaged if they are properly informed, kept in the loop, and treated fairly. Some conversations become difficult. The following suggestions can help defuse tense situations:

- Be respectful
- Actively listen
- Rephrase their concern to show you are listening
- Don't respond to what's unproductive
- Ask another team member for help
- Find the underlying interest or need
- End the conversation by directing the person to the comment form

Collecting Comments

The public comment period for the meeting should be listed in all meeting notices. The comment period for all public meetings begins one calendar day after the last event and continues for at least 7 calendar days. Most public meetings follow an informal format where attendees are provided the opportunity to review display materials and ask questions. Team members are not expected to remember or record verbal comments provided during the meeting, nor can verbal comments be effectively captured for the meeting record. For this reason, after discussing the project with each person, direct them to fill out a comment form (written or electronically) or send an email to ensure that their comment is documented.

506 Conducting the Virtual Public Meeting

Welcome

As people join the meeting, the organizer should periodically thank them for joining and let them know that the meeting will soon begin. As an alternative, include a statement on the screen with a similar message.

Virtual Broadcast

The goal of the virtual meeting is to replicate, as much as possible, the experience and information provided at the in-person meeting. This can be achieved by walking through the various boards and display materials on slides or providing a presentation about the project. As part of the virtual broadcast, participants are typically encouraged to ask questions through the question box with the moderator reading the question and the FDOT or consultant PM providing a response. Make sure to discuss with the project team the most appropriate way to taking questions during the virtual broadcast.

Collecting Comments

During the virtual broadcast, invite participants to ask questions through the question box or verbally after unmuting them. Throughout the meeting, remind participants that they can send their comments by filling out a comment form and mailing it in or by sending an email to ensure that their comments are documented. The public comment period for all public meetings begins one calendar day after the last event (in-person or virtual, whichever occurs later) and continues for at least 7 calendar days.

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