



FDM 6-5-1 Introduction

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

Public involvement is a critical component of any project. Ensuring the public has a voice throughout the life of a project helps to position WisDOT as a good community partner. Investments in public involvement are meant to increase positive outcomes and overall satisfaction with the project. Good public involvement is also integral to good transportation planning. It enables us to make a lasting contribution to the quality of life. It is more than an agency requirement and fulfilling statutory obligations. It is central to informed decision making.

Public involvement must be implemented in accordance with this chapter on all projects administered by WisDOT, including those federally funded projects that are developed by local units of government or their consultants. The policies outlined in this chapter can be used for all WisDOT projects, regardless of size.

The policies and processes identified in this chapter shall be used to develop and administer the public involvement process regardless of whether an environmental document is being prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act or the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act.

FDM 6-5-5 Staff Resources

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

Each WisDOT Region has key staff with specialized expertise in the public involvement process. Just as the goal should be to communicate early and often with the public, contacts with the Region public involvement process experts should occur in the same manner.

5.1 Region Communication Manager

Each WisDOT Region has a Region Communication Manager (RCM) who assists Region staff in developing a comprehensive communication plan and choosing appropriate public involvement techniques. It is critical to involve the RCM early in the project and to keep them apprised of progress. The RCM approves all Public Involvement Plans (PIP) and can provide critical guidance to aid in drafting. The RCM also serves as the Region's Liaison to the WisDOT Office of Public Affairs (OPA).

5.2 Regional Tribal Liaison

Each WisDOT Region has a Regional Tribal Liaison, who assists project development staff in developing and choosing appropriate public involvement techniques to ensure Wisconsin Tribes have an opportunity to provide input in the process.

5.3 Region Environmental Coordinator

Each WisDOT Region has one or more Region Environmental Coordinators (REC) who assist project development staff in ensuring the appropriate public involvement procedures are followed throughout the environmental review and decision-making process.

5.4 Local Program Considerations

Public involvement on Local Program projects is primarily the responsibility of the Local Public Agency (LPA). The LPA approves the PIP and is responsible for coordinating all public involvement. The Local Program Project Manager (LPPM), in coordination with the REC, will ensure the LPA has followed appropriate public involvement procedures. Bureau of Technical Services – Environmental Process and Documentation Section (EPDS) staff must also be involved in any project that will require a public hearing. The RCM typically is not involved in the Local Program public involvement process.

FDM 6-5-10 Public Involvement Plan

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

10.1 Introduction

WisDOT PIPs aid staff in determining how to perform outreach, collect feedback and make decisions. The PIP ensures staff have considered methods and strategies to interact early and often with project partners so that

decisions made are in the best overall interest.

All projects are required to have a written PIP. Most projects will require some level of public involvement.

- For projects on the State Highway System, the level of public involvement is determined by the Project Manager in consultation with the RCM and REC.
- For Local Program projects, the LPA recommends the level of public involvement, and the LPPM reviews and concurs with the decision.
- A limited number of very low scope projects (for example, deck-sealing or pavement-marking projects) may not meaningfully benefit from public involvement activity. In cases where no public involvement will occur, the approved PIP must clearly document why public involvement will not be a part of the project, and the PIP must be retained in the project file. A PIP is subject to review and approval regardless of the level of activity prescribed.
- Project Managers also may elect to include public involvement on select project phases (planning, design, pre-construction, construction or post-construction). This type of public involvement must be vetted through the RCM.

As stated in [FDM 6-1-1.2](#), the level of detail in the PIP will depend on the scope of the project, possibly on the type of environmental document being prepared and a host of other variables.

The PIP is essential in assuring the effectiveness of public involvement. Use the PIP template found at the environmental program form, templates and checklists website.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-business/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/environment/formsandtools.aspx>

Details for completing the template are found in [FDM 6-5-10.2](#).

The PIP is a project-specific sequenced list of anticipated contacts with the public. Preparation of the PIP is a crucial task completed early in the environmental review process. A properly developed PIP will ensure effective involvement of the affected project partners throughout the entire project.

A PIP will assist with:

- Early and continuous communication, education and outreach to stakeholders.
- Collaborative problem-solving and consensus-building with the community.
- Identifying specific outreach efforts based on the project.
- More comprehensive discussions with project partners to evaluate additional design alternatives.
- For projects being evaluated using an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment (for which the 23 USC 139 process applies), a Coordination Plan for Agency and Public Involvement (Coordination Plan) must also be prepared. Elements of the PIP should be incorporated into the Coordination Plan. Refer to the environmental website for the Coordination Plan Template.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-business/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/environment/formsandtools.aspx>

Refer to [FDM 20-10](#), Roles and Responsibilities in the Environmental Documents Process, to coordinate plans and activities that align and complement the activities in this section.

10.2 Considerations for an Effective Public Involvement Plan

Communication should be conducted strategically with much thought and research given to the targeted audiences. The level of communication and outreach in a PIP will vary depending on project needs and related impacts.

Methods used to communicate the proposed improvements should reach the target audiences using several techniques included in [FDM 6-5-15.3](#). Creativity, innovation and thinking "outside the box" are encouraged to tailor PI methods to project and unique stakeholder needs. A PIP should be dynamic and may require periodic updates and modifications as the project evolves. It is important to leverage partnerships within the community (i.e., local officials, business associations, etc.) and take time to listen to those audiences to learn about their values, interests and beliefs and to obtain their input on the project. Actively listening and asking the right questions can result in answers that may not be obvious initially. In addition, the PIP should align with other land use and transportation plans at all levels so that conflict is limited.

10.3 Staff Responsibilities for Public Involvement Plans

It is imperative to have a well-thought-out PIP that comprehensively, equitably and inclusively engages residents, businesses and other project stakeholders. There should be agreement early in the process identifying who has what role, who is responsible for which decisions, activities to be conducted, follow-up and

communication. A timeline will help to clarify these details.

Examples of staff responsibilities for PIP preparation include:

- WisDOT Project Manager – Initial development of PIP with input from consultants/design team. Ensure PIP is reviewed by the below groups at major life cycle changes during the project development process. .
- WisDOT Consultants/Design Team – Coordination with Project Manager to develop PIP and consultant provides mailing lists and other materials for WisDOT review.
- WisDOT Region Communication Manager, Public Involvement Staff – Suggest right-sized outreach efforts based on project scope and schedule. Review and provide continual feedback of PIP. Can assist project staff with new communication methods in partnership with the Office of Workforce, Innovation and Budget (OWIB).
- WisDOT Regional Tribal Liaison (as applicable) – Review PIP to understand project and potential effects to any Tribal communities.
- WisDOT Region Environmental Coordinator (as applicable) – Review PIP to ensure necessary environmental considerations are followed.
- WisDOT Local Program Project Manager – Collaboration with local government (i.e., county or municipality) to understand and follow their public involvement policies and procedures.
- Local Program Agency – Coordinate with WisDOT Local Program Project Manager and share guidance on local public involvement policies and procedures.

10.4 Developing the Public Involvement Plan

Project Teams should strive for a well-defined, well-documented PIP tailored to the dynamics of a project and the unique needs of stakeholders. This process should include collaboration among staff resources identified in [FDM 6-5-5](#). Strategies and tactics should remain flexible based on the public's needs, questions, and feedback.

Preparation:

- Consider current transportation and urban development plans including WisDOT, regional and local plans.
- Align the public involvement process with needs of the project.
- Provide for flexibility in process to adapt to changes.
- Design a plan for the specific project and tailor it to the demographics of the project's area of impact.
- Define key measurable outcomes of the community's values.
- Train all staff, both internal and external, to properly execute the plan in an effective and timely manner.
- Utilize best practices from projects that have similar community characteristics and challenges to anticipate and avoid previous mistakes.

Considerations:

- Who is the core audience?
- What is the best way to reach a particular core audience?
- What challenges are anticipated in ensuring an equitable, inclusive outreach strategy?
- What is the functional classification of the roadway?
- What is the timeline of the project?
- Is PI only needed for a certain phase of the project?
- Is PI properly right-sized for the life of the project?
- What is the level of potential impact to the human, natural and physical environment?
- Are there low income, minority, or other unique populations in the study area?
- How much involvement from federal/state agencies, state/county/local governments, and interest groups (businesses, nongovernmental organizations, etc.) is required or anticipated?
- What is the level of potential project controversy?
- In the past, how have the public and stakeholders reacted to similar transportation projects in the area?
- How many residential or business properties or Tribal lands are in the immediate area of the project?
- What is the impact to users in the project area including motorists, pedestrians, bikers and others?
- What is the proposed construction staging or detour plan? (See [FDM 11-3-5.3.1.5](#) Construction Traffic

Control)

- What is the amount and complexity of right of way impacts?
- What is the anticipated level of political concern?

Components:

The PIP template consists of the following key components.

- Define the project's purpose and need

The first step in developing a PIP is to clearly define the need for the project and the issues it is meant to solve. In this section, work with the RCM and REC, as needed, to provide a clear, non-technical description of why the project is needed. Please keep in mind that any solutions identified are defined as "proposed" until the project has gone through the public involvement process (i.e., communication with regulatory agencies, local community officials, property owners, etc.).

- Create a PIP timeline

The PIP should include a detailed timeline of the planning, program development or decision-making processes as well as the public involvement activities within that process. Public involvement needs to be timed early enough to provide the public many opportunities to influence the decision.

Describe key phases of the project delivery and include public involvement/outreach activities. Include a targeted month and year to clarify expectations and have a clear vision of what will be done and when.

The first phase of public involvement should be conducted very early in project development to ensure that appropriate public involvement is conducted before any decisions are made.

Example milestones to include in timeline: 30%, 60%, 90% plans; local community officials/emergency management meeting and public involvement meetings; list of attendees for public involvement meetings; notice and news release for public involvement meetings; complete environmental document; handouts and exhibits for public meetings; final PS&E; project let; beginning of construction; completion of construction.

- Identify public involvement goals and objectives

After determining the appropriate level of public involvement for the project, the next step is to define the goals for inviting the public to participate. Consider the following questions to develop the goals:

Could this be an opportunity to:

- Create a better project?
- Incorporate other community goals into the project?
- Benefit from public input, involvement and support regarding the project?
- Collaborate with citizens, businesses and organizations in overlapping areas?
- Promote good news, WisDOT programs and/or projects?
- Strengthen partnerships between WisDOT and local community officials?

List what the PIP intends to accomplish. Start each sentence with a verb and incorporate measurable results with criteria on accomplishing the measurement.

For example: "Identify and actively involve affected stakeholders by November 2023."

- Identify stakeholders and target audiences

With goals and objectives outlined, it is easier to identify stakeholders and what level of public outreach is needed. When creating the list of stakeholders, make sure to think about audiences that may not typically be engaged to try to cover a broad range of citizens. Focus on all audiences that are important. They should be included early and regularly during project development. *Please include a contact name and contact information for each stakeholder.* Target audiences can include but are not limited to:

- Residents and business community
- Road users, pedestrians and bicyclists
- Critical services (fire, police, etc.)
- Neighborhood associations/special interest groups
- Populations needing special accommodations or access to public involvement
- Local and county officials
- Regulatory agencies
- Tribes

- Media
- Define the process, tactics and techniques (see [FDM 6-5-15](#))
Describe in detail the different methods to convey information and to which intended audiences. List key public involvement activities and their tentative dates. Project Managers should work with the RCM to identify techniques from [FDM 6-5-15.3](#) to include in the PIP. Regional Tribal Liaisons and the REC will also play a key role in determining how to reach specific communities.
For example: “For the project, WisDOT will conduct a Local Officials Meeting (LOM), one in-person public involvement meeting (PIM), and one recorded presentation from the Project Manager. The purpose of the LOM and PIM are to (*state purpose*). These meetings and digital communications are to inform the public of the project purpose and the reasoning behind (*include specific decisions relating to project*). The goal is to conduct all meetings by (*month, year*) so there is time to incorporate any necessary comments into the plans before they are finalized.”
- Define the key messages
The key messages reflect the facts critical to public understanding of the project. These messages also include description of the project benefits. They should be simple, easy to understand and non-technical. The messages will evolve and will be incorporated into all aspects of the PIP and activities.
- Approvals
Ensure that the WisDOT Project Manager and RCM review and approve the PIP prior to implementation, preferably during the scoping phase of the project development process.
Review the plan periodically and update as the project progresses. Contact the RCM regarding any questions.

FDM 6-5-15 Putting Your PIP Into Action

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

15.1 Introduction

How a Project Team engages the public will vary widely. Each highway or bridge project is unique, addressing different concerns in different locations. As a result, the level and type of public involvement needed will differ from project to project. When choosing how to share project information, teams need to consider many factors. This section looks at both traditional WisDOT methods, like in-person meetings, and newer digital tools. There are many examples to pick from, and Project Teams are required to work with the RCM to determine what works best in a particular community. The RCM will also help to evaluate new ideas.

15.2 Right-Sizing Your Public Involvement

Project Managers are asked to stay flexible. Often public involvement processes are like much of our other workload – a balancing act of needs, time and resources. There are times when relatively small-cost or small-scope projects can create greater public interest compared to large-cost or large-scope projects, depending on the circumstances.

- Keep It Simple
Strive for flexibility and informality when using any public involvement techniques. Consider what’s most convenient for the audience and what’s likely to encourage quality interaction and participation. Also remember that not all members of the public process written and oral information the same.
- Know Your Audience
Always consider the audience first when determining techniques. Talk with community members, local officials and/or attend community events to better understand current issues and history in the community. These contacts will provide insights that may not be found in other ways. Collaborate with community leaders to determine methods for conducting business in an inclusive manner that allows engagement by all partners and the community.

Think about how to provide trustworthy information in a timely manner. No technique or message is guaranteed to work as effectively with one group compared to another.

Consider:

- Who are you trying to reach?

- Why should they care?
- What do you want them to know?
- How can they most effectively be reached?
- What is the Project Team trying to understand through stakeholder feedback?
- Should your approach focus more on in-person or digital techniques?

- Know Your Project

The public involvement process will vary based on the complexity of issues presented, the potential for controversy, project impacts, political interest and other variables. It is important to understand the complexities of the project and put into place an appropriate PIP based on the specifics of the project. Projects both large and small may involve a fair amount of public involvement.

Nobody will know the operations and benefits of a project quite like the Project Manager and Project Team. Start with those core benefits in mobility, safety, and quality of life. Think about how to best illustrate them to your audience. See [FDM 6-5-15.3](#) for techniques.

- Involve the RCM, REC and Regional Tribal Liaison Early

Timing can be equally important to technique. While gathering project information is important to WisDOT, it is critical to understand and appreciate how public involvement for projects can often compete for attention with evening family commitments, running errands or even just time relaxing. No matter the technique(s) chosen, it remains a best practice to keep information both simple to understand and simple to find.

Project Managers should connect with the RCM to discuss audience considerations and technique selection in the PIP. Depending on the circumstances, the RCM may suggest additional consultation with the REC, Regional Tribal Liaisons or any other relevant WisDOT staff as well as external parties such as civic, business or church leaders who intimately know their communities.

Some questions project staff may consider while exploring techniques with the RCM include:

- Have we worked in this area recently? If so, was there anything that seemed to work well?
- Are there community or business leaders that might consider assisting with information?
- Are there language or cultural considerations?
- Are there any opportunities to work with other ongoing local public awareness campaigns?
- Are there possibilities for media coverage?

- Be Flexible to Including New Techniques and Tactics

Project Managers are encouraged to be creative. The main priority is to share timely, accurate and useful information with the public. Whether this takes the form of a mailer, a project website or a virtual town hall, the goal remains the same.

When there are new ideas on techniques, Project Managers should first discuss with the RCM. The RCM can provide general guidance on implementing any new ideas through a pilot program and whether those new ideas would require additional vetting at the Region or Division level. The RCM should involve the OWIB – Division & Bureau Communications Unit to initiate a discussion of possible inclusion of the technique into Procedure 6-5-15.3

15.2 Techniques

Using various methods is very important because many techniques can be combined into integral parts of a community or Region's regularly scheduled events. It is important to understand the context of a project.

It is important to "right-size" the techniques to fit the project. Many of the techniques are relatively simple, low-cost methods of involving the public. Others are complex, high-cost techniques that should be implemented only after carefully considering the potential return on investment. Some techniques may be required by law under certain scenarios (i.e., public hearings) and must be included as part of the public involvement process.

- Written and Verbal Communication

- **Develop targeted mailing lists and set up databases including online or electronic versions to streamline processes and reduce duplication of efforts.** Compile up-to-date mailing lists of property owners, businesses, special interest groups, Tribes and others who are affected by or who have an interest in the project. Use tax listings, telephone books, online searches and utility customer lists as possible sources. Expand lists by adding interested parties from sign-in sheets at public involvement meetings, emails or phone calls from the public to make it as comprehensive as possible.
- **Contact property owners.** Contact property owners by letter, email, phone or door hangers and literature drops. No matter the method, inform property owners adjacent to a project of all major developments to ensure they are aware of scheduled meetings and basic project concepts.
- **Create project brochures and newsletters.** Work with the RCM to create brochures, newsletters, construction guides, get-around guides and/or project briefs that are concise, clearly written and appealing. Follow WisDOT Style Guidelines and, when possible, use the WisDOT project information template.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-bus/eng-consultants/cnsit-rsrcs/tools/pub-involve/default.aspx>

The message should be relevant, simply stated, and reinforced with graphics, pictures or other visuals to enhance understanding. Publications can be handed out during public meetings, mailed to selected stakeholders, distributed throughout communities, made available at WisDOT Field or Region offices and posted on the Internet.

Consultants should contact the RCM for project templates and style guidelines.

- **Compile a fact sheet for project news releases/events.** Submit a fact sheet to the RCM when the PS&E is submitted to WisDOT Central Office. The fact sheet will be used as the basis for project news releases and developing publicity for groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings.
- **News releases.** Collaborate with the RCM to develop news releases throughout the project and at key points – such as when the contract is awarded, when construction starts or ends or when there are changes in traffic flow. Information concerning the project and scheduled meetings can be distributed to the public through news releases, feature articles, notices placed in local newspapers, television and radio and/or electronically. Large groups of people can be reached for minimal cost.
- **Conduct a survey.** Surveys provide detailed information from the public while allowing them to voice their concerns. Surveys can be mailed or emailed to affected parties, distributed throughout communities at various locations, handed out at public involvement meetings and hearings or included as a QR code on handouts and posters. Additional public involvement questions could be included during other data gathering opportunities. It is important to understand that responses should be received from a representative portion of the population affected. Contact the RCM regarding the department's process and coordination.
- Digital Communication
 - **Create a digital presence.** The public increasingly expects communication via the internet and social media including but not limited to video presentations, project plan descriptions and timelines. Having a body of work online that includes information about the project, schedule and traffic impacts as well as key contacts will help create a consistent and accurate location for the community to learn more.
 - **Project website.** Project web pages cannot be placed on a consultant website; pages must be posted on the WisDOT website or on a local unit of government (project sponsor) website for Local Roads projects. Websites developed by consultants must follow WisDOT Style Guidelines and approval process. Work with the RCM to gather appropriate project information for development on project web pages and submit information to the RCM following department style guidelines and the approval process. Keep the RCM informed about project developments and any updates to the project web page.
 - **Social media.** Social media is a primary means of communication to be considered in your PIP. Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, email announcements and other forms of social media, as they emerge, should be considered for use in the public involvement process. Each Region currently maintains an X (Twitter) page for Region transportation information and news. Project Managers should coordinate with the RCM to promote the project on the Region's social media account. OPA manages statewide accounts that could be considered for region project communication, in consultation with the OPA Division Communication Manager and Social

Media Manager. Other interests in social media must involve WisDOT OPA per WisDOT Transportation Administrative Manual (TAM) Directive COM 103. COM 103 includes social media purpose, general operations and administration, setting up an account, responsibilities and roles and references or related WisDOT policies.

- **Consider a display model, digital drive-through animation or computer-enhanced photos of the project for public use.** These options can help the public better visualize project concepts and potential impacts. They may also help minimize misconceptions about the proposed improvements. Consider using “before and after” photos of similar projects or visual aids such as the photo log of the project or photographic/computer modeling.
 - **Monitor media coverage through news stories, online articles and posts from media outlets’ social media platforms.** Use these to learn the local perspective on issues, problems and values important to a particular community and to discover issues that may be controversial.
 - **Consider use of messaging along roadways.** Billboards and electronic signs at large venues adjacent to the roadway are typically used to advertise upcoming public meetings, direct people to the project website and inform of upcoming impacts to traffic.
 - **Community newsletters and/or social media platforms.** Identify best communication channels within a community (i.e., Facebook page) and request a post on that page to encourage public involvement.
- Individual/Small Group Outreach
 - **Conduct meetings with local officials and interested groups.** Like a public involvement meeting, targeted meetings allow for personal interaction in an informal setting. These meetings are organized for a specific neighborhood or interest group rather than the public at-large. They help define and address concerns from a particular group and provide focused assistance.
 - **Present the project at a local board meeting.** If a WisDOT or Local Program team determines the public involvement technique will be to conduct a presentation at a local (town, village, city, county, etc.) board meeting, the presentation must be officially noticed per the local unit of government’s methodology. WisDOT should also notify the public in the project area about the presentation with a postcard or newsletter. This technique should only be used for projects with little to no impacts and no detours. This should only be used as the primary public involvement technique after discussion with the RCM.
 - **Be a voice for the project.** Proactively seek and accept invitations to appear on radio or television programs, public schools, chamber of commerce meetings, festivals, special community events or other local venues. News media and other public appearances inform large numbers of people about specific projects as well as the decision-making process, which encourages the public to be more involved. RCMs must be engaged in media outreach to work through necessary approvals. Be aware that a Public Communications Record (PCR) may also be needed when making these types of contacts. See FDM 6-5-35 for the PCR process.
 - **Establish advisory committees.** This can include citizen advisory committees, technical advisory committees and business advisory committees. The advisory committee is responsible for gathering data from the constituents and making recommendations to decision makers. The aim is to ensure that their voices are heard, input is considered in a timely manner and that they understand their feedback is important.
 - **Contact legislators.** WisDOT takes an active role in building good relationships with legislators by providing them information about specific transportation projects and responding to their requests in a timely manner. WisDOT encourages legislators to contact Region Directors and the RCM as key sources for project information. Collaborate with the RCM to brief legislators on larger or sensitive projects through email, personal visits or phone calls.

Make sure legislators are on all mailing lists; they should be invited to all public involvement meetings and public hearings. Keep legislators informed about construction timelines and emerging project issues that may result in constituent contacts.

 - **Involve affected area businesses.** It’s vitally important for the local business community to have time to prepare for project impacts. Business owners will generally have questions about project timelines, detours and the temporary business signage process. Work with the RCM to meet with area businesses early in the design phase of the project and stay involved during construction. The “In This Together” program offers a comprehensive plan including a workbook, case studies, promotional samples and WisDOT staff contacts. The program includes suggestions and advice

for Wisconsin businesses that face construction impacts. The business coordination guide can be obtained through the RCM or at:

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/projects/in-together/default.aspx>

The worksheet includes a timeline and associated tasks for up to 18 months in advance of the project beginning and continues through post construction.

- **Establish standing availability for drop-in questions.** Establish a location (i.e., Region office, State Fair, community center, etc.) where the Project Team will be present on a specific day of the week during a specific time to answer questions.
- **Community-based organizations.** Community-based organizations serve various ethnicities, cultures and religions. They may share common beliefs, values, rituals, history or other characteristics that are deeply integrated into everyday living. These may be openly expressed by preferences in housing, clothing, meeting in a common location, rituals, etc. Research the ethnic, cultural and religious groups that currently exist in the community and those that have existed in the past. Understand how, why and where these groups find commonalities amongst each other and what is most important to include, avoid and/or understand about the project.
- **Help coordinate and participate in groundbreakings/ribbon cuttings.** For most events, the decision to hold a groundbreaking/ribbon-cutting event is made by the local community. The RCM then works in cooperation with the community and OPA to select a date and location and to help organize the event. Refer to the [Fact Sheet – Ribbon Cutting/Groundbreaking Ceremony](#).

<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-bus/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/environment/formsandtools.aspx>

- The Federal Highway Administration does not consider ribbon-cutting events as a necessary cost of a project. Costs associated with ribbon-cutting events are not eligible for federal participation.
- Meetings
 - **Hold public involvement meetings (PIMs).** These meetings are held during the project development process to share ideas or details with the public and receive public feedback. Whether informal or formal, they provide direct communication between department staff and the public. Always provide an opportunity for input and feedback from all interested stakeholders regardless of their position. A PIM can be in-person, done with video-meeting platforms or a mixture of both. **Standard practice is to hold a Local Official Meeting (LOM) prior to the PIM so local officials are aware of information that will be presented to the public. See [FDM 6-10](#) for details about the PIM process.**
 - **Open house.** An open house is conducted at a building rented by the department at an area along the project. The days and hours of operation are determined by the Project Team. This allows informal exchange of information and collection of data by providing a highly visible, two-way communication process between the department and the community. Staff should be familiar with the project and overall development process. This technique can be used for large and/or sensitive projects where the cost of having project staff on duty at remote locations is warranted.
 - **Hold a public hearing.** When public hearings are held for environmental documents, the hybrid-style public hearing shall be used. Hybrid-style public hearings provide more options in presentation styles and how testimony is taken. Testimony from the audience can be either provided orally in traditional, town hall-style format, one-on-one with a court reporter or in written form. **Standard practice is to hold a LOM prior to the public hearing so local officials are aware of information that will be presented to the public. See [FDM 6-15](#) for details about the public hearing process.**

FDM 6-5-20 Special Public Involvement Considerations

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

It is particularly important that any special public involvement requirements are incorporated in the PIP. This includes announcements in English and other languages for news, social media and minority publications. Consider using multi-lingual experts to interpret comments during the meetings with non-English-speaking attendees and writing techniques to accommodate those with limited English proficiency. ADA requirements including public accommodations for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision must be met as well.

When conducting public involvement, be sure to research and collect information about all populations that may be affected by the project including historically underserved communities. Also include the elderly, disabled and

low-income populations that may be impacted.

Identify key community leaders and open the lines of communication in a way that is most meaningful to all the affected public. It is important to understand their cultural practices and methods for interacting effectively. This will vary depending on the situation. Involve the populations early and often to ensure their needs, goals and vision for the project are considered. Different techniques and strategies may be needed depending on their comfort level of participating in the technique, using the technology, the availability to technology (such as computers or smart phones) and frequency of participation required to have meaningful engagement.

20.1 Engaging Minority, Low-Income, and Underserved Populations

To be effective, a technique must provide appropriate public input for the project phase, be affordable and reach the appropriate customers. To accomplish this, the department should:

- Actively identify populations within the project's area of influence.
- Involve affected populations in the determination of whether the effect is adverse or beneficial, and, if adverse, whether it falls disproportionately on that population.

Public involvement efforts should incorporate techniques that seek out and interact with minority and low-income populations to adequately inform them about the project and to obtain their input. Possible techniques and practices include:

- Contacting community leaders to determine the best method of engaging with the populations.
- Asking the community leaders to participate in public presentations.
- Offering to give a project presentation at regularly scheduled meetings that the population conducts.
- Placing meeting notices near mailboxes, grocery stores, places of worship, community centers and other public gathering areas.
- Putting meeting notices in local newspapers that serve the populations. Print the publications in languages other than English, if deemed necessary.
- Running radio announcements on stations that serve the populations. This may be especially important to reach people whose first language is not English, especially in areas of large Hmong populations.
- Considering providing special public transportation methods so people without vehicles or those living in areas without access to public transportation can get to the meeting.
- Considering methods to accommodate parents with children to enable parent participation.

20.2 Tribal Public Engagement

The "Tribal public" is composed of the entire community with all its diverse interests and points of view. It also includes a range of groups within or adjacent to the community who are likely to be impacted by the transportation decisions that are made. The Project Team must coordinate with the Regional Tribal Liaison if the project is located within or near Tribal lands. The Project Team is encouraged to consider a wide range of groups and individuals such as:

- Tribal leaders
- Tribal elders
- Tribal members
- Tribal government officials
- Non-tribal residents living within the area
- Neighboring jurisdictions, including local and county governments
- Economic development or tourism groups
- Business owners and employees
- School and health officials
- Individuals or groups who do not drive (pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders)
- Transportation service providers

There are often Tribal events planned for other purposes that provide opportunities to engage attendees in a discussion about transportation planning. This strategy might draw in Tribal members who are unlikely to participate in meetings held specifically to engage the public in transportation planning. These events might include:

- Tribal pow wows
- Dances

- Rodeos
- Church events
- Elder community events
- School events
- County fairs
- Casino events
- Health fairs
- Job fairs

20.3 Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) stipulates involving the community, especially those with disabilities, in the development and improvement of services. An individual with a disability is defined as a person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity, a person who has a history or record of such impairment or a person who is perceived by others as having such impairment. Sites of public involvement activities and the information presented must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Special efforts are needed to comply with statutory requirements.

Include those with sight, hearing or mobility limitations and provide adequate access and services such as sign language, listening assistance and telecommunication for the deaf and hard of hearing (TDD).

ADA requires specific participation activities including:

- Outreach, developing contacts and notification to participate
- Consultation for those with disabilities
- A chance for public comments
- Accessible formats and forums
- Summaries of main issues during the public comment period
- Ongoing efforts to involve the community in planning

For a PIM and public hearing, ADA requirements must be met under federal requirements. Elements to consider ensuring ADA requirements are met:

- Has an accessible site for the PIM or hearing been selected?
- Are primary entrances easily accessible?
- If the meeting is held on an upper or lower level of the building, is there an elevator or other method for making the meeting location accessible?
- Is there space for wheelchairs throughout the room and at the front of the room?
- Are microphones accessible to persons in wheelchairs?
- Is the meeting site accessible by public transportation, or have other arrangements been made to provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to attend?
- Is there accessible parking available?
- Have requests been made by persons with disabilities for alternative methods of providing input to or receiving information from the department? For example, have listening aids or sign language interpreters been requested?
- Is a separate meeting needed for persons with disabilities at an alternate meeting location?
- If the meeting will be held virtually, are other accommodations such as closed captioning needed?

For developing the ADA portion of your PIP, the ADA Effective Communications Plan guidance document serves as a valuable resource.

<https://wisconsin.gov/Documents/doing-bus/civil-rights/titlevi-ada/2023-effective-comm-plan.pdf>

20.4 ADA Title II, State, Local and Tribal Government Activities

This covers all activities of state and local governments regardless of the size of the project or use of federal funds. It requires these governments to give persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from their programs, services and activities, including but not limited to transportation and town meetings.

For additional ADA Title II information, refer to 28 CFR Part 35.

20.5 Executive Order 13166 - Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Many individuals may struggle to comprehend and communicate in English, which may prevent them from accessing essential programs and services. The U.S. Department of Transportation LEP guidance ([DOT's LEP Guidance | US Department of Transportation](#)) states that [Executive Order 13166](#) "Improving Access to Services for Persons With Limited English Proficiency" requires DOT recipients and DOT funding recipients to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to LEP individuals and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons can have meaningful access to them. LEP individuals do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English.

There are more than 165,000 LEP individuals in Wisconsin. A language analysis completed using data from the American Community Survey on "Languages Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over" (2020) indicated that the most commonly spoken languages among Wisconsin's LEP population include: Spanish, Hmong, Chinese and German (Table 1).

Written materials and presentations used to engage and inform LEP members of the public should reflect their technical understanding of the topic. Visual tools (pictures, maps, drawings, charts, graphs) are good ways to help illustrate the problems, proposed solutions and how these will affect their community.

Special techniques and methods for engaging all members of the public, such as clearly defining project-related terms commonly used by Project Team members, can play a critical part in conveying information and receiving meaningful feedback.

The Title VI/Language Access Plan (LAP) is a guide for staff to ensure programs, services and activities are accessible to non-English-speaking and LEP individuals requiring information in alternate languages and formats.

For developing the LEP portion of your PIP, the LAP (<https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/doing-bus/civil-rights/titlevi-ada/2022t6languageaccessplan.pdf>) serves as a valuable resource.

20.6 Wisconsin Telecommunication Relay System

Wisconsin Telecommunications Relay Service (WTRS) is a free communication service that provides full telephone accessibility to Wisconsin citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or those with a speech disability. The service provides a link between text telephone users and conventional telephone users. Callers can access the relay 24 hours a day, and operators will be able to assist you. There are different ways to contact the WTRS:

- Dial 711
- TTY 1-800-947-3529
- Voice 1-800-947-6644
- ASCII 1-800-272-1773
- Fast ASCII 1-800-267-8867
- Speech to Speech 1-800-833-7637
- Spanish to Spanish 1-800-833-7813
- For further assistance, go to <https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/ForConsumers/TRS.aspx>

FDM 6-5-25 Other Public Involvement Requirements

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

In addition to the general National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public involvement requirements described in 23 CFR 771.111, other federal laws and regulations have distinct requirements for public involvement activities. In many cases, these requirements may be integrated into the project's planned public involvement efforts, avoiding the need to hold duplicate meetings. During the preparation of the PIP, project staff should give careful attention to public involvement requirements outside of the standard NEPA requirements. Project staff should communicate early in project development with staff from other state and federal agencies to ensure that all applicable public involvement requirements are incorporated into the PIP and implemented during project development.

Examples of other federal laws and their implementing regulations requiring public involvement follow, although this list is not exhaustive.

- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended; 36 CFR 800.2(d)

- Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966; 23 CFR 774.5
- Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1972, as amended; 33 CFR 325 & 327

25.1 Stormwater

WisDOT has a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) General Permit to discharge stormwater under the Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) General Permit No. WI-S066800-2. WisDOT is permitted to discharge stormwater from its Transportation Separate Storm Sewer System (TS4) to waters of the state in accordance with the conditions set forth in this permit.

The TS4 permit requires WisDOT to distribute an educational pamphlet at a PIM to aid the public's understanding of WisDOT's Stormwater Management Program.

<https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrces/environment/stormwtr-mgmnt.aspx>

In addition to being available online, multiple printed copies are available from each Region Stormwater and Erosion Control Engineer (SWECE) and the Central Office BTS-ESS Statewide Stormwater Quality Engineer.

The pamphlet is required to be available at a PIM for all WisDOT Mega Projects and at least 50% of all Major Projects.

The pamphlet is suggested to be available at a PIM where changes to the existing stormwater management system are being proposed.

Project staff familiar with the project's stormwater design should also attend the PIM.

25.2 Section 4(f) *de minimis* Finding (Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966)

Refer to FDM 20-45-5 for information about Section 4(f) applicability, and particularly FDM 20-45-5.6.1 pertaining to Finding of *de minimis* Impact Documentation.

25.2.1 Section 4(f) *de minimis* Finding for Parks, Recreation Areas, and Wildlife and Waterfowl Refuges

An impact to a park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge that qualifies for Section 4(f) protection may be determined to be *de minimis* if:

- The transportation use of the Section 4(f) property, including incorporation of any measure(s) to minimize harm (such as any avoidance, minimization, mitigation or enhancement measures), does not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that qualify the resource for protection under Section 4(f);
- The public has been afforded an opportunity to review and comment on the effects of the project on the protected activities, features, or attributes of the Section 4(f) property; and
- The official(s) with jurisdiction over the property, after being informed of the public comments and FHWA's intent to make the *de minimis* impact finding, concur in writing that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f).

Before a Section 4(f) finding of *de minimis* impact for Parks, Recreation Areas, and Wildlife and Waterfowl Refuges can be approved by FHWA, the public shall be afforded the opportunity to comment on the project's effect on the Section 4(f) protected property. The public involvement requirements associated with specific NEPA document and process will, in most cases, be sufficient to satisfy the public notice and comment requirements for the *de minimis* impact finding. In unique situations, a separate public notice and opportunity for review and comment will be necessary. In these cases, appropriate public involvement should be based on the specifics of the situation and commensurate with the type and location of the Section 4(f) property, the impacts, and public interest.

The public involvement materials should clearly show and label the Section 4(f) resource. The proposed build alternative display should clearly show the impacts on the Section 4(f) resource. It is suggested that information about the Section 4(f) property and project impacts be outlined in the handout and discussed in the project presentation if either of these are used. There is no requirement to use the words Section 4(f) or *de minimis* as the public is often not familiar with these terms.

The official with jurisdiction (FDM 20-45-5.5) may not concur that the project will not adversely affect the activities, features, or attributes that qualify the property for protection under Section 4(f) until they have reviewed and considered comments that were provided during the comment period.

25.2.2 Section 4(f) *de minimis* Finding for Historic Properties

For historic properties, public notice and comment is completed via the Section 106 consultation process prior to making a Section 4(f) *de minimis* impact finding.

FDM 6-5-30 Public Involvement and the Administrative Record

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

The administrative record for a project consists of the project files, emails, and other electronic documents related to the project. Maintaining a complete record of public involvement actions is a critical part of the project development process. At a minimum, the Public Involvement Plan and all documentation and correspondence regarding the public involvement process must be included in the project file.

FDM 6-5-35 Public Communications Record (PCR)

February 14, 2025

Significant changes made to section.

35.1 General

With program responsibility that affects virtually every citizen in the state, WisDOT employees routinely answer questions from the public, local officials, state legislators and other groups. Media outlets also regularly contact WisDOT for interviews or comments on WisDOT projects, programs or initiatives. WisDOT staff are not authorized to speak to the media without clearance. In the event of a media question:

- **Region staff, including contractors/consultants engaged on projects, must coordinate with their RCM.**
- **Statewide bureau staff must coordinate with OPA.**

When contacted by the media, be sure to ask for the reporter's contact information, topic and deadline. OPA or the RCM will coordinate the response to media and assist with the Public Communications Record (PCR) per Transportation Administrative Manual (TAM) COM 102.

35.2 When is a PCR Required?

WisDOT requires a PCR to document media contacts. A PCR informs the Secretary's Office, OPA, division management and the RCM to emerging issues, as well as feedback regarding public or media interest in transportation programs, initiatives, proposals or plans.

The RCM, in coordination with project staff, can handle media questions focused on individual project scope, benefits and schedule. The RCM is responsible for submitting a PCR. Per COM 102, the RCM should coordinate with OPA for any media contacts that focus on policy, budget, politics, multi-division topics or Region projects or incidents with statewide impact.

A PCR should be filed when any of the following occur:

- All communication with media outlets, including online publications, radio, podcasts, television or newspaper
- RCM coordinates directly with state legislative office
- Other external communications when:
 - Subject matter is, or potentially will be, controversial or sensitive in nature
 - There is reason to believe that the contact may be gathering information from others within the department
 - Subject matter relates to a legislative issue or comes from a legislative office
 - The communication is likely to result in a call to the Secretary's Office, Governor's Office or an elected official
 - Data is requested

35.3 How to File a PCR

OPA or the RCM will use the respective division's SharePoint PCR form to enter information about the media contact. The PCR form is available internally via the OPA MyDOT page.

Significant changes made to section.

There are legal requirements associated with both the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Wisconsin Open Records Law requests. The request must be handled in a timely manner prescribed by law. It is important that you involve the right people as soon as a request is received.

40.1 Freedom of Information Act

FOIA requests are typically filed with FHWA. If you receive a FOIA request, information about the FOIA process can be found by contacting the WisDOT Office of General Counsel.

40.2 Wisconsin Open Records Law

The WisDOT Access to Records Notice can be viewed at:

<https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/records-access.pdf>

It provides guidance on how WisDOT complies with the Wisconsin Open Records Law, which is set forth in Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31 to 19.39 and has been in effect since Jan. 1, 1983.

Central Office staff must coordinate the open records request with the Central Office Records manager.

Region staff must coordinate the open records request with the Region Records manager. The RCM should also be informed about the situation.

A PCR (see [FDM 6-5-35](#)) is often required when an open records request is made.