

Self-Study Module 4: Convening a Meeting

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4.1 Goals and Learning Objectives for Self-Study Module 4: Convening a Meeting

The goal of Self-Study Module 4: Convening a Meeting is to orient transportation planners and others to strategies for holding, conducting, and designing public meetings so that they are more accessible, understandable, and welcoming to underrepresented citizens.

Learning Objectives of Self-Study Module 4: Convening a Meeting

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

1. Identify ways to hold and conduct public meetings that are more accessible and convenient for underrepresented citizens.
2. Explain comprehension and literacy considerations when working with underrepresented citizens, and develop methods to help address those considerations.
3. Develop visuals, illustrations, and PowerPoints using “best practices” that help ensure clarity of the message.
4. Describe and implement meeting activities that welcome, involve, and engage underrepresented participants.

4.2 Key Federal Guidelines Relating to Underrepresented Groups

An important point to note before getting started: all federal agencies including transportation planning organizations are required to follow legal requirements and code of ethics for working with underrepresented populations. These guidelines require, for example, that agencies avoid adverse impacts on underrepresented communities, and ensure that these communities are not excluded from participating in or benefitting from federal programs. Convening public meetings and inviting underrepresented populations to participate are key ways transportation agencies meet these requirements. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Selected Federal Guidelines that Apply to Underrepresented Groups

Federal transportation law requires transportation plans to avoid a disproportionately high and adverse impact of transportation policies or investments on traditionally underrepresented communities. Sections 450.210 and 450.316 of the Statewide Transportation Planning; Metropolitan Transportation Planning Final Rule, effective March 16, 2007, require "a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underrepresented by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services."

Executive Orders also direct Federal agencies to conduct their programs, policies, and activities to ensure that they do not exclude persons from participation in or benefits of the programs. Presidential Executive Order 12898, the Environmental Justice Order of 1994, requires Federal agencies to identify programs, policies, and regulations with a disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations. Presidential Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, requires Federal agencies to create a system by which limited English-proficiency individuals can meaningfully access agency services. This can usually be done by modifying existing participatory programs.

Source: Transportation Planning Capacity Building: Planning for a Better Tomorrow. Public Involvement Techniques. 1.A.a. Tailoring Outreach to Underrepresented People Who are Underrepresented, and Why? U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration. https://www.planning.dot.gov/publicinvolvement/pi_documents/1a-a.asp

4.3 Convening a Meeting

This section describes strategies for holding meetings and engaging underrepresented group members. These ideas and recommendations presented are based on discussions with underrepresented groups members from Morgantown and Monongalia County, recommendations from experts with successful track records of working with underrepresented populations, or who have led successful transportation planning programs, and highlights from the literature.

Two Approaches to Convening a Meeting

Convening an effective meeting requires developing an effective approach. This takes time and effort—to determine the location and purpose of the meeting, the audience you want to engage, and strategies for interacting with the audience to obtain input and ideas.

This section discusses two approaches to convening a meeting. The first is convening a meeting in the traditional way—where the meeting is held at a location in town which requires citizens to

travel to your location. This option, although usually not the best option, is most often used by government agencies.

The other option is to take your meeting to the citizens. Experience with underrepresented populations suggests that taking the meeting to them—to a location in their neighborhood or in conjunction with events or meetings that they already attend—encourages and facilitates higher levels of attendance and involvement.

There are certainly times when it is necessary to hold a meeting in town and ask citizens travel to you. But whenever possible, meeting citizens where they are helps ensure more people have the opportunity to engage in the process.

In “Self-Study Module 3: Advertising a Meeting—Preferred Communication Venues” we discussed this same type of approach: shifting the focus from “expecting the audience to find you and your message” to instead “finding the audience and taking your message to them.” The same is true for meetings. Taking the meeting to the audience can be especially important when people you hope to involve may lack access to transportation, or are dealing with many competing priorities that limit their ability to participate.

It’s important to do your homework to get an idea of best places to hold meetings. Talk with your contacts--underrepresented communities’ trusted allies, advocates, and providers, including social service and other organizations who work with underrepresented groups and ask for suggestions.

SIDE BAR: Participants in the Morgantown-Mon County Transportation Equity Project offer thoughts about holding transportation planning meetings

*Marjorie Gardens and Unity House could be good meeting spots.
(Quotes from interview #7 10/27/18 Workshop)*

FEMALE: "...it almost seems like when you have a group of people come together, you're getting more opinions and some more insight. Like he might say something that might trigger something we have, like, 'Oh, wait a minute. Yeah, that's a good idea.' And I can give my opinion, as well."

FEMALE: "...to get feedback from everybody is more important, so the more people you get together the better.

FEMALE #2: You mean like a larger group?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so more than just people in Marjorie Gardens?

FEMALE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah, so maybe trying to cluster areas together?

FEMALE: Yeah, like because where we live is called the First Ward.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

FEMALE: Or like the First Ward group of - like an essential place...where the First Ward can meet."

DEVELOP AND INCLUDE A CASE STUDY EXAMPLE: “Hal Greer Boulevard Corridor Management Plan/Fairfield Innovation Corridor.” Example of very successful WV effort to engage underrepresented community members in transportation planning. Focus on what worked in those meetings and community engagement efforts.

“Hal Greer Corridor/Fairfield Innovation Corridor “Case Study to be Developed Here

OVERVIEW

“The Fairfield Innovation Corridor project is a complete and holistic revitalization of the area from 8th Avenue to the Interstate and from 12th Street to 28th Street. The initiative’s success to date relies on involving in the planning process residents, businesses, the faith community, and anchor institutions; strengthening existing community entities that provide services; and developing a master transformation plan that focuses on all challenges that face Fairfield while maintaining the culture and heritage of this traditionally African-American community.”

Source: City of Huntington, WV (Website). Fairfield Innovation Corridor.

<http://www.cityofhuntington.com/residents/americas-best-communities/fairfield-innovation-corridor>

Additional Sources:

City of Huntington, WV. (2019). Hal Greer Corridor Management Plan. Final Report Part 1.
https://aead719e-6703-4663-848d-70a14eca5a10.filesusr.com/ugd/d3843c_33b86ecca3ce4a22a2e67f353d3a0cda.pdf

See Chapter 3: Public Engagement Summary, pp. 40-61

City of Huntington, WV. (2019). Hal Greer Corridor Management Plan. Final Report Part 2.
https://aead719e-6703-4663-848d-70a14eca5a10.filesusr.com/ugd/d3843c_a1d578741c3c4b1abf265da3828604ed.pdf

Timing, location, and other meeting considerations

The transportation agency should identify times when community members are available to participate in transportation planning meetings, and schedule meetings accordingly.

Underrepresented populations often work more than one job, and work many different shifts, Consider holding more than one meeting, and holding the meetings at various times to accommodate different schedules. That can mean evening meetings or weekend meetings, in addition to a weekday option.

Many low-income people do not have a car and rely on public transportation, biking, or walking. Be sure to hold the meeting at a location that is either close to their homes, or easily accessible by bus. That means the meeting location should be on the bus route, the meeting should be held during hours when busses are running, and the agency should provide bus passes if possible. Another option is to arrange for transportation, such as hiring a van to transport people to the meeting location.

Child-care and other family care responsibilities or health issues can limit people’s ability to attend meetings. One solution is to offer child-care services at the meeting. All meeting spots should be handicapped-accessible and easy to enter.

You may want to consider combining formal meetings with other less formal approaches. For example, in-the-field activities such as setting up an information desk during local or neighborhood activities, or piggy-backing on existing meetings and making a brief presentation can help reach underrepresented audiences where they are. Small meetings or more informal approaches may be more comfortable settings for certain underrepresented groups or people who are new to public involvement process

In these instances, make sure there's a quick and easy way for people to provide input, and offer to include their names on a contact list so you can reach out to them for more input and let them know when formal public meetings or other events are taking place. It's also important to use the input you gather in these informal settings, and let people know how you plan to use their input. (US DOT/FHWA/FTA (No Date), Section 1.A.a)

SIDE BAR: Be creative with meeting locations!

Meeting locations can be anywhere in the community. Transportation agencies and Metropolitan Planning Organizations have held meetings at shopping malls, agricultural and county fairs, neighborhood and community events, housing developments, libraries, senior centers, workplaces....group homes, head start centers.

LIST SOME IDEAS FROM OUR INTERVIEWS HERE

(Source: *Transportation Planning Capacity Building: Planning for a Better Tomorrow. Public Involvement Techniques. 4. Using Special Techniques to Enhance Participation. 4.B.d. Non-Traditional Meeting Places and Events. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration.*

https://www.planning.dot.gov/publicinvolvement/pi_documents/4b-d.asp#toc4b-d

Using new meeting approaches to interact with underrepresented groups demonstrates your interest and concern to these new audiences. Taking the time to learn about best ways to interact with them, at their convenience, in their neighborhood, or in conjunction with events in their lives shows your willingness to obtain their input.

Many times, people do not get involved in community or public activities because they are never asked to do so. Being visible to underrepresented groups and reaching out to them--in other words taking your meeting to them instead of expecting them to come to you--can increase their interest and at the same time, enhance your agency's credibility. (US DOT/FHWA/FTA (No Date), Section 4.B.d)

4.4 Comprehension and Literacy Considerations for Underrepresented Populations

Transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian planning meetings often address very technical topics, which can be unfamiliar to audiences, especially new participants or underrepresented populations. When including or interacting with people who have no previous experience with this sort of planning, you'll need to present complex information in understandable ways.

Specifically, you'll need to create a meeting environment that provides a variety of ways for people to comprehend complex or unfamiliar information, and which gives people with literacy challenges a variety of ways to learn and interact.

Comprehension Defined

Comprehension is the process of fully understanding the information under consideration or study. To comprehend means to understand, know, grasp, and have a handle on the information. Ways people can demonstrate their comprehension of information are by explaining it, summarizing, paraphrasing, describing, or illustrating it. Using techniques in your meetings that offer participants the chance to demonstrate their comprehension in these ways will help you determine if they are comprehending the information.

Literacy Defined

Fundamentally literacy means competency in a specific area. For the purposes of this training, we focus on literacy as the ability to read and write, speak and listen, and to understand visuals: i.e. reading, writing, verbal, and visual literacy. These are the fundamental communication methods you'll likely employ in a public meeting or other interactions with underrepresented populations.

This Module is not designed to help you teach literacy, but rather to help you provide opportunities in a meeting that allow participants with different levels of reading, writing, verbal, and visual literacy to have a more fruitful and successful experience. In other words, to provide them every opportunity to participate and provide input in ways that work for them.

SIDE BAR: Literacy is Fundamental to Communication and Participation

“Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen, and use numeracy and technology, at a level that enables people to express and understand ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, to achieve their goals, and to participate fully in their community and in wider society...”

Source: Memorial Assistance Ministries. Literacy Advance of Houston: Transforming lives and communities through the doorway of literacy.

https://www.literacyadvance.org/About_Us/Defining_Literacy/

Comprehension and Literacy Characteristics of Underrepresented Populations

Consider some characteristics of underrepresented populations related to comprehension, literacy, and participation in public meetings:

- They are not likely to have experience or feel comfortable in official or public settings;
- They may not be used to reading, hearing, or examining technical information; reading PowerPoint slides; reading documents and surveys; examining or interpreting visuals;
- They may not have experience or confidence articulating and voicing their opinions in public;
- They may have lower education levels;
- They may have limited reading proficiency;
- They may have limited English proficiency.

Addressing those Characteristics -- The chart below offers activities and solutions that can help address comprehension and literacy challenges.

| Underrepresented Populations' Comprehension & Literacy Characteristics | Activities or solutions |
|---|--|
| Lack of experience in public or official meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and orient participants to the meeting from the moment they walk in the door • Conduct activities that will help break the ice, allow participants to talk and get to know one another • Make sure participants know how important their participation and input is to you and other government officials in attendance • OTHER/SEE INTERVIEWS |
| Lack of experience reading and understanding technical information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present information in smaller “chunks” to make it more understandable • Present the information in several ways that allow a person to either read it, hear it, see it (via visuals), or watch it being demonstrated • OTHER |
| Lack of experience or confidence articulating and voicing their opinions in public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use smaller group activities in which participants can share their opinions in a less intimidating setting • Conduct one-on-one interviews/discussions • Ask questions that relate to participant’s experiences (tell me what happens when you walk to work on this roadway...) • Ask probing questions to help guide the participant toward expressing a more clear explanation or descriptive details • OTHER |
| Lower education levels and limited reading proficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep information clear and concise, whether its spoken or presented via text • Provide information in a variety of ways -in writing, verbally, visually, and through hand-on, physical activities • Provide concrete and understandable examples to illustrate the point • Ask questions to determine if the participant understands the information – questions must be constructive and helpful, vs. judgmental • Keep written information at the 7th grade reading level or below • OTHER |
| Limited English proficiency (about 4 percent of people in Morgantown/Mon County speak different languages (from an MPO doc) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure a translator is involved in the meeting • Provide materials in the other language(s) • Conduct separate meetings for different language speakers • OTHER |
| Limited experience examining or interpreting visuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use visuals (photos or illustrations) that clearly illustrate the information • Use visuals that are simple and straightforward, without extra images that clutter or distract from the main point • Use visuals that the audience can relate to – familiar locations, familiar people, etc. • Explain the visual and the key points it's making, and ask for comments/questions • OTHER |

4.5 Fixing Your Graphics: Visuals, Illustrations, PowerPoints

Visuals are an important way to interact with participants, keep their attention, and increase retention. “Visuals are powerful and natural ways for humans to communicate.”

- We are drawn to images
- We remember visuals more so than text and verbal messages
- Visuals help us learn
- Visuals help increase retention. (Garr, R. 2005)

Why Your Choice of Visuals is Important

During a meeting, you want participants to focus on the information and activities underway. You don’t want them to be distracted, struggling to see, read, or comprehend information in a photo, graphic, or PowerPoint. However, this can easily happen if a visual has too many details, too much text, no clear message or focus, and fonts too small to read.

PowerPoint Design Recommendations

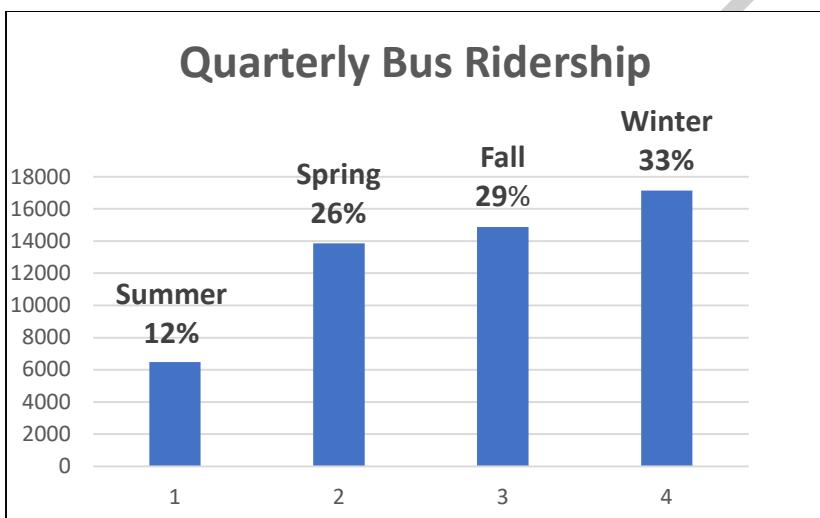
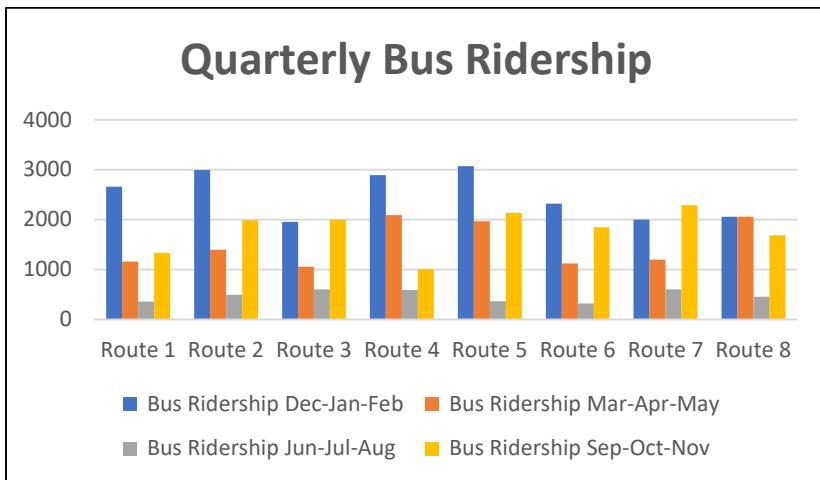
Decisions you’ll make for each PowerPoint slide include: the main message, text or visual(s) that best convey the message, text font and color, background color or design, design/layout of text and visuals. Here are some guidelines:

- Identify one main topic for each slide, with supporting information that is brief, simple, and clear
- Follow the 5/5 rule:
 - No more than five words per line of text
 - No more than five lines of text, maximum
- When possible, try to use one image with one brief, straightforward message
- Select readable fonts, and choose font and background colors that work together
 - Dark text on a lighter background helps ensure people can read the text
 - Use 24-point text, minimum, nothing smaller
- The background should not compete with the text or illustrations, keep the background simple
- Use an appropriate visual that supports, clarifies, or illustrates the main point
- Avoid using detailed charts. Create a simpler visual or graphic than clearly depicts the information with a minimum of text and details.
- Use a simple design – not too many words, colors, or visuals. Design should have one focus point that catches the viewers eye
- The PowerPoint should support your verbal presentation, providing visual or written information to exemplify what you’re saying, rather than duplicate what you’re saying. (Reynolds, G, 2008)

Example Illustrations of Effective Graphics and Visuals

Below are some examples that illustrate effective design of graphics and visuals.

Example 1: Presenting graphics and data. (These are placeholder graphics, need to develop some related to transportation)



Which image is easier to read?

The graphic on the top has too much detail, no clear focus, and is difficult to comprehend. The lower graphic uses a simpler approach and readily draws your attention to the main points. To display data more effectively, find a way to simplify the presentation of detailed data into a clear and easily understandable graphic.

Example 2: Text-based visuals vs. image-based visuals. (Need to develop our own slides)

Bike your way to better health

- Increase cardiovascular fitness and stamina
- Decrease levels of stress and anxiety
- Increase muscle strength
- Decrease levels of body fat and increase weight control
- Increase bone strength



Bike your way to better health

A photograph showing a woman from behind, riding a bicycle on a paved path. She is wearing a blue t-shirt and light-colored shorts. The path runs alongside a large, calm body of water, likely a river or lake, with a rocky shoreline in the foreground. The background shows a clear blue sky and some distant buildings or trees.

(Placeholder photo. May need another photo)

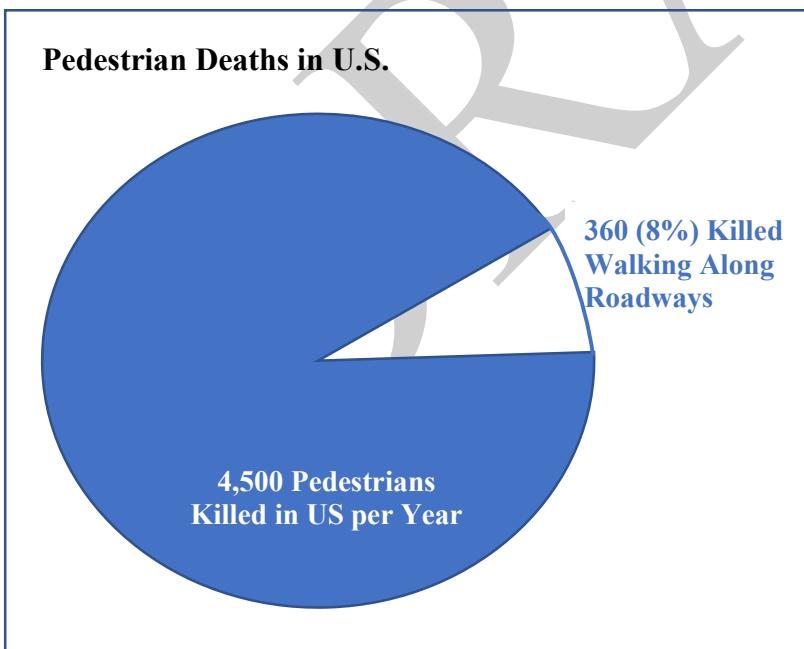
FROM: https://all-free-download.com/free-photos/download/woman-riding-bike-on-path-along-river_596308.html

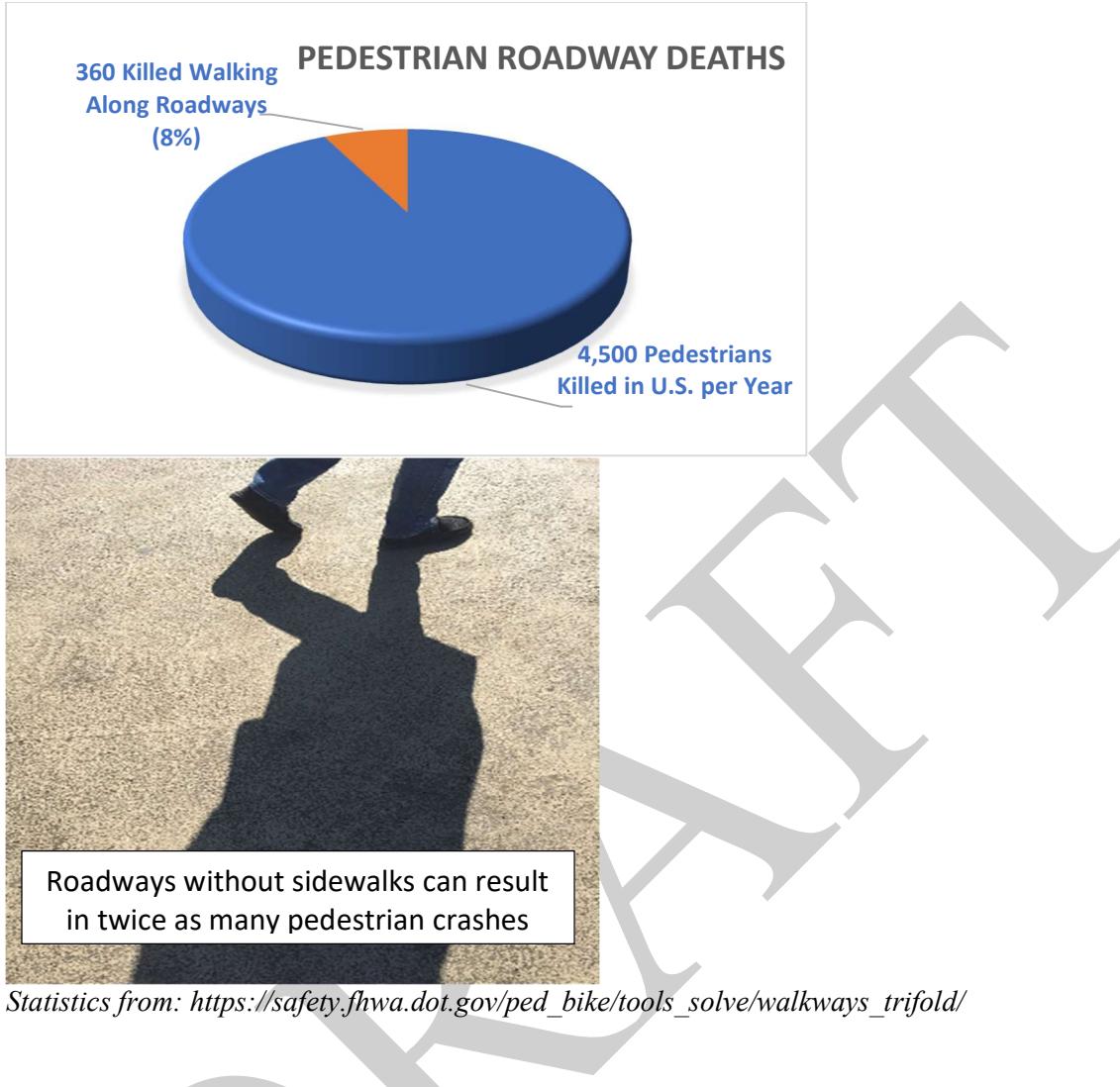
A slide that duplicates the presenter's words has more to do with reading than illustrating an idea. The simpler slide "does a much better job of enhancing the presenter's spoken words. The photo has impact and makes the point clearly. Plus, since people are not reading, they can actually listen to you." (PresentationZen)

Example 3: Additional examples that illustrate different ways of using visuals. Consider which of the following images attract your attention, and why.



<http://buildingpublicunderstanding.org/assets/files/presentationzen.pdf>
pp. 148-149 Zen





4.6 Observations of Morgantown Regional Bike & Pedestrian Transportation Plan Meeting

The MMMPO conducted “Morgantown Regional Bike & Pedestrian Transportation Plan” community meetings throughout 2019 as part of its work to update the Bike and Pedestrian Plans. The observations presented below came from data that we collected after attending the opening and/or that participants shared with us after they attended the unveiling of the plan.



Observations about the MMMPO Bike-Ped Meeting Held on February 5, 2019

The observations in Figure 2 are from Morgantown residents and college students who attended the meeting. They were all middle class, educated, and white. Their comments are provided in different colored text in the table; each color represents a different observer. Note that even with their middle class status and education, these participants had some difficulty navigating the meeting and understanding the information. Imagine how much more difficult it would be for low wealth citizens with limited education or low literacy skills.

Based on these comments, consider some ways you would re-design the Bike-Ped Transportation Plan Meeting.

Figure 2. Observations of MMMPO Bike-Ped Meeting

| Positive aspects of the meeting | Need for improvement |
|---|--|
| They really want to get people in Morgantown to be more active with walking and riding bikes | --- |
| They had a ton of voting opportunities...there was also a survey to get your exact thoughts, if you drove, walk, ride your bike and if you did why... | --- |
| We all got to talk to individuals who truly wanted to know how we felt and what they could do | --- |
| Easy to participate in the written survey and pick tasks that were most important to us | Could have been another person or two assisting in these activities, especially when a good amount of people started to show up |
| --- | Information on boards was complex |
| --- | Lighting was poor |
| -- | Assistants appeared uninterested in my personal stories |
| Attendees appeared physically fit and higher social economic status, perhaps joggers, bikers | Average pedestrian and homeless/carless not represented |
| --- | The open house had very low visibility in the community, including the student body... |
| --- | As a non-car owner, I would likely not have been able to attend the meeting if my classmate had not provided me with transportation |
| The event itself was OK... | ...Although the information was presented at a very high level |
| --- | As a public health graduate student, I was able to interpret the information, but a person lacking the required skills would likely have had difficulty doing so |
| --- | Data presented should be able to speak for itself, not require an interpreter |

| | |
|--|--|
| --- | Although the Metropolitan Theater is a beautiful and historic building, its lobby was too dark to host such a visually-heavy event |
| The event was well organized with a registration table at the entry way and a person at the table directing you to sign in and fill out a survey | The survey was long and took some time to complete. It would have been helpful to have someone, a staff person, available to orient you to survey and its purpose, and answer questions |
| --- | As a first-time participant in a Bike-Ped Planning meeting, I would have appreciated someone speaking to me, personally welcoming me, thanking me for attending. Many in attendance were engaged in conversation and appeared to know one another, I felt a bit like an outsider |
| --- | There were many posters in the lobby, I had no idea if I was supposed to read them or if they had information I needed for the meeting |
| --- | Presenter's explanations and graphics were complicated and technical, it was difficult to follow and understand all that was being presented |

4.7 Welcoming Participants to Meetings

As illustrated in observations from the Morgantown Regional Bike & Pedestrian Transportation Plan meeting, it's important to make the participants feel welcomed and valued from the first moment they step into the meeting. Consider the following welcoming scenarios:

Traditional Welcoming Activities:

Registration table with a sign in sheet, a survey to complete, name tags, one or two people saying hello and asking participants to sign in, complete the survey, and fill out a name tag. Participant completes these tasks and takes a seat.

Alternative Welcoming Activities:

Same registration table with sign-in, survey, other documents, and one or two people offering instructions. However, there are several other people solely dedicated to meeting and greeting people when they walk into the building or room, shaking their hands, exchanging names, and orienting people to the process.

“We'd like you to sign-in at this table using this sign-in sheet, then take a few minutes to complete our survey.” Offer two ways to complete the survey: written survey or verbal interview. Be aware of the fact that people may not be familiar with completing surveys, may have limited reading skills, and may need personal coaching. (Another option is to ask the surveys questions during the session, using discussion and other strategies as an alternative to written surveys.)

Setup posters throughout the entry-way and room that say “Welcome” and “.....”

Introduce new participants to meeting facilitators and others who are in attendance.

Begin the meeting with Ice-breaker games/activities that provide opportunities for people to meet, talk, and get to know others in the room. IDENTIFY SOME ICE BREAKER ACTIVITIES.

Importance of Welcoming Activities

Welcoming activities help set the tone of the meeting, right from the beginning. They give people time to arrive and warm up to the new environment. They help participants feel more comfortable, at ease, and less intimidated. They offer the chance for people to connect with one another. Ice-breakers that invite people to speak, even in a small group, sends the message that every voice is important. Taken together, these benefits contribute to building relationships that in turn can open pathways to meaningful communication and engagement.

SIDE BAR: “The Importance of Relationships”

“You cannot effectively participate with people you do not know. Formal public hearings where agency staff never actually meet or interact with the public often fail because there are simply no relationships upon which to base communication. Relationships define the ability to fully understand one another and give proper consideration to one another’s needs, issues, and concerns. In designing a public participation program, you need to pay a great deal of attention to creating the opportunities to get to know key stakeholders and create the kinds of dialogue spaces necessary to build trust and understanding.”

Source: US Environmental Protection Agency. Public Participation Guide: Process Planning.
<https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-process-planning>

4.8 Who Should Convene Public Meetings

NEED TO DEVELOP IF WE WANT THIS INFO INCLUDED

Basic thrust would be that trained facilitators who understand collaborative participation methods and have experience with underrepresented populations should conduct the meetings. Either hire a consultant or train staff members in these skills.

4.9 Summary Paragraph

NEED TO DEVELOP

References

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https://www.literacyadvance.org/About_Us/Defining_Literacy/
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https://www.planning.dot.gov/publicinvolvement/pi_documents/1a-a.asp)

US Environmental Protection Agency. *Public Participation Guide: Process Planning.*
<https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-process-planning>
Accessed July 2019

END OF SELF-STUDY MODULE 4:++++++