



## **Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—**

Determining the Message and Communication  
Strategies

# **GUIDEBOOK 6**

**VERSION 2**

*Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies*

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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 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies

## Introduction to *Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies*

The approaches presented in *Guidebook 6* for determining message and communication strategies to reach underrepresented citizens can be used for the variety of advertising and outreach activities in which transportation planners engage. These include advertising local neighborhood meetings, general public meetings, transportation information and updates, requests for input, participation in surveys, and more.

*Guidebook 6* is presented in two parts:

- *Part 1: Determining the Message* covers the process of crafting messages, i.e. how to shape or word messages that will resonate and be effective with underrepresented audiences.
- *Part 2: Determining Communication Strategies* suggests reviewing the effectiveness of your current communication strategies and determining new and preferred communication venues for your audience. That is, whether the audience prefers traditional media such as radio, printed flyers, or newspaper ads; social media such as website or Facebook postings, email, texts, etc.; or other types of non-traditional communication channels including working directly with or through the audience's trusted allies and advocates.

## Table of Contents



The Goals of <i>Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies</i> .....	<a href="#">1</a>
<b>PART 1: Determining the Message</b> .....	<a href="#">2</a>
The Importance of Messaging and Advertising .....	<a href="#">2</a>
Guidelines for Crafting an Effective Message .....	<a href="#">3</a>
Discuss Messages with Underrepresented Groups and Their Trusted Allies and Advocates .....	<a href="#">4</a>
Guideline 1: Identify and Know the Audience .....	<a href="#">6</a>
Guideline 2: Make the Message Clear and Understandable .....	<a href="#">7</a>
Guideline 3: Make the Message Relevant to the Audience .....	<a href="#">8</a>
Guideline 4: Move the Audience to Action .....	<a href="#">10</a>
Sample Transportation Meeting Advertisements .....	<a href="#">10</a>
Messages that Would Move Morgantown/Mon County Residents to Action .....	<a href="#">12</a>
Worksheet: Questions to Consider for Crafting an Effective Message ...	<a href="#">14</a>
<b>PART 2: Determining Communication Strategies</b> .....	<a href="#">15</a>
Determining Underrepresented Citizens’ Preferred Communication Channels/Venues .....	<a href="#">16</a>
Example: Communication Venues Used by the MMMPO .....	<a href="#">18</a>
How to Move from your Current Approach to a New Approach .....	<a href="#">20</a>
Social Service Providers Can Help Relay Messages to Underrepresented Citizens.....	<a href="#">22</a>
Summary: Determining the Message and Communication Strategies .....	<a href="#">24</a>
References .....	<a href="#">25</a>
Recommended Reading .....	<a href="#">26</a>



**Effective messages are crafted with the audience in mind**

The goals of *Guidebook 6* are to introduce transportation planners to strategies for:

1. Developing effective advertising and outreach messages for underrepresented populations;
2. Determining which communication venues to use (traditional media, social media, print, etc.);
3. Working with underrepresented citizens and their trusted allies and advocates to help determine effective messages and communication channels.

Information identifying and describing a wide variety of communication venues and detailing their benefits and disadvantages can be found in *Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens*.

## PART 1: Developing Effective Messages



*Developing Effective Messages* covers:

1. The four guidelines for crafting effective messages (know the audience and develop messages that are clear and understandable, relatable, and move the audience to action);
2. The importance of discussing and testing messages with underrepresented audience members and/or their trusted allies and advocates;
3. Messaging advice from Morgantown/Mon County underrepresented residents and social service providers.



A worksheet, *Questions to Consider for Crafting Effective Messages*, is provided as a resource for developing advertising and outreach messages based on the four *Crafting Effective Messages* guidelines.

### ■ The Importance of Messaging and Advertising

Transportation planners rely on advertising and outreach for an important component of their work: securing public involvement in transportation planning. Developing effective messages requires gaining a full understanding of the audience you're trying to reach and developing messages that will inspire its members to act. This can take time, effort, and oftentimes, money. 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 and then continually tested and revised to gauge their effectiveness. Without effective advertising, products won't sell and the business won't succeed.

Although transportation agencies do not have the same level of funding, staffing, or resources for advertising as businesses do, business advertising practices illustrate how important it is to understand the audience, develop effective messages, and select the appropriate communication venue(s). These decisions are fundamental to getting the word out and engaging underrepresented and other community members.

Reaching underrepresented citizens is especially challenging. As an example, 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 *Guidebooks* draw upon those and other lessons learned and offer some new ideas for reaching out to underrepresented citizens.

## ■ Guidelines for Crafting an Effective Message

Crafting an effective message means shaping or wording the message so that it will have the intended effect: essentially capturing the audience's attention and moving people to action—i.e. persuading them to do what you're asking them to do. For transportation planners that can mean asking the audience to attend public meetings, provide input into transportation projects, or respond to a survey, for example. Four tried-and-true guidelines are integral to crafting effective messages:

1. Identifying and knowing the audience;
2. Making the message relevant to the audience;
3. Making the message clear and understandable; and
4. Moving the audience to action.

Guidelines for Effective Messaging	Strategies for Achieving Effective Messaging Guidelines
<b>1. Identify &amp; Know Your Audience</b>	Know audience demographics Know their values, concerns, self-interests Take into account existing transportation experiences and knowledge
<b>2. Make the Message Clear &amp; Understandable</b>	Inform with accurate or evidence-based information Use simple, straightforward language
<b>3. Make the Message Relevant to the Audience</b>	Make a connection to the audience Reference something familiar: a person, location, something of local or special interest Make it about the audience and not about the transportation agency Evoke an emotion
<b>4. Move the Audience to Action</b>	Raise awareness: increase what they <u>know</u> Elicit a behavior: ask them to <u>do something</u>

**Table 1. Guidelines and Strategies for Crafting Effective Messages**

## **Discuss Messages with Underrepresented Groups and Their Trusted Allies and Advocates**

To identify and/or get to know your audience you may want to talk with members of the underrepresented group you’re targeting or their trusted allies and advocates about the four Effective Messaging Guidelines in Table 1. For example, to understand an audience’s existing transportation knowledge and experience, ask for specifics about their daily transportation challenges, the barriers they face, their awareness of transportation planning in Mon County, what would motivate them to attend a transportation planning meeting, or their experience participating in civic or local government activities.

Some issues you might discover about these audiences and possible messages to address the issue:

**1** ***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 their participation is important, and what options are available for them to participate.

**Message to Address Issue #1:** The message should convey the importance you place on hearing their concerns and how participation will benefit them. (Follow this up with proof and examples--and avoid making empty promises)

**2** ***Perceptions about working with public officials, agencies, or public processes:*** The audience may have a history of being left out of decisions or feel that their opinions do not matter. They may have little or no involvement or even negative experiences with government officials and agencies. (You should not be offended or surprised at stories that reflect a lack of trust in government agencies.)

**Message to Address Issue #2:** If you discover that an underrepresented group has little trust in government agencies, a message that one of their trusted allies, advocates, neighbors, peers, or community members will facilitate a meeting with the transportation planning agency might peak their interest in participating. It may also be helpful for the trusted ally to deliver this message.

**3** ***Their many challenges to engaging in public participation:*** Underrepresented citizens may lack experience voicing their needs in public settings or may lack personal means of transport or reliable bus service. Child-care, conflicting work schedules, personal mobility issues (for example, a wheel chair), or lack of funds may also present challenges.

**Message to Address Issue #3:** Plan for and advertise that you'll conduct one-on-one or small group discussions. Make bus passes, child-care and other assistance available. If bus service is not available, let people know you'll meet in a location convenient for them or provide transportation.

**4** ***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 personal transport options and many other problems.

**Message to Address Issue #4:** 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 with underrepresented groups and/or their trusted allies and advocates can help guide your thinking about best ways to handle them in your outreach messages and efforts.

It is essential to discuss messaging with members of the underrepresented groups or their trusted allies. Ask for ideas that underrepresented citizens' will respond to, and ask them to provide feedback on the messages you develop.

Suggestions for crafting effective messages using the four Guidelines for Effective Messaging are presented below.

## ■ **Guideline 1: Identify and Know the Audience**

Identifying and knowing the audience means understanding their age and other demographics, their community issues and/or transportation challenges along with their values and concerns. In addition to consulting with underrepresented citizens or their trusted allies about audience characteristics, two *Guidebooks* in this *Transportation Equity Toolkit* discuss characteristics of underrepresented citizens in Morgantown and Monongalia County:

- *Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens we Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning*
- *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*

Another important consideration in knowing the audience is identifying their self-interests. People act out of self-interest. If the underrepresented audience you want to reach is concerned about safety as it relates to the project at hand, the message should indicate that addressing their safety is one of your goals. If you discover that a 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.

If your message does not convey an understanding of people’s self-interests 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 or trustworthy.



### **The Importance of Uncovering Underrepresented Citizens’ Self-Interests**

In building trusted relationships, the bedrock principle is self-interest. 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. The key to establishing a sense of community, 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.

## **■ Guideline 2: Make the Message 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 a 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 sixth- or seventh-grade reading level. Approximately 45 percent of the U.S. population reads below a seventh-grade level proficiency (i.e. their literacy skills are below a seventh-grade level).
- 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 offer feedback on its clarity and understandability.

### **■ Guideline 3: Make the Message Relevant to The Audience**

Information alone may not convince an audience or move them to action. It's important to incorporate relevancy and emotional elements.

Making the message relevant means the viewer or reader can relate to the message because it makes a connection or speaks to them personally. A message that seems more personal to the audience will help catch their attention. You can make the message more relevant and personal by localizing it; featuring recognized local leaders, agency representatives, or peers; or evoking an emotion:

- 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.

Moving an audience emotionally and eliciting a feeling can also help persuade them to take action. An emotional appeal can cause people to feel hopeful, inspired, or energized (among other feelings). An emotional appeal can be conveyed through the message itself, through images, or by using a messenger, such as a child or a local respected leader to make the appeal.

Ultimately, the message should focus on the information you want the audience to understand, or the action you want the audience to take, and why—from their perspective, i.e. "What's in it for them?" The message should convey something they can relate to, instead of focusing on your organization and its goals.

***Example of a Less Effective Message  
(focus is on the agency)***

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



## ■ Guideline 4: Move the Audience to Action

Ultimately the message should result in the audience taking an action. An action can be either “an increase in awareness” or “taking a step/changing a behavior.” Increasing awareness means to increase or expand the viewers’ knowledge, understanding or perception about a topic, situation or fact. An example would be letting the viewer/reader know that you want and value their opinion, or that their opinions are important in transportation planning.

Taking a step or changing behavior refers to what a person does. An example would be attending a meeting or giving feedback.

## ■ Sample Transportation Meeting Advertisements

The following Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MMMPO) Greenbag Road “Open House” meeting advertisement 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 accompanying West Virginia Department of Highways’ advertisement is an example of a confusing, unclear, text-heavy advertisement for an “Open House Public Meeting.”

Local underrepresented citizens who attended this *Transportation Equity Project’s* workshops provided input on these two sample advertisements. Their comments:

- Short and straightforward ads are preferable to ads that require a lot of reading;
- Ads that clearly indicate what is being asked of the reader (or meeting attendee) are preferable;
- Using visuals with too many details (such as detailed maps) that are difficult to see or interpret are not preferable.

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

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](mailto: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



## ■ Messages that Would Move Morgantown/Mon County Residents to Action

This *Transportation Equity Project* conducted several workshops with local underrepresented citizens and asked their opinions about messages that would impact their decision to attend a transportation planning 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

## Messaging Advice from Local Social Service Providers



“I think the message has to be presented in a way that will help [underrepresented citizens] see how this could impact them. How will it help them in some way? I mean, I think we all need that. Why should I go to this meeting if I don't think that it's going to help me in any way?”

“I like to think that people generally like to help others. So, if you approach it more of like, ‘Please help us. We need your input. We need your help. Help us decide the future of the transportation industry in Morgantown,’ that would probably appeal to, I would think, more people.”

“You also could focus on the fact that their input now will help their children in the future. If you're trying to get them to participate in a plan that may not see anything for 20 years, obviously, their children will be affected by that. And that might be an effective way to reach people.”

“ I think that you just really maximize on that they're worth something, and that their opinion matters. And regardless of their... circumstance, they're needed, and they can be helpful, and you would really appreciate their participation.”



## ■ Worksheet: Questions to Consider for Crafting an Effective Message

The worksheet below offers questions to consider when crafting a message to a particular audience using the four Effective Messaging Guidelines.

1. Who is the underrepresented audience? i.e. homeless, low income, minority groups, other? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What are some of the audience characteristics? i.e. age, community issues, transportation issues; values, concerns, self-interests? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What do you want them to do? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How is the problem/meeting related to their lives? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. To their neighborhood? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. To their ability to get where they need to go? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How will the meeting result in a benefit for the audience? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Why is it important for them to participate and offer their perspectives? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How can you personalize the message and make it relevant to the audience?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What are you offering to make participation easier or more convenient for the audience? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What visual(s) would make the message seem more personal to the audience?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What do your key contacts say about the message? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What are their suggestions for making it more effective? \_\_\_\_\_



Communication strategies refer to the numerous communication channels and venues available for advertising messages or reaching out to the underrepresented audience. They include traditional media venues such as newspaper, radio, TV, and printed materials as well as non-traditional venues—everything from social media such as websites, Facebook, email, and texting to an array of activities that take the message directly to the audience. These range from setting up booths at fairs and festivals to piggy-backing on other organizations’ meetings to working with and through underrepresented citizen’s trusted allies and advocates.

*Determining Communication Strategies* covers:

1. Ideas for reviewing current communication strategies, or venues, a transportation agency uses for advertising and outreach and choosing new venues that reach underrepresented citizens;
2. Suggestions for reaching underrepresented citizens with and through their trusted allies and advocates;
3. Ideas for advertising and outreach practices that take the message directly to the audience.

## ■ Determining Underrepresented Citizens' Preferred Communication Channels and Venues

There are dozens and dozens of ways to advertise an upcoming meeting or event. However, despite the time and effort transportation planners spend developing outreach materials and posting announcements, most agree that underrepresented citizens typically do not attend advertised meetings and do not get involved in the transportation planning process.

In other words, these communication strategies are not having the desired effect.

The key to determining the appropriate communication strategy is to determine how the audience prefers and/or actually receives information: essentially, which media they use, people they trust and with whom they interact, or which locations they frequent. Then use those venues to take the message to the audience.



“I would suggest that the actual marketing materials, the public notices that go out in the paper, I'm not sure they actually reach people. And if they do, they may not even understand what it is, or why they need to be at that meeting.” *Morgantown Social Service Agency Administrator*



There are a few overarching concepts to keep in mind when considering effective venues for advertising or reaching out to underrepresented populations:

- No one communication venue is likely to be enough—you'll need many;
- It's important to use venues that you know underrepresented audiences prefer, vs. the ones you think might work;
- Strategies that work best may likely require more time, effort, and coordination than other methods (for example, a “Knock and Talk” door knocking campaign vs. posting on your website);
- It's important to track which options work, i.e. which ones result in people showing up or participating in the process;
- Most important:
  - Nothing surpasses personal contact.
  - And: Take. The. Message. To. Them.

**Knock-and-Talk Campaigns** are one-on-one conversations between transportation planners (or their representatives) and residents via neighborhood canvassing—knocking on doors and talking to people about transportation planning.

Keep in mind that advertising efforts should build on the strategies discussed in earlier *Guidebooks*:

- Work through underrepresented groups’ trusted allies and advocates to reach and/or identify underrepresented populations’ preferred communication venues;
- Piggy back on social service and other agency meetings;
- Get involved in advance with different community and service groups to establish relationships with the underrepresented so they know who you are and understand that their participation is important to you;
- And of course: Take. The. Message. To. Them.

Social service providers offer ideas about getting the word out to their clients:



“I definitely think that word of mouth and coming from people in [social service] agencies are going to be the key. And it sounds like a lot of it is just people don't know that these meetings are happening. And the word isn't being spread that way.”

“Something that [transportation planners] can do too is to give that information to those of us that work with these populations a lot, and we can communicate that...a big way we communicate our services is through Facebook. And so we can either reach out to specific people that we know or just kind of a group wide thing that this is happening, if you'd like your voice heard, either share with us, or come to this meeting. And then we can also facilitate transportation to that meeting. If it's virtually we can facilitate help with that.”



## ■ Example: Communication Venues Used by the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO)

Using the MMMPO as an example, it is instructive to take a look at the many communication strategies it currently employs. MMMPO has publicized community meetings or engaged community members using the venues listed in Figure 1 and Figure 2, according to the 2045 Long-Term Plan update.

**Figure 1. MMMPO’s Current Advertising/Publicity Strategies**

Type of Communication Venue		Specific Venues
<b>MMMPO MEETING AND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS</b>		
Online	Websites	MMMPO Website City of Morgantown Website Mountain Line Transit Authority Website
Online	Online Calendar	MMMPO online calendar
Social Media	Facebook	MMMPO Facebook page City of Morgantown Facebook page Morgantown Green Team Facebook page
Social Media	Email	MMMPO email list (150 email & web contacts) Pedestrian & Bicycle Board email lists WVU email to WVU students
Traditional Media	Flyers	Delivered to homes Posted at local business or gas station Posted on public library, grocery and convenience store bulletin boards WVU Transportation Department
Traditional Media	Newsletters	Announcement in City Newsletter sent to Neighborhood Associations
Traditional Media	Newspaper	Classified/legal ad in Dominion Post Purchase ad in Dominion Post
	Radio	WAJR Morning Show Interview

**Figure 2. MMMPO’s Survey Distribution**

<b>MMMPO SURVEY DISTRIBUTION</b> MMMPO also collects input via online and hard copy surveys More than 700 surveys were returned in a recent survey	
<b><i>Surveys were disseminated via the following venues:</i></b>	
MMMPO Website and Facebook Page	
Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board and Bicycle Board	
City of Morgantown public media	
Mountain Line Transit public media	
WVU Transportation Department	
Dominion Post Advertisements	
Hard Copy Distribution	
Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce	

MMMPO undertakes many outreach activities and is committed to improving its engagement with underrepresented populations. Even with its robust outreach activities, MMMPO reports that underrepresented citizens’ participation in public meetings continues to be low. Underrepresented representation on its Boards and Committees is also low. The ongoing challenge is to find more effective communication strategies so that the messages reach these citizens and motivate them to participate in transportation planning.

“When you're talking about public hearings, and you're marketing for those, reaching out to these agencies, the homeless shelters and your Marjorie Gardens, and even your boys and girls clubs, and churches, and girl scout programs, that seems to be where we market ideally to try to reach our underserved population. And that seems to give us the most, probably, people that come back to us and are interested.” *Monongalia County Social Service Provider*

## ■ How to Move From Your Current Approach to a New Approach

A first step is to understand who is currently receiving and responding to your outreach. Perhaps you can informally gather information about how people learned about a specific event you advertised. Strategies could include asking for a hand count at public meetings in response to questions such as, “Who heard about this public meeting from the newspaper ad?” “Who saw the meeting announcement on the website?” Or including an option on the sign-up sheets such as “How did you hear about this event?”

If you find that people do respond to a particular outreach strategy, by all means keep using it. For example, MMMMPO had a good return rate on a recent survey distribution effort, with more than 700 surveys returned. So, it may be wise to maintain that approach, although it will take extra effort to ensure underrepresented groups receive and respond to the survey. For example, you may need to conduct the survey in-person via a knock-and-talk campaign, by setting up a booth at local events attended by underrepresented populations, or piggy-backing on social service agency meetings.

A social service provider interviewed for the *Transportation Equity Project* offered this suggestion:



...It's easy for us to disseminate a survey to small group of our parents. We could do that now...hand written surveys, we do home visits with lots of students in Mon County...we each [Mon County Schools Outreach Facilitators] have a pocket [group] of parents we see regularly, in my pocket I could do a hand survey with 10-20 families in my schools...that would be a possibility.”



All in all, the optimal approach to improving your outreach to underrepresented groups is to do the homework with those groups and their trusted allies and advocates. Find out which communication venues they prefer, and why. Find out where people go for lunch, church, and other neighborhood meetings and events, then reach out to them through those venues. Gather all the information you'll need to make good decisions about how to best reach the audience(s).

Refer to the information in ***Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*** to identify social service and other agencies to contact.



### **Questions To Ask Underrepresented Citizens or Their Trusted Allies About Preferred Communication Strategies**

1. Which newspaper, TV and radio stations and programs do underrepresented citizens listen to?
2. Are there specific places they visit or attend meetings—agency visits and appointments, churches, schools, businesses, community events, etc.—where they would see the information?
3. Who in the community would be willing to help distribute a flyer AND encourage customers to engage in transportation planning? (church pastor, social service agency, local restaurants, or businesses, etc.)
4. Do they use social media or other resources? If yes, which ones?
5. What are specific ways the trusted ally could convey messages and reach out to their underrepresented clients?



## ■ Social Service Providers Can Help Relay Messages to Underrepresented Citizens

In *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*, social service providers identified numerous options for connecting transportation planners with their underrepresented clients. This includes getting messages out to underrepresented citizens as well as getting underrepresented citizens to the table. Social service providers 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.

Comments from local social service agency personnel on getting messages to their clients:



“I’m sure if you could approach [clients] one-on-one and say, ‘Hey, would you mind to come and navigate and be part of this transportation meeting?’ And I think that goes a long way. And same with us, we have folks that I could reach out to and network with and say, ‘Hey, every one of our agencies probably has an individual that they could talk with that would be willing to be involved, and doing it on a one-on-one basis would help a lot.’”

“If [a transportation planner] just asked someone from our agency... we could promote [a transportation meeting or other message] ...I know we would promote to our actual clientele too, because it's benefiting them and it's all about that full circle collaboration, working with other places to help. That's the only way you're going to be able to help people anyway.”

“Just reach out to me, we can set up a meeting, if [transportation planners] want to hear from clientele I could arrange for clients to be here, or set up a phone or zoom meeting.”



Ultimately you’ll likely need to use new venues or strategies to reach underrepresented groups. In addition to targeting communication strategies more directly to underrepresented citizens, the opportunities to work with social service providers and other trusted allies in Morgantown and Mon County, as described in *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*, offer many promising options

## ■ Summary: Determining the Message and Communication Strategies

The importance of re-thinking and re-designing your advertising approaches so that they reach underrepresented audiences cannot be overstated. The effectiveness of advertising and outreach can be greatly enhanced when transportation planners take the time, up front, to work with underrepresented populations and their allies, understand their perspectives, and identify relevant messages that will entice them to participate in transportation planning. Using the four Guidelines for Crafting an Effective Message: (1) identifying and knowing the audience, (2) making the message clear and understandable, (3) making the message relevant, and (4) moving the audience to action can help gain the audience's attention and secure their participation in transportation planning and related activities.

To determine communication venues that will be effective in reaching underrepresented citizens:

- Work with underrepresented groups and their trusted allies and advocates to identify underrepresented populations' preferred communication venues;
- Piggy back on social service and other agency meetings;
- Get involved in advance with different community and service groups to establish relationships with the underrepresented so they know who you are and understand that their participation is important to you;
- And use strategies that: Take. The. Message. To. Them.

In the end there is no one communication message or method that will work in your efforts to engage underrepresented populations in the transportation planning process. But by implementing the strategies described in these *Guidebooks* you can begin the process of developing important relationships, getting to know key people affiliated with underrepresented groups, and building trust and respect. You can then work more closely with these contacts to identify advertising and outreach messages as well as underrepresented audiences' preferred communication channels and venues.

## Reference



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## Recommended Reading



Transportation4America (2014). The Innovative MPO: A Guidebook for Metropolitan Transportation Planning. “Focus Area 2: Engaging Communities in Regional Decision-Making.” <http://www.t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/The-Innovative-MPO-Focus-Area-2.pdf>