

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENT COMMUNITIES



WHAT IS A TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENT COMMUNITY?

Transportation efficient communities support health, prosperous economies, energy conservation and a sustainable environment by requiring less driving to meet daily needs.

How can cities and counties meaningfully engage communities?

Introduction

Meaningful public input provides the framework of quality planning and project development. Facilitators of public decision-making processes must ensure equal opportunity for meaningful participation. Cities and counties that seek early and ongoing input from the affected interests are more effective at delivering projects and services to the people they serve. Meaningful engagement ensures accountability, effective communications and consistency.

What is Community Engagement?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines community engagement as: "the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes



WSDOT piggybacks on a [Feet First outreach event](#) to talk about the I-5 overpass over SR 524. The event was an interactive walking tour and conversation to discuss changes to the community surrounding the site of the future Lynnwood Sound Transit light rail station.

that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices."



[Families learning about the new Washington State Ferry, Tokitae, with hands-on activities in the wheelhouse, 2014.](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Know your audience
- Plan why, where, when, and how you will do outreach
- Adapt your engagement strategies to your audience and message
- Consider other perspectives
- Anticipate special needs, make your meetings safe and accessible, and use interpreters if needed
- Use innovative technology when appropriate

Why Should Planners Engage?

As a frontrunner in identifying and resolving issues facing today's city and county planners, [APA Washington](#) suggests effective community engagement helps planners and plans to:

- Prevent displacement. Incorporate policies, programs and incentives that maximize the ability of current residents to remain in their homes in the face of gentrification, and discourage displacement of viable businesses that serve community needs.
- Understand and respond to local context. Respect local community character, cultural diversity, and values while building upon local assets.
- Preserve and expand affordable housing options. Complement or support healthy, safe and affordable housing for all family sizes and incomes in all neighborhoods.
- Promote environmental justice. Eliminate disproportionate environmental burdens on low-income communities and communities of color.
- Achieve full accessibility. Ensure that future projects are accessible and welcoming to people of all ages, incomes, abilities, or languages.
- Anticipate special needs. Recognize that people do not always articulate their inability to hear, so use microphones, and test in advance to make sure they work. People with low vision may not be able to see your PowerPoint or visuals, so also "tell" the story in your presentation and during exercises. Assign staff to work one-on-one with folks who may have difficulty participating.



At a Bremerton outreach event for the 2007 Washington Transportation Plan Update, a hard of hearing community member utilizes an audio induction loop provided by WSDOT, courtesy of the DSHS Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2006.

- Advance economic opportunity. Help increase quality living wage jobs for people in all neighborhoods and enhance community-serving establishments.
- Promote broader mobility and connectivity. Provide linkages to an effective and affordable public transportation network that supplies equitable access to core services and amenities.
- Ensure inclusion. Develop plans with local community

participation and leadership in decision-making to reflect a diversity of voices, including targeted strategies to engage historically marginalized communities.

- Develop healthy and safe communities. Enhance community health through public amenities (schools, parks, open spaces, complete streets, health care and other services), access to affordable healthy food, improved air quality, and safe and inviting environments.

What are the Benefits of Engaging Communities?

Meaningful, effective community engagement allows you to take advantage of the community's good ideas, address concerns early, and head off potential problems. Engaging the people who live in the affected community allows them to participate in the shaping of their community. It also helps you to be successful, since community members may try to stop decisions they don't like.

How Should Planners Engage Communities?

- Get to know your community. Research demographics for community engagement activities before you begin any project or plan. Use [EJSCREEN](#) and data for respective Tribes to inform how you reach various cultures in the community, as well as people with low-incomes, minority populations, people with disabilities, the elderly, people who speak other languages, and any other population traditionally underserved. Also, consider if the affected community is rural, suburban, or urban.
- Review city and county public participation plans and then plan why, where, when, and how you will do your specific outreach. Before posting notices or conducting activities, plan your engagement. Think about why the community is being engaged (it may be required but it's also a good idea), where your decision may have the greatest impact, when participation will be most effective, and what methods you will use to reach out to the community.
- Articulate the goals of your outreach to your audience.
- Adapt your strategies to your audience and your message. Frame the issues within relative contexts using qualitative and quantitative data. Depending on the context, consider strategies such as participating in pre-existing cultural and festival gatherings, providing information kiosks around the community, hanging posters at grocery stores, schools or faith-based organizations, submitting articles to local print media, developing inserts for utility bills, appearing on local radio or television stations, or [creative placemaking](#).
- Consider other perspectives. Be sensitive to how an affected community may perceive your plan or project and look for opportunities to work through

trusted community members or organizations.

- Consider the need for interpreters at your public meetings. Translate key documents into the prevalent languages in the community. Consider hiring translation companies for public meeting notices. Do not assume that on-line translators are accurate.
- Make your meetings accessible. Ensure meeting spaces are located on transit routes that provide regular scheduled services at the times you plan meetings and that room set-ups are accessible for people of all abilities. If possible, provide free childcare.
- Make your public meeting safe. Planners often set a goal of ensuring that the person who has never attended a public meeting and who feels uncomfortable speaking in front of people feels safe and respected. The professional advocates who often frequent meetings don't need our help to participate. Including small group exercises on the agenda often increases participation.



[Open House for proposed rebuilding of the I-5 interchanges to Berkeley St. and Thorne Lane as part of an overall corridor improvements project. 2015](#)

- Use innovative technology when appropriate. Depending on your audience's comfort, consider using polling apps during public meetings. Since not everyone understands transportation planning terms and jargon, it's important to frame important issues around relative contexts and include visual aids, photo simulation, and 3D renderings to display proposed solutions and explain issues. Use, as appropriate, web sites, social media (Facebook, Twitter), and any other useful method to reach the greatest number of people. However, do not assume that everyone has access to technology. Libraries are great partners and can help overcome that barrier.
- Work with partners. Your [Regional Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations](#) may provide helpful resources.

In addition to community engagement, consider how your decisions can positively affect social equity. Consider these questions, adapted from APA Washington's research package to help address social equity concerns:

- Preventing displacement of communities with traditionally underserved populations, due to redevelopment. What are metrics, indicators, and conditions that would signal the potential for and start of neighborhood displacement? (See [Equitable Target Area](#)

Tools and Resources

APA Washington's Social Equity Working Group is gathering and building tools to help planners thoroughly think through the repercussions of public investment, prioritize improvements truly needed and desired by local communities, and maintain affordability for residents and businesses. The group has developed: a social equity university research package, an affordable housing resources list, strategies to better incorporate meaningful public engagement and social equity in awards criteria, and a mobile workshop focusing on affordable commercial space and housing around light rail stations. (For more information, contact Rachel Miller, rachelm@makersarch.com or Sophie Glass, Sophieglass4@gmail.com).

Some additional resources include:

- [FHWA Environmental Justice Reference Guide](#)
- [International Association for Public Participation](#)
- [Active Community Environment Toolkit](#)
- [DOH Washington Tracking Network](#)
- [EJSCREEN](#) (Formerly EJVIEW, an EPA mapping tool for EJ demographics and environmental factors)
- [StreetPlan](#)
- [StreetMix](#)
- [Creative Placemaking](#)
- [WSDOT Community Engagement Plan](#)

Groups that may be able to help connect you with your community:

- [Clark County: Healthy Living Collaborative](#)
- [Grant County region: Safe Kids Coalition](#) and [City of Moses Lake Community Health Center](#)
- [Kitsap Community Health Priorities](#)
- [Pierce County Cross-Cultural Collaborative](#)
- [Spokane: Better Health Together](#)
- [Thurston County: Thurston Thrives](#)
- [Accountable Communities of Health](#)
- [State & County Health Departments](#)
- [American Indian Health Commission](#)
- [Area Agencies on Aging](#)
- [Food banks](#)
- [Affordable housing providers](#)
- [Schools, K-1](#)
- [Higher education](#)
- [Libraries](#)

[maps](#) for an example).

- Policy tools. How can policies help make redevelopment projects more socially just?
- Affordable commercial real estate. Affordable commercial real estate is necessary to allow existing businesses to continue operating in the face of gentrification. What are some ways to ensure affordable real estate while balancing these methods within a free market system?
- Geographical Information Systems. GIS has been increasingly popular in urban planning. How can GIS and geospatial analysis be utilized to monitor, evaluate and predict social equity conditions related to displacement?
- Qualitative approaches. In addition to quantitative data from censuses, surveys, and remote sensing, what are some qualitative approaches such as storytelling art and filming you could use to capture detailed elements of displacement?

Performance Measures

Now that you have a framework for community engagement, you need to analyze its effectiveness during and after implementation of your plan. Some performance measures to consider when analyzing your community engagement efforts could be:

- Intuitively, are activities, formats, and technologies working?
- Are our engagement activities helping us meet our goals?
- What would it look like if there was no engagement vs. what it looked like when you did?
- Qualitative: By how much are/aren't we meeting our goals?
- Quantitative: By how much are/aren't we meeting our goals?

In order to get the data you need to effectively analyze how your community engagement is working, consider:

- Administering a short survey to the community you're working with.
- Compiling and analyzing direct responses from stakeholders in discussions or presentations to groups.
- A call center, if that is appropriate, for community members to provide verbal feedback.
- The number of complaints before implementing community engagement vs. post-implementation.



[SR 9 - 176th to Marsh Rd. groundbreaking event, 2008](#)

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Examples

- [Lacey Woodland District Plan](#)
Used a visual preference survey with automated polling to develop a plan to transform an old suburban office park into a vibrant urban setting that resulted in new street standards giving higher priority to walk, bike, and transit access; and updated site and building design standards.
- [Sustainable Thurston Plan](#)
A regional planning process involving extensive community outreach articulates a shared vision, sets goals and targets, and recommends actions to achieve them including an urban corridor and centers approach.
- [City of Seattle's Pedestrian Planning Prioritization Process](#)
The Strategy for Prioritizing Projects uses three components—vibrancy (or demand), equity, and corridor function—to recommend areas of the City for early Implementation. By looking at the opportunities for improvement in these areas of highest priority, project lists were developed for use by City staff, private developers, and community and neighborhood organizations.
- [City of Shoreline Light Rail Station Subarea Planning](#)
Held visioning workshops, used multiple language links on their website, held walking tours, hosted a Korean community workshop and event focusing on engaging folks of modest means, etc. to prepare for light rail coming to the city in 2023.
- [Indiana DOT Best Practices in Public Involvement](#)
Outlines best practices in public involvement, how IDOT did it, what was the outcome, the time the effort took, and why the activity is considered a best practice.
- [Spokane Regional Transportation Council \(SRTC\) Community Engagement](#)
The SRTC engaged communities to gain their perspective on the region's long-range transportation plan, Horizon 2040. The team capitalized on community events to spread the word and get input.

For More Information

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