

Self-Study Module 1: Advertising a Meeting--Working with Underrepresented Groups' Trusted Allies and Advocates

Outline of Self-Study Module 1

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1.1 Goals and Learning Objectives of “Self-Study Module 1: Advertising a Meeting--Working with Underrepresented Groups' Trusted Allies and Advocates

The goals of Self-Study Module 1 are to help transportation planners (1) understand why their current advertising and outreach efforts may not be achieving the desired results, i.e. getting underrepresented citizens to attend transportation meetings and engage in transportation planning, and (2) learn how to reach underrepresented citizens in more effective ways by working with and through underrepresented groups' trusted allies and advocates.

The information in this Self-Study Module includes feedback and recommendations from:

- 1) local Morgantown and Monongalia County underrepresented community members and transportation experts via interviews and workshops conducted from July 2018 – April 2019, and
- 2) transportation planning best practices identified from a review of the literature.

Learning Objectives for Self-Study Module 1

As a result of reading this Module, the learner will be able to:

- 1 Identify reasons underrepresented groups may not be responding to current advertising and outreach strategies.
- 2 Identify underrepresented groups' trusted allies and advocates who could provide suggestions, insights, and new options for outreach and messaging.
- 3 Explain the types of information to obtain from these trusted allies and advocates.
- 4 Develop a plan for working with and managing relationships with these new contacts.

1.2 The First Step: Understanding Why Underrepresented Citizens Do Not Attend Your Meetings

The first step toward enhancing your public outreach and advertising strategies is to take stock of your current efforts and consider why underrepresented populations are not participating in transportation planning efforts.

In this case underrepresented refers to any citizen who lacks transportation that is accessible, reliable, and affordable. These groups may be further defined as vulnerable using health care categories: the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, the uninsured, low-income children, the elderly, the homeless, the disabled, those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and those with other chronic health conditions, including severe mental illness. The modules have been developed with these underrepresented citizens in mind particularly as they are rural residents, who often encounter barriers due to poverty and a lack of opportunities and resources similar to low income urban residents.

Transportation agencies often hear the following reasons about why people do not attend public meetings or participant in planning: (US DOT 2015 Update, p. 53)

- “[People] are not aware a meeting is taking place
- They receive inadequate notice
- They have other commitments
- They have a negative perception of the sponsoring agency
- Public comments are not taken seriously
- Decisions have already been made behind closed doors
- Meetings are too time consuming or boring
- Meeting sites are too far away, inconvenient, or inaccessible

Closer to home, transportation planners and experts in West Virginia who were interviewed for this project offer the following observations about why underrepresented citizens do not attend public meetings.

I. Current advertising approaches do not reach underrepresented citizens

- “WV Department of Highways will probably have a legal ad...don’t know how many people go through legal ads on regular basis”
- “[Even though all the info may be placed on the website and FaceBook page] “the problem with that is, frankly, as much of that outreach as there is, it doesn’t reach that many people”
- “Agencies are required to do legal advertisements, they post them but nobody reads those. We post on the website, post on front doors of the building...put information out to neighborhood associations...”

II. Understandability and consistency of outreach

- “Key issue is getting word out in a way that people understand – on a continual basis”

III. Difficult to get people to show up

- “It’s extremely difficult to get people to show up...usually the same four-six community people show up, plus bike and pedestrian board members”
- “That’s always the biggest hurdle, public participation is very limited, it’s always the same people who are active in their community are the same people at every single meeting”
- “Most people have their life to live, can’t afford or spare time to go to every public meeting and be educated about what’s going on...plus follow the world of politics, too much for the average person...people just want to live their lives...already have sports, music, kids’ events”
- People complain about time and place of meetings ALWAYS;

IV. We just need to do better

- “We need to do more and do better”
- “Elected officials and we can all do better to engage all who need to be engaged in transportation planning”

Along with these observations, there are also socioeconomic factors that play a role in why underrepresented groups do not attend public meetings. Using carefully designed communication and outreach strategies tuned to the needs and interest of underrepresented groups can help you be more effective in reaching those citizens, gaining their attention, and peaking their interest to participate.

SIDEBAR: Barriers to Public Attendance at Transportation Meetings

The observations offered by West Virginia transportation planners are reasons that average citizens do not show up at meetings. Imagine, then, the barriers for underrepresented citizens and intensify or multiply the disincentives to participation by adding socioeconomic factors such as low education levels, low literacy, low income, and challenging family situations.

Traditional efforts to involve underrepresented populations in public meetings usually include placing legal advertisements in newspapers, posting notices on the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or transportation planning agency website and Facebook pages, sending notices out via email lists, and posting flyers in places like grocery stores and coffee shops.

These strategies often rely on the audience finding the MPO or transportation planner and the message.

An alternative strategy for reaching underrepresented populations is for the transportation planning agency to find the audience and take the message to them.

Government agencies have traditionally relied on the public to come to them. More and more transportation agencies are realizing that being proactive and going to the public can result in better and more meaningful interactions and engagement.

SIDEBAR: Getting messages out to hard-to-reach citizens can require a shift in perspective: *Take your message to them instead of hoping they find your message. For example: Go to the*

social service agency, meet with providers, and ask them to help you get the word out. Next, hold the meeting on site where the underrepresented group lives or gathers.

The communication strategies recommended here may differ a bit from strategies you typically use. As mentioned above, once you develop an understanding of your audience, you can customize your outreach to facilitate better communication.

As indicated by more than one transportation or planning expert interviewed for this project, transportation planners want to engage more underrepresented citizens in their planning efforts, and they need to know “what that looks like.”

SIDEBAR: Recommendation from a Morgantown interviewee about engaging underrepresented populations:

*“Our Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Citizen Advisory Committee members should reach out to underrepresented populations. **We need to know what that looks like.**”*

You can learn about audience characteristics and their communication preferences by determining the following:

- (1) Who are the underrepresented audiences’ trusted allies and advocates? And what are the best ways to understand and reach underrepresented populations through them? (Covered in this Self-Study Module 1)
- (2) What types of messages will resonate and be effective with underrepresented audiences? How to shape or word the messages? (Covered in Self-Study Module 2: Crafting Effective Messages)
- (3) How does each audience prefer to receive information (radio, flyer, newspaper ad, etc.)? And which of those communication venues is best suited to delivering the message? (Covered in Self-Study Module 3: Preferred Communication Channels)

1.3 Identify the Underrepresented Groups’ Trusted Allies and Advocates

Initiating a relationship with underrepresented citizen groups can begin by working with and through their allies, advocates, and providers, and people with whom these groups regularly interact. Allies and advocates can include highly relevant or visible people that relate to or work with underrepresented groups; providers can include, for example, representatives from social service or other agencies.

Allies, advocates, and providers are people who understand and can represent the underrepresented groups’ perspectives and needs. They can introduce or refer you to other underrepresented citizens, and encourage them to speak with you or participate in transportation meetings and planning.

To identify individuals who may be allies or advocates for the underrepresented audience, some good strategies are to:

- Review your own meeting sign-up sheets and mailing lists;
- Ask local government advisory and other committee members for suggestions;
- Ask local leaders, church leaders, community groups, and social service agency contacts, i.e., the local university may have a social work program where students are required to know about underrepresented groups including service providers, advocates and allies;
- Contact people you know in professional associations and community groups;
- Check with medical providers, schools, and child-care centers.

Many of these contacts will be able to make introductions and help you make connections. It's likely you already know local social service agency staff members who interact regularly with underrepresented populations. Some examples in Monongalia County are the Women Infants and Children Special Supplemental Nutrition Program or The Shack Neighborhood House.

Perhaps you know a state legislator or public health worker who has special connections with groups you're trying to reach. You are likely to find underrepresented groups' trusted allies and advocates from many sectors.

Keep in mind that underrepresented citizens who live in one part of town or another, or outside of town, will attend different churches, social service agencies, or health care providers. So you may need to reach out to many types of social service and other organizations, depending on the geographic location and other characteristics of each underrepresented group.

CAN ADD A LIST OF RELEVANT AGENCIES IN THE MORGANTOWN, MON COUNTY AREA

SIDEBAR: Over time, a key strategy is to make sure you and your transportation planning colleagues are among underrepresented communities' trusted allies and advocates.

1.4 Conduct Interviews with Underrepresented Groups' Trusted Allies and Advocates

Interviewing Underrepresented Populations' Trusted Allies and Advocates

After you identify which underrepresented group's allies or advocates to contact, arrange to conduct interviews with them. Interviews can occur either via phone, or in-person at a place that's convenient for them. It helps to have a mutual contact reach out first and let them know you're interested in getting together to talk about transportation equity and underrepresented community members.

Your phone call or in-person meeting will likely cover the following topics:

- Explain who you are and provide information about the organization you work with or represent;
- Explain what you're trying to achieve in terms of engaging underrepresented community members in transportation planning;

- Explain that you are seeking this person’s assistance to:
 - Help you develop a better understanding of the underrepresented audience and ways to engage them in transportation planning
 - Help you make contact with the underrepresented audience members so that you can get to know them, their needs, issues, and concerns, and begin to develop relationships
 - More specifically, in terms of advertising public meetings, explain that you are seeking information related to the types of advertising/outreach messages and the types of media, social media, and other outreach venues that underrepresented audience members’ prefer to use, and what messages and outreach strategies would be effective in reaching those audiences.

SIDEBAR: A word of advice from a West Virginia transportation expert: *We already do a lot of outreach. If we’re not getting the participation we want, we need to dig deeper.*

SIDEBAR: To establish a relationship with a social service provider remember to drop the “expert” position. The demeanor of being an expert can set up power imbalances, disrupt relationship building and make it harder to break down barriers between your agency and underrepresented groups.

Suggested Interview Questions When Contacting an Agency or Organization

Be sure to first clearly explain why you’re contacting the organization, what your transportation planning agency does, which community groups you’re trying to reach, and that you’re investigating if and how the agency can help you accomplish your goal of reaching out to underrepresented populations. Some questions to consider:

- Ask what the organization does, the services they offer underrepresented groups, and how they typically interact with those groups;
- Identify specific underrepresented groups and key individuals (if possible) with whom they interact;
- Discuss the complimentary services you would each bring to the partnership and to each other’s clients (for ex., better transportation planning will likely help social service agency clients meet their own transportation needs);
- Ask for ideas on how the agency can help facilitate better connections between you and the underrepresented groups you’re trying to reach (handing out your literature, inviting you to make personal contact during their meetings, piggy-backing on their meetings, etc.).

SIDEBAR: Be sure to keep track of each audience’s trusted allies and advocates, along with contact information and best ways to work with them, for reference.

After Interviews, Next Steps with Ally or Provider Organizations

If an organization is willing to work with you, it may be helpful to write up the plan or strategy you’ve discussed and/or agreed to. It will likely take more than one phone call or meeting to decide on a plan. Develop a brief, informal written document that explains why you are

partnering, what each organization has agreed to do, and the outcomes you're trying to reach, such as the number of people who will receive information or with whom you will make contact, the timeline, and other agreed upon activities.

You may prefer to take a more informal approach with agency contacts vs. putting commitments in writing. The important thing is to be clear about what they have offered to do, what you have offered to do, and stay on top of the situation with appropriate communications and interaction.

1.5 Manage and Nurture Your Relationship with New Contacts

It's important to be appreciative and manage and nurture your relationship with partners who are helping you understand, access, and connect with underrepresented populations. Be sure to stay in touch, deliver what you promise to deliver, help them stay on task and meet timeframes, and determine if the advertising and outreach strategies are working. That is, are the strategies helping to engage underrepresented populations, and are they moving underrepresented populations to action, such as attending your transportation meetings?

Some Tips for Managing Partnerships

from "Global Outreach in Local Communities" (2015)

- 1 "Take advantage of your partner's expertise and relationships with their client groups by listening to their advice about being culturally specific and sensitive, and have them take the lead with interactions."
- 2 "Hold regular meetings [with your partners] to assess your partnership's progress and performance, and make needed adjustments accordingly."
- 2 "Cultivate trust by communicating openly and honestly. Be prepared to resolve differences/challenges when they arise."
4. "Show gratitude to your partner for their contributions."
5. "Make every effort to continue maintaining your relationship with your partner over the long-term."

Source: Office of Citizen Involvement, Multnomah County Oregon. (2015). Global Outreach in Local Communities. Bringing worlds together...one tip at a time. (p. 10).

<https://multco.us/file/46897/download>

1.6 Work Towards Building Relationships with Underrepresented Populations

Ultimately, the goal in interviewing the communities' trusted allies and advocates is not only to identify more effective ways to reach underrepresented populations and publicize events that you want them to attend. The goal is to also begin developing meaningful relationships with these audiences and to nurture those relationships over time.

Developing relationships requires a commitment of personnel, effort, and time on the part of the transportation planning agency, and on the part of people and organizations with whom you're working. For example, one strategy for improving your connections to underrepresented groups is to attend their meetings, when appropriate. This creates the opportunity to learn about their issues and concerns, learn more about one another, and develop deeper connections.

Your transportation planning agency's advance work with community members and the agencies who interact with underrepresented populations with can pay dividends over time, paving the way to establishing more direct and meaningful relationships with underrepresented groups.

1.7 Recommendations for Working with Local Social Service and Other Agencies

NOTE: ANOTHER PHASE IN DR. ANDRESS' WORK—PENDING RESEARCH SUPPORT—IS TO INTERVIEW SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES ABOUT THEIR WORK WITH UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

WHEN RESEARCH IS COMPLETE, WE CAN INCLUDE INFORMATION FROM LOCAL WIC OR SHACK OR OTHERS ABOUT BEST WAYS TO ENGAGE THEM, HOW IT WOULD WORK FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW.

Closing Summary

WRITE WHEN CONTENT IS FINALIZED

References

Office of Citizen Involvement, Multnomah County Oregon (2015). Global Outreach in Local Communities. Bringing worlds together...one tip at a time.

<https://multco.us/oci/global-outreach-local-comunities> or
<https://multco.us/file/46897/download>

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (2015 Update). "Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking." pp. 83-87. "Establishing Communication Outside of Meetings"

Actual document:

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/publications/pi_techniques/fhwahep15044.pdf

Website: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/publications/pi_techniques/

Recommended Reading

"ON TO 2050" Public Engagement Summary (September 2018). Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Access the full plan at <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/2050>

"ON TO 2050" Public Engagement Summary is a report by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) about its long-range planning process. "ON TO 2050" public engagement

efforts address broad community planning including transportation planning. Their process illustrates the benefits of implementing an inclusive and long-term planning process that marshals local resources and agencies to engage and personally interact with citizens in meaningful ways.

“In developing the ‘ON TO 2050’ plan, CMAP spent approximately three years working with partners to conduct extensive research, issue more than two dozen reports, and engaged over 100,000 residents of the seven-county region...Residents participated in workshops, open houses, topical forums, interactive kiosks, online surveys, and social media to contribute their ideas for the region’s future. CMAP’s extensive public engagement activities produced voluminous comments, data points, and insights, which have guided the plan’s development.”

“CMAP made a concerted effort to hear from low-income populations, people with disabilities, those disconnected from transit, and others who face significant barriers to participating in public process. To optimize this, CMAP partnered with organizations in [the] region already doing important work in these communities. [CMAP] sometimes joined their existing agenda or helped them facilitate special meetings for in-depth discussions.”

END SELF-STUDY MODULE 1 ++++++

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