



FDM 6-10-1 Public Involvement Meetings (PIM)

February 14, 2025

1.1 Description

A public involvement meeting (PIM) is used by WisDOT to disseminate information and to give the public an opportunity to voice viewpoints about a particular plan, project or alternative. This is one of many possible techniques (see [FDM 6-5-15](#)) that could be used to involve the public and has been one of the most commonly used methods to achieve that goal.

A PIM provides an opportunity for face-to-face communication between staff and interested parties in an informal setting that can be tailored to a community's needs. Handouts, exhibits and displays should be available to inform the public about proposed actions and facilitate questions in return. Project staff should be stationed at key locations in the meeting area to interact with those in attendance.

A formal presentation can be given to convey key information about a project. Often, the project manager or a consultant will act as the presenter. They should have an in-depth understanding of the project, the challenges, opportunities and threats, as well as the proposed alternatives. The person presenting should be comfortable answering questions following the presentation or be able to refer them to appropriate staff. Note that public speaking can be a challenge for even those who do it routinely. Before any public meeting, it's important to consider specific audience needs and to think through how to present information in the most professional, engaging and insightful way possible.

Using digital products such as websites, PowerPoint, video or social media may enhance understanding of the project and streamline the meeting process itself. Staff are asked to give strong consideration as to how digital tools can help to effectively cover more ground with target audiences. In some cases, digital methods may fully replace in-person public involvement (PI) offerings. This will be a project-by-project decision. Project staff should discuss digital options with the Region Communication Manager (RCM) and Region Environmental Coordinator (REC).

A Local Officials Meetings (LOM) is often held with legislators and local officials, preceding and following those held with the general public. These meetings are an opportunity to give legislators and local officials a preview of what their constituents will be seeing or to tell them what we heard at the PIM. Briefing legislators and local officials before and after a PIM will prepare them to answer constituent questions and concerns about the project.

Project teams are also encouraged to incorporate the In This Together program at early phases of PI planning. Keep in mind that:

- Business impacts can happen adjacent to the work zone, not just within it.
- Business owners are very busy people and may require multiple efforts at communication.
- "In This Together" business coordination materials include tips and checklists to aid in conversation.

Project Teams should weigh all outreach options in Public Involvement Plan (PIP) preparation (see [FDM 6-5-10](#)).

Remember: Meaningful public involvement takes all of us. If you are unsure about any step of the process, please include the RCM and REC in your effort to deliver public involvement that allows everyone to have input in development of a project.

1.2 Are Public Involvement Meeting(s) Needed

With the exception of a limited number of very low-scope projects (See FDM 6-5-10.1), some methods to inform the public about a proposed project and allow the public to provide feedback should be included as part of the PIP for every project. Decisions on public involvement should be informed by project staff in concert with the RCM and REC.

An internal WisDOT meeting prior to scoping is a good forum to discuss whether there is a need to hold an in-person, digital or alternative-format PIM or if a combination is appropriate for gathering public input. Consider inviting local officials to this meeting to get their opinion on public involvement methods. The unit of government sponsoring the project should hold a meeting prior to scoping to make this determination when the project is part of the Local Roads Program.

It is the Project Manager's responsibility to ensure a PIM and other opportunities to gather public comment are included in the PIP as appropriate.

1.3 Number of Public Involvement Meeting(s) to be Held

There is no requirement to hold a specific number of PIMs. The appropriate timing of conducting a PIM depends on various factors. Holding a PIM at major project-development milestones is a good guideline for making this determination. If the project corridor is long and goes through multiple municipalities, consider holding multiple PIMs on separate nights or supporting the effort online.

The Project Team schedules the following meetings as appropriate.

1.3.1 Project Scoping

A PIM at the earliest stage of project development is especially important to projects that:

- Have the potential for substantial impacts on the socio-economic, natural or physical environment.
- Require capacity improvements that will increase the footprint of the roadway.
- Are controversial.
- Have a high degree of community/political opposition.
- Have concerns raised by the local officials or the community.

A PIM held during public-level scoping activities provides an opportunity to involve the public in an upcoming project at the earliest possible point in the design process. It lets the public discuss issues and concerns about the project and the roadway itself and comment on project purpose and need. It also allows designers to collect information from the public. These discussions are important because they assist Project Teams in further refinement of the purpose and need for the proposed project.

These meetings should take place early to take in public opinion and build trust with the community.

The goal of these meetings is to coordinate with the public on project scope before entering the investigation phase of the design process. Optimally, the public will feel engaged and part of the solution.

1.3.2 Preliminary Alternative Screening

If the project is complex and involves screening of multiple alternatives, another PIM should be held when preliminary alternatives are available for public review and comment. Displays with all alternatives being considered and those that have been eliminated from further consideration should be available for review.

Consider providing markers so the public can provide layouts of other alternatives they believe may meet the project purpose and need. Consider having notepads available so the public can include comments about specific alternatives and make notes of errors or omissions that may be found on the aerial maps.

It would also be helpful to display these options on a project design website.

1.3.3 Final Alternative Screening

If the project included multiple preliminary alternatives that were narrowed down, another PIM should be considered to get public input on those alternatives remaining and the reasons for elimination of other alternatives. The reasoning for retention/elimination should be clearly explained at this meeting. It is recommended the Project Team post those alternatives on a project design website to reach more people.

Another focus of this meeting should be a more detailed explanation of the potential impacts of the remaining alternatives. This will allow the public to provide specific comments on those impacts identified by the Project Team and help ensure all potential impacts have been evaluated.

Efforts made to avoid impacts and opportunities to minimize, mitigate or compensate for potential avoidable impacts should be identified to the extent practicable.

1.3.4 Selected Alternative Screening

When a final alternative has been selected and a public hearing on the decision is not required (see [FDM 6-15](#)), it may be appropriate to hold another PIM to inform the public of the decision. In addition to the meeting, the decision should be posted on the project website if one is available.

1.3.5 Project Scope Change

If a change in project scope is made after the last PIM, an additional PIM is required.

Changes in project scope that require an additional PIM include, but are not limited to:

- Change in the proposed WisDOT project classification.

- Substantial addition to or reduction in the length of the project.
- Substantial addition of work on a connecting roadway.
- The addition of a new roadway to the proposed project.
- Substantive increase in project impacts.
- Addition of a *de minimis* Section 4(f) impact not previously identified.

Another public hearing may be required if the project scope change occurred after the public hearing on the draft environmental document.

1.3.6 Design Change

Additional public involvement opportunities may be needed when there is a change in the proposed project design.

Changes in the proposed project design are typically modifications that don't result in a substantial increase to the project impacts. Some examples include: changing the intersection type, a minor addition to the length of the project, a minor addition of work on a connecting roadway, changing from a ditch cross-section to curb and gutter, minor changes to the roadway width, etc.

If a design change occurs to the proposed project after the last PIM or the public hearing, the Project Team must consult with the REC and the Environmental Process and Documentation Section (EPDS) Region Liaison to determine if additional public involvement is required. The EPDS Region Liaison will determine if FHWA-Wisconsin Division Office staff should be included in the decision-making process.

The level of additional public involvement needed can also vary based on the type and location of the proposed design change. Additional public involvement could include a newsletter sent to the project mailing list to update the public, a meeting with individual property owners, holding a PIM for those members of the public directly impacted by the design change or holding another PIM for the entire public, along with noting the changes on a project design website. The appropriate level of public involvement will be determined during the consultation process.

1.3.7 Time Lapse Between the Last Public Involvement Meeting

If more than one year has passed between the last PIM and final environmental document approval, the Project Team must consult with the REC and the EPDS Region Liaison to consider if additional public involvement is required. The EPDS Region Liaison will determine if FHWA-Wisconsin Division Office staff should be included in the decision-making process.

1.3.8 Additional Public Involvement Related to Environmental Document Re-evaluations

If a written re-evaluation is required (see [FDM 20-40-10](#)), the Project Team must consult with the EPDS Region Liaison and FHWA-Wisconsin Division Office staff to determine if additional public involvement is required and the appropriate level of public involvement.

1.3.9 Pre-construction and Construction

A PIM prior to the start of construction and/or during construction (as needed) may be considered to provide the affected public with timely updates regarding access closures, utility interruptions and location of work activity. These meetings also give the public an opportunity to ask questions about potential construction impacts and inform the construction team of any concerns related to those impacts. Project updates during construction can be included on the project website.

Project Teams are encouraged to consider continuation of business outreach throughout the construction phase of the project through the In This Together program or other outreach efforts.

1.3.10 Issue-Specific Project Development Actions

There are other issue-specific project development actions that may require a separate PIM and other actions for which the Project Team could consider holding a separate PIM.

When noise barriers have been determined to be a feasible and reasonable method of noise abatement, a separate PIM must be held (See [FDM 23-35-20](#)).

1.4 Developing a Public Involvement Meeting

The following guidelines may be used for developing an effective PIM.

Remember that you are representing the department. Assume any statement you make regarding the proposed action could be cited by another source.

A. Before the Meeting

- Work with the RCM to determine if the meeting will be in-person, virtual or a combination of both.
- Determine a time for the meeting that is convenient for most community members (not conflicting with local functions). Early evening meetings (i.e., 4-6 pm) are often more suitable for the public. Contact local officials to find out a time that is most convenient and the best location for the meeting.
- Before booking a site for an in-person PIM, be sure the meeting place is accessible as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (see [FDM 6-5-20](#)). WisDOT or its consultants may not hold public meetings without providing wheelchair accessibility to the meeting.
- If there will be a virtual component of a PIM, contact the RCM to determine the format and the platform of the PIM.
- Inform citizens and groups of the meeting's purpose, date and time. Announce the meeting two to three weeks in advance. Mailings and notices in local newspapers can be effective for this purpose.
- All notices should include information on how people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision can access services. This includes using TDD or the Wisconsin Telecommunication Relay System (see [FDM 6-5-20.5](#)), as well as the option to request an interpreter at the meeting. Posting meetings on the project website and other social media platforms should also occur.
- Work with the RCM to determine if PIM materials should be published in other languages and who will publish if the responsibility is not included as part of a project with a Two- or Three-Party Design Contract Special Provisions document.
- For projects that may involve the acquisition of right-of-way interest, at a minimum, a notice of the PIM should be mailed to all property owners that have the potential for property acquisition.
- Assign tasks to specific people. A meeting checklist with timeline, task list and task assignments is helpful and alleviates confusion.
- It is recommended to schedule a "dry run" of the meeting to anticipate any problems with logistical or technology issues. Resolve all problems before the meeting begins.
- Determine staff who will be present and make sure they know their role so they are adequately prepared. Departmental staff working on the project should try to attend so they can be there to provide responses to audience questions in their areas of expertise.
- Be sure one WisDOT staff person (typically the RCM) is assigned to handle questions from the media. Let all staff working at the PIM know who has been assigned that role.
- All visual material shown at the meeting must be easy to see by everyone, use clear language and be easy to understand.
- Arrive early to allow time for setting up exhibits, computers, displays, tables and chairs and other needed logistics. Make sure to test all audio/visual equipment.

B. During the Meeting

- Facilitating meetings, hearings or other events is critical and used to gain valuable information to move forward. A facilitator should know the audience, anticipate questions, acknowledge behaviors and be able to negotiate skillfully. Understand what facilitation tools can be used and how to use them. Not only will the meeting run smoother, but better outcomes will likely result.
- Be warm and welcoming. Thank attendees for participating and ask them to put their name and address on the sign-in sheet so that they will be informed of future project developments. If a virtual format is being used, work with the RCM to determine the format for attendees to sign-in.
- Provide attendees with a public involvement comment form. Explain that the form can be filled out and submitted at the meeting or returned by the date specified on the form. Have virtual attendees submit comments by any combination of email, online form and/or verbal comments during the PIM via the platform being used.

- Staff may choose to record individual comments or group presentations. If individual comments will be recorded, staff should first get verbal permission from the person. If a group presentation will be recorded (via video, audio or both), the presentation facilitator should announce that the entire presentation, including public comments and questions, will be recorded. The recordings must be made part of the administrative record and retained similar to other items included as part of the administrative record.
- A handout providing proposed project details and Project Team contact information should be considered for use at the PIM.
- These above-mentioned forms are on the environmental programs forms and tools website.

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

- All staff attending the PIM should also add their names to the sign-in sheet as part of the meeting record.
- If there are elected officials in attendance, ask them before the meeting if they would like to be introduced. Make a special effort to determine any specific questions they may have.
- When responding to audience questions, do not dominate the discussion with lengthy comments. Keep answers short and speak in non-technical language. Give direct responses, but, if you do not know an answer, find a staff member that can help. If no one knows the answer, get contact information from the person asking the question and let them know we will get them an answer.
- Use an informal or semi-formal structure that encourages citizen input and responses. A group presentation with an optional question-and-answer session can be a valuable public engagement tool and should be strongly considered. If a group presentation is made, the public will typically expect an opportunity to ask questions.
- Use simple visual aids (e.g., video clips, aerial photography, narrated PowerPoint videos, etc.) to clarify the project and have enough information so people are well informed.
- Be receptive to citizen input even if it is emotional. Note reactions and suggestions. Listen carefully and ask questions to be sure you understand the viewpoints. Be professional and objective when comments or criticisms are directed at the project design. Maintain a calm demeanor, but do not let one or two people take over the meeting with continued negativity.
- Present all viable alternatives at the meeting. Alternatives can be presented using maps, renderings, hypothetical examples or case studies, photographs of sites, project overlays, etc. Clearly explain the advantages and disadvantages using qualitative or quantitative methods in clear, understandable terms. It is important that all participants understand the alternatives presented and that their input and viewpoint is important.
- Also include an exhibit of all alternatives previously analyzed that have been eliminated from further consideration.

C. After the Meeting

- Be sure to respond to any unanswered questions as timely as practicable.
- Retain notes of individual or group discussions in the project file.
- Consider holding a debriefing session after the PIM so everyone has a chance to hear what you heard. This technique is especially valuable when the PIM is held in multiple rooms or on multiple days.

1.5 Standardized Public Involvement Meeting Sign-In Sheet and Comment Form

The Public Involvement Meeting Sign-in Sheet and the Public Involvement Meeting Comment Form are the only form formats that should be used at a PIM. The reverse side of the Public Involvement Meeting Comment Form should include a mailing label and pre-paid postage. These forms are on the environmental programs forms and tools website.

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

1.6 Public Involvement Meeting and Section 4(f) *De Minimis* Findings

Be sure to provide the public with a reasonable opportunity to comment on the impacts of the proposed project as they relate to Section 4(f) resources. This is particularly important if a Section 4(f) *de minimis* finding could be applicable to any of the proposed actions (See Procedure 6-5-25.2.1).

1.7 Local Unit of Government Board and Committee Meetings

Providing a presentation during a local unit of government board meeting or other regularly scheduled committee meeting is a method for satisfying PIM requirements for some types of low-impact projects such as roadway resurfacing. When this method is used, the Project Team should ensure that the project is included in the governmental board or committee's agenda.

Written notification of the Project Team presentation should be mailed to property owners who use the roadway to access their property or depend on the roadway for customer access to their business.

A separate news release, indicating that the Project Team will be making this presentation at the board or committee meeting, should also be issued in the local newspaper encouraging attendance by those persons interested in the project.

Prior to issuing the news release, the Project Team should determine what level of public input will be allowed by the board or committee. If there is not availability for public discussion as part of the presentation itself, the Project Team should make arrangements to answer questions in another location of the building. If project controversy is anticipated, other methods of public involvement should also be incorporated into the PIP.