



Public Involvement Best Practices

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Public Involvement Best Practices document and matrix provide a functional framework for considering public involvement (PI) tools for transportation projects. There is no expectation that a project will make use of the various tools. Each project is different and the PI approach depends on the specific needs and demands of the project. See the [PI Best Practices](#) document for more details.

Category	Task	Application	Benefits, Effectiveness	Challenges	Recommendations	Cost	Environmental	Preliminary Design (Pre 60%)	Final Design (Post 60%)	Construction	Standard	High Profile (\$100M-\$500M)	Mega (> \$500M)
Outreach strategies	Public involvement plans	PI plan articulates goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve project's outreach goals.	Identifies public concerns and affected stakeholders and helps allocate resources in a strategic manner.	Plans need to be tailored to individual projects to avoid a one-size-fits all approach. Measuring effectiveness can be difficult, but is required for annual updates.	Write a yearly public involvement plan to help manage the expectations of the public, provide a strategic direction for the project team and help evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach activities.	\$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Project identity	Branding	Creates a consistent voice/theme for all project communications that is easily identifiable.	Distinguishes the project and project's materials and helps the public recognize legitimate project informational materials.	Project branding results in an identity separate from WisDOT which can confuse the public and the consistent application of the brand can be difficult to enforce on larger projects.	Adopt as a best practice to set the stage for all project communications. Consider using CSS for future branding work and coordinate with other statewide efforts for market research.	\$\$	X	X	X	X			X
Web-based tools	Project websites	WisDOT oversees and manages an outside vendor contracted to develop and maintain the project website.	Provides the public with a single source for timely and accurate information and a forum for public feedback that is easily updated.	Need to dedicate resources to constantly develop and maintain the content and integrate and respond to feedback.	Continue to use project websites within the determined 511 template. Allocate sufficient resources to set up initial pages, provide graphics support and maintain the content.	\$\$\$		X	X	X		X	X
	Social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)	WisDOT provides oversight and management of social media sites that are developed and maintained by an outside vendor.	Low-cost direct connection to media and stakeholders who are instantly notified of new content and status updates including closures and other traffic impacts.	Resources need to be dedicated to constantly manage, update accounts and to respond to comments.	Continue to use social media in tandem with WisDOT's "Stay Connected" site.	\$\$	X	X	X	X		X	X
	E-blasts	WisDOT project staff develops messages and provides content to an outside vendor who manages the email database and distributes the content.	A relatively low cost method to instantaneously deliver messages directly to stakeholders who have signed up to receive information.	A sound list is required for e-blasts to be effective and requires regular maintenance. E-blast software requires training and substantial QC.	Use e-blasts as an effective best practice tool. Consider using Mail Chimp (or similar product) to allow distribution of 12,000 emails per month to a list of up to 2,000 subscribers.	\$	limited	X	X	X		X	X
Paid media	Radio live reads and produced spots	Used to disseminate information about a project that will affect a large number of people.	Radio reaches a wide audience and can target specific drive times and demographics.	Advertising firms are needed to produce and place advertisements.	Continue to use radio advertisements to saturate targeted audiences during the project's construction phase when impacts are the greatest.	\$\$				X			X
	Television ads	Typically used to announce a construction project that will affect a region.	A television advertisement reaches a wide audience and informs drivers before traveling.	Television ads can be expensive and it is difficult to gauge their effectiveness due to TiVo and DVR systems.	Discontinue the use of produced TV spots. Explore cable TV opportunities and work with news shows to secure regular updates.	\$\$\$				X			X
	Print ads	Ads run in community or multi-cultural papers to advertise public information meetings and public hearings.	Typically less costly than TV or radio ads and able to target specific publications and demographics including those without access to the internet.	Running ads in large papers can be expensive and effectiveness will decrease as readers switch from hard copies to online sources.	Use print ads in community-specific and multi-cultural papers when input is most critical during a project's environmental and design phases, but discontinue print ads during the construction phase.	\$\$	X	X	X		X	X	X
	Digital banner ads	Used to advertise public meetings and to direct people to the project website and social media profiles.	Drives users to the project website with the latest project information. Digital banner ads can target specific stakeholder groups.	Click-through trends are declining as more ads appear online; some users disregard online ads.	Use digital banners when the demographics suit the technique.	\$\$	limited	X	X	X		X	X
Free media	Cable public access shows	Partner with local public access cable stations to create a forum for discussing the project.	Air time on cable TV is less expensive than network television and typically allows a more in-depth conversation about the project.	May only reach a small number of viewers who watch public access, and not all stakeholders have cable television.	Explore opportunities to utilize public access cable shows.	\$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

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	News releases	News releases with information about meetings, traffic impacts, and construction milestones are posted on website and distributed to a list of media sources.	Distributes information directly to targeted media sources; positions WisDOT to proactively convey the message in an accurate and timely manner.	Long-term traffic impact releases rarely get picked up by the media and stakeholders don't typically monitor WisDOT's website for news releases.	Discontinue weekly news releases and use traffic alerts to communicate major traffic impacts and events; continue posting closures on website and social media tools.	\$	X	X	X		X	X	X
Print materials	Newsletters	Newsletters provide the public with detailed information and encourage the public to provide feedback at project milestones.	The format allows WisDOT to publish detailed maps and a variety of in-depth content.	Newsletters require distillation of a large amount of content that can become outdated quickly. Distribution can be costly.	Use newsletters during the planning and design phases of a project when more discussion of alternatives is needed, but limit use during construction. Consider translating newsletters into other languages.	\$\$	X	X	X	limited	X	X	X
	Get Around Guides and rack cards	A quick and easy reference for the public to use during construction that conveys information on alternate routes, modes and access.	Rack cards and guides contain a large amount of information on one sheet that is available to stakeholders at facilities within the construction zone.	Substantial amounts of content and resources are required to develop a useful rack card/guide, which has a limited shelf life.	Continue using to diversify techniques to reach stakeholders other than via a computer, but estimate rack card print quantities accurately to reduce cost. Consider translating guides into other languages.	\$\$\$				X			X
	Project briefs	One-page factsheets or letters that provide concise area-specific construction information on construction impacts and schedule.	Briefs are easily updated and distributed by a variety of methods including mail, email, door-to-door, meetings, etc.)	Information must be carefully distilled into a clear and concise message and can have a limited shelf life.	Continue to use as a best practice and enhance distribution by obtaining email addresses from stakeholders.	\$				X	X	X	X
	Media inserts	Information materials that are inserted into newspapers.	Distribute information such as get around guides and rack cards to a wide audience.	Some stakeholders object to use of media inserts which are generally costly to distribute especially with larger newspapers.	Minimize the use of media inserts. If necessary, focus insertions into small or medium-sized newspapers to maximize cost-effectiveness.	\$\$				X		X	X
Outreach	Neighborhood specialists	Contract-employees who conduct on-the-ground outreach and assist WisDOT staff at public meetings and festivals.	Lend credibility and establish public trust by establishing contacts with community leaders and organizations.	Neighborhood specialists can be less effective in less-densely populated areas; Additional contracts result in more training and administration costs.	WisDOT should build relationships with community leaders as a best practice. Limit the use of specialists to aspects of Mega projects that are met with greater public concern and resistance.	\$\$\$		X	X	X			X
	Festivals	Project booths are displayed and staffed to provide project information at festivals and community events.	Enables direct communication with the public, including under-served groups, at events held in their community.	Festivals require substantial staff resources to update materials, move and set up displays, and staff the event, including nights and weekends.	Continue to use as a best practice, but investigate the use of self-service booths to minimize staff commitments. Consider multi-cultural / ethnic festivals to reach traditionally under-served groups.	\$\$		X	X	limited			X
	Door to door	Project representatives canvass a pre-determined area to deliver project information and collect email contact information from the most affected stakeholders.	Ensures information is getting to the correct location or person and provides opportunities for direct interaction with stakeholders.	Can be time-consuming and may require the use of lower cost staff who need to be trained and managed.	Limit routine door to door outreach to areas of particular concern and obtain email and/or mailing information for future correspondence.	\$\$\$		X	X	limited			X
	Business toolkits	Customize WisDOT's "In This Together" program for specific projects.	Customized toolkits are a forum for coordinated advertising and signage and raises awareness of WisDOT's efforts to accommodate stakeholders' needs.	Need to dedicate resources to keep materials updated at least once per year.	Continue business toolkits as a best practice when applicable.	\$			X	X	X	X	X
Visualization tools	Drive-through animations	Computer generated animations that show what the transportation facility will look like from the driver's perspective.	Videos are relatively easy to update, upload onto websites and transport to meetings.	Must be developed and updated by outside vendors. Need to balance the quality of the animation with the cost.	The design and complexity of a Mega Project should drive the need for an animated video.	\$\$\$		X	X	X			X
	Renderings	Renderings are graphics developed on a computer that show what the transportation project will look like in the future.	Very flexible digital format that can be used on the website, meeting materials and booth displays.	Must be developed and updated by outside vendors.	The design and complexity of a Mega Project should drive the need for renderings.	\$\$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Committees	Advisory committees: technical, citizen and community, CSS	Small groups of stakeholders and interest groups assembled to obtain feedback on alternatives and design plans.	Obtain input from a select group of stakeholders early in the design process.	Utilizing advisory committees can be time-intensive, including identifying the participants, planning for and executing the meetings.	Utilize Advisory Committees during the planning phases of a project, when input is critical into design. Communicate with these groups via email during the construction phase.	\$\$	X	X			X	X	X