



# **Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues**

for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens

## **GUIDEBOOK 7**

**VERSION 2**

*Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens*

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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**Special recognition and thank you to:**

**Bill Austin, AICP**, Executive Director, Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization, Morgantown, WV

**The City of Morgantown, WV** for financial support

# Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens

## **Introduction to *Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens***

*Guidebook 7* builds on topics addressed in *Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies* by identifying, describing, and presenting the benefits and disadvantages of a wide variety of communication strategies, or venues. Understanding benefits and disadvantages can help determine which venues are best suited to delivering a message to a particular audience.

Information is presented for:

- Traditional venues including newspapers; television, cable and radio; billboards;
- Public information materials such as fact sheets, fliers, posters, etc.;
- Website and social media;
- Contact lists and direct mailings;
- Surveys;
- Piggybacking on meetings, briefings, speaker and listeners bureaus, engaging employers, and more.

## Table of Contents



The Goals of <i>Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens</i> .....	<a href="#">1</a>
Benefits and Disadvantages of Various Communication Venues, and New Venues to Consider .....	<a href="#">2</a>
Traditional Media Strategies .....	<a href="#">2</a>
Public Information Materials .....	<a href="#">4</a>
Website and Social Media Strategies .....	<a href="#">6</a>
Contact Lists and Direct Mailings .....	<a href="#">7</a>
Surveys .....	<a href="#">8</a>
New Ideas for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens .....	<a href="#">9</a>
Closing Summary .....	<a href="#">12</a>
References .....	<a href="#">13</a>

## The Goals of Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Reaching Underrepresented Citizens

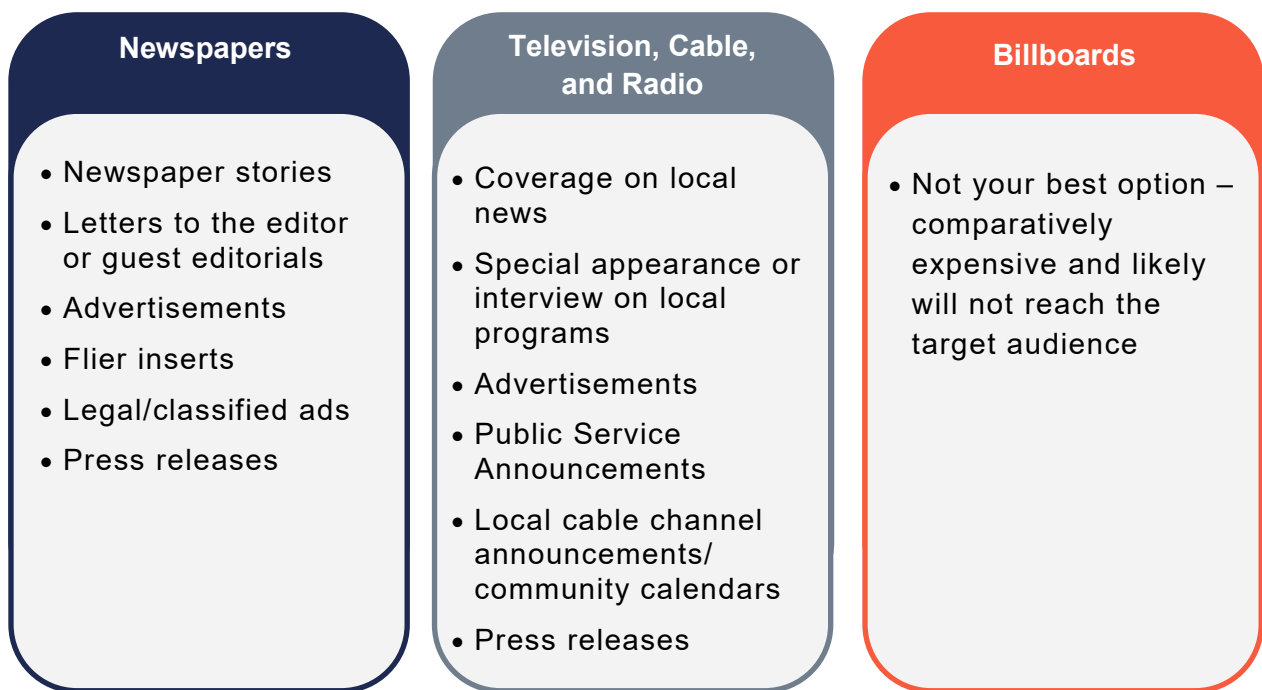


*Guidebook 7* is designed to assist the reader in understanding the various benefits and disadvantages of a wide variety of communication strategies, or venues in reaching an audience. Combining this understanding with information about the audiences you want to reach, such as which communication venues they prefer, rely on, and/or have access to can help improve efforts to reach them and get your message across.

## ■ Benefits and Disadvantages of Various Communication Venues and New Venues to Consider

This section offers an overview of communication venues, their benefits and disadvantages, and some suggestions for using them more effectively. Seeking information and advice from members of underrepresented groups and/or their allies will help yield the most reliable information about the best use of these venues.

### ■ Traditional Media Strategies <sup>1, 2</sup>



### Going Beyond Federal Requirements for Public Notification or Involvement

Federal requirements typically identify the minimum level of public notice, such as placing a classified or legal ad in the newspaper. Experience suggests that you need a more comprehensive and targeted approach to reach underrepresented citizens. However, if a transportation planning agency does place a classified or legal ad, consider supplementing it by purchasing a larger ad in a more prominent section of the newspaper, or getting an article published that features the meeting you want to publicize.

### 📌 Benefits of Traditional Media:

- 📌 You can reach larger numbers of people with a consistent message. However, it takes more than one media announcement to reach the viewer. The “Rule of 7” is a marketing principle that says a customer must see your message at least seven times before they notice it and begin to take action. Of course, it may take many more than seven advertisements before a customer sees the message seven times.
- 📌 For certain types of media strategies, you can determine the message and test it out in advance with the underrepresented audience to gauge reaction.
- 📌 Messages you develop will be uniform across all venues which can help reduce misinformation.
- 📌 Many people rely on traditional local media for information about local issues and events.

### 📌 Disadvantages of Traditional Media:

- 📌 Cost to advertise is expensive; your appearance on local media programs are at the discretion of the media; you cannot rely on media to broadcast unpaid options such as Public Service Announcements.
- 📌 It requires many exposures to a message before the audience hears and pays attention which adds to the expense.
- 📌 Underrepresented groups most likely do not use traditional media instead preferring online resources that they can access with their cell phones. They will likely not pay for print media like newspapers.

### Links to Resources about Working with Tradition Media

- 🔗 “Working with the Media” (2010) “Community Heart & Soul” Project; Orton Family Foundation. <https://www.orton.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/working-with-the-media.pdf>
- 🔗 “Top 25 Public Relations Tips from the Pros.” FitSmallBusiness.com. <https://fitsmallbusiness.com/public-relations-tips/>

### Topics Covered in These Resources:

Building a Bridge to Local Media; Sending the Message; Pitching a Story (Shed light on your successes; Announce a milestone; Tell the story in photos); Letters to the Editor; Be Prepared to Respond after a Press Release or News Story; Media/Press Packets.

## ■ Public Information Materials <sup>1, 3</sup>

Public information materials include any type of material that you create to present information about transportation planning or events you want to publicize. Some examples are fliers, brochures, posters, signs, utility stuffers, along with items that can be used by or distributed to the media. These can include press releases, news articles, and public service announcements.

Public information materials can be distributed in a variety of formats, from printed to online, from posting in local shops to handing out at meetings.



### Public Information Materials

- Advertisements—display & legal notices
- Billboards
- Brochures
- Display boards
- Electronic media
- Fact sheets
- Fliers
- News articles
- Newsletters
- Newspaper inserts & articles
- Notices
- Posters
- Press releases
- Progress bulletins
- Public service announcements
- Slides and overheads
- Social media posts
- Summaries of reports
- Utility bill stuffers
- Web pages



### ↑ Benefits of Public Information Materials:

- ↑ Public information materials are useful for summarizing a consistent message in a clear, straightforward, and visually interesting fashion, and can be distributed in many ways.
- ↑ People can keep materials like fliers and handouts, which offers easy access to your contact information and the information you're publicizing.
- ↑ The cost to create these materials is usually less expensive than conducting a media advertising campaign.
- ↑ You can reach large numbers of people by distributing these materials through the mail, at public events, or online.

### ↓ Disadvantages of Public Information Materials:

- ↓ It takes time and effort to develop and disseminate materials, and they require broad distribution.
- ↓ They are one-way communication vehicles, so an agency must track and respond to phone calls and inquiries it receives from the public.
- ↓ If not designed or worded well, or if the information is too technical, the public information materials can fail to achieve the goal of engaging or informing the reader.

## Website and Social Media Strategies <sup>1</sup>



Social media refers to the variety of online communications channels that enable users to create and share content, collaborate, or network. Examples are applications and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, forums, and blogging.

### **Text Message**

Electronic text communication via mobile phone

### **Email**

Electronic messages sent and received via electronic devices

### **ListServ**

An electronic mailing list that distributes messages to online subscribers

### **Website**

A page or collection of pages on the World Wide Web that can be accessed via a single URL address

### **Facebook**

A social network that allows users to connect with other users and post messages, photos, links, etc.

### **Twitter**

Online microblogging where communication occurs in short messages called tweets

### **Tumblr**

A microblogging platform, easy to post almost anything, used mostly by young users but has no privacy settings, so it can contain illegal and inappropriate content

### **Instagram**

Mobile application for posting, following, and commenting on pictures and videos

### **Meetup**

A service that organizes online groups that host in-person events for people with similar interest

### **Pinterest**

Uses software that enables users to discover information on the web using images, GIFs, and videos, i.e. a visual discovery engine for finding ideas

### **LinkedIn**

A website/mobile app-based service for professional networking, posting resumes, etc.; less useful with the public, more useful to reach professional networks

### **Virtual Communities**

A community of people sharing information and common interests and ideas on the Internet

Source: WhatIs.com, Tech Target. <https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>

### Benefits of Website and Social Media Strategies

- Considered to be among the most cost-effective and easy-to-use tools for engaging the public in the transportation planning process.
- Offer the opportunity for two-way communication: you can either have conversations with or broadcast information to the public.
- Can provide an immediate and direct way to reach underrepresented community members.
- Underrepresented citizens often prefer social media because it is free and they can access it with their cellphones.

### Disadvantages of Website and Social Media Strategies

- Social media won't engage everyone in underrepresented populations, but can reach a large number of people.
- Agencies need to have a "governance model" with guidelines for staff members' engaging with the public via social media (i.e. there are risk and liability issues).

#### Links to Resources about Website and Social Media Strategies

- ↻ A Strategic Guide to Social Media for Nonprofits by Alicia Johnston. Sproutsocial. <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/nonprofit-social-media-guide/>
- ↻ Social Media. In Tapping the potential of social media analytics tools. WhatIS.com. <https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media>
- ↻ Social Media FactSheet (June 2019). Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>

### ■ Contact Lists and Direct Mailings <sup>1</sup>

It's important to develop and continually update your contact lists. They are extremely useful tools for knowing who your active audiences are and for reaching people.

Contact lists can be developed by gathering names and contact information—address, email, phone, social media accounts—of people who have attended meetings, called in to a hotline or to the office, contacted the

agency through the web, or otherwise expressed an interest in an issue... such as people who may want to serve in an advisory capacity.

Contact lists can be used for online communications such as emailing and list serves. They can also be used for direct mail campaigns, where a brochure or other printed document is mailed to contacts, as well as for reaching contacts via phone.

### **Benefits and Disadvantages of Contact Lists, Direct Mail, and Listservs**

- Contact lists are extremely useful for keeping track of people and ways to get in touch with them. A primary drawback is the amount of time it can take to develop and keep contact lists updated, although it is usually time well spent due to the benefits of having a useful outreach list.
- Direct mail can be useful in reaching people directly at their home address, although the recipient may or may not read the item. A good rule of thumb is to mail information about a particular event you want to advertise at least four times. A primary disadvantage is the cost to print and mail direct mail pieces.
- Listservs involve sending online emails using a listserv application. Listservs can be one-way from the sender to a list of recipients, or two-way where all recipients can send and receive messages. Two-way list serves are more appropriate for discussions on a select topic. One-way listservs are more appropriate for sending a message out to a large group of people. Listservs are much less costly than direct mail. Recipients must subscribe to the list.

## **■ Surveys <sup>1</sup>**

Surveys are questionnaires used to assess opinions. They can be administered online or through in-person or telephone conversations. Surveys are usually administered to a limited sample of people considered to be representative of a larger group. Surveys can be informal and used by staff members at a public meeting, for example. Or they can be more formal and scientifically developed, administered, and analyzed.

## Benefits and Disadvantages of Surveys

- Surveys can assess opinions and reactions to transportation plans, activities, or questions. They are considered to provide an accurate although limited reporting of community perceptions or preferences, as well as what people know or want to know. They can be useful in helping transportation planners understand public concerns and misunderstandings, and the key components of public opinion. They can also help to determine effective messages for a media strategy.
- Surveys tell you what people think but not how they think or how they derived the conclusion that you see in a survey or explain what the data mean.
- Using surveys with underrepresented citizens will likely require using a limited number of questions (three–five) and administering the survey in person. The surveys can be administered verbally or in writing, depending on the situation. Conducting a survey verbally offers the opportunity for the respondent to ask clarifying questions. Conducting surveys in-person can be done in a door-to-door campaign, during meetings, or at a booth at public events attended by underrepresented groups you want to reach.
- A disadvantage of formal surveys is the expense involved with hiring experts to develop, administer, and analyze the results. A disadvantage of informal surveys is that they may offer only limited perspectives and not represent the opinions of all community members.

## ■ New Ideas for Reaching Underrepresented Populations <sup>1, 4, 5</sup>

### | *Piggybacking on other meetings or activities*

Teaming up with social service or other agencies that provide services or interact with underrepresented citizens can be useful in meeting these citizens face-to-face, getting the word out, or gathering input. Piggybacking can include getting on the agenda of agency meetings or developing an arrangement with an agency or service to help you contact underrepresented citizens and get the word out.

Piggybacking usually guarantees that you will reach a greater number of people. Meeting people where they are is also a good way to increase the feedback or participation you're seeking.

Some suggested agencies for piggybacking in Morgantown and Monongalia County are: Family Services, Meals on Wheels, Food Banks, Goodwill Industries, YMCA, Senior Centers and Assisted Living. A fuller list of agencies to contact can be found in *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*, in the section called *Social Service and Other Provider Organizations in Morgantown and Monongalia County*. You may also want to consider working with transit operators and taxi companies who, for example, receive recurring requests to transit people to employment sites.

Some suggested business or other establishments for piggybacking: “places of worship, community centers, social service agencies, settlement houses, senior centers, meeting rooms in apartment complexes, restaurants, hair salons/barber shops, feed stores, shopping malls, convenience stores, libraries, community fairs, sporting events, and other places where traditionally underrepresented populations may congregate.”

Keep in mind that a cold contact, such as a customer finding a brochure at the barber shop or hair salon, will likely not result in further engagement unless the transportation agency is collaborating with the barber or stylist and getting their buy-in and help to recruit people.

### **| Briefings <sup>1</sup>**

Briefings are issue-focused meetings that transportation planners and officials hold with other officials or with members of the public. Briefings can be called to discuss immediate issues, project updates, or other important information, and can provide the opportunity for the participants to ask questions and provide candid feedback. They are a good way to establish communication, especially with groups that may be impacted by a project, and can offer opportunities to comment off the record.

### **| Speakers or “Listeners” Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers<sup>1</sup>**

A speakers’ bureau is a group of trained representatives who can present information about your organization and its programs. These representatives can be members of the MMMPO and other transportation planning agencies, city or other government agency staff, or community members, i.e. public involvement volunteers. For example, the trusted allies and advocates you work with could participate as public involvement volunteers.

These speaker bureau representatives can be available to meet with local organizations to discuss any number of transportation topics. In the case of advertising a meeting or getting the word out, a speakers' bureau representative could attend social service agency meetings or events attended by underrepresented citizens to talk with them about engaging in transportation meetings or planning.

A key focus of a speakers' bureau is to not only speak, but to "listen." In other words, the most important goal is to engage in two-way communication with the audiences. These engagements not only help get the word out, they can provide important feedback from underrepresented citizens.

### **| *Engaging Employers***

Getting the word out through employers who employ underrepresented citizens is another option, for example, TeleTech in Morgantown or other service or retail employers. It might be possible to engage with employees at the worksite or leave announcements or surveys. Be sure to work through the employer and respect the employees' work times and responsibilities.

### **| *And Other Suggestions for "Taking it to the Streets!"***

Booths at fairs and festivals, kiosks in shopping areas, on-street meetings, site-visits, and knock-and-talk (one-on-one conversations via neighborhood canvassing) venues are being used more-and-more by transportation planning agencies throughout the country. They all have one important thing in common: they take the message to the people.<sup>5</sup>

When possible, make sure a recognized community leader is present for these very public engagements. This can include a representative from the underrepresented community and/or an elected leader like the Mayor or City Council member. Perhaps a football, basketball, or other sports player or coach would participate. The presence of a community leader or entertainer helps underscore the importance of participating in transportation planning, and the strong desire on the community's part to engage and interact with its underrepresented friends and neighbors.

While this module discusses these “Taking it to the Streets” ideas in terms of advertising transportation planning events to underrepresented populations, all of these venues can be used for gathering input, needs, recommendations, and other feedback. So, it may be a good idea to take advantage of these opportunities for a variety of reasons.

*“[My staff members have] great ideas to get info out, through state festivals, county festivals...regardless of socioeconomic status, people come to those festivals...even if you don’t have money to spend, the time you get to spend with social interaction and seeing other people is helpful to so many people...For people way out in rural areas—they come out of their hollers for the Buckwheat Festival. Get advertising out to those places”* **Local Social Service Agency Administrator**

## ■ Closing Summary

In the end there is likely no one communication venue that will work in your efforts to reach underrepresented populations about engaging in transportation planning. Reaching any audience typically requires employing more than one communication venue, repeatedly, over time. Understanding the benefits and disadvantages of different communication strategies—including traditional venues such as newspapers, television, radio, and public information materials; websites and social media; contact lists and direct mailings; surveys and a host of new and nontraditional approaches—can help determine which approaches may be most effective.

Along with understanding the benefits and disadvantages of various communication venues, working closely with underrepresented citizens and their trusted allies and advocates can help identify their preferred communication channels and venues, specifically, those they use, rely on, and are readily able to access. The importance of re-thinking and re-designing your advertising approaches so that they reach underrepresented audiences, with an emphasis on taking the message to them, cannot be overstated.



## References



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