

**Request for Research Funding for FY 2023-2024**

**Project Number** (Research Center Use Only): OPP-24-01

<b>Requesting Office</b>	Office of Policy and Planning	<b>Priority</b> 1	1 of 1 (projects may not have the same ranking – no ties)
<b>Proposed Title</b>	Enhancing public engagement; A review of resources and recommendations on emerging practices.		
<b>Justification</b>	Stakeholder engagement is an essential component of the federal NEPA, and the state directed PDE processes. The Florida Department of Transportation has a long-standing commitment to identifying stakeholders and giving them multiple opportunities to be involved in the transportation delivery process, regardless of the phase. The agency recognizes that efforts to engage the public should be flexible and updated as a project or plan progresses, should be scaled to match the magnitude or complexity of the project or plan, and should strive to use the most appropriate tools for each audience. While FDOT has a strong commitment to public engagement, backed up by staff, educational resources and tools, the application of new and emerging practices and tools is needed to better ensure that engagement targets the right communities with the right questions using the right methods to ensure more inclusive and reflective project outcomes.		
<b>Impact</b>	The conduct of stakeholder engagement is a constantly evolving process driven by changes in technology, demographics, and community awareness. This project will examine new and emerging techniques and develop approaches for integrating them into the current FDOT system of resources and training. New/emerging techniques to be examined include tools and techniques to match Agency- and community-specific resources and capabilities (ex: pay-per-response survey platforms s/a Pollfish, USPS targeted mail programs s/a EDDM), interdisciplinary subject matter expert integration into new/existing processes and tools, use of virtual spaces to expand outreach and engagement, design of training materials to accommodate a high turnover workforce, and the selection, design, and use of specific training videos. Approaches to be developed include the creation of job aides including a decision support platform aligned by project phase and key staff to help guide the timing and use of specific practices. The decision support tool will be static, but the job aide will include a conceptual design for an automated wizard or graphical user interface. A second set of job aides includes the creation of fast fact reference sheets on selected best practices and emerging techniques that will be summarized in easy to read, stylized one- or two-page fact sheets. The failure to reexamine and enhance engagement techniques and to build effective staff training modules will likely result in the interests of key affected groups not being adequately integrated into project planning, potentially resulting in community resistance to planned initiatives and suboptimal project outcomes.		
<b>Affected Offices</b>	Ben Naselius, Office of Policy and Planning will be involved in the scoping and conduct of the research. All business units at FDOT will have the opportunity to benefit from the project work.		
<b>Existing Work</b>	FDOT has a strong set of community engagement tools, including its Public Engagement Resource Guide, FDOT Public Involvement Policy, FDOT Public Involvement Handbook, and a Computer Based Training, entitled, An Introduction to Public Involvement. Further, the agency has funded various research projects on engagement, including the recent, pre-COVID, USF/CUTR 2018 Assessment of the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida. This project hopes to look at new and emerging techniques, particularly those developed during and since the COVID-19 pandemic and develop approaches for integrating them into the current FDOT system of resources and training. This project goes beyond these foundational works by looking at new and emerging techniques and then developing job aides to ensure that the recommended practices can be easily implemented.		
<b>Keywords Used In Existing Work Search</b>  (Cannot leave blank)	Public Involvement, Stakeholder Engagement		
<b>Related Contracts</b> (Give contract numbers)	<i>Assessment of the Practice of Public Involvement in Florida</i> , (2018). FDOT BDV25-977-46		
<b>Funding Request</b>	\$150,000	<b>Anticipated Duration</b>	24 months

<b>Project Manager</b>	Ben Naselius	<b>Contracting Method</b>	Direct contract with university (via FSU Master Agreement)
<b>Equipment</b>	N/A	No equipment will be needed for this research project	
<b>Urgency</b>	Score = 1	This project is of immediate need. As techniques have evolved after COVID-19, it is important to build them into the standard operating guidelines of the agency. Recent public opposition to major, cornerstone agency-backed initiatives could have been mitigated through better advanced public engagement techniques and staff training and technical support.	
<b>Implementability</b>	Score = 1	This project has the highest likelihood of having implementable results. Because this is more than simply a research project on techniques, but also includes the development of job aides, the findings and recommendations of the research will be easily transferable to FDOT staff	

**Project Benefits (Succinct, complete explanation)**

This project benefits the State of Florida by,

- 1) Ensuring FDOT’s full compliance with the public engagement requirements and goals of the state directed PDE process by researching and promoting the most comprehensive and up-to-date public engagement and participation techniques,
- 2) Supporting FDOT in professional development and improving staff effectiveness by creating job aides to better understand and implement public engagement activities,
- 3) Understanding the limitation of or gaps in current approaches to prevent the perpetuation of techniques, tools, or relationships that do not help to move projects forward.
- 4) Creating a framework for broader public awareness of and input into project visioning and planning to ensure that public supports statewide planning efforts, and that negative opposition is mitigated.

<b>Project Benefits (Select all that apply and explain)</b>	<b>Quantifiable Benefits (units, dollars, etc...if applicable)</b>	<b>Methodology or Data Sources Used to Determine Quantifiable Benefits. If not applicable, please give justification of project benefits</b>
<input type="radio"/> Materials Enhancement	N/A	N/A
<input type="radio"/> Materials Savings	Nonpecuniary	Streamlined and effective project planning saves time and materials through better project scoping and cost controls. The time savings afforded by effective community engagement may result in a more efficient programming of resources and an overall reduction in total material costs.
<input type="radio"/> Time Savings	Nonpecuniary	As documented by the US DOT ( <a href="https://www.transportation.gov/public-involvement">https://www.transportation.gov/public-involvement</a> ), properly conducted, meaningful public engagement processes take time but yield more fully supported projects and actually can get projects underway quicker and save project time overall. This will avoid expending unnecessary time and money on projects that the public may not support or that opposition groups can cause to be cancelled in later project phases. The benefit cost from a time standpoint is positive.
<input type="radio"/> Lives Saved/Injuries Prevented	Nonpecuniary	Improved local input helps to identify and/or validate projects that promote traffic safety in areas of risk so that the potential for injuries or loss of life can be mitigated, helping to better achieve statewide “Vision Zero” goals.
<input type="radio"/> Other (Explain)	N/A	

\*Comments should explain and support urgency, financial benefit, and implementability scores