

Self-Study Module 2: Advertising a Meeting--Crafting the Message

Outline for Self-Study Module 2

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2.1 Goals and Learning Objectives of Self-Study Module 2: Advertising a Meeting – Crafting the Message

The goals of Self-Study Module 2 are to introduce transportation planners to strategies for crafting effective advertising and outreach messages for underrepresented populations, and underscore the importance of working with underrepresented groups’ trusted allies and advocates to help determine effective messages.

Learning Objectives for Self-Study Module 2

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

1. Identify and explain the three key guidelines for crafting effective advertising and outreach messages (message is about the audience, clear and understandable, and relatable).
2. Complete the “Crafting an Effective Message” worksheet and develop advertising and outreach messages based on the three key guidelines.
3. Explain the importance of discussing and testing messages with underrepresented audience’s trusted members and trusted messengers.
4. Identify the types of messages that Morgantown/Mon County underrepresented residents indicate are relevant to them.

2.2 The Importance of Messaging and Advertising

Developing effective messages takes time, effort, and money. It requires developing a full understanding of the specific audience you’re trying to reach and the messages that will inspire its members to act. Consider how a business advertises its products. A business has a marketing

department that analyzes statistics, trends, and other data to answer these same questions. Ads are carefully crafted based on these analyses. Ads are continually tested and revised to gauge their effectiveness. Without effective advertising, products won't sell and the business won't succeed.

Transportation planners and transportation agencies do not have the same level of funding, staffing, or resources to dedicate to advertising. But this business practice serves as an example of how important it is to dedicate time and effort on understanding the audience, developing effective messages, and conducting advertising. It is fundamental to getting the word out about your programs and engaging underrepresented and other community members.

The public health sector has long known that traditional advertising and promotion are not optimal ways to reach low wealth or underrepresented groups because of issues with literacy and the way in which these groups consume information based on their daily habits. These Modules draw upon those lessons learned and offer some new ideas for reaching out to underrepresented citizens.

2.3 Key Guidelines for Crafting the Message

What types of messages will be effective, i.e. how to shape or word the message.

Several considerations are integral to creating messages that will be effective with the underrepresented audiences you're trying to reach. First, seek to understand your audience's perspectives and self-interests about transportation planning and public involvement.

Then, craft the message using three tried-and-true guidelines:

- (1) make the message about the audience vs. about your transportation organization,
- (2) make sure the message and what you're asking the audience to do is clear and understandable, and
- (3) personalize the message to help make it relevant to the audience.

The goal of an effective message is to capture the audience's attention and move them to action, in other words, get them do what you're asking them to do.

SIDEBAR: The Importance of Uncovering Underrepresented Citizens' Self-Interests

In building trusted relationships, the bedrock principle is self-interests. Upon first encountering this concept some may find it reminds them of the idea of selfishness but the truth is that everyone acts out of their own best interest. It is a natural behavior important to survival. However, the key to establishing a sense of community and shared responsibility, and collective action, is to uncover shared self-interests.

For example, we all want our children to have the best education available. The key is to find out the self-interests of underrepresented groups (a sense of safety, a job, self-respect) and use those interests to build a core group of shared self-interests and relationships of trust with that community.

2.4 Discuss Audience Messaging with Underrepresented Groups' Trusted Allies and Advocates

Work with your key allies and advocates to gain an understanding of underrepresented populations' perspectives on (a) transportation planning, (b) engaging with government agencies, and (c) public participation. Some issues you might discover about these audiences:

- *Their knowledge about transportation planning:* The audience may not know how the transportation planning process works, that they can have a voice in the process, why that's important to them, why their participation is important to transportation planners, and what options are available for them to participate in the process.
- *Their perceptions about working with public officials, agencies, or public processes:* The audience may have a past history of being left out of decisions, or feel that their opinions do not matter. They may have a history of little or no involvement or even experiences of negative involvement with government officials and agencies. You should not be offended or surprised at stories that reflect a lack of trust in government agencies.
- *Their challenges to engaging in public participation:* Underrepresented groups have many challenges and competing priorities that prevent them from fully participating in public meetings. They may lack experience speaking in public and voicing their concerns or needs. In many cases rural underrepresented groups lack a personal means of transport or do not have access to reliable/easy bus or transit services. Issues with child-care, the cost of child care, conflicting work schedules, family care issues, personal mobility issues (wheel chair), and lack of funds/affordability issues are all challenges underrepresented populations face.
- *Their daily transportation challenges.* Many underrepresented citizens deal with immediate and daily transportation problems related to bus schedules, bus routes, lack of safe sidewalks or bicycle paths, in addition to lack of transport options and many other problems.

In crafting a message, it's important to understand the challenges, self-interests, and perceptions of underrepresented groups. If your message does not convey an understanding of their self-interests, issues, concerns, experiences, and beliefs, it may prevent them from paying attention or seriously considering your invitation to participate in transportation planning. They may not view you as truly interested.

Here are ways a more informed understanding of underrepresented groups might be reflected in your outreach messages:

Example #1: If you discover that an underrepresented group has little trust in government agencies, the message that one of their trusted allies, advocates, neighbors, peers, or community members will facilitate a meeting with the transportation planning agency might catch their

attention and peak their interest in participating. It may also be helpful for the trusted peer to deliver this message.

Example #2: If the population you want to reach relies on bus service, you'll need to plan for and advertise that bus passes will be available. If they don't have access to reliable bus service, let them know that you will come to a location convenient to them, or make transportation available.

Example #3: If the audience does not understand they can have a voice in transportation planning, the message should convey the importance you place on hearing their concerns, and why it will benefit them. You must follow this up with proof and examples--and avoid making empty promises.

Example #4: If the audience you want to engage in transportation planning also experiences short-term, daily, or immediate transportation problems, the advertising message should convey that people will be at the transportation planning meeting to answer their questions about these immediate concerns.

Discussing these issues during your interviews with underrepresented groups' trusted allies and advocates can help guide your thinking about best ways to handle them in your outreach messages. This will help you address the audience's concerns, fears, lack of understanding, lack of trust, lack of interest, or help you identify a good reason--from their perspective--to prioritize your meeting in light of their competing responsibilities.

Strategies for crafting effective messages are presented below. Again, it is essential to discuss messaging with your key contacts. Ask them for ideas that underrepresented populations will respond to, and ask them to provide feedback on your ideas.

2.5 Make the Message About the Audience vs. About Your Transportation Organization

The message should focus on the action you want the audience to take, and why—from *their* perspective. The message should convey something they can relate to, instead of focusing on your organization and its goals. In other words, make the subject or request relevant to *them*.

Example of an Ineffective Message (focus is on the agency)

Public transportation meeting is taking place on Date at City Hall.

The Department of Highways want to discuss ways to fix Greenbag Road. Topics include:

- reviewing our analysis of roadway problems
- reviewing project goals and objectives
- obtaining public input.

Open to the public, please attend.

Example of a More Effective Message (focus is on the audience)

The Department of Highways wants your input about fixing Greenbag Road.

Don't miss this chance to tell us about your experiences driving, walking, biking, or waiting for the bus on Greenbag Road.

November 9, 2019 at your local Community Center.

Child care, bus transportation, and pizza available.

2.6 Make Sure What You're Asking the Audience to Do is Clear and Understandable

It's important that your message is clear and to-the-point, concise, and uses visuals to help draw and focus attention. If people have to read a lot of text and dig for the message, you'll lose their attention. Here are some tips for developing clear and understandable messages:

- Identify the one main message you want to convey: what you're asking the audience to do and why it's useful or addresses their self-interest. Write it as clearly as possible.
- Write the message with the person or audience you're trying to reach in mind. For example, you would advertise a meeting to transportation engineers differently than you would underrepresented citizens who live close to the roadway under consideration.
- Avoid technical jargon – the audience will not be familiar with technical terms and acronyms. One technique is to try to remember what it's like not to know or understand something, then develop the message from that perspective.
- Write the message at a 6th or 7th grade reading level. Approximately 45% of the population reads below a 7th grade level proficiency (i.e. their literacy skills are below a seventh-grade level).
(https://www.planning.dot.gov/publicinvolvement/pi_documents/1a-a.asp)
- Use a visual or photograph to add interest to the message. The visual should help emphasize your message or include a photo the audience can relate to (perhaps a local leader they know, or a location in their community).
- Test the message by asking a few people to read it and offer feedback on its clarity and understandability.

SIDEBAR: A good rule of thumb: less is more when crafting a message. Keep it simple, straightforward and to the point.

The MMMPO Greenbag Road “Open House” meeting advertisement below is an example of a direct, easy-to-read ad. It is succinct, to-the-point, and clearly asks the reader “How can Greenbag Road work better for you?” and “Where are improvements needed?”

The WV DOH advertisement on the following page is an example of a confusing, unclear, text-heavy advertisement for an “Open House Public Meeting.”

Underrepresented citizens who attended this project's workshops reviewed and provided input on these sample advertisements. They reported, for example, that short and straightforward ads were preferable to ads that required a lot of reading. They want an ad to clearly indicate what is being asked of the reader (or meeting attendee). They caution against using visuals with too much detail, and that are difficult to see or interpret.

GO TO THE NEXT PAGE

857 Greenbag Rd Corridor
←→
PLANNING STUDY

Open House

**How can Greenbag Rd work better for you?
Where are improvements needed?**



Marilla Park Recreation Center
799 East Brockway Ave, Morgantown

Wednesday | Oct. 15, 2014 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm

DRAFT



**Upcoming Informational
Open House Public Meeting
Intersection Improvement WV 7 & CR 857 Project
State Project U331-7-35.35
Federal Project CMAQ-0007(247)D
Morgantown, WV**



Join us on Wednesday, October 7, 2015 from 4:00pm to 7:00pm, at Marilla Park Recreation Center for an informational open house public meeting on the Intersection Improvement WV 7 & CR 857 Project. West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) project representatives will be available to discuss the proposed project and answer questions. There will be no formal presentation, but project maps and other information will be on display, plus a handout with project details. This open house meeting complies with the public involvement requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Project Background

The proposed project will improve the intersection of WV 7 (Earl L Core Road) and CR 857 (Green Bag Road) in the Sabraton area of Morgantown. Originally six alternatives were studied for this area. Due to the complex layout of the WV 7 with CR 857 and Connector intersection and its contribution to the overall poor traffic operations along WV 7 Corridor, the study area was expanded to include the adjacent intersections. The alternatives have been narrowed down to four alternatives and a no-build option.

When and Where?

**Wednesday, October 7, 2015
4:00 PM to 7:00 PM
Marilla Park Recreation Center
799 E. Brockway Avenue
Morgantown, WV**

Upon request, WVDOH will provide reasonable accommodations to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate. Please contact us at (304) 558-3931, or (800) 982-8722 (voice to TTD), or (800) 982-8771 (TDD to voice).

To Comment

Comments are due Monday, November 9, 2015 on the project and can be submitted at the meeting or sent to:

**Mr. RJ Scites, P.E.
Director, Engineering Division WVDOH
1334 Smith Street
Charleston, WV 25301**

Comments can also be emailed to:
Sondra.L.Mullins@wv.gov or

Visit our website at
<http://go.wv.gov/dotcomment> under
Public Comments, Engineering Projects,
Open, then Intersection Improvement WV 7
& CR 857 Project



2.7 Make Sure the Message Represents the Self-Interests of Underrepresented Citizens

As discussed earlier in this Module, people act out of self-interest. Work with your allies and advocates to identify the self-interests of the underrepresented citizens you want to reach, and incorporate those ideas into your publicity and outreach messages. If the underrepresented citizens are concerned about their safety as it relates to the project at hand, let them know that addressing their safety is one of your goals. If you discover that the transit issue under consideration is important because people need the service to get to work, let them know that facilitating their transportation to work is important to the project.

2.8 Make the Message More Relatable to the Audience by Personalizing the Message

A message that seems more personal to the audience will likely catch their attention and be more effective in gaining their participation. You can make the message more relevant by personalizing it, localizing it, and featuring recognized local leaders, agency representatives, or peers:

- Use a representative from the underrepresented population, or from an agency they regularly interact with, to convey or endorse the message, such as a faith leader, health provider, neighborhood activist, etc.
- Use a concrete, real-life example and/or photo that the audiences will recognize – such as the specific bus stop or roadway under consideration.
- Tell a story to illustrate the problem or illustrate a success, especially if you have a local success story that can inspire people to action.
- Let specific people/groups know you seek their participation by identifying who you'd like to be involved for example, “residents of Marjorie Gardens,” “people whose children walk to school along Dorsey Avenue,” “people who drive or wait for the bus along University Avenue,” etc.

2.9 What we Learned from Morgantown/Mon County Residents about Publicity Messages

This project's workshop participants, who are members of underrepresented communities, offer thoughts on types of ads or messages they find interesting and would impact their decision to attend a meeting or participate in an event:

- If the issue concerns me, I'll be at the meeting
- Messages that would make me attend:
 - We need your involvement...
 - Be part of...
 - We want public involvement...
 - We want your opinion...
 - Come and plan your future...
 - Help this work better for you....
 - Improvement is needed...
- Keep ads simple with not too much text
- Use bulleted information

- Make sure the ad is informative
- Be sure to identify the exact issue: sidewalk? bus? trail?
- Include information on how to get to the meeting
- Want to know if child care is available
- It is best if meeting times correspond to bus schedule and location is on bus route
- Logos and images catch the eye
- If you use visuals, make sure they are clear and readable, for example, details on a map can be too small to read

2.10 Worksheet: Questions to Consider for Crafting an Effective Message

INCLUDE A WORKSHEET WITH QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CRAFTING A MESSAGE TO A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE, USING THE THREE KEY GUIDELINES:

- (1) make the message about the audience vs. about your transportation organization,
- (2) make sure the message and what you're asking the audience to do is clear and understandable,
- (3) and personalize the message to help make it relevant to the audience

DRAFT WORKSHEET ITEMS:

- Who is the underrepresented audience? i.e. homeless, low income, social service providers to low income groups?

- What do you want them to do? _____
- How is the problem/meeting related to their lives? _____
 - To their neighborhood? _____
 - To their ability to get where they need to go? _____
- How will the meeting result in a benefit for the audience? _____
- Why is it important for them to participate and offer their perspectives? _____
- How can you personalize the message and make it relevant to the audience? _____
- What are you offering to make participation easier or more convenient for the audience?

- What visual(s) would make the message seem more personal to the audience? _____
- What do your key contacts say about the message? _____
- What are their suggestions for making it more effective? _____

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2.11 Closing Summary DEVELOP WHEN CONTENT IS FINALIZED

Communication and outreach can be greatly enhanced when transportation agencies take the time, up front, to work with underrepresented populations, understand their perspectives, and identify relevant messages that will entice them to participate in transportation planning...

References

Turner, D.S., Evans, W. A., Kumlachew, M., Wolshon, B., Dixit, V., Sisiopiku, V.P., Islam, S. Anderson, M.D. (2010). Issues, Practices, and Needs for Communicating Evacuation Information to Vulnerable Populations. In Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board. No. 2196. Transportation Research Board of the National Academies. Washington, DC. Pp 159-167.

END OF SELF-STUDY MODULE 2 ++++++

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