



# Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens

through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates

## GUIDEBOOK 5

VERSION 2

*Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*

Version 2, 6/2021

The full series of *Transportation Equity Toolkit* resources is available online at:

*Suggested Practices for the Transportation Planning Community*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/suggested-practices-for-the-transportation-planning-community/>

The *Transportation Equity Toolkit* is a component of:

*Place & Health in West Virginia and underrepresented populations:*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com>

The website and its contents seek to reframe the way West Virginians think about and address population health less automatically as individual responsibility shaped by access to healthcare and more as the outcome of intentional policy decisions that leaders make about the places where people live, work, and play.

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## Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates

### Introduction to *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*

One option for “doing things differently” to reach and engage underrepresented citizens in transportation planning involves working with their trusted allies and advocates—people who know them and can facilitate connections and communication with transportation planners.

*Transportation Equity Project* principals conducted interviews with nine social service providers from eight local agencies to determine their willingness to facilitate their clients’ engagement in transportation planning. All expressed interest.

Interviewees emphasized that transportation is critical to their clients’ ability to meet fundamental basic needs. Many clients either cannot work (sometimes due to transportation challenges) or work in low-income jobs and are unable to own or afford a dependable car. They instead rely on public transportation, walking, family, friends, or other means to get around. While most clients’ problems relate to transit service, many must walk along busy roadways with no sidewalks, compromising their safety. When a client needs assistance from a social service agency, transportation usually becomes an immediate issue, whether it’s getting a client to medical appointments, obtaining food and basic necessities, or responding to other emergencies.

Most of the social service providers interviewed were unfamiliar with the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) and its transportation planning process. They were, however, familiar with Mountain Line Transit Authority as a result of working with them to secure bus service and bus passes for clients. All indicated a willingness to learn more about the MMMPO and help clients connect with transportation planners.

Based on the interviews with local social service providers and others, *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates* offers information and recommendations about best ways to reach and engage their clients, and how social service providers can facilitate that process.

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## The Goals of *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*



*Guidebook 5* is designed to help transportation planners:

1. Consider if current outreach and advertising efforts are achieving the desired results, i.e. getting underrepresented citizens to attend transportation meetings and engage in transportation planning;
2. Reach and engage underrepresented citizens in more effective ways by working with and through their trusted allies and advocates to “meet them where they are.”

The information in *Guidebook 5* includes feedback and recommendations from:

1. Local Morgantown and Monongalia County underrepresented community members and transportation and planning experts via interviews and workshops conducted from July 2018 – 2020;
2. A focus group and interviews with Morgantown and Monongalia County social service agency administrators and social workers conducted March-May 2021;
3. Transportation planning best practices identified from literature reviews.

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.” Several guidebooks in the *Transportation Equity Toolkit*, including *Guidebook 5*, address “what that looks like.”

- *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates* offers concrete recommendations for working with and through underrepresented citizens' trusted allies and advocate to engage them in transportation planning.
- *Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies* offers suggestions about developing and delivering effective messages.
- *Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens* identifies pros and cons to consider when selecting communication venues.
- *Guidebook 8: Convening Public and Other Transportation Planning Meetings with Underrepresented Citizens* identifies strategies for holding effective meetings with these audiences.

### **Recommendation from a Morgantown Planner About Engaging Underrepresented Populations**

“Our MMMPO Citizen Advisory Committee members should reach out to underrepresented populations. ***We need to know what that looks like.***”

## A First Step: Understanding Why Underrepresented Citizens Do Not Attend Your Meetings or Participate in Transportation Planning



**A** first step toward improving efforts to reach and engage underrepresented citizens is to take stock of your current practices and consider why those populations do not participate in transportation planning.

### **Who Are Underrepresented Citizens?**

For the purposes of this *Transportation Equity Project*, underrepresented refers to any citizen that lacks accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation and can be defined as vulnerable using health care categories such as 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. For more detailed information about characteristics of underrepresented citizens, see this *Toolkit's Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens we Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning*.



According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, transportation agencies often hear the following reasons why people do not attend public meetings or participant in planning:



- “[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.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Local Transportation Planners’ Perspectives on Lack of Meeting Attendance***

Closer to home, transportation planners and experts in West Virginia who were interviewed for this project offer their 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

- "A 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"

## 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.



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.”



**T**raditional efforts to involve underrepresented populations in public meetings usually include placing legal advertisements in newspapers, posting notices on the MMMPO website and Facebook page, 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 message and coming to MMMPO meetings. In fact, most government agencies have traditionally relied on the public to come to them.

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

These *Transportation Equity Toolkit* resources are designed to help you do that.

### **Meet People Where They Are**

Identifying and engaging hard-to-reach citizens can require a shift in perspective requiring you to take your meetings and messages to them instead of hoping they find you. For example, you can work in conjunction with a social service agency and ask social service providers to help you connect with clients. Next, hold the meeting at the agency or a location where those individuals live or gather.



Meeting people where they are can begin by working with and through their trusted allies and advocates. These can be social service providers and other trusted individuals or agency personnel with whom these groups regularly interact. Allies and advocates can also include well known, respected, and prominent community members such as religious clergy, educators, and civic, neighborhood, or elected leaders.

As a result of working with and serving underrepresented populations over time, allies and advocates have developed trusting relationships. They understand underrepresented citizens' perspectives, needs, fears and challenges. They know how to communicate with them. In turn, many social service clients view their social service providers as nonjudgmental, reliable, compassionate and helpful problem solvers. Social service providers can serve as liaisons by introducing or referring transportation planners to their clients, and encouraging those clients to engage one-on-one or participate in meetings to discuss transportation needs.

### ■ ***Trust is Key to Interacting with Underrepresented Citizens***

Social service providers interviewed for this project identified reasons why trust is so important. Without trust, underrepresented citizens may be fearful or shy away from sharing their thoughts, experiences and needs.

“

“There's a lot of shame sometimes that people feel when they are living in poverty, especially with children.”

“...Those living in poverty and houseless that I'm most familiar with... they have a hard time trusting, because they think that their kids are going to be taken away, if they share too much they will lose what little they already have.”

“So in terms of the transportation planning process, I think [transportation planners] need to go out, find the people where they are, like what United Way does, the Pantry Plus More does...And you have to build trust with them. And that's how you figure out the needs they have, and how to best address them...But you have to work really hard to build that trust to really help people.”

”

Without the social service providers' facilitation, transportation planners with no relationship or connections to underrepresented citizens may have difficulty getting people to open up, share information, or even meet with them at all.

### ■ ***Social Service Providers Understand the Importance of Transportation to Their Clients***

Social workers understand the enormous transportation and transit challenges their clients face and think it is important for their voices to be heard. Clients work minimum wage, service sector jobs often outside a traditional 9-5 schedule. They cannot afford cars and bus service is typically not available during evenings, late-night or early morning hours. Clients run into challenging situations—like needing a prescription filled, running out of diapers for a baby, or getting a call from school to pick up a sick child when bus service is not readily available. Taxi service can be too expensive. People often have to walk long distances along busy roadways with no sidewalks or cross dangerous intersections.

“

**According to social workers:**

“if a client comes here for service, and we refer them out to Mon General or Ruby Hospital, it’s ‘how are they going to get there?’...a lot of our clients want to work but can’t get to a job interview. Christian Help provides clothing...but transportation is always a big hang up.”

“This [transportation] is just such a huge issue, we’re delivering food, the basics, food, shelter, transportation...people cannot work.”

“A lot of our clients don’t know where to turn to with unmet needs, a transportation agency representative [showing up] could help.”

”

**■ Social Service Providers Can Help Get Underrepresented Citizens to the Table**

Social service providers identified numerous options for connecting transportation planners with their underrepresented clients. They can:

- Publicize transportation planners’ requests for input to their clients and to partner organizations via list serves, Facebook pages, social media and other outreach venues;
- Identify specific individuals and families who would be willing to discuss transportation needs;
- Invite and put transportation planners on the agenda for client meetings, parent meetings at school, or parent advisory council meetings where the planner could engage and gather information;
- Invite transportation planners to social service agency networking meetings;
- Invite transportation planners to the agency office where they could talk with clients;
- Set up and facilitate zoom meetings or phone conversations between planners and clients;
- Reach out to clients when they’re working in the field, i.e. visiting homes and families such as via the food mobile;
- Facilitate a survey;
- Facilitate transportation to meetings.

All of these options involve meeting underrepresented citizens “where they are.” Social service providers underscore the importance of meeting with clients in places where clients feel safe, secure and comfortable.

“

“...My staff could be super helpful. I have staff who were homeless or who are in recovery. We give people second chances. They...would be happy for the opportunity to be invited to the table, they have been through the system and have first-hand experience in trying to figure this stuff out, and have advice about what would be helpful...”

”

Social service providers suggest that both one-on-one and group meetings could work. In addition, one social worker sees benefits to accompanying clients to transportation planning discussions:

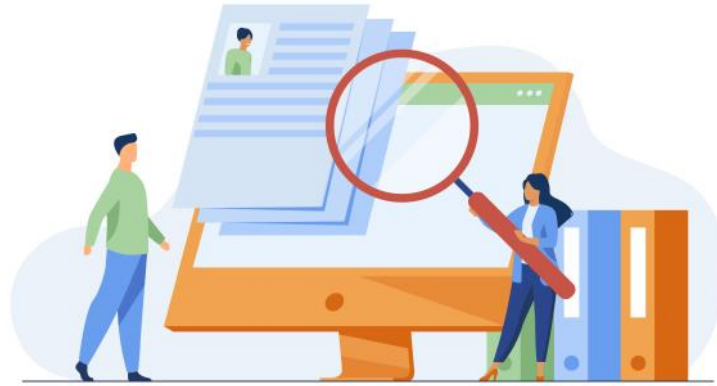
“

“I also think that, if we would attend with them, that that would be really helpful. Like I said, trust is a big thing. So if you can have individuals from service agencies that are able to attend...I think that that could get them to open up a little more, because they trust us, knowing that we would trust this meeting. I think that they would be more likely to attend and most importantly, give their input.”

”



## Identifying Underrepresented Groups' Trusted Allies and Advocates



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;
- Check with the local university's social work program about their links to service providers;
- Contact people you know in professional associations and community groups;
- Check with medical providers, schools, and child-care centers;
- Contact local employers who employ a large number of low-wage workers.

Some of these contacts will either be trusted allies or be able to connect you with trusted allies. It is 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, Morgantown Health Right, or The Shack Neighborhood House. A more complete list of local social service agencies is provided below in Figure 1: Social Service and Other Provider Organizations in Morgantown and Monongalia County.

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 have connections to different churches, social service agencies, or health care providers. You may need to reach out to many organizations, depending on the geographic location and other characteristics of each underrepresented group.

### **Figure 1. Social Service and Other Provider Organizations in Morgantown and Monongalia County**

#### **School System**

Mon County School System Outreach Facilitators (OF), OFs are social workers in the school system

Head Start and Early Head Start

- the Parent Policy Committee, the governing body at Head Start, includes very involved parents who may be inclined to talk about these issues

School Bus Drivers, they travel all over the county and know the areas and the problems (check with Board of Education)

#### **Social Service Agencies and Programs**

*Almost every agency has either outreach or social work personnel*

[Milan Puskar Health Right](#), free healthcare clinic serving low-income and uninsured clients

[Operation Welcome Home](#), serves veterans, helps overcome barriers to employment

[PACE Enterprises Inc.](#) helps people with disabilities find employment

[United Way of Monongalia and Preston Counties](#), serves people from every demographic, fights for their health, education, and financial stability

[Family Resource Network](#), coordinating and planning body for Monongalia County's community service system

- the Family Resource Network holds monthly Community Resource Meetings where representatives from approximately 20 agencies meet to bridge gaps in communication among services (they're meeting via zoom during COVID)

[Christian Help](#), responds to situations of emergency and need, with immediacy and simplicity, for everyone

[WV Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), a program of the WV Department of Health and Human Resources that provides monthly benefits to help eligible households buy food

[Women Infants and Children Special Supplemental Nutrition Program](#), a program of the Monongalia County Health Department, provides quality nutrition and breastfeeding counseling and education

[Workforce West Virginia](#), a state government agency, funded through the US Department of Labor, oversees the state unemployment insurance program and offers workforce development services

[West Virginia Works](#), a program of WV Department of Health and Human Resources that provides monthly cash assistance to eligible families

[WV Department of Health and Human Services, Monongalia County Field Office](#), offers a host of family assistance and child support services

[Monongalia County Child Advocacy Center](#), helps coordinate case management, ensures guidance, protection, and help to children and families affected by abuse

[Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center](#) (RDVIC), provides emergency shelter and counseling to victims of domestic violence

[Scott's Run Settlement House](#), serves Monongalia County residents who find themselves marginalized by economic and social decline

[The Shack Neighborhood House](#), a local community, family, and youth center with programs that promote cultural enrichment, healthy living, intellectual and spiritual growth and personal development

[Pantry Plus More](#), non-profit organization that works to eliminate hunger in children, also has a monthly food mobile, a primary way they can reach families that are childless, or outside the school system

[West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness](#), state coalition doing street outreach and providing housing for people; lead agency for both the WV Balance of State Continuum of Care and the Client-Level Database to people without houses through the day (affiliated with Health Right)

[Bartlett House/Bartlett Housing Solutions](#), local agency that supports people experiencing homelessness by offering emergency, temporary, and permanent

[McKinney-Vento Program](#), a West Virginia Department of Education program serving homeless families in the school system

[Friendship Room/House](#), a local mental health drop in center, provides services housing opportunities

#### **Hospitals and Rehabilitation Centers**

*For hospital social workers, transportation is a huge issue when discharging patients*

West Virginia University Hospital  
Mon Health Medical Center  
Morgantown Health and Rehabilitation Center  
WVU Medicine Chestnut Ridge Center, offers a variety of mental health services  
New Children's Hospital (currently under construction)

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.



## Considerations When Making Initial Contact with Social Service Agencies and Providers



A transportation planner's initial contact with a social service agency or provider can be simple and direct via a phone call or email along with the explanation of your request. When contacting someone you do not know, it may help to have a mutual contact reach out first on your behalf.

In addition to contacting a single agency, there are opportunities to share information via agency networking meetings. According to one administrator,



“First, just get the information out to the agencies, lots of us don't even know that this [transportation planning] is happening...for the Family Resource Network meetings, 20 agencies attend and do a round robin, it could be a very easy one-stop-shop.”



### ■ ***Make Your Request at Least 30 Days in Advance***

Timing is an important consideration. Social service providers need plenty of advance time to get ahold of their clients and make arrangements:



“We need the information, though, in a reasonably advanced amount of time, not the week before or a couple of weeks before. If we're going to organize people to show up for a meeting, we're going to need to know enough in advance that we can identify those people, help them figure out how we're going to get them there, etc. I know they probably put that public notice in for 30 days, but if we don't see it, then it won't be helpful. And we might need more than 30 days.”



In addition to giving at least 30 days advance notice, other things to keep in mind when contacting social service providers include:

- Some social service providers may need to get approval from supervisors or administrators.
- There may be client privacy and confidentiality issues to consider; take the lead from the social worker.
- Different agencies may have different processes and considerations, which may require additional time.

### ■ ***Example Topics to Discuss When Making Your Request***

- Explain who you are and provide information about your organization;
- Explain what you're trying to achieve in terms of engaging underrepresented community members in transportation planning, and 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 underrepresented citizens so that you can meet them and get to know their needs, issues, and concerns;
- Ask what the organization does, the services they offer to underrepresented groups, and how they typically interact with those groups;
- Ask if they can identify specific underrepresented groups and individuals who would be willing to discuss transportation issues;
- Discuss the complimentary benefits of partnering (for ex., better transportation planning will likely help social service agency clients meet their transportation needs);

- Ask about other ways to facilitate better connections between you and the underrepresented groups you want to reach (perhaps the agency could hand out your literature, invite you to make personal contact with their clients, allow you to piggy-back or make presentations during their meetings, etc.).

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.

### ■ ***Be Aware of Financial Considerations***

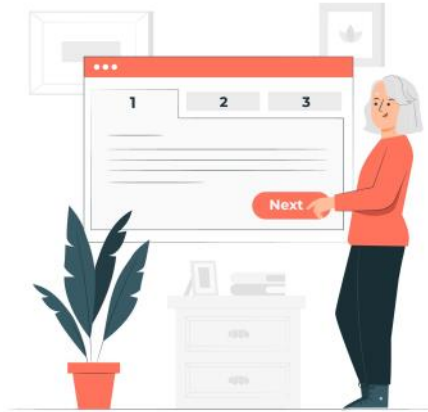
Social service agencies may need financial assistance or reimbursement related to connecting a transportation planner with their clients. Many options will be cost-free, such as setting up a one-on-one or group meeting at the agency. Other arrangements such as transporting clients to a meeting or providing food or child care may require funds. The social service agency may or may not be able to cover these expenses; the transportation planner should be sure to understand the costs and cover them.



“...it does take some time to get ahold of people. A lot of our folks have phones that are only working during part of the month, and then their minutes run out. So there's some barriers to actually getting to people. And I guess the other thing is funding would be helpful in terms of getting them to the meeting. So if we're providing them bus tickets to get there...it's the only way people can get around, especially people who are homeless. So there's a cost involved with that...”



## Possible Next Steps with Ally or Service Provider Organizations



If an organization is willing to work with the transportation planning agency, it may be helpful to write up the plan or strategy you've discussed. 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, location of the meetings, 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.



It is important to be appreciative and manage and nurture your relationship with partners. Be sure to stay in touch, deliver what you promise to deliver, help them stay on task and meet timeframes, and determine if the outreach and engagement strategies are working. For example, are the strategies achieving the goal of obtaining meaningful transportation planning input from underrepresented citizens?

### Some Tips for Managing Partnerships

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.”
3. “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>

Over time, you may want to consider moving towards a more formal partnership...“Partnerships would be great. They will take time.” *Local social service agency administrator*





Ultimately, the goal in working with trusted allies and advocates is not only to identify more effective ways to reach and engage underrepresented populations. The goal is to also begin developing meaningful relationships with these audiences and 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 are working. 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 work with community members and the agencies who interact with underrepresented populations can pay dividends over time, paving the way to establishing more direct and meaningful relationships with underrepresented groups.



*Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates* suggests that transportation planners examine why underrepresented citizens may not be engaging in transportation planning efforts and offers specific recommendations for increasing their participation.

Working with and through social service providers in Morgantown and Monongalia County to engage their clients in transportation planning is a promising strategy. Social service providers are interested and willing to encourage their clients' participation in transportation planning and facilitate connections with transportation planners. They understand the needs and challenges faced by their clients, have developed trusting relationships, and can serve as effective liaisons in getting underrepresented citizens to the table.

*Guidebook 5* identifies things to keep in mind when working with social service providers, such as allowing time for making connections with their clients and helping to cover financial costs that may be involved. *Guidebook 5* also identifies numerous local social service agencies and related organizations that can help transportation planners reach underrepresented citizens, along with ideas for building partnerships with those organizations.

## References



- 1 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (2015 Update). “Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking. “Establishing Communication Outside of Meetings”  
Actual document: [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/publications/pi\\_techniques/fhwahep15044.pdf](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/](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.”