

METHODS TO IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN OUTREACH EQUITY IN THE SJTPO REGION



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INTRODUCTION

The South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem Counties in southern-most New Jersey. Established in 1993, SJTPO is responsible for regional transportation planning through a collaborative, cooperative, comprehensive decision-making process. In keeping with Federal guidance, SJTPO is dedicated to fostering a meaningful, proactive public involvement process that not only provides complete and timely information to the public on key decisions but actively involves involvement by all members of the public interested in getting involved in the regional transportation planning process.

The most recent updates to SJTPO's Public Involvement Plan (PIP) lay a course for how SJTPO engages or plans to engage under-represented communities within the SJTPO region. This document serves as a companion document to the PIP, focusing on best practices in public engagement and outreach strategies best suited to engaging specific demographic groups, including immigrant and limited English proficiency communities, ethnic minority communities, low-income communities, youth, young adults, older adults, and individuals with special needs.

MPO AND SJTPO OVERVIEW

The system of roads, railways, airports, and waterways making up our nation's transportation network is not owned, operated, or funded by any single government entity. Just as they are not controlled by a single entity, the impacts of these systems extend beyond municipal borders as they traverse vast areas and connect a broad range of communities. Recognizing the interconnected needs of regions, the federal government required urbanized areas with a population greater than 50,000 people to establish MPOs as part of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962. MPOs are federally mandated and federally funded transportation planning agencies made up of representatives from local government and governmental transportation authorities created to ensure regional cooperation and best practices in transportation planning. By conducting



The SJTPO Region

transportation planning and overseeing transportation investments, MPOs cooperatively set the vision and goals for a defined region's transportation system and allocate federal funding for various transportation investments throughout their region, including transit, road, bicycle, and pedestrian projects.

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the core functions of all MPOs include:

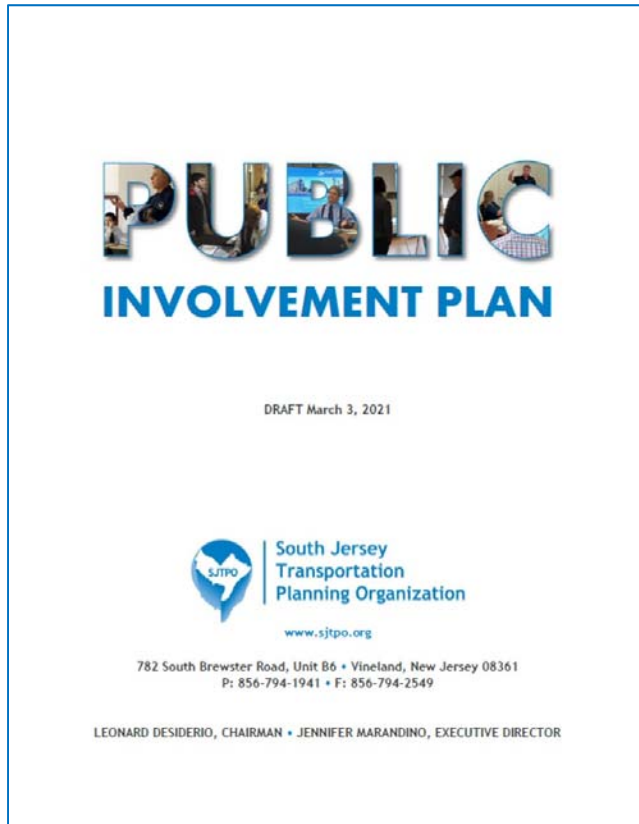
- **Establish an MPO policy board.** Establish and manage a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision making.
- **Analyze and evaluate alternatives.** Identify and evaluate transportation improvement options scaled to the region's size and complexity and appropriate to the nature of its transportation issues.
- **Maintain a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).** Prepare and update a long-range RTP covering a planning horizon of at least twenty years that fosters mobility and access for people and goods, efficient system performance and preservation, and quality of life.
- **Develop a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).** Develop a fiscally constrained short-range (four-year) program of capital improvements based on the RTP.
- **Protect air quality.** Ensure transportation plans, programs, projects, and policies help improve air quality in the region and conform with air quality goals in the State Implementation Plan (SIP).
- **Monitor Performance Measures.** Monitor and evaluate performance targets for surface and public transportation.
- **Involve the public.** Involve the public by offering all interested persons opportunities to participate in the decision-making of the MPO.

Nationwide there are more than 400 MPOs. New Jersey is served by three MPOs covering the entire state, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, and the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization. Formed in 1993, SJTPO replaced three smaller existing MPOs and incorporated areas not previously served to cover a region comprised of 68 municipalities in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem counties.

While many planning challenges are consistent among all three MPO areas, SJTPO also faces challenges unique to the region. Although the SJTPO region accounts for nearly 20 percent of New Jersey's total land area, the region contains less than seven percent of the state's year-round population. Its population and jobs are more widely dispersed, with the greatest concentration of employment in one location, Atlantic City. Tourism is an important industry to the region that follows seasonal patterns, resulting in significant increases in residents and visitors during warmer weather. The SJTPO region is also more economically disadvantaged relative to the rest of the state. Barriers to mobility, traffic fatalities, and poverty rates are higher; educational attainment is lower, and social issues associated with poverty are more pronounced. Additionally, the region is home to vast environmentally significant areas. Large parts of the region fall under one of two environmental regulatory areas, the Pinelands and Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) of 1973. The environmental regulations associated with these regulatory areas serve to protect critical water sources and the sensitive habitats of endangered and threatened species. These environmentally significant areas benefit the region by attracting visitors and provide local as well as statewide benefits, however, they also present obstacles in completing transportation projects

as decisions are subject to increased scrutiny and regulation. SJTPO recognizes that effective long-range planning requires a thorough understanding of these unique challenges that influence and affect the region. The unique context for transportation planning and decision-making in South Jersey underlies all MPO plans, projects, and decisions.

Current Engagement with SJTPO



The 2020 PIP fully details the public's opportunities to engage with SJTPO. The SJTPO website, www.sjtpo.org, is the primary tool used by SJTPO to disseminate information. In addition to a variety of materials and resources, other opportunities for public involvement are posted online on the Public Comment webpage. Additional online options for engagement and information exchange include the e-list, social media, and the *On the Go* digital newsletter. Those members of the public who join the e-list receive information about upcoming meetings, special events, public comment periods, project news and developments, and they also receive issues of the *On the Go* newsletter. SJTPO maintains various social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn to reach the public and highlight key activities and initiatives. *On the Go* is an electronic, bi-monthly newsletter highlighting SJTPO projects and programs, meetings and events, public outreach programs, and more.

Throughout the year, numerous opportunities are provided for residents and stakeholders to be engaged in SJTPO's planning process. In addition to providing information online, the SJTPO utilizes local newspapers to publicize meetings, events, and other SJTPO projects and programs. Public meetings, both in-person and virtual, are typically held to provide information and a setting for formal comments to be received. Policy Board meetings are open to the public, who are given the opportunity to comment at the beginning of each meeting. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings are also open to the public. The TAC functions to advise the Policy Board, the governing body of the SJTPO, on technical matters related to the development and implementation of transportation plans and programs. Members of the public are given the opportunity to comment on agenda items at the start of each meeting.

In addition to regularly scheduled meetings, SJTPO hosts in-person and virtual workshop-style meetings open to the public on an as needed basis. At these workshops, attendees learn about transit, roadways, bicycle and pedestrian access, freight, and other transportation matters through the use of presentations, displays, posters, and other informational materials. Attendees have the opportunity to comment, and all comments are recorded. A written summary, analysis, and report on all significant comments received is prepared and used to inform decisions.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT MISSION AND GOALS

SJTPO believes that meaningful and proactive public involvement is vital to the regional planning process. Guided by federal mandates, SJTPO aims to achieve a transparent and inclusive planning process that places public engagement at the forefront, focusing on the need for the public to understand and support the activities proposed by the Organization. To achieve this, SJTPO is dedicated to

- Advancing and improving opportunities for public involvement,
- Increasing the accessibility and transparency of information available to the public,
- Boosting the efficiency and inclusion of the public involvement process,
- Providing the public with more options and education on how to get involved and be heard in the transportation planning process,
- Making transportation decisions that support the needs of all peoples, and
- Enhancing the environmental justice process.

SJTPO is guided in these efforts through its PIP, which outlines the rules and identifies various procedures that SJTPO will maintain in its efforts to ensure that plans and programs include the public to the greatest extent possible. This document is a companion for the PIP, providing a menu of options for additional engagement activities and strategies that can be deployed throughout the SJTPO region, as well as specific methods to reach under-represented and hard-to-reach communities.

DEFINING UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SJTPO REGION

SJTPO is committed to upholding the 1964 Civil Rights Act's principles and intentions and related nondiscrimination mandates in all work, including publications, products, communications, public input, and decision-making processes. To meet these goals, SJTPO seeks to maximize outreach to underserved communities, including, individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), racial minorities, low-income communities, people with disabilities, zero-vehicle households, older adults, and youth. SJTPO has an excellent understanding of the region and the people they serve, as demonstrated in the RTP, LEP Plan, and Title VI Implementation Plan that have been completed and made available on the SJTPO website. Demographic information included in these documents regarding traditionally underserved communities has been summarized below.

Limited English Proficiency

SJTPO's LEP Plan uses data from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, "Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over" at the county and the Census Tract levels. For each population that speaks a language other than English at home, the ACS distinguishes those who speak English "very well" from those who speak English "less than very well." A person with LEP is defined as an individual over the age of five who speaks a language other than English at home and speaks English "less than very well." USDOT has adopted the Department of Justice's Safe Harbor Provision, which outlines requirements for the translation of written materials for LEP populations. The most common language spoken by people with LEP, by far, is Spanish. According to 2015 5-Year ACS data, over two-thirds (67.1%) of the four-county LEP population speaks Spanish. The other languages spoken at home by the LEP population in the region vary greatly. Including Spanish, five languages or language groups have populations over the 1,000-person Safe Harbor threshold. Following

Spanish, the most common languages spoken by people with LEP are Chinese, Vietnamese, Other Indic Languages, and Gujarati. While Spanish is spoken by people with LEP throughout the region and has been identified as the primary LEP language, significant LEP populations speaking the other identified languages reside in Atlantic City.

Racial Minority

As specified in SJTPO's Title VI Implementation Plan, minority is defined as the total population minus White Alone-Non Hispanic or Latino. Throughout the SJTPO region, thirty-nine percent of the population is considered a minority, with Hispanic, Black, and Asian people comprising the largest minority groups in the region. Most of the minority communities are concentrated in Atlantic and Cumberland Counties with small pockets of minority populations also in Cape May and Salem Counties.

Low-income

The SJTPO region is a disadvantaged region relative to New Jersey, and overall incomes are lower. SJTPO has used the national poverty level to determine the percentages of people with low-income living in the SJTPO region. This analysis shows that approximately 14.7 percent or 30, 500 households live below the poverty level in the SJTPO region. Cumberland County has the highest percentage of households with low-income compared to its total population (17.66%), followed by Atlantic (14.20%), Salem (13.00%), and Cape May (10.52%).



East Point Lighthouse, Maurice River Township

People with Disabilities

To ensure inclusion, transportation plans and projects must consider how decisions will impact persons with a disability. According to SJTPO analysis, people with disabilities comprise 14.01 percent of the regional population. By county, Salem has the largest percentage of people with a disability in the SJTPO region at 15.53 percent of its noninstitutionalized population. Specific disability types identified include hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living difficulties. While considered together in this analysis, SJTPO notes the importance of recognizing that people with different disabilities will be affected by a project, program, or plan in vastly different ways.

Zero-Vehicle Households

In an auto-centric society, living and working without access to a vehicle depends on many associated factors such as the community's size, locations of jobs, and availability of mass transit. Over 11 percent of the SJTPO region's households do not have a vehicle. Atlantic County, containing the urbanized municipalities of Atlantic City and Pleasantville, has the largest percentage of households with no vehicle (13.65%), followed by Cumberland County (10.33%). Cape May and Salem Counties have 8.13 percent and 8.15 percent zero vehicle households, respectively.

Older Adults and Youths

The population is aging. In less than ten years, 55 million Americans will be over age 65. According to the Urban Institute, more than three-quarters of these older adults live in rural or suburban areas and depend on driving. As these older adults stop driving, their ability to age in place is challenged as their access to daily needs such as doctor visits and grocery shopping becomes more limited, and their dependence on others increases. In areas without access to mass transit and safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, youth rely on others to meet their transportation needs to access



Delaware Bay, Cumberland County

school, libraries, recreational activities, social engagements, and part-time jobs. While at opposite ends of the life spectrum, older adults and youth often have similar access needs that can be addressed through inclusive planning of transportation improvements.

In the SJTPO region, 7.4 percent of the population is 75 and older. Cape May County has the highest percentage of older adults, with 10.6 percent of residents. Salem County has the second-highest percentage at 7.6 percent, followed by Atlantic at 6.9 percent and Cumberland at 6.1 percent. Throughout the SJTPO region, 15.9 percent of the population is between the ages of 5 and 17 years old. Cumberland County has the highest percentage of youth between the ages of 5 and 17 years old at 17.2 percent, while Cape May County has the lowest at 13.1 percent.

BEST PRACTICES IN EQUITABLE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The term public engagement is used in a variety of sectors to refer to a process involving the public in problem-solving or decision making and using public input to help make decisions. Public engagement includes all aspects of identifying problems and opportunities, developing alternatives, and making decisions. While public engagement is multi-faceted and takes many forms, successful public engagement must be a two-way process involving informing, interaction, and listening. The following principles of public engagement should be considered when developing a public engagement strategy.

Overarching Principles of Public Engagement

Understand the “public” in public engagement. - The public, often referred to as stakeholders, is any individual or group of individuals, organizations, or political entities with an interest in the outcome of a planning decision. They may be, or perceive that they may be, affected directly or indirectly by the outcome of a decision. Some people will be aware of the issues and how they may be potentially affected, while others may not. Some people will be extremely engaged, attending every meeting and consistently part of the process. Others will occasionally comment from afar. Still, others may know the process is occurring but will choose not to become engaged. With this in mind, it is essential to understand that there is no single public, but different levels of the public based on varying degrees of interest and ability to participate. These differences are apparent within what may initially be perceived to be a single interest group. An effective public engagement process needs to provide opportunities for those at every level of interest and involvement.

The process must have clear goals and be supported by those with the power to make change. - To be truly inclusive, public engagement must be incorporated into the decision making process. Too often in the past, public engagement has been thought of only as a tool for informing the public once a decision has already been made and can often be seen as cynical, empty public relations gestures. In contrast, authentic public engagement involves inviting the public to join the dialogue surrounding a problem and provides them the tools to give feedback productively before decisions are made. Effective engagement involves members of the public shaping priorities and decisions rather than consulted to gain acceptance. Any public engagement initiative should start with a clear set of questions in mind: what do you want to ask, and how will feedback be incorporated? Actively involving the public from the early stages helps create legitimacy of the process and a sense of shared responsibility and ownership of the outcomes.

Engagement opportunities should be targeted to specific audiences and communities. - As mentioned, there is no single public, and therefore there can be no single public engagement method. When focused too broadly in an attempt to engage everyone, initiatives may only engage an interested and motivated group. Effective public engagement is not “one size fits all.” When developing a public engagement strategy, be thoughtful about who to engage, why, and how to foster engagement. While some members of the public will already be engaged and interested in the process, all members of the

public will not come to public meetings and websites. It is crucial to meet members of the public where they are, in a way that works for them, to get their input. This is especially true in communities that have traditionally been underserved or underrepresented. Some of the best public engagement often occurs in locations where the intended audience was already present, such as parks, farmers' markets, grocery stores, and community festivals and events. Reach them where they already are, or "go to them" engagement.

Equity must be at the heart of public engagement. - Public engagement must be approached through an equity lens if the process is to be inclusive and allow for a diversity of ideas. Unfortunately, structural inequality and institutionalized racism have long impacted planning decisions throughout the nation. Without acknowledging history and how equity can be a part of public engagement processes, projects and plans may unintentionally have disproportionate adverse outcomes for minorities, low-income, and other underserved and underrepresented communities. Additionally, when communities are intentionally or unintentionally excluded from engagement, residents' needs and visions for their community are unheard, and new plans, projects, and policies can be developed without local acceptance or ownership, limiting their success from the start. Engaging with and understanding the entire community fosters a more informed decision-making process that allows change to incorporate the vision people who live there have for their community. Each region, community, and neighborhood is different and failing to understand the different demographics and characteristics of each may result in projects that do not reflect the needs of the community and will have little public support for lasting change. Projects, plans, and policies must also be considered relative to each other to identify potential cumulative impacts or opportunities for mutual collaboration.

Public engagement must be welcoming and beneficial for participants. - When engaging with the public, always consider what participants are benefitting from the experience. A top-down approach that does not consider the participant experience often results in a meeting or series of meetings where planners and decision-makers do not get what they want and communities feel excluded and do not have their needs met, wasting everyone's time. It can be very intimidating to walk into a room full of strange people who are considered experts and feeling frightened to speak. This is further complicated if participants have never attended a meeting or have had negative past experiences with government or other organizations. To combat these issues, plan a public engagement process designed to be pleasant and welcoming. It should involve staff spread throughout the room rather than in front of a podium and abandoning a formal PowerPoint presentation for a series of interactive displays designed to inform and foster small group and one-on-one conversations. Provide child care, food and refreshments, particularly if meetings occur in the evenings. Effective and authentic public engagement should be mutually beneficial and empowering for the community. Benefits for participants can include learning, developing new skills, gaining new insights or ideas, or being empowered to seek further involvement and become a community advocate for change.

Experiment with various methods of public engagement. - Planners and decision-makers often rely on a standard set of methods to engage the public, including formal meetings and long presentations. To ensure that public engagement efforts are mutually beneficial for the decision-makers and the public, be open to new methods, change, and experimentation when designing outreach. Innovative, community-focused approaches, from arts-based engagement to the use of social media, can help to create a more effective, inclusive process and help to highlight public concerns that can be missed during formal and presentation-based approaches.

Accessibility must be maximized and events must convene in a neutral place. - The accessibility of the physical location for public engagement may be particularly challenging for those with disabilities, the elderly, those who use public transportation, people without access to childcare, those with busy or complicated work or personal schedules, and those who feel the location is not comfortable or appropriate. If a meeting or program is held in a building that requires a state ID card or driver's license, people who forgot their ID will be excluded, as well as people who do not have IDs and those who feel intimidated or not comfortable having to provide that information. If the location is not accessible by bicycle or public transit, anyone who does not drive or have access to a personal vehicle may be excluded. If the building where the meeting or program is being held does not have ADA compliant access or an elevator, the involvement of interested community members with disabilities may be prevented. Hold public engagement meetings, programs, or events in accessible and neutral spaces like libraries, parks, and recreation centers. Strive to identify comfortable spaces and avoid spaces that may exclude, perpetuate power dynamics or imbalances, and avoid places where people may have negative associations or prior experiences.

Continue to build and maintain partnerships with the community. - To have effective public engagement, understand who the public is and know how to reach them. While highly engaged and interested individuals may respond to public notices posted online or in newspapers, reaching members of less-engaged and historically underrepresented communities can take much more effort. This is further complicated if members of these groups have had poor previous experiences with similar organizations or past participatory processes; they do not believe their involvement will be worthwhile or make a difference; they doubt their ability to represent or protect their interests effectively; or they do not trust other stakeholders or the process as a whole. Overcoming these obstacles to involve under-represented communities fully demands ample time and lasting support from project managers and organizations. This process of building sustained relationships with partners and collaborators from under-represented communities begins with two-way dialogue.

Organizations can't only approach these groups when they want or need something. For these relationships to flourish, they must be seen as mutually beneficial by both parties. These groups are often resource-strapped and can't spare the time to communicate with outside organizations on issues that may not seem critical to their main mission. The development of partnerships could be fostered through a program aimed at providing funding or resources for local groups to encourage participation in the planning process. An example can be seen in the Together North Jersey Program (funded by HUD), in which an NGO Micro-Grant Program provided financial assistance to non-governmental organizations to meaningfully participate in the planning processes that would lead to the development of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) for Northern New Jersey. Together North Jersey's NGO Micro-Grant Program partnered with community-based organizations at the local level that regularly interact with, are trusted by, and include members of traditionally underrepresented populations. The program was targeted toward community-based organizations whose primary mission is to work on behalf of low-income or minority populations, persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), persons with disabilities, underprivileged youth and seniors or who work in communities with high concentrations of these traditionally underrepresented populations. Grant recipients undertook small planning studies that focused upon neighborhood revitalization and designing and planning the built environment to promote health and well-being, safe neighborhoods, and active transportation (e.g., bicycling, walking, safe routes to transit, schools and parks). Together North Jersey has also made use of a Technical Assistance Program. Through this program, technical assistance services were provided to support local initiatives that advanced the focus areas and strategies from the Together North Jersey Plan. Eligible applicants included municipal governments, county governments and non-profit, community-based or non-

governmental organizations in the Together North Jersey region. Unlike the Micro-Grant program, under the Technical Assistance Program funding was not given to local groups directly, but technical service was provided to complete a mutually beneficial project.

Building relationships and partnerships does not necessarily rely upon funding or donations, but can instead be built upon mutual support. Organizations can work with these community partners by attending their events or offering a targeted outreach event for their constituents. Relationships can be built by working together towards common goals such as better walking and bicycling conditions in the community. Even promotion of their programs or events through social media and website postings can help build a relationship as it shows that your organization values their group, admires their work, and respects their constituents. While not always a quick or easy process, building and maintaining relationships with well-known organizations representing or serving communities of concern helps to establish trust and is a great method for helping to include their constituents and members in the public engagement process.

Expand measures of success. - While exploring new outreach methods and embracing new partnerships, it is also important to expand the idea of what constitutes a successful public engagement event beyond merely counting the number of attendees. Having a large monolithic audience for a public presentation does not indicate that the participants or the presenters learned anything, that any ideas were exchanged, or that members of the community felt engaged in the process. Although attendance may be small at more targeted, less traditional engagement events, the impact may be more significant. Beyond attendance, also consider who the attendees were and if multiple demographics and traditionally underserved communities were reached. Consider the level of interaction with attendees; was it one-way, were some questions asked, or were they invited to participate in discussions actively? Did new partnerships develop with community groups or organizations? The output of public engagement processes are often reports used to justify public support for and embrace of a resulting plan, project, or policy. However, public engagement can be much more than this. Instead of viewed as only project or plan specific, public engagement should be thought of as an ongoing process that documents outcomes and focuses on relationship building and how the public engagement process itself can influence participants and lead to more long-term discussions and interaction.

Questions to consider when developing an inclusive public engagement process that addresses some typical barriers to engagement:

- Will the event be held in a neutral and accessible location?
- Is the event location ADA compliant?
- Is the event and event location welcoming to people from different cultures?
- Have power dynamics and differences around race, age, gender, and culture been considered?
- Is there a history of mistrust?
- Will the event need a translator?
- Are events or sessions held at a variety of times to accommodate people with alternative work schedules?
- Are there technology or literacy skills needed that may be difficult for people with less education, limited English proficiency, or who are from another generation?
- Would it be appropriate for children to accompany a parent to the event if childcare is an issue?
- Should childcare or child activities be provided at events?
- Should food or refreshments be provided?
- In the overall public engagement process, are there opportunities for varying commitments related to involvement? (short-term vs. long-term)

- Who may not be reached by this process and how can they be reached?
- Have we clearly expressed what decisions will be made as a result of this process, who decides them, and how the engagement fits into the overall decision-making process?
- How does their feedback and input get incorporated into the plan, project or policy?
- How will the community be informed about the progress of the plan or project during the process and after completion?

BEST PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT (VPI)

The internet has changed society and how people throughout the world interact. Each day, people connect virtually for learning, business, shopping, and play. Increasingly the internet has been playing a role in civic involvement through VPI. There are various methods and tools that fall under the category of VPI platforms, which range from websites, blogs, social media, online crowd-mapping, online public meetings, and open houses to detailed, comprehensive online surveys and public comment platforms. These tools provide another mechanism, beyond traditional face-to-face engagement methods, for the public to be informed about transportation issues and plans and for agencies to gather public input regarding a project, program, or plan to help make more informed decisions. Practitioners view VPI as a supplement for traditional or face-to-face public involvement opportunities but not substitutes. The realities in 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic have shown that VPI is the only option as a result of health concerns for social distancing. Despite the growing use of various online public involvement technology throughout 2020, it is constantly evolving. While information changes and new platforms arrive regularly, certain considerations and best practice recommendations should be kept in mind when developing and conducting VPI.

VPI considerations

When utilizing online platforms such as websites, blogs, and social media, it's essential to understand the goals and whether pursuing information distribution, involvement, or engagement. With information distribution, the intention is clear - online platforms are used to post information, such as plans, for the public to consume. Information distribution does not provide the opportunity for public involvement but can provide the public with the information they need to understand a project, plan, or decision-making process. Involvement activities expand upon information distribution resulting in a mostly one-way communication.

Essentially, activities involve obtaining feedback about plans, ideas, options, or issues but with little



SJTPO Virtual Listening Session

interaction such as an online survey or social media where the public cannot comment, or public comments are not answered. Both information distribution and involvement techniques have value in a public engagement process, but they are not engagement in and of themselves. High-quality engagement follows the same principles whether it is virtual or in person. If seeking engagement, utilize virtual methods that expand two-way interaction with the public. Engagement approaches generally move beyond individual response and allow members of the public to interact virtually, share views and information and offer their collective ideas or recommendations. Any public engagement initiative, whether face to face or virtual, might fall into one or more of these categories. To successfully use VPI technology to engage residents, one approach and one strategy will likely not be sufficient. An effective public engagement strategy combines virtual processes with opportunities for face-to-face engagement. Depending on the nature of the project or plan and the time and budget allocated for the process, the array of engagement strategies and levels of engagement employed, information distribution, involvement, or engagement, will vary. At a minimum, online forms of media, such as websites, email, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, are fast and inexpensive tools for disseminating information to the public online and serve as a base for a broader engagement process.

When planning to use VPI strategies, agencies must be aware of the digital divide and its impact on their engagement process. The digital divide refers to the gap between people with adequate access to digital and information technology and those with poor access. Some of the variables affecting access are location, income, disability, and age. Location is relevant because there are varying connectivity levels in rural, suburban, and urban areas and unequal access to connectivity options based upon where people live. Even if someone lives in an area with excellent connectivity, access is not inexpensive, and the digital divide can be seen as a gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" who can't afford access. Even among those with some access to technology, the digital divide can be evident in the form of lower-performance computers, lower-speed wireless connections, and lower-priced connections such as dial-up. In addition, the type of disability an individual has can prevent one from interacting with computer screens and smartphone screens. Many websites are not ADA compliant or compatible with screen readers or other assistive technologies, diminishing that person's access. Older adults, those over age 60, have not had lifelong exposure to digital media and have had varying success adapting to incorporate it into their lives. Even older adults in more privileged socio-economic positions with excellent access options may have an actual low rate of access due to unfamiliarity or a lack of desire to access digital technology. While mobile devices are changing the landscape and providing more affordable and reliable access options for various populations, many communities are still unable to get adequate basic access. Due to the digital divide, people who have the highest level of access who are more likely to be already engaged with their community at some level are the most likely to use online engagement technology, while those already the hardest to reach are the least likely to participate digitally. When planning an engagement process, it is important to address the digital divide by ensuring diversity in strategy design and ensuring that methods are varied and focused on inclusion.

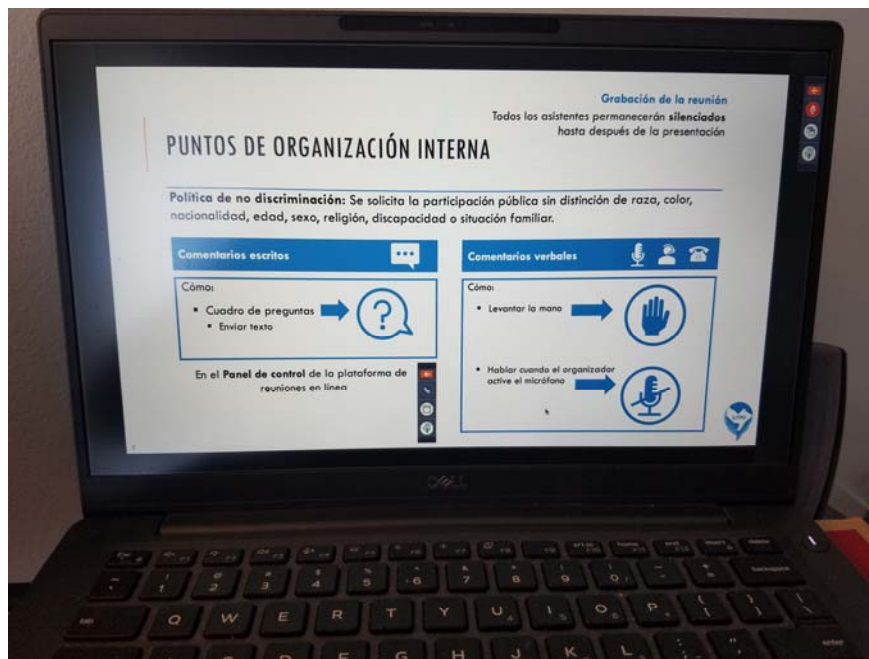
While accounting for the digital divide may be the most significant challenge to implementing effective online engagement strategies, other challenges impact the organization implementing these methods that must also be considered. Adapting to a new communication form can be challenging and time-consuming. For online engagement to work effectively, there is a need for agency staff and members of the public to become acclimated to online outreach methods and for staff to be able to deal with any

technical issues that may arise. Depending upon the engagement method, an agency may need to adapt its communication style to suit the new online formats, such as the ability to be concise, visual, and appealing on social media platforms and in videos. With new technology also comes technical issues. It can sometimes be difficult for longer-term or more extensive projects to maintain online involvement platforms as the project progresses. Regularly and continually producing updated web content and keeping online information current can be challenging and time-consuming.

Although implementing VPI strategies can be challenging, it can also bear many benefits. VPI strategies can be beneficial for public education efforts, using online platforms to educate the public about new concepts or topics like safety as part of a broader engagement effort. VPI can also lead to overall greater public involvement from a more diverse representation of the community. Participants can attend and provide feedback at a time that is most convenient to them, particularly if it is virtual and recorded. If meetings and events are conducted virtually, then child care, transportation and reluctance are no longer major concerns. Furthermore, participating through a land line or a telephone that is not smart eliminates the digital divide. Using various virtual methods in a coordinated engagement strategy can lead to a larger number of responses during public input periods from a wider variety of participants from different demographic groups and geographic locations who may not have participated in more traditional public engagement opportunities.

Recommended Strategies for VPI

Whether using live online presentations, interactive websites, or surveys, VPI can be an ideal way to disseminate information and gather feedback for a project or plan. However, if nobody knows about the presentation, website, or information available, engagement will not occur. As with in-person engagement, when considering VPI, go where the people already are. It is essential to determine where the target audience is and obtain their information when developing the outreach plan. This is another area where strong partnerships with municipal and county officials, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and cultural organizations could help SJTPO make a direct connection with a variety of targeted demographic communities. Beyond the essential first step of enhancing relationships through partnerships, some general best practices and tips for VPI should be kept in mind during planning.



Spanish Language Instructions for SJTPO Virtual Listening Session

- Work with partners to utilize all familiar channels to let people know about the opportunity for public comment, such as websites, social media, and email blasts. Share the project website or information on the county/municipal webpages and social media accounts and encourage partners such as community groups and non-profits to share information to their social media accounts and email information to members or affiliates.
- Design engagement differently for different audiences. Identify specific communities and demographics to engage with, then build relationships with those communities by connecting with partners. Be sure to ask what online channels the group is familiar with and prefers and develop your approach targeted to those specific communities. Provide multiple channels to engage the public so they can participate in the way they are most comfortable.
- Ensure there are opportunities for residents who have limited English proficiency by translating project information and project engagement tools as much as possible. If sustaining translation through virtual outreach websites or tools is not feasible, opportunities to provide translated materials via other means, such as via website or mailed materials, should be offered and promoted.
- Experiment with new forms of advertising to help spread the word. Facebook ads can be used to target people living in a community or study area. More traditional advertisements can also be promoted in newspapers, highlighting both project website information and a way for people who don't have computer access to request information, such as a phone number.
- Fully consider and plan for the amount of time needed to implement an VPI tool or process. Some tools may be free to access, but staff may require significant time to develop content, configure tools, or monitor interaction.
- Develop a moderation policy and strategy to help determine who will serve as moderator or be in charge of responding to comments, how often to respond to comments, what types of comments to respond to and how. Consider implementing user standards such as a social media policy that describe both encouraged and disallowed behavior through VPI.
- Consider expanding public comment periods to allow more people to participate as they find out about the opportunity to offer input.
- Although some will be reluctant to provide their contact information, request the information so follow-up regarding any questions or concerns can be communicated.
- Manage expectations. It is tempting to gauge the success of VPI through standard online measures such as open rates, follows, or likes. However, none of these typical measures accurately indicates engagement success in and of itself. Performance metrics should instead be tied to goals. For example, if a particular method did not reach hundreds of residents but instead produced effective engagement with 20 members of a previously unreached demographic, that engagement tool or process could be considered a success.

Virtual Public Meetings

With the arrival and spread of COVID-19, there has been a rapid response from the government and agencies at all levels to meet the needs and requirements related to public meetings while maintaining social distance. SJTPO has adopted GoToWebinar, one of the most established and well-known webinar hosting platforms. While there are various advantages and disadvantages associated with the numerous meeting hosting technologies, GoToWebinar is an attractive solution. The platform offers registration so you can follow-up with meeting attendees if necessary, allows the use of webcams so that multiple parties

in separate locations can be seen as co-presenters to the audience, and can accommodate up to 1,000 attendees at once. GoToWebinar is also extremely user-friendly and has versatile email functionality, allowing users to send email invitations to attendees right from the application or through their regular email programs. Some best practices from virtual public meetings are presented below.

- Keep virtual public meetings brief. The audience will lose interest if presentations are too long or use complicated or technical terminology. Ensure the public can understand what is presented. Slides should be simple and visual, including images and graphics. Meetings should be kept to one hour (or less) in length. If the meeting will consist of Q&A, a 30-minute (or less) presentation followed by a 30-minute Q&A session is recommended. The presentation should conclude by telling people how they can provide additional feedback (ex: online form, email, social media, telephone voice mail, etc.).
- If planning a webinar or live presentation, also provide people with a recording they can watch later and a way to submit comments after the virtual meeting. Presentations posted online may need to be formatted differently than those given in person. If slides are posted rather than a recording of a presentation, ensure they have adequate information to explain what people are looking at and what they are being asked to provide feedback.
- If presenters are new to the technology, be sure to do a test run ahead of time. Test the audio, screen sharing, video sharing, and any other features. Also, test the feedback mechanism (chat, voice, etc.) to ensure participants will be able to ask questions.
- Ensure all the presenters log in early so attendees are not waiting on someone to log into the meeting and ensure all presenters/speakers have a quiet space they can use during the meeting.
- If possible, have someone who is not presenting available to be responsible for the technology, troubleshoot any issues, and assist members of the public having access difficulties.
- To keep the meeting moving, explain that questions will be held until the end but encourage people to submit them via the comment box or chat.
- If possible, appoint a moderator to monitor questions as they come in and ensure they are addressed. The moderator or other staff members should try to answer as many questions as possible during the live meeting. Consider whether people will be allowed to ask a question verbally or only via chat and whether you will allow them to unmute themselves or if you will control the mute function. Allowing participants to choose how they want to provide feedback and ask questions is suggested.
- Remember that participants may only be able to call into the meeting and may not see the presentation. Make sure that what is being said adequately represents the message without the aid of slides and that participants can communicate and ask questions through the telephone.
- Expect the unexpected. The conversation public response may not flow as expected. Be objective and avoid value judgment in responses to ensure those who are participating that they have been heard.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR TARGETED GROUPS

While many public engagement strategies will work effectively across varying audiences, in order to have a genuinely effective process, one must understand and plan accordingly to break down the barriers to involvement that historically under-represented groups face. While current restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic have limited opportunities for in-person interaction, many of the best strategies and practices for equitable engagement rely upon face-to-face interaction. Though these practice may not be options currently, it is important that they be considered as restrictions lift. While

VPI can be effective, it should not be relied upon solely. The best processes result from a multi-faceted approach involving both VPI and targeted in-person engagement. The following section provides an overview of tips, best practices, and strategies for effectively involving targeted communities in a public engagement process. Some of these tips, best practices, and strategies are appropriate across multiple demographic groups, while others are specific to a potential target group.

Immigrant and Limited English Proficiency Communities

Immigrants and people with LEP bring a diverse array of perspectives to the planning process. It is challenging to categorize immigrants into one group as they represent a great diversity of backgrounds, each with different cultural nuances, communication styles, and language. Likewise, it is difficult to consider LEP individuals as one group as they represent different cultures, dialects, and different comfort levels with the English language. Many people with LEP understand more English than they are comfortable speaking but still may prefer to interact in their native language, especially when discussing complex issues. In addition to language barriers, it should be kept in mind that immigrant and people with LEP may have some preconceived notions regarding authority or government officials. Past negative experiences both in their home countries and the United States may have contributed to a mistrust of legal processes or intimidation of those in authority that must be overcome.

Although immigrant and LEP communities are vastly different, some principles should be kept in mind when developing a public engagement process that can help ensure involvement from these communities. Outreach should:

- *Incorporate approachable, informal events.* - The physical location of programs or events is significant when considering outreach opportunities for immigrants and people with LEP. Members of these communities may fear traditional public meetings or other formal and structured gatherings for various reasons. They may lack documentation in the United States and feel uncomfortable entering government buildings or meeting with government officials and police officers. They may fear getting trapped in an extensive process or be afraid that they will not understand what is being discussed. Events or programs targeting these communities should be as non-confrontational, relaxed, and welcoming as possible. It is best to host meetings or activities in neutral locations where these groups already are, including community or cultural events, parks, plazas, stores, schools, and recreational centers, events or activities.
- *Address language adequately.* - Whatever form the outreach event or program takes, language must be accounted for in order to engage minority and LEP communities successfully. Event recruitment materials, as well as key program resources, must be translated. If time and funding permits, events can be held entirely in another



Targeted Outreach Event

language or languages. For group events, skilled interpreters can provide flexibility for handling people with LEP who speak a variety of languages at a group public meeting or event.

- Use visual messaging. - The use of high-quality graphics, photos, and hands-on activities is always a good idea in developing a successful outreach strategy, but it becomes especially important when planning effective outreach for immigrant and LEP communities. Finding ways to rely on graphics and photographs over text and in-depth presentations can help transcend language barriers and make topics more understandable for those who have different backgrounds or experiences related to the topic. Even if materials have been translated into a variety of target languages, members of many immigrant and LEP communities may not be reached effectively. Education may have been limited for many members of these communities, and it is a mistake to assume that they are literate in their native language. Focusing on visual information can help when translated text may not be comprehended.
- Show relevance to their needs and concerns. - Members of recent immigrant and LEP communities may not yet have made significant community social ties or be heavily invested in community outcomes. It must be plainly demonstrated how the plan, program, or policy relates to them or their families in both recruitment materials and program or event activities. Engagement with these communities is most effective when issues have been connected to attendee's personal experiences, the experiences their children have or will have, or the experiences a family member has had or can expect to have. If the event shows people how the project, plan, or policy is relevant to their daily lives they are much more likely to participate. Even involvement in a long-range plan can be shown to be a good use of their time if they see that it directly relates to their children's future.
- Involve sharable experiences and information. - Reaching immigrant and LEP communities can be extremely difficult, and even when reached, these communities may be unlikely to participate due to a variety of reasons already discussed. To help address these issues, outreach should include creating takeaway materials that participants can share with family and friends or that children can share with parents. These takeaways can include specific information, links to websites or project portals, or information on other ways potential participants could become involved with the project. Many immigrant and LEP communities rely on word-of-mouth communication. Providing materials that can be distributed or shared by participants can help spread the word throughout their community and garner increased involvement in this and future processes.

Keeping the best practices discussed in mind, the following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process that includes immigrant and LEP communities:

- Partner with advocates and community organizations/groups. - The importance of building and maintaining partnerships within the community cannot be overstated. To ensure that key demographic and traditionally under-represented groups are included in SJTPO programs and projects, working with non-profit, neighborhood, and community-based organizations throughout the SJTPO region to assist with recruitment for outreach and engagement activities to their constituents and residents could be extremely useful. This format for engagement is especially suited to reaching immigrant and LEP communities, as well as minorities, elderly residents, and people with disabilities. SJTPO should identify and contact a variety of non-profit organizations, neighborhood and community groups, including public agencies, social service organizations, ethnic or language based community groups, immigrant advocacy groups, family service groups, faith-based public service groups, and philanthropic organizations. Many of these

groups have direct access to and good relationships with members of the targeted communities. Developing relationships with immigrant advocacy groups could be especially beneficial for SJTPO to reach immigrants who may be apprehensive about participating. An event or program sponsored in coordination with a group or agency could help alleviate a variety of concerns. Partnering with well-known organizations with strong community ties is an excellent opportunity to make inroads with traditionally hard to reach and underserved communities.

- Conduct key informant interviews or focus groups. - By working to develop partnerships with organizations, SJTPO can begin to identify individuals who are already respected members of a targeted community. These key people may be affiliated with or lead an organization, an elected official, faith leader, or someone else with standing in the target community. People with strong community connections generally know who else in the community is a strong leader and advocate and can help SJTPO make new connections. While these leaders can serve as liaisons that link SJTPO to the community by facilitating communication and recruiting participants for outreach events, they can also provide a wealth of information. SJTPO could conduct interviews or focus groups with respected community leaders to obtain information and insight into a specific community or issue of concern.

- Implement ELL Outreach. - Differences in language can be a barrier to effective engagement with immigrant and LEP communities. Partnering with English Language Learner (ELL) classes can be an inexpensive and effective way to collect feedback and interact with immigrant and LEP communities. Participating in ELL classes is a great opportunity to reach residents who are reluctant to participate in civic affairs. In addition, ELL class instructors are often looking for opportunities for their students that expose them to new ideas, situations, and



ELL Class Outreach Event

allow them to practice conversing in English while keeping their personal information confidential. As a benefit to SJTPO, students will already have some familiarity with English and the class instructor will be on hand to aid with any comprehension issues that may arise, significantly limiting the need for excessive amounts of translation. It also takes place in an environment where they already feel comfortable and relaxed. To make the activity more engaging and rewarding for both SJTPO and the students, it is recommended that when working with ELL communities, typical presentations should be avoided, and activities that maximize interaction should be employed. A brief, easy-to-understand interactive lesson will provide SJTPO with the feedback desired while offering ELL students a valuable learning experience.

- Host at pop-up kiosks or events. - The most effective way to reach people is to go where they already are. Hosting mobile outreach activities at places where people already gather will reach a larger and more diverse audience than traditional meetings. Ensuring that these activities are simple, quick, fun, and engaging provides an easy opportunity for attendees to participate. Community events, cultural events, parades, and fairs offer excellent opportunities to reach immigrant and LEP communities. Example events include Chinese New Year, Day of the Dead, Diwali, and various nations' local Independence Day parades or celebrations. Local governments, chambers of commerce, community organizations, cultural heritage committees, or ethnic newspapers or media may have details about planned and scheduled local events and how SJTPO could become involved and participate.
- Reach immigrant and LEP communities through youth engagement. - When developing or planning an engagement event targeting immigrant and LEP communities, it is especially important to make the event youth-friendly. Children and teenagers are an often overlooked group when it comes to community engagement. While they offer a valuable and unique perspective that should be explored, they often also can be a key to engaging with adults. While learning a language as an adult requires effort and study, children tend to pick up new languages more easily and quickly. In immigrant and LEP communities where adults may still be struggling with learning English, their children may already be fluent due to greater exposure to the language through school and socialization among peers. In such cases, youth often act as interpreters for their parents or other family members in situations where English is required for communication. While children and teenagers are not very likely to attend a public meeting, they often attend community and cultural events with their families. If pop-up activities are engaging, SJTPO may be able to interact with youth and their parents by acting as interpreters.
- Use ethnic media outlets. - Some immigrant groups and LEP communities obtain their news and information primarily through ethnic or foreign-language media outlets, including television and radio stations as well as newspapers offered in a particular language, such as Spanish or Mandarin. SJTPO should look into advertising their programs, projects, and events through these means as an ideal way to reach LEP individuals. Community partners can advise which media outlets are most used, most trusted, and most likely to resonate with the targeted community.

Ethnic Minority Communities

Ethnic minorities, also often referred to as people of color, include people who do not identify racially as white and may include Black, Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, or multiracial populations. Throughout the SJTPO region, thirty-nine percent of the population is considered minority, with people who are Hispanic, Black, or Asian comprising the largest minority groups in the region. Much like with immigrant and LEP communities, it is challenging to categorize all people who are members of an ethnic minority group into one cohesive group. The individuals who make up minority communities represent a great diversity of backgrounds, cultures, languages, and communication styles. While diverse, ethnic minority communities are linked through the shared experience of being underserved because of economic disadvantage or lack of political affiliation. Like immigrant and LEP communities, past negative experiences and legacies of historical neglect may have contributed to a mistrust of government, legal processes, authority figures, and those seen as "outsiders" that must be overcome to ensure an equitable public engagement process.

Many of the principles that have already been discussed regarding immigrant LEP communities hold true when developing a public engagement process that can help ensure involvement from minority communities. When seeking to work with minority communities, outreach should:

- *Incorporate approachable events rooted in the community.* - When planning an engagement process for minority communities, the physical location and structure of programs and events are very important. Due to historical neglect and under-representation, a large degree of mistrust is often associated with the typical public outreach project. Members of a minority community will not want to travel to an unfamiliar building and sit through a lengthy presentation given by someone with little familiarity of their neighborhood who then disappears and are never heard from again. As much as possible, events need to be different and inclusive. Events should be interactive, informal, and hosted in the community in neutral locations where people already are, including community or cultural events, parks, plazas, stores, schools, and recreational centers, events, and activities. Incorporating partners in the process is also an essential component. An active partner who participates in the engagement process that identifies with or has ties to the community being served will help build a better rapport with residents as opposed to an outsider. A well-respected local organization or a neighborhood leader is often more important for establishing trust and legitimizing the process than just a member of the same race or cultural background of the targeted community.
- *Show relevance to their needs and concerns.* - As with immigrant and LEP communities, when working with minority communities, it is essential that in both recruitment materials and program or event activities, explicitly demonstrate how the plan, program, or policy relates to them or their families. People may not be familiar with SJTPO and may feel that it does not impact their life if no connections are established. Engagement with immigrant, LEP, and minority communities is most effective when issues have been connected to attendee's personal experiences, the experiences their children have or will have, or the experiences a family member has had or can expect to have. If the event shows how the project, plan, or policy is relevant to their daily lives, they are much more likely to participate. Even involvement in a long-range plan can be shown to be a good use of their time if they see that it directly relates to their children's future.



Engagement Event at a Community Festival

- *Create a welcoming atmosphere with a flexible schedule.* - Due to the trust issues that may be present and have already been discussed, it is important for events and program to be welcoming, non-threatening, and flexible. While it is best to minimize long formal presentations and maximize activity and discussion opportunities, many people are reluctant to participate in heavily scheduled, structured events. As much as possible, events and the engagement process

should be flexible, offering various ways and opportunities for community members to become involved. While some people will welcome the opportunity to participate in the event and interact with facilitators, others may prefer to quietly review information and drop a feedback form into a box. Offering more varied opportunities to provide feedback will result in more input.

- *Positively reflect the community.* - With a renewed focus on and commitment to equity, representatives of organizations and governments at every level have been increasing their efforts to engage with traditionally underrepresented communities. While overall this should be considered positive, with multiple organizations seeking to get feedback regarding various issues, concerns, projects, and programs, if public engagement is not implemented properly, it can leave minority communities feeling over-sampled, over-surveyed, and judged as inadequate. To ensure that the organization is not part of the problem, public engagement should positively reflect the community. As an example, if seeking feedback related to local concerns for a bicycle and pedestrian plan, engagement should not solely focus on what is wrong with the community or what needs to be improved but should also include messages about what is working well within the community and which of these best practices should be replicated elsewhere. Too many engagement processes focus solely on the negative or what should be changed when much can be learned by asking people what they like about their community or neighborhood and how these benefits can be expanded.

Keeping the best practices discussed in mind, the following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process that includes minority communities:

- *Partner with advocates.* - As with immigrant and LEP communities, the importance of building and maintaining partnerships within minority communities cannot be overstated. To ensure that key demographic and traditionally under-represented groups are included in SJTPO programs and projects, working with non-profit and/or community-based organizations throughout the SJTPO region to assist with recruitment for outreach and engagement activities to their constituents and residents could be extremely useful. SJTPO should identify and contact various non-profit organizations, neighborhood, and community groups, including public agencies, social service organizations, family service groups, faith-based public service groups, and philanthropic organizations. Partnering with well-known organizations that have strong community relationships is an excellent opportunity for making inroads with traditionally hard to reach and underserved communities. Working with partners to vet messages can help ensure that they are culturally appropriate and relevant.
- *Develop Advisory Boards/Committees for Specific Populations.* - Building upon partnerships with advocates, SJTPO could seek to form a board or committee comprised solely of members from a specific community or demographic, who can serve to provide feedback as well as recruit support and develop new ideas for outreach to minority communities.
- *Involve Small Businesses.* - In addition to pop-up events at parks, community festivals, and cultural events, SJTPO could seek to develop partnerships with and host engagement events at small businesses targeting minority communities or heavily frequented in neighborhoods with minority residents. Embracing partnerships with small businesses helps to provide entrepreneurs a chance to engage in the process without closing or leaving their place of business and can be a great way to reach community members by going to them instead of waiting for them to come to you. Ethnic grocery stores or bodegas specializing in food or products targeted toward a specific

culture or minority group provide an excellent opportunity for engagement. Conducting outreach events or surveys near laundromats is also an excellent way to engage a captive audience. The audience is likely to be local and generally stay at the laundromat while waiting for their laundry, making them more likely to participate in a survey or engagement event than people who are on their way elsewhere.

Low-Income Communities

New Jersey is home to some of the wealthiest communities in the United States, where the average home price is well over \$1 million. But it is also a state with a wide gap between the rich and the poor, and some neighboring towns, in some cases just a few miles away, have almost one-fourth of their population living in poverty. As rent and home prices keep rising in New Jersey, the number it takes to be considered low-income by the Department of Housing and Urban Development continues to be surprisingly high in New Jersey. If the cost of living in a particular area is high, then the median income is often high and thus, the low-income limit is raised. What may be considered an above-average income in other states often does not get a family very far in New Jersey. To make ends meet, many households with low income balance multiple jobs and face insecurity of housing, food, and transportation. With numerous struggles, competing needs, and limited time availability, people with low-income have specific needs that often challenge organizations looking to involve them.

When seeking to engage with low-income communities, many of the principles that have already been discussed regarding immigrant, LEP, and minority communities are applicable when developing a public engagement process. When seeking to work with low-income communities, outreach should:

- *Convene with multiple points of access.* - With many low-income community members balancing multiple jobs with family and facing various issues and concerns, free time is not something often available or taken for granted. Timing is a very important consideration for this community. With varied work shifts around the clock occurring seven days per week, the likelihood of finding one time for a meeting or event that works for a large group of people within a low-income community is nearly impossible. Additionally, convincing people with limited time availability to dedicate multiple hours to a meeting is a hard sell. To reach this community, events must not be heavily structured with long formal presentations and should maximize opportunities for activity and discussion. As much as possible, events and engagement processes should be flexible. This involves offering activities and programs at a variety of times and days and offering multiple ways for community members to become involved. There should be opportunities for community members to engage directly with facilitators during events, but less-involved informational displays with surveys or feedback forms that can be dropped into a box can help engage people with very limited time available for involvement. As with other groups, it is best to bring events to places people already congregate, such as parks, plazas, stores, and schools, and scheduled to coincide with activities people are already planning to attend, including community or cultural events and recreational centers, events or activities.
- *Offer incentives.* - Incentivizing programs and events can help draw involvement from low-income communities. Incentives often include cash payments or gift cards for more intense involvement, such as focus groups, or eligibility for a contest drawing through involvement. However, effective incentives do not have to be expensive prizes and can instead focus on making programs more convenient or easy to attend. Events that include activities for children or childcare can help

attract parents with young children, assuring them that their children will have something to do and will be safe while they participate. Offering family-friendly food or a meal for those who attend is another excellent way to attract involvement. Knowing that they will not have to worry about feeding themselves or their children after or before your event can reduce another barrier to involvement.

- *Positively reflect the community.* - With multiple struggles, needs, and concerns, a lot of the attention spent on low-income communities can focus only on what is problematic. As noted, if public engagement is not implemented properly, it can leave members of minority communities, including low-income individuals, feeling over-sampled, over-surveyed, and judged as inadequate. After multiple experiences focused solely on what is considered wrong or deficient in their communities, people may be reluctant to engage with another group or organization. To help foster a positive and meaningful experience, public engagement should strive to reflect the community positively. While it is important to gather feedback regarding issues or concerns, it is equally important to devote time to what is working well within the community and what should be replicated elsewhere to expand success. Too many engagement processes focus solely on the negative or what should be changed when just as much can be learned by asking people what they like about their community.
- *Show Relevance to their needs and concerns.* - As with other groups, when seeking to involve people with low income, it is important that both recruitment materials and program or event activities explicitly demonstrate how the plan, program, or policy relates to these individuals or their families. Members of low-income communities have limited time and a variety of competing issues and concerns. To encourage involvement, connect the project or plan to attendee's personal experiences, the experiences their children have or will have, or the experiences a family member has had or can expect to have. For low-income community members to consider participating in the process, it needs to be demonstrated that involvement is a valuable use of their time and the ultimate project or plan directly relates to their family's future.

In accordance with the practices discussed, the following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process that includes low-income communities:

- *Partner with advocates.* - Once again, building and maintaining a network of partnerships is a key factor in effectively engaging low-income communities. As already discussed, working with non-profit, neighborhood, and community-based organizations throughout the SJTPO region to assist with recruitment for outreach and engagement activities to their constituents and residents could be extremely effective. SJTPO should identify and contact various non-profit organizations and community groups, including public agencies, social service organizations, family service groups, faith-based public service groups, housing groups and organizations, food banks and food



Food can be an excellent and important incentive for participation

distribution charities, philanthropic organizations, and groups specializing in assistance programs such as utility assistance.

- Conduct interviews or focus groups. - By working to develop partnerships with organizations, SJTPO can begin to identify individuals who work with and represent low-income communities' needs. These key people may be affiliated with or lead an organization, an elected official, faith leader, or someone else with standing in the community. SJTPO could conduct interviews or focus groups with these respected community leaders to obtain information and insight into community concerns or reactions to a specific project or plan. SJTPO could also work with these organizations and leaders to identify and recruit individuals to participate in resident specific focus groups or interviews.

- Host at pop-up kiosks or events. - Conducting mobile outreach activities at places where people already gather will reach a larger and more diverse audience than traditional meetings. To effectively reach low-income community members, SJTPO needs to ensure that these activities are simple, quick, and easy for attendees to participate. SJTPO should seek to incorporate outreach events into existing community events, cultural events, parades, and fairs. Events can also be located in popular or



Pop-up Kiosk at a Public Library

busy areas where low-income residents can be expected to already be including plazas, shopping areas, public transit stations. SJTPO can also include pop-up events or kiosks at the offices or community centers affiliated with partner organizations. Local governments, chambers of commerce, community organizations, and advocacy organizations may have details about planned local events and how SJTPO could become involved.

- Involve schools. - Schools offer multiple avenues of engagement. Many schools offer a variety of programs and events occurring throughout the year targeted toward bringing students and families together, such as health fairs, environmental fairs and events, back-to-school fairs or events, Parent/teacher organization sponsored activities, and school concerts and performances. Schools are excellent at marketing these events to students, parents, and family members resulting in many of these events having a large crowd of local community members from multiple age groups. While direct youth engagement will be discussed in more detail, SJTPO should not overlook opportunities to engage with children directly through schools as a way to

reach parents in low-income communities. Through a lesson or program, students can be engaged and spread information to parents. There may also be opportunities in which students can be assigned to interview family members about a local issue, concern, or project. Many schools, especially schools in low-income areas, are open to free guest speakers who can engage with students and teach them something new. Opportunities are especially available towards the end of the school year after statewide assessment testing has been completed.

Youth

Youth participants are often overlooked in the planning process, and as a result, opportunities for their involvement are often missing from public engagement processes. This is a disservice to youth and the entire community as young people have a unique ability to recognize everyday life details that often escape adults. Youth provide unique and fresh voices to the dialogue about creating great places and participating in the future development of their community. Even if they are just a few years removed, adults cannot understand the reality of how youth interact within their community and how they navigate systems created without



Involve youth and show them that their feedback is important.

them in mind. The involvement of young people provides planners and officials with perspectives and input that can improve projects, policies, and plans, especially with regard to youth needs and issues. Involvement in the process also has significant benefits for youth. Participating in planning processes offers young people the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills, better understand their government and community, learn about planning and planning-related professions, develop the habits of involvement and good citizenship, and have a positive experience with other youth and adults.

When offering meaningful opportunities for youth to be engaged in their communities, more young people participate and encourage their peers to do the same. To effectively engage youth, ensure that these opportunities are not missing from the involvement processes. When seeking to work with children and teens, outreach should:

- ***Show relevance to the needs and concerns of youth.*** - Youth are extremely interested in issues that have a direct impact on their lives, such as safety in their neighborhoods, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and the presence or lack of parks and recreation facilities. However, it is a mistake to assume that young people are not interested in other issues as well. Engagement activities should be brief, interactive, and focused on connecting the project or plan to their personal

experiences, the experiences of their families, or how they can expect to be impacted in the future.

- Invite and appeal. - Teens may feel intimidated about lending their voice to a process when older, more experienced adults dominate. Be clear that young peoples' opinions are sought and valued and that no professional experience or knowledge is necessary to participate. Young people may be attracted to an engagement opportunity for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they are looking to strengthen college applications, maybe their friends are going, or perhaps they are only interested if there will be pizza. Including an interactive and fun component like a competition or game can help to make the appeal of involvement clear from the beginning.

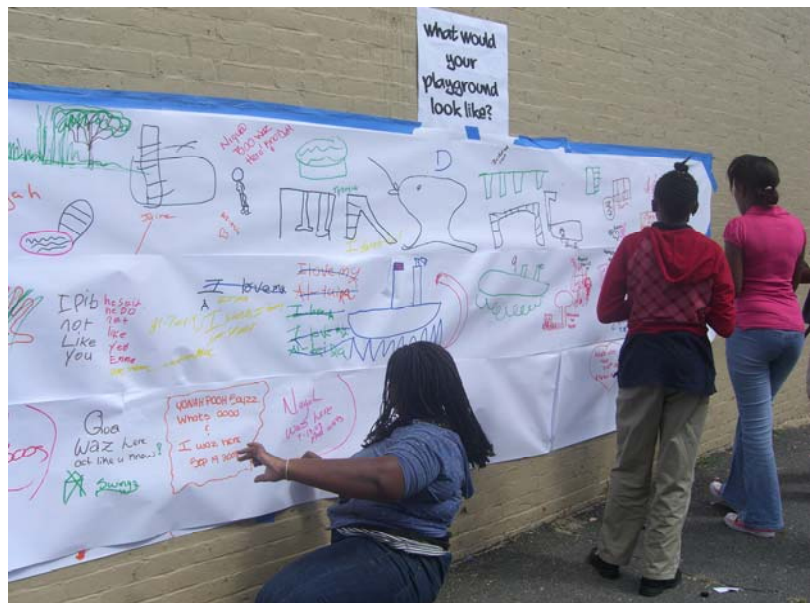
Nothing can kill enthusiasm for engagement faster than youth believing that their involvement is pointless or does not matter. If a process is opened to or created specifically for youth, there must be some feedback mechanism to show youth how their thoughts and ideas have been considered. Websites, e-newsletters, or social media can be helpful mechanisms for following up with youth who participated. It is also important to make expectations clear. Some youth may believe that by merely presenting their ideas and suggestions will be implemented. They may interpret a lack of immediate action or results as an indication that their voices were not heard, potentially resulting in disillusionment with the process. Help youth understand how their ideas are considered by honestly explaining the process. Focusing on appearing kind or friendly, instead of addressing youths' concerns, adults often ignore the content of the discussion and compliment the speakers on how professional they look or how well they have performed. While youth appreciate being told they have done well, it is more important for adults to demonstrate that they are listening by asking questions, noticing areas of alignment with policies or issues, and acknowledging their ideas. Adults should not shy away from discussing their "big ideas" but should clearly explain if an idea cannot be implemented. Youth engagement is most effective when adults look for opportunities to teach as well as to listen.

- Address barriers that might keep youth from participating. - Welcoming youth means more than greeting them with a smile when they come to a meeting. It involves setting up a structure that sends a message that they belong. Adults should treat young people like leaders and show that they take youth seriously by ensuring that events or programs are designed and organized to meet youth needs. Paying attention to logistics such as where and when meetings are held, if food is offered, and transportation availability will help attract youth involvement. Most children and teens cannot drive themselves to an event, therefore outreach should meet them at places where they already are, including schools, parks, recreation centers, teen centers, community centers, and at local attractions such as movie theaters. Conducting outreach at schools and after school programs will also ensure that privacy and consent from parent/guardian are addressed.
- Seek a varied voice. - When youth are involved in public processes, communities and organizations often rely on an established line-up of high achievers. While involvement with standing groups such as a mayor's youth council or members of the local national honors society should be investigated, authentic youth engagement should seek involvement from all youth. The identity of "youth" can mask the fact that young people identify in many ways, including by race, social class, sexual orientation, economic level, attitudes, religions, and family background. When heard, the youth perspective generally comes from these highly motivated youths who are academically and socially successful. It is vital to ensure that opportunities to become involved are extended to young people who appear to be disengaged from established youth programs or

may not enroll in honors classes. Programs and events should be structured and organized in a way that promotes a safe place for involvement from a diversity of youth voices, including young women, minority populations, immigrant youth, low-income youth, and youth with a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences.

Incorporating the principles, the following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process that involves youth:

- *Partner with advocates.* - As with other groups, building and maintaining a network of partnerships is a top recommendation for developing an engagement process that includes youth. Many non-profit, neighborhood, and community-based organizations located throughout the SJTPO region specialize in working with and advocating for youth. Partnerships with these organizations to directly engage with or get assistance with recruitment for outreach and engagement activities could help reach youth. SJTPO should identify and contact various non-profit organizations and community groups, including public agencies, social service organizations, schools, after school programs, educational organizations, family service groups, faith-based public service groups, philanthropic organizations, youth groups and clubs, scouting groups, and sports leagues.
- *Collaborate with Youth Leadership Programs.* - SJTPO could seek to develop a youth leadership program. Such a program could help SJTPO get insight into youth concerns and issues while also providing valuable community service through teaching local youth about the roles of planners and the issues that the field of planning addresses. Such groups can also allow youth to gain a realistic understanding of the problems their communities face and encourage them to take an active role in helping to alleviate those problems. SJTPO already has an extensive youth-focused safety program that could be complemented by a youth leadership program developed in coordination with new and existing education partners.
- *Involve schools.* - Schools offer the most direct access to youth populations. Many schools offer a variety of programs and events occurring throughout the year targeted toward bringing students and families together, such as health fairs, environmental fairs or events, back-to-school fairs and events, Parent/teacher organization sponsored activities, and school concerts and performances. This can be a way to reach youth populations as well as their parents. Direct engagement through a lesson or extracurricular program



Interactive Youth Outreach in Newark

offers an excellent opportunity for youth engagement as well. There are many examples of interactive lesson plans that can solicit feedback regarding a plan or project while also teaching students about the roles of planners and the issues that the field of planning addresses. Many schools embrace such opportunities for students to meet with professionals as a form of career exploration and are happy to find free guest speakers who can engage with students and teach them something new. Opportunities for direct student engagement through classroom activities are especially available towards the end of the school year after state assessment testing has been completed. If schools are reluctant to allow for in-classroom activities during school time, interactive experience-based educational events or displays offered during lunch periods are also an excellent option as well as after school programs.

- Host at pop-up kiosks or events. - Transportation can be a large barrier to youth engagement that can be overcome by planning events or programs to occur where youth already are. Regional sporting events, street fairs, museums, zoos, skate parks, and other locations where youth gather provide opportunities for engaging youth without needing to worry about transportation or marketing an event ahead of time. Activities used at pop-up events should be simple and easy to understand. Projects such as visual preference surveys, visualization exercises, short essay competitions, art projects, or simple projects such as posing for photos with or adding to a display their thoughts regarding what “I want to see ___ in my neighborhood.” Most of these activities provide an excellent opportunity for feedback with a minimal expense for supplies. Activities should be quick, interactive, and entertaining.
- Organize Student Contests. - Even if the opportunity to meet directly with youth is unavailable, effective youth engagement can occur by working with partners to organize contests. Contests can be developed regionally with schools or through community groups and organizations with access to youth. Contests can be held to solicit students' ideas for solving a transportation problem or creating a transportation vision for the future. The contest can be focused on art, photography, voice recording, or writing and award gift cards or other incentive based on creativity by age group. A contest provides the opportunity to engage students who might not otherwise participate in other events and can help to diversify the feedback SJTPO receives while encouraging the next generation to think about planning issues and how they relate to their community.
- Engage via Social Media. - Similar to the contests, SJTPO could engage with youth populations by starting social media campaigns using hashtags that encourage youth of various age groups to submit photos around a theme related to the plan or project. The theme can include topics such as “my favorite place in ___ County,” or “my favorite place to ride my bike,” “my favorite spot in ___ Park.” Such a contest would help SJTPO collect positive stories and images from throughout the region and show the locations, features, or aspects of the area that youth value and would like to see replicated. SJTPO could also use social media to “push out” information and encourage youth to react to what is posted. SJTPO could post flyers or visually convey information about current projects and plans to solicit general feedback or establish preferences between multiple options.

"Millennials" or Young Adults

The terms "millennial" or "Generation Y" define a broad generation of individuals born between the early 1980s and 2000s. In the United States, they comprise the largest and most racially diverse generation in history. Many millennials have been burdened by student loan debt, and a large cohort of younger millennials live with their parents to make ends meet. Growing up in an age of significant technological advancement, they are incredibly comfortable with and frequently use the internet, electronic tablets, smartphones, and multiple forms of social media. In addition to technological advances, this generation has also grown up in an era of significant global changes, including expanded domestic and international terrorism, the Great Recession, and climate change. These shifts have altered the ways millennials view and interact with the world compared with their parents, tending to value experiences over possessions, drive less than older age groups, and expect convenience from most transactions. It is important to remember that millennials are a very diverse generation with different needs. It is a common mistake for many to think of millennials as an age group instead of a generation, identifying millennials simply as "young."

Recognizing that millennials span an extensive range of ages and life stages, from college students to parents, strategies for engaging them will need to vary. In general, outreach targeted toward millennials should:

- *Be social, active, brief, and clearly defined.* - It is a common misunderstanding that millennials are not engaged and self-centered. They are more tolerant, educated, and racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation and are, for the most part, eager to make a positive impact in the world. However, millennials are generally not going to engage on institutional terms in traditional manners. They will not attend weekly meetings and long presentations. Instead, events should be focused around social events or fun experiences that they can share with friends. Millennials do not want to read posters or sit through presentations; events should prioritize activity and interaction with both facilitators and peers. Events should also be brief. Having grown up in the information age, millennials are used to quick turnarounds and fast results. That being said, millennials are more likely to engage if the aims and goals of the project or plan are directly



Interactive and Social Tactical Urbanism Event

stated and made clear. They want to know how engagement will help them and others.

- Show relevance and appeal. - The Millennial generation is tech-savvy and visually oriented. Millennials are accustomed to advanced graphic design and short, powerful messaging in marketing materials. They are less likely to engage with an organization with a wordy flyer or unattractive webpage, as it appears behind the times, incomplete, and insincere. Millennials are more likely to engage when opportunities seem unique, well planned, and technologically advanced. An ugly flier or a boring PowerPoint presentation can convince them that the organization is not serious and not worth their time.
- Use the right format. - Millennials are more likely than other generations to use technology and get information online and from social media. Social media use varies with older millennials frequenting Facebook, but the younger demographic preferring Snapchat. Many also make regular use of Twitter and Instagram. Millennials are more likely to learn about an event or program via social media. A well-crafted social media campaign can attract millennials and allow them to share messages with friends, allowing further reach as most millennials are much more likely to attend an event if invited by a friend or if they know a friend will also be present. Although millennials favor social interaction and experiences, their digital fluency also makes them a prime demographic for online-based engagement activities.
- Be suitable for small children and families. - While millennials are generally considered young, the oldest members of the cohort are approaching 40 years old and often have young children and families. Whether planning a pop-up outreach event or developing an interactive open-house, providing games and activities to attract and occupy their young children may encourage millennial parents to stop and participate in the event.

The following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process that meets the needs and encourages the involvement of millennials:

- Pop-up events. - Millennials are more likely to participate in an event that seems interesting, exciting, enjoyable, and social. SJTPO could investigate hosting interactive pop-up events at street fairs, festivals, concerts, or other local or regional entertainment or recreation events to engage the millennial or young adult population to participate. In addition to the pop-up events hosted in coordination with other events and opportunities, SJTPO could pursue more direct engagement by hosting their own events or programs related to a plan or project at small businesses such as local bars or restaurants. Millennials are more likely to attend an event hosted in a place that feels more approachable and enjoyable. Small local businesses can also benefit from these arrangements. People who already frequent their establishment will have another reason to come in and may see this as a social opportunity to gather with friends, helping to spread the word about your event, and welcome additional friends and acquaintances who may not already be regular customers. While the event takes place, participants will likely purchase food or drink while they attend. Generally, millennials will not mind spending a little money to support a local business if the event is engaging, social, and perceived as a valuable use of their time.
- Tactical urbanism and place-making. - Millennials do not want to attend a public meeting in a nondescript municipal building; they want a unique experience. Tactical urbanism is a method that allows planners and organizers to create low-cost, simple, temporary projects that often

attract attention and challenge how residents perceive their community. Typical projects include temporary bike lanes or other improvements to streets, new public spaces, or place-making projects that make existing public spaces function differently or encourage different activities. Instead of creating detailed designs and renderings for plans, tactical urbanism projects allow planners to quickly build a prototype that community members can experience and test. The quick and inexpensive nature of these projects allow planners to gather important feedback and to make sure residents understand how new concepts could work early in the planning process. While tactical urbanism is an ideal way for users to experience projects such as bike lanes and curb extensions, the principles of tactical urbanism can be used to create a unique engagement experience for any topic. Planning a visually appealing and interactive event or program to occur in an unexpected place such as on a street corner or in a parking space significantly increases the chances of passers-by stopping. Incorporating aspects of tactical urbanism is a great way to expand upon pop-up events and run them successfully without relying on other events or activities to draw a crowd.

- Small group engagement or “meeting-in-a-box.”* - The “meeting-in-a-box” concept is a great way to facilitate a meaningful and fun engagement process that can be used with many populations but is especially attractive to millennials. This type of project encourages small groups to invite their friends, family members, colleagues and neighbors, gather at a convenient time and location to provide feedback and input on a plan, project, or program. Hosts are given a meeting kit that contains everything they need to hold a meeting/discussion on their own, including instruction sheets for the host/facilitator, discussion questions, worksheets for participant responses, feedback questionnaires, and directions for recording and returning responses. The “box” can be a literal box that includes hard copy versions of all the materials and other small giveaways to make the meeting fun, or it can be electronic and downloadable for any interested individual or pre-existing group to use. While the effort is directed toward recruiting hosts, the message expands, and involvement becomes more diverse as these hosts tap into their networks to participate in their meetings.



“Meeting-in-a-Box” Event

- Social media engagement.* - SJTPO could remotely engage with millennial populations by starting social media campaigns using hashtags that encourage interaction related to a particular plan or

project. Using social media, especially Instagram, could help SJTPO “push out” information to a millennial audience. Social media can offer a quick and approachable way for millennials to engage with SJTPO by commenting on photos or other information that portrays plans or projects graphically. An innovative social media campaign encourages interaction and can also help expand or establish credibility with younger populations. Beyond traditional social media, millennial audiences are also more likely to respond to other digital engagement opportunities, including participatory mapping programs, digital storytelling, or interactive video games.

Older Adults/Senior Citizens

Senior citizens are generally considered to be those aged 65 and older and include both the Baby Boomer and the Silent generations, a large but aging population. Older adults offer a unique perspective due to the wealth of wisdom, knowledge, and experience they have gathered throughout a lifetime. It is important to avoid stereotypes when seeking to engage with older adults. Many have substantial amounts of health and energy. Older adults often spend time volunteering, caring for grandchildren, or pursuing hobbies, while others may still work part-time. However, despite their capacity, they may be discouraged from active engagement in community life through informal barriers such as ageist attitudes. Though many older adults keep busy with work and activities, those who are retired may have more flexible schedules or more free time than younger people that allows them to get involved in the engagement process. Active older adults often frequent community gathering places like community or senior centers as well as restaurants, grocery stores, and movie theaters at earlier hours when they can receive special discounts and crowds are smaller. Older adults use technology to varying degrees, with many using Facebook to keep up with friends and family, but in general, they use it less than younger generations and rely more on other methods of communication. Older adults vote at higher rates than any other age group and often feel a strong sense of civic duty. Many older adults are already very involved in their communities, and the newly retired may especially welcome opportunities to remain active, meet new people, and support their community.

Older adults are a large, diverse group spanning a range of ages and lived experiences, but in general, outreach targeted toward seniors should:

- ***Include a variety of formats.*** - Older adults are a diverse group, and engagement methods and outreach should reflect this diversity. While not considered “digital natives,” many use technology such as Facebook to communicate with family. Social media should not be ignored entirely as a tool to reach older adults, but even those who use it to interact with friends and family regularly may not be sure how to use it to engage with public agencies. While social media can be valuable for reaching older adults, it should not be the sole method used. Many prefer to obtain information by word of mouth or from newspapers, U.S. mail, or television rather than computers and smartphones.

Varied formats should also be considered when planning actual engagement programs or events. While older adults may be one of the groups least objectionable to a traditional public meeting and presentation, when planning, ensure language is direct and straightforward, speaking at an appropriate volume, and that visuals can easily be seen from a distance. Older adults also appreciate more direct events, such as pop-ups or displays, where they can interact more directly and have any questions they may have answered. If choosing to use displays or printed material, make sure that fonts are an appropriately large size and that pictures reflect a range of ages, including older adults. If choosing to implement a survey as part of the event, it may be best to rely on large font paper format surveys over online surveys. Many older adults do not have

smartphones and may be uncomfortable using technology such as tablets, even if provided at an event, so assistance may be necessary. However, if using online engagement formats, make sure to include an option to enlarge the font or view.

- Ensure accessibility. - The space chosen to hold the program or events is significant when engaging with older adults. Many have mobility concerns. Events should be held in places that are fully ADA accessible, and choose sites that participants can easily get to and are serviced by transit or local senior shuttles as many no longer drive. Even if they still drive, many find travel difficult or fear navigating unfamiliar places. Engagement will be more effective at a specific gathering place that is convenient and comfortable such as a senior center or local library.
- Be appropriately timed. - Daytime activities may be more suitable for older adults as many avoid driving at night or in the evening, and others rely on public transportation or local shuttles that run more frequently during daytime hours. While daytime, weekday activities may appeal to older segments of the population, the 65-70 age group may prefer other times, such as weekends, due to work and commitments related to caring for grandchildren during weekdays.

To meet the needs of older adults, the following strategies are recommended for developing an effective public engagement process:

- Partner with advocates. - Building and maintaining partnerships can help SJTPO to reach and engage older adults. National, statewide, and local organizations that care or advocate for older adults offer opportunities to engage directly or get assistance with recruitment for outreach and engagement activities. SJTPO should identify and contact a variety of non-profit organizations and community groups, including local agencies on aging, libraries, senior centers, recreation programs, healthcare centers, older adult housing communities, senior volunteer programs, AARP chapters, long-term care facilities, and city or regional departments of aging, health, or social services. Well-respected local organizations such as food banks and Meals on Wheels programs could also be excellent partners. One of the best opportunities for partnership lies with local or regional libraries. Older adults make great use of libraries, and they already offer excellent programming that SJTPO could build from.



Older Adults Outreach Event at a Senior Center

- Conduct directed interviews or focus groups. - Through the development of partnerships with key organizations, as discussed, SJTPO can begin to identify individuals who work with and represent

the needs of older adults and can engage directly with these advocates. SJTPO could conduct interviews or focus groups with these respected community leaders to obtain information and insight into concerns or reactions to a specific project or plan. SJTPO could also work with these organizations and leaders to identify and recruit individuals to participate in resident-specific focus groups or interviews.

- Implement “go to them” engagement. - Mobility-related barriers to involvement are a concern when developing events or programs to engage older adults. Hosting events at places where older adults already gather requires less marketing than a traditional meeting and can help overcome mobility barriers. Pop-up events, focus groups, visual preferences surveys, maps, or other activities can be brought to senior centers, grocery stores, and other gathering spots. As stated earlier, libraries offer excellent opportunities for engaging older adults as many libraries are used regularly, are places they feel comfortable traveling to, and already have extensive programming that SJTPO could build from.

Individuals with Special Needs

The special needs community comprises individuals who may experience any number or combination of cognitive or physical disabilities. This could include hearing or vision loss, autism, neurological diseases, loss of limb function, or developmental delays, among many others. People with disabilities have a valuable role to play as active representatives of the communities in which they live. Their involvement helps agencies develop more robust plans and projects, but it also helps people with special needs to build personal connections in the community and break down misconceptions about people living with disabilities. Because the range of needs is so broad, agencies should be aware of the many ways in which people with special needs may be excluded from traditional public outreach and how to correct for them.

While there is a diverse array of needs associated with specific disability communities, outreach targeted toward special needs populations should be:

- Physically welcoming. - Meeting spaces should be fully ADA accessible, and any materials available should be reachable and visible from a seated wheelchair position. The bathrooms should ideally be located on the same floor as the event, but if that is not possible, they must be easily accessible. In addition, the area surrounding the meeting area should be safe and free of debris or sidewalk cracks that could pose a danger to a person with limited mobility or vision, and ADA entrances should be clearly marked. If holding a meeting inside a room, there should be a designated section for ADA seating near the front of the room or where the activity is expected to take place. When organizing the event room, make sure that walkways are wide enough for wheelchairs.
- Visually and audibly accessible. - Large print and high-contrast displays and presentations and a good sound system will help ensure that all guests can see and hear as much as possible. Plain language, or language that is easy to understand, well organized, and free of confusing jargon, will be appreciated by those participating. All visual materials should be streamlined, clutter-free, and have decent contrast. If using videos, be sure to include closed captioning.
- Using appropriate disability language and etiquette. - When seeking to engage with special needs communities, be cognizant of how the community prefers to be referenced. Words have the

power to inspire, motivate, and uplift people. They also can hurt, isolate and oppress individuals or entire segments of society. Throughout history, it has become necessary to change language and how to refer to individuals and groups to avoid further oppressing those members of society. There is ongoing effort throughout society to pay attention to and reshape language to refer to people with disabilities and the disability community respectfully and inclusively. This is an area where there may be differences of opinion; however, some words or phrases are generally considered out of date or offensive, while others are commonly accepted. Using labels contributes to negative stereotypes and devalues the person they attempt to describe. Avoid labels when speaking to or about persons with disabilities. In general, it is best to avoid labeling people by using "people-first language" to put the person before the disability respectfully. Refer to a person's disability only when it's relevant. In writing and speaking, use the word "disability" rather than "handicap" or other offensive references. Avoid making people into nouns such as "the blind, the disabled, the epileptics, the deaf" and avoid sensational language such as "suffers from, a victim of, or afflicted with" when referring to disabilities. If it is necessary to make comparisons, use "people without disabilities" rather than "normal," "regular," or "able-bodied."



People First Language. Oklahoma People First, Inc.

General etiquette tips to keep in mind include speaking directly to the person, not to their aids, parents, or other caregivers. Be sure to offer assistance and don't just give it. If assistance is accepted, be sure to listen or to ask for instructions. Remember that a wheelchair is part of a person's body space. If addressing someone with a visual impairment, always begin with introductions, speak in a normal tone and speed of voice, and never touch or grab a cane or the person. When interacting with a person who has a speech impairment, allow the person to finish what they are saying and don't pretend to understand what they have said. If unsure, repeat their comments and ask for clarity. It is important for an individual with hearing impairments to view both the face and mouth for lip reading.

- Developmentally appropriate and avoid the appearance of exploitation. - Adults with only physical disabilities that have typical cognitive functioning should be spoken to at the same level as everyone else. A person with a disability may be turned off from future involvement and

interaction if they feel they were disrespected because they use a wheelchair. While some adults with cognitive disabilities will require more straightforward language and personalized attention, treat them like adults by not being condescending. While this may seem obvious, it is very easy to slip into a different tone unconsciously. People with disabilities are just as independent and capable as other adults and should be treated as such. Make sure to avoid tokenizing. It is easy to rely on one or two voices from an interest group, especially when those voices are eager to be involved in your process. While enthusiastic participants should be included, do not base all interactions with the disability community on interactions with a few people, or think that including only those few people is enough.

To effectively engage with special needs communities, the following strategies are recommended:

- *Partner with advocates.* - Across the country and at the local level, many disability rights organizations work on disability policy advocacy. Many of these groups are especially interested in accessible transportation and transportation to healthcare. Many national-level organizations have local chapters throughout the country. These local chapters or organizations would be ideal places to connect with the local disability community. SJTPO should identify and contact a variety of non-profit organizations and community groups, including The Arc of New Jersey (chapters in all 21 counties), Area Agency on Aging (AAAs serve as Aging & Disability Resource Connection lead agencies in all 21 counties), Disability Rights New Jersey, Centers for Independent Living (by county), The Family Resources Network, and other local and regional Disability Services organizations and councils.
- *Conduct directed interviews or focus groups.* - Through the development of partnerships with key organizations as discussed, SJTPO can begin to identify individuals who work with and advocate for the needs of various special needs communities and can engage directly with these advocates. SJTPO could conduct interviews or focus groups with these respected community leaders to obtain information and insight into concerns or reactions to a specific project or plan. SJTPO could also work with these organizations and leaders to identify and recruit individuals to participate in specific focus groups or interviews.
- *Listen to the voices of people with disabilities.* - While it can be useful to work with and to engage advocates, it is important to listen to the first-person voices of people with disabilities as they are the ones who know the most about their lives and their needs. Through pop-up



Physically Welcoming and Accessible Event Location

programs, focus groups, meetings, or other activities brought directly to disability communities, SJTPO can engage individuals in conversation and listen to their needs or answer questions about how a policy or plan may impact their lives. SJTPO could consider forming an advisory board consisting of a diverse group of representatives from various disability communities from throughout the SJTPO region. The advisory committee would be voluntary but could have formal or semi-formal meetings monthly, bi-monthly, or as needed to discuss concerns or specific plans or projects.

Many of the same tried and true outreach techniques and methods previously described, such as pop-up events, focus groups, and partnerships with advocates, can work effectively and efficiently with many different demographics. The key to implementing these ideas across a variety of demographics is to consider what modifications or adjustments need to be made to best meet each group's individual needs and preferences. Whether the outreach effort is a meeting, a pop-up event, or all via social media, it is important to determine the best way to follow up with participants. At a meeting or event, ask them for their preferred contact method or distribute cards with website information and social media tags. Be sure to provide options for people who do not use the internet or own smartphones. Depending upon the audience, follow-up outreach may occur via email, social media, blog posts, other digital outreach, media coverage, additional events, or any combination of all these methods. Whatever method or methods are chosen, follow-up communication should always start with a "thank you" to the participant for choosing to engage with the plan, project, or organization. Additional follow-up messages should acknowledge and summarize the key messages or concerns heard from the public throughout the process and explain what actions are being taken as a result of the outreach, which actions will not be taken, and why. Transparency and honesty in explaining why a choice was made and how it meets the community's needs will help inspire trust and community ownership over the outcome. Because decision-making can take time, messages are likely to be spread over several months, but the initial "thank you" follow-up message should promptly take place immediately after the event. Whatever methods for follow-up is chosen, the important thing is to show that SJTPO recognizes and thanks those who have taken the opportunity to engage, laying the groundwork for continued positive interactions with constituents into the future.

ESTABLISHED ENGAGEMENT METHODS, TECHNIQUES, AND TOOLS

When developing a public engagement process, there is a wide variety of ideas, techniques, and tools available, and it can be challenging to know where to start. The following section outlines outreach and public engagement activities and methods that have been used effectively by Rutgers POET and other staff members and groups at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center in various programs and projects in the past with reference to their appropriate audience and associated efforts and costs.

Open House Meetings

- *Description:* An open house is a free-flowing style of meeting where guests can drop in at any time and talk one-on-one with representatives at various booths or stations. Unlike a formal public meeting with a presentation and audience, there is no formal agenda, and an open house provides an informal setting for participants to get information at their own pace. There should be multiple interactive stations/tables/kiosks, each focused on providing information about a single aspect of a project or plan. Through activities, attendees are encouraged to offer their options, thoughts, or comments regarding the project or plan. This feedback can be captured through conversations with staff or through other activities that generate written information. The format

of an open house allows for several advantages over the traditional public meeting and presentation. The individual stations break up large complex projects or plans into smaller, more understandable sections for better comprehension and focus by participants. The more personalized interaction allows participants who may be reluctant to speak in front of a large group the opportunity to engage comfortably. Also, because there is no single presentation or schedule, the open house-style meeting's flexible format can take place over an entire day or extended period, giving potential participants with busy schedules increased opportunity to attend.

- *Appropriate Audience:* Open houses are ideal for communicating issues and collecting feedback surrounding complex, large-scale plans to the public. The format is suitable for most demographics and can be scaled depending on the scope of the plan or project. A single open house event can be used to target one neighborhood or community, but if the plan or project covers a large region, it may be necessary to hold several similar open house events throughout the region to ensure potential participants do not have to travel too far.
- *Effort:* Most of the effort associated with developing and hosting an open house will be related to creating the individual exhibits, posts, and activities that participants will experience. Each station should be designed to be independent of the others, interactive, and meaningful to attendees. Other aspects that will require effort include advertising and outreach to ensure high turn-out for the event.
- *Costs:* The costs for hosting an open house event can vary. The most significant factor to consider is whether the organization can acquire event space for free or if there will be costs. Other costs include staff time for developing materials, production of the materials for the stations (posters, informational handouts, or other visuals, etc.), any costs associated with advertising the event, and other potential incentive items such as providing food or refreshments for attendees or child care. With free meeting space, it should be easy to design a compelling event with relatively minimal costs.



Mapping Station at an Open House Meeting

Visual Preference Exercises

- *Description:* A visual preference exercise is a technique for obtaining public feedback on various issues, options, or physical design alternatives. In general, the exercises consist of a series of images that participants must score or rank according to their preference or the degree to which the images concern them. The images may be actual photographs related to your plan, project, or region, or they can be simulated images or images from other areas that can serve as examples.

When using visual preference exercises, it is important to choose images that don't portray meaning or judgment. When showing one option photographed on a bright sunny day and another filled with garbage or graffiti, the exercise could be quite leading, and results may be skewed. There are many ways to run a visual preference exercise. Participants can be shown and rank images on a screen; they can look at images in a paper format or interact with image boards and indicate their preference or top concern via a sticker.

- **Appropriate Audience:** Visual preference exercises are suitable for most demographics and can be especially useful when there are potential communication barriers, such as with LEP and immigrant communities. A visual preference exercise can be a standalone event for a particular project or plan, or it can be incorporated into a more extensive process, such as serving as one station at an open house meeting.
- **Effort:** Most of the effort associated with developing and hosting a visual preference exercise will be related to sourcing and choosing photos to create the exercise.
- **Costs:** The costs for hosting a visual preference exercise should be relatively minimal. Costs include staff time for developing the exercise and may include producing the materials for the exercise if images will be printed or displayed on boards and voted on with stickers.

Pop-up meetings

- **Description:** Pop-up meetings are a way to engage the public by bringing the meetings to where people already are. The purpose and structure of pop-up meetings can vary greatly, allowing them to be simple tabled events meant to distribute information or elaborate interactive displays with exercises intended to encourage active involvement and generate feedback from participants. While it can be hard to recruit participants for traditional public meetings, a pop-up meeting can be organized in convenient and heavily trafficked areas such as farmers' markets, shopping malls, downtown, and parking lots. A pop-up meeting can be beneficial as it doesn't have the limitations of a traditional public meeting because it can be moved to different places, allowing for multiple engagement sites during the process. A pop-up meeting can be quite useful for attracting participants as passersby stop.
- **Appropriate Audience:** Pop-up meetings are a great way to distribute information or solicit feedback from any population in any heavily trafficked area. However, the usual considerations of how to accommodate the anticipated audience should be maintained. For example, if a pop-up meeting is organized in a neighborhood with many LEP Spanish-speakers, displays and information should be available in Spanish, and bilingual staff members or translators should be on



Interactive Pop-up Event

hand. With proper consideration of how to accommodate the target audience, pop-up meetings can be scaled to effectively engage with virtually any audience in any highly trafficked area.

- Effort: Depending upon the nature of the activities or materials developed, the amount of effort necessary to organize a pop-up meeting can vary greatly. Considerations such as the number of events and locations the pop-up is organized for and the pop-up's physical form must be taken into account. A simple tabletop display is relatively easy and straightforward, but it may not be as eye-catching and inviting as other more elaborate approaches involving more interactive and visually pleasing displays or exercises.
- Costs: Much like the effort necessary, the costs associated with developing and running a pop-up meeting can vary significantly. Depending on the exercise or display's complexity and the necessary materials involved, there could be a significant initial monetary investment in developing and hosting the pop-up event. While material costs may be higher when coordinating pop-ups, many of the expenses associated with organizing a more traditional public meeting, such as renting space, advertising, or providing refreshments, are eliminated.

“Meeting in a Box”

- Description: Through “Meeting in a Box” public engagement, community groups or friends gather together at a convenient time and location of their choosing to share their opinions about a plan or project. To coordinate these meetings, volunteer participants are given a “Meeting in a Box” kit that contains everything they need to hold an engaging discussion on their own, including instruction sheets, discussion questions, worksheets for participant responses, feedback questionnaires, and directions for recording and returning responses. “Meeting in a Box” kits can take many forms; they can be entirely paper-based, or they can be downloadable materials posted to a website. In addition to the meeting materials necessary for conducting the event, sponsors can also provide snacks or a small stipend for refreshments to make involvement even more attractive to potential volunteer hosts and their guests.
- Appropriate Audience: The “Meeting in a Box” can be an incredibly useful engagement technique because it leverages social connections that already exist in a community. “Meeting in a Box” can work with various audiences but is most effective in communities or with demographics that have high civic involvement rates.
- Effort: Implementing “Meeting in a Box” engagement requires significant effort upfront to develop the exercises and associated materials included in the kit. There will also be an investment of time necessary to publicize the effort and to recruit participant hosts. While developing initial concepts and materials may require significant effort, once the “Meeting in a Box” kits are distributed, there is almost no staff time required to implement the program. Once an initial concept and material set has been developed, it will take much less effort to modify the materials for subsequent plans or projects.
- Costs: “Meeting in a Box” is a reasonably low-cost engagement method; however, costs can vary depending on the types of meeting materials provided. If materials are being custom printed, simple refreshments are being provided, or a stipend is being offered for a host to purchase their refreshments, costs will be higher. To keep costs as low as possible, agencies can implement “Meeting in a Box” with a basic downloadable information packet.

Focus groups or community conversations

- Description: Focus groups geared towards specific populations may be more inviting and will often see higher involvement levels for hard-to-reach populations. Focus groups are usually conducted in small groups (8-12 individuals) who have common characteristics (demographics, geography, employment status, commute times, etc.). Usually, the focus group participants are

given a small stipend for their involvement and often a meal. Typically, focus groups last one to two hours and are an effective way of learning about a particular demographic or geographic group's preferences and concerns affected by a project, plan, or program. Participants for focus groups are screened, and participation is only open to anyone who meets the criteria such as age, where



Focus Group

they reside, etc. However, the basic concept of a focus group can be expanded into a community conversation. While conversation groups should still be kept relatively small, they can also be conducted with subgroups in a larger setting. These sessions are often less formal and less structured than a typical focus group, and generally, participants are not prescreened.

- **Appropriate Audience:** While usable for any demographic, the focus group or community conversations model relies on people who are comfortable sharing personal opinions in small group settings. This model should be used if acquiring specific local input is of serious importance to implementing a program or project. This model can also be an effective method for increasing familiarity and trust between the agency and community.
- **Effort:** Effort includes planning and organizing sessions, recruiting participants, and reserving spaces to hold sessions, and therefore could require a significant amount of up-front effort as well. Additional effort will be necessary to facilitate, record, and document the discussions that take place.
- **Costs:** Costs will include the development of the discussion questions, reserving space to host the sessions, and possibly compensation or other incentives to elicit involvement from the public.

Interactive polling

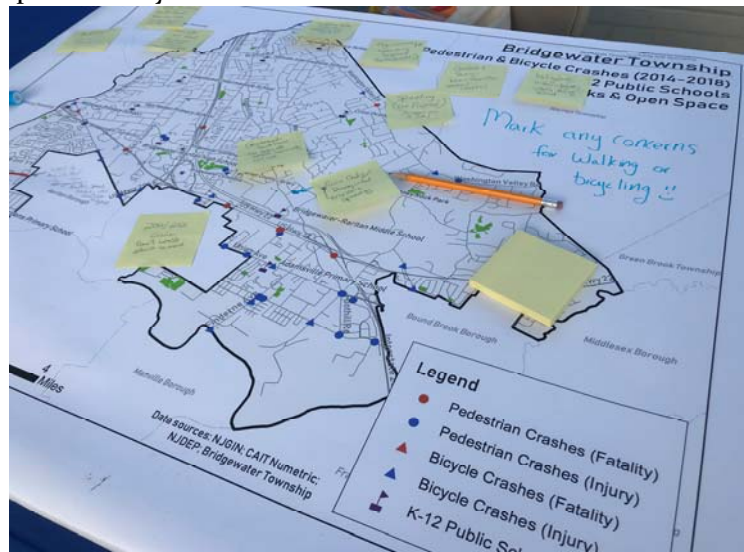
- **Description:** Interactive polling involves using technology that allows participants at meetings or events to provide input on whatever topics an agency needs feedback. Usually, multiple-choice questions are presented to an audience via an electronic projector or through the internet. Audience members interact with the presentation by pressing numbers on their keypad that correspond with their personal opinions. Some companies, such as TurningPoint Technologies, offer keypad polling packages that include keypads for participants and software that can collect, analyze, and display response data almost instantaneously. Other technologies allow participant cell phones such as Mentimeter to take the keypads' place but still collect and analyze the data immediately for live feedback during a meeting or event, providing a more engaging and interactive experience for participants.
- **Appropriate Audience:** Interactive polling can be used effectively with nearly every population, from children to seniors. It can be adapted to accommodate people with Limited English Proficiency but may be difficult for those with visual impairments or low literacy levels to participate. Consideration must also be made regarding whether or not your target audience will

have access to personal cellphones. Interactive polling is a great way to provide immediate, accurate, and honest feedback regarding an issue and can be an excellent way to demonstrate a consensus or lack thereof.

- Effort: If the meeting or event is already organized and the technology is available, interactive polling requires little effort. A member may need to set up and familiarize themselves with the technology in advance of the meeting to avoid confusion or delay and include it in the presentation or activity.
- Costs: Interactive polling may prove a significant investment; however, if an agency intends to use polling consistently at various other meetings or events, the purchase of a package should be investigated. After the initial acquisition costs, the technology can be used repeatedly for no additional cost. If the agency is considering interactive polling for a one-time event, they should investigate rental options or cheaper cell phone-based polling programming.

Participatory mapping

- Description: Nobody has a deeper understanding of a community's geographical dynamics than the people who live there. Participatory mapping is a group-based method that harnesses this information by empowering participants to mark preferences, locations, and other features related to a given topic on a map. This is most often accomplished by using a large format physical map that is presented at a meeting or other public event and made accessible to the group so that they can write, draw, or place post-it notes directly on it. However, there are now web-based applications such as Crowd-Map, which allow users to provide data digitally.
- Appropriate Audience: Participatory mapping is an excellent way for an agency to understand a community's perception of any topic that has geographical implications. Participatory mapping is also a very visual, interactive process that can help generate meaningful conversation and maintain interest in involvement. Participatory mapping can be used effectively with most audiences. However, it might be better to rely on paper maps when the target community may lack access to technology or internet connection. Physical, in-person paper map-based exercises are also more beneficial for participants who are less spatially aware and may need the assistance of a staff member to interact with the map effectively.
- Effort: Participatory mapping is relatively low effort as the only required element other than basic event planning is developing the map(s).
- Costs: Costs of participatory mapping can vary considerably. Printing a paper map and using standard office supplies such as pens and post-its can be inexpensive. Prices start to increase with improved map quality, map size (plotting), and the accessories used for the public to interact with the map. Maintaining a digital map that allows users to insert pins and other information cataloged in an online database may also prove moderately expensive.



Participatory Mapping

Story Telling

- Description: Storytelling can help to demonstrate how a project, program, or plan affects the lives of real people and can help to provide a human element that can generate interest in that project, program, or plan. Digital stories are first-person narratives told in the storyteller's own words and voice that can combine text, still images, or short video clips to allow an individual to express their story in a concise and relatable way. Digital stories are often exhibited on an agency website, but they can also be incorporated into other events such as pop-up meetings or displays. By providing compelling, relatable, personal stories, an agency can more effectively communicate the gravity of an issue. Story telling can also take the form of a story slam or poetry slam
- Appropriate Audience: Digital storytelling can work with any demographic and is a great way to help the public make personal connections to an issue, program, or plan. Digital stories can show how a specific event affected an individual or family, how someone benefitted or could benefit from a program or plan.
- Effort: The most significant effort associated with digital storytelling lies in identifying people with stories and coordinating their involvement. Additional effort may be required in finalizing or editing the content.
- Costs: With an existing website or plan to display the stories, the only associated costs with digital storytelling are those related to seeking out participants with relevant stories to share and formatting the story files to display on the website. Depending upon how the stories are produced, some additional production costs may be associated with recording or editing video footage.



Storytelling Workshop

Social media photo campaigns

- Description: Social media is one of the quickest and most efficient ways to reach a large audience. Social media photo campaigns allow an agency to promote a project, plan, or program by encouraging the public to volunteer relevant photos and other media online. These campaigns usually work by employing a themed simple message or tag-line with general mass appeal, such as "my favorite place in Atlantic County." Once the theme is developed, the public posts their content related to the theme and, in the process, shares the project or plan with their followers. With a good theme, photo campaigns on social media have an avalanche effect where each post generates additional posts. In general, a theme should be interesting, fun, exciting, or humorous to help secure involvement.
- Appropriate Audience: Social media campaigns are mostly used to target younger, media-savvy audiences. However, internet and smartphone usage are expanding rapidly across all demographics, so a social media campaign could be effective across many groups. Photo

campaigns work best when used for concepts that are highly visual and do not need much explanation.

- Effort: Most effort will be in designing a theme that can generate attention. While it is hoped that the avalanche effect will take hold and each post will lead to other posts, some effort will be necessary to maintain the campaign's promotion.
- Costs: Because social media platforms allow free involvement, costs associated with social media campaigns should be virtually nonexistent. Potential costs could be incurred if the agency decides to pay for physical or virtual advertisements to spread the word about the campaign.

Interactive lesson plans at schools

- Description: Interactive lesson plans are a great way to get the youth perspective while also teaching them about a project, plan, and career in planning. This type of lesson plan engagement can be useful for in-class presentations, after-school groups, and summer camps or recreation programs. Depending upon the time available, offer a short presentation and discussion or a full lesson plan. Students respond well to visual lessons that include photos and maps that are also interactive. Incorporating a participatory mapping session into a lesson can be an excellent experience for both adults and students. Students almost always have a different interaction with and perception of the community than adults and can provide unique insight. Students learn why their community is the way that it is and how change can be made.



Interactive lesson plan at a public school in Perth Amboy.

- Appropriate Audience: While lessons can be adapted to students' age, it is generally best to work with students in grade 4 and above as they are more mature and can better understand more difficult concepts.
- Effort: The most significant effort will be in developing the lesson. A simple google search reveals many lessons that can be adapted to the project or plan, but time will be necessary to make the appropriate changes to ensure that a full lesson that will gather the feedback needed while providing the students with a rewarding experience. When dealing with children, be prepared. It is best to have a back-up plan if the lesson runs too long. It is also a good idea to have a follow-up activity if the lesson runs short and there is time to fill.
- Costs: The cost to implement an interactive lesson plan project will be relatively low. After the lesson plan is developed, the only associated costs will be purchasing any necessary supplies or incentive items for the students who participate.

INTERESTING ENGAGEMENT IDEAS AND TOOLS

When developing a public engagement process, there is a wide variety of ideas, techniques, and tools available, and it can be challenging to know where to start. The following section outlines outreach and public engagement activities and methods that have been used effectively by Rutgers POET and other staff members and groups at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center in various programs and projects in the past with reference to their appropriate audience and associated efforts and costs.

Text campaign

- *Textizen*: Textizen is a web platform that utilizes text messaging to get public feedback. Agencies using Textizen customize their campaign, and the platform sends, receives, and analyzes interactive text messages to gather feedback and provide follow-up questions to respondents. People are then invited to participate in the campaign by texting responses to these customized questions that are displayed on transit ads, postcards, at live events, on websites, or whatever location or medium is best suited to reaching the targeted audience. Participant phone numbers can also be imported to invite participants to join the conversation directly. An online dashboard reports results as they are communicated. The platform can be used for an initial survey only or can continue to send project updates, event notifications, or follow-up surveys. <https://www.textizen.com/>

Game and comment platform

- *Crowd Gauge*: CrowdGauge is an open-sourced tool for creating online games that allow users to rank a set of priorities and understand how a plan, policy, or series of actions will affect those priorities. The third part of the sequence gives users a limited number of coins, asking them to put that money towards the actions they support most. Utilizing funds received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the game maker has developed this open-sourced version of an existing platform with new code and a revamped back end for easier use and deployment. CrowdGauge is entirely open source and licensed under the permissive MIT license. <http://crowdgauge.org/>

Mapping and Visualization Tools

- *Community Viz*: CommunityViz is an ArcGIS extension that allows participants to envision alternatives, understand their potential impacts, explore options, and share possibilities with others. The platform contains two components, Scenario 360 and Scenario 3D. Scenario 360 adds interactive analysis tools and a decision-making framework to the ArcGIS platform. Scenario 360 helps view, analyze, and understand land-use alternatives and impacts to make the planning process more visual, collaborative, and effective. Scenario 3D is a visualization tool that creates realistic, interactive, sharable 3D scenes. Some tools are accessible to users with no knowledge of GIS, and others require specialized expertise. <https://communityviz.city-explained.com/index.html>

Expanded use of video

- SJTPO could expand upon its use of video as a way to engage with the public. Videos can often convey complex issues and ideas in a way that is easily understood, providing participants with the same information and a shared understanding. Videos can be used in various ways; they can be posted online, accessed through social media, or used at events, kiosks, or meetings. Videos can be a great way of attracting participants and can be an excellent primer for starting a discussion about a project or plan. Videos can also be used as a part of other public engagement

events to capture stakeholder input and document the engagement process. For videos to be useful, they must be high quality. For large projects, it is advisable to work with a professional multi-media firm. However, with new technology, it is easier for agencies to produce and edit short videos at increasing levels of quality.

CONCLUSION

Public engagement is not a “one size fits all” process. Just as people are different, the methods and process for interacting and engaging them must also be different. The most recent updates to SJTPO’s PIP have laid a course for and demonstrated SJTPO’s commitment for engaging under-represented communities within the SJTPO region into SJTPO’s programs and processes. But committed to enhancing public engagement is, of course, quite a different thing from carrying out public engagement. There is no unified and agreed upon common methodology that can be devised and followed to coordinate all public engagement. Effective engagement embraces the notion that each different project and situation will require a different design, using a new combination of methods and tools as part of a continually evolving cycle. To help SJTPO navigate this process, this document has focused on identifying best practices in public engagement and outreach strategies best suited to engaging specific demographic groups, including immigrant and limited English proficiency communities, ethnic minority communities, low-income communities, youth, young adults, older adults, and individuals with special needs. The best practices and targeted engagement activities and programs identified above serve as a menu of options that can be customized and deployed for making substantive project and target audience specific improvements regarding equity to the SJTPO outreach process.



Pop-up Event



Placemaking Event

OUTREACH METHODS SUMMARY CHART

Many outreach methods are relevant to and appropriate for multiple communities. This chart displays outreach methods and which communities they are recommended for to try to condense some of the information that has been presented.

	Communities						
	Immigrant & LEP	Ethnic Minority	Low-Income	Youth	"Millennial" / Young Adult	Senior	Special Needs
Advisory Boards or Committees		X		X			X
Contests				X			
ELL Class Outreach	X	X					
Focus Groups			X			X	X
Interactive polling		X	X		X		
Interviews			X			X	X
Involve Schools			X	X			X
Involve Small Businesses		X					
Mobile Kiosks	X	X	X		X	X	X
Open House Meeting		X	X		X	X	
Participatory Mapping	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Partner with advocates	X	X	X	X		X	X
Pop-up events	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Social Media Engagement				X	X		
Social/Small group Engagement					X		
Tactical Urbanism				X	X		
Targeted Media Outlets	X	X					
Visual Preference Exercise	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Youth Engagement	X		X				