

**DEVELOPING AND ADVANCING EFFECTIVE  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE STRATEGIES FOR RURAL AND SMALL  
COMMUNITIES**



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## **INRODUCTION**

The objective of this research was to help transportation planners, practitioners and other decision makers in rural areas and other smaller communities develop effective, locally appropriate, replicable strategies for public involvement in transportation planning and programming, especially to engage environmental justice communities in working with transportation planners to co-create strategies that will mitigate or avoid prospective environmental justice issues.

Working initially with six competitively selected planning organizations in rural and urban areas of less than 200,000 population, found that effective practices for public involvement in transportation planning required as diverse a set of strategies in smaller metropolitan areas as in those with much larger populations, but smaller areas' planning agencies have correspondingly smaller staffs, and must be selective in their use of various public involvement strategies.

During the course of this research, all six sites responded, as well as from their peer MPOs across the country, that there are few reliably effective strategies for engaging with minority and low-income community stakeholders in smaller metropolitan areas and in rural areas. Therefore, an eight-step framework was developed to guide planning agencies through this engagement with low-income community stakeholders, which CTAA itself followed in its work with the selected communities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Through a competitive call for projects, six communities were selected to participate as field sites for this research activity. Each site had a local issue related to public involvement or low-income/minority community engagement in its planning processes for which examination and capacity-building assistance would be helpful. These sites were (a) the Lake Tahoe basin on the California/Nevada border, (b) Valdosta, Georgia, (c) Midland, Michigan, (d) St. Joseph, Missouri, (e) San Angelo, Texas, and (f) Yakima, Washington.



Figure 1: Map of US, showing location of six sites participating in this study. Created by CTAA

In each site, the local partner was a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization, included the following entities:

- Tahoe MPO (housed within the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency), Stateline NV
- Valdosta-Lowndes MPO (housed within the Southern Georgia Regional Commission), Valdosta GA
- Midland Area Transportation Study, Midland MI
- St. Joseph Area Transportation Study Organization, St. Joseph MO
- San Angelo MPO, San Angelo TX
- Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, Yakima WA

The project team began engaging with these six sites in August 2015. With the exception of one community (San Angelo) that suspended its participation in this study on account of losing its senior staff in December 2015, the project team continued to engage with these sites through August 2016.

More detailed profiles of these sites and their issues of stakeholder engagement addressed in this study are included as an appendix to this report. However, below are brief descriptions of the local challenges that led to these planning agencies' participation in the study, at least as initially presented to the project team when the sites were selected in June 2015.

#### **Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, Stateline NV**

As TRPA proceeds with the development of its upcoming Tahoe MPO regional transportation plan for the Lake Tahoe basin of California and Nevada, it is concerned about the effectiveness of outreach and participation by the area's Latino community, by officials in the region's local governments, and by other often-excluded populations such as older individuals and persons with disabilities. TRPA has a solid foundation of community involvement from which to launch its next public involvement activities, as demonstrated through its recent Active Transportation Plan and Coordinated Public

Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan. However, it sees the need to have an even more inclusive and effective program of stakeholder engagement as it updates the regional transportation plan.

### **Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Valdosta GA**

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC), parent agency of the Valdosta-Lowndes MPO, faces some very specific planning challenges. As a result, it had an almost immediate need to boost its capacity with respect to: (a) increasing the depth and breadth of low-income and minority community participation in its planning processes, (b) helping quantify and engage community leaders' awareness around the possible needs and options for urban public transit and improved pedestrian/bicycle transportation mobility within Valdosta, and (c) enhancing local officials' level of interest and engagement in the transportation planning processes for the Valdosta metropolitan planning area.

### **Midland Area Transportation Study, Midland MI**

As a brand-new MPO, the Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS) has a lot on its plate. One of the important tasks at hand is to develop the initial long-term metropolitan transportation plan for the MPO's planning area. Because this is the first time in Midland's history that such a task has been undertaken, there's no history of public involvement in the transportation planning process. MATS wants to be sure of receiving input from the area's lower-income, minority, and senior community stakeholders as it crafts this first-ever metropolitan transportation plan for the Midland area.

### **St Joseph Area Transportation Study Organization, St Joseph MO**

The St Joseph Area Transportation Study Organization (SJATSO) has demonstrated its commitment to public involvement through a number of steps, including traditional forms of outreach and involvement, plus the use of social media, and targeted outreach to specific segments of the community, as exemplified through its recently updated Safe Routes to Schools plan and city-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. However, there is much that the MPO wants to do to improve the scope and efficacy of its community engagement, particularly with respect to the lower-income and minority communities within the St Joseph area. The importance of community engagement will loom large in the near future, as plans proceed to rebuild or reconfigure the Interstate 229 viaduct through St Joseph's central business district, which may have significant implications for the city's low-income and minority residents, many of whom live in the area directly affected by whatever work is done in connection with the viaduct's rebuilding or replacement. To support a responsible planning process, the MPO wants to improve the quality of its engagement with St Joseph's low-income and minority populations.

### **San Angelo MPO, San Angelo TX**

*[Note: CTAA's engagement with SA-MPO ended in December 2015 upon the departure of the then-director of SA-MPO.]*

The San Angelo MPO (SA-MPO) has demonstrated its commitment to public participation through a number of steps, including traditional forms of outreach and involvement, plus the use of its website and social media, all of which have helped

inform many of SA-MPO's recent plans and projects. However, when SA-MPO considers the substantial minority population of the city, it becomes apparent there's been little participation by Latinos or other minority community members. SA-MPO staff felt that the area's transit, bicycle, pedestrian and roadway projects reflected this lack of engagement with the area's low-income and minority communities.

### **Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, Yakima, WA**

After many years of community-wide advocacy, the community secured funding for a new thoroughfare, Interstate interchange and Yakima River bridge to connect the city of Yakima with its eastern suburb of Terrace Heights, which will reduce traffic congestion on existing river crossings and facilitate economic development of land that used to be the site of a large lumber mill. However, this "East-West Corridor" will pass right through the heart of a lower-income, predominantly Latino residential neighborhood on the north side of downtown Yakima. At a minimum, YVCOG needs to assure it's taking the proper steps to involve the public in development of an updated metropolitan transportation plan that reflects the state's funding of this Corridor project, and the City of Yakima realizes that there will need to be an environmental justice equity analysis as part of the environmental reviews required for the project to move forward. While they have a history of successful collaboration around advocating for the region's transportation priorities, the city of Yakima, Yakima County, and Washington State DOT do not have a strong history of working arm-in-arm to carry out a joint project like the Corridor.

The project team's involvement with each of the project sites followed the same general model:

1. The team held an initial conference call with the project site's planning agency (often joined by interested staff from the state DOT and/or the FHWA division office) to gather additional information and refine the targeted effort to have a clear statement of the issue to be addressed and how CTAA both can research the circumstances of the particular community and can lend CTAA's expertise to have the issue addressed satisfactorily. This often led to a regular pattern of monthly or bi-monthly telephone contacts with the site and key stakeholders.
2. In almost every instance (the one exception was Tahoe), there was at least one on-site experience involving the project team traveling to the site. Details of these site visits varied, but included such things as meetings, study sessions, fact-finding or data collection, listening sessions, workshops, or other mutually determined outreach/inclusion/engagement activities that helped address the identified local issue(s) through improved public involvement or community engagement.
3. Following the on-site experience, The team developed an informal implementation plan to guide the local site's stakeholders to a satisfactory resolution of their identified issue. Developing this plan generally entailed reviewing meeting notes and field observations from the on-site experience, performing background research as appropriate to the site and their issue, and phone/email informational interviews with pertinent stakeholders, peer practitioners and/or subject matter experts.
4. The team then continued regular contact (generally on a bi-monthly basis) with the local site to review progress, hear about evolving issues, and provide (or develop) ad hoc resource materials or peer contacts as appropriate. In two instances (Valdosta and Yakima), this continuing contact included additional travel for the team to meet in-person with the local site stakeholders to review progress and assist in implementation.

5. At the end of the teams's period of engagement with each site, a summary profile was developed and shared with that site's stakeholders for review and comment. The final drafts of these profiles are included as an appendix to this report.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Every one of the project sites presented a specific need to identify and deploy locally appropriate strategies for engaging with low-income and minority community stakeholders as part of the MPO's transportation planning process. Several of these sites had explored community engagement strategies used by larger planning agencies, either through on-line searches and visits to websites such as the FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building site, or through direct networking with their peers in these planning agencies; in any case, the tendency was to avoid adapting larger planning agencies' engagement strategies to their own circumstances.

In reviewing the experience of its engagements with these small MPOs, the team found some common observations that presented themselves in all the sites. Moreover, these observations were evident in the team's impromptu scan of the entire network of MPOs in smaller urbanized areas. These observations were:

- There is a pervasive perception among smaller planning agencies that public involvement techniques that work well in larger urbanized areas do not readily adapt to smaller communities; even when scalable or adaptable approaches are identified, smaller communities' planners and leaders have a tendency to resist using materials, images, stories or examples that carry the look and feel of major metropolitan areas.
- The involvement of low-income and minority community stakeholders in planning processes is seen as particularly challenging, since these stakeholders tend not to have a history of involvement or inclusion, tend not to have organized advocacy networks in smaller communities, and often feel alienated by the public involvement methods traditionally used by transportation planning organizations.
- Small planning agencies have to be judicious in the use of their staff resources; among a majority of all MPOs, there are fewer than five – and often only two or three – professional staff members, which means these agencies have a limited number of staff-hours to spend on all the functions of an MPO, often causing those activities seen as experimental, non-essential, or of uncertain outcomes to be given a back seat to the necessary, mandatory technical and policy functions of the MPO.
- As with almost any organization, small planning agencies are most receptive to learning about and adapting the techniques used by those they regard as their peers; FHWA and its partners and contractors are seen as doing much to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange of ideas and practices, but smaller planning agencies are interested in much more of peer-to-peer exchange that can be done without having to travel to conferences, in-person peer exchanges or traditional classroom-style training events.

The team had launched this applied research project anticipating that its staff would be working with participating sites to co-create replicable strategies in public involvement and community engagement. Once working with these sites, though, it became apparent that some items of additional research and information collection were necessary:



1. The team prepared a two-page “Transportation Planning Stakeholder Engagement Bookshelf” as a compilation of selected web-based resources, documents, and policy guidance aimed to help smaller transit agencies quickly connect with pertinent, readily usable documents and information. That document is included as an appendix to this report.
2. To gauge the extent of replicable peer practice, the team conducted an industry-wide scan of all 274 MPOs serving smaller metropolitan areas to learn about their current, proven practices of engagement with low-income and minority community stakeholders in their planning processes. The results of that informal scan were compiled into a document, included as an appendix to this report, that first was shared with the project sites, to help them learn from some of their peers’ readily adapted strategies, and then shared informally with other MPOs in a group email from the team.
3. The team drafted an eight-step framework for low-income community engagement in transportation planning. This framework guided the team’s work with the participating project sites, and was shared with them as a resource for their ongoing engagement with low-income and minority community stakeholders. Below is the text of this framework:

## ***A FRAMEWORK FOR LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING***

### **Introduction**

Every planning organization or office, whether large or small, metropolitan or rural, will need to engage with low-income community members and stakeholders as part of their planning function. In some instances, this engagement comes easily and effectively; in other instances, engaging with low-income communities can be a tremendous challenge. Among smaller planning organizations – and often among larger organizations with more staff – there is the added challenge of finding time-efficient approaches for engaging with these and other community stakeholders.

To help the transportation planner in a small organization find a successful path to low-income community engagement, what follows is an eight-step approach for addressing these challenges and opportunities. When reading this document and any supporting or linked material, it is important to remember that any views, opinions, suggestions or recommendations are those of the author, and do not represent official positions or policies of the United States Government.

As you can see, this framework follows a set of eight question-based steps. For some transportation planners, the questions themselves will be sufficient for guiding them through this process of engagement; for others who need information on interpretation, strategies, etc., some supporting information may be necessary.

If you don't have time to read your way through all eight steps, simply recall that phrase from the second "habit" of Stephen Covey's 1989 book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Begin with the end in mind." Before you launch any specific approach or strategy for engaging with this (or any other) community, think through the following:

- Why am I seeking input from this portion of the community?
- How will they know how the input they provide is benefiting them?
- Am I seeking input from this community, or am I seeking their endorsement of decisions that others already have made?
- Are we exchanging input and ideas using terminology and language that everyone understands?
- When will they begin to see the results of the input they're providing to me?

Those questions probably will not have definitive answers, and it's almost certain that things will change as you carry out your engagement with your low-income community members or stakeholders. Nevertheless, it's incredibly useful to wrap your thinking around the above questions as you proceed with the eight-step framework below.

### **Step 1: What's the general context behind your need for low-income community engagement?**

Basically, you begin this framework by completing the statement “I want to hear from the low-income community because....”

Presumably, your motivation is something more substantive than “because I have to check this box in our process.” There are a lot of reasons why low-income community engagement may be important. Some examples are:

- *“We are beginning to plan for a major road project that will be disruptive to a certain part of our city with many low-income residents, and it’s important to find ways that this project can help, rather than harm, the residents of this neighborhood.”*
- *“We’re beginning to develop a metropolitan transportation plan that needs to consider everyone’s long-range transportation issues and priorities; it’s important that we get a handle on the transportation issues of our area’s lower-income community members.”*
- *“Our city has an area that’s considered ‘blighted’ by some officials and developers, who are ready to launch an aggressive plan for redevelopment. But for some residents, this area is their only real chance for finding affordable places to live. Are there ways we can balance the benefits of redevelopment with the social costs of potential ‘gentrification’ and displacement?”*
- *“Historically, our approach to bicycle and pedestrian mobility has been addressed through ‘safe routes to schools’ and the development of trails and paths for recreational bicycling. But it seems that more and more of our area’s lower-wage workers are commuting by foot or by bike. Is this an accurate impression, and – if so – is it one we should address differently in our ‘active transportation’ planning and programming?”*
- *“Currently, the only transit program we have is a dial-a-ride program that mainly serves older residents and those with disabilities or other mobility challenges. It’s pretty minimal. We have a lot of data showing limited automobile availability in those parts of the community where incomes are low and unemployment is high. Should we be making the case that a more substantive investment in transit is needed, and what kind of transit would likely be of value to this and other segments of our community?”*
- *“The last few times we updated our Section 5310 coordinated public transit – human services transportation plan, we’ve had good participation by groups representing our older population, and by groups advocating for the needs of our area’s residents with disabilities. If we don’t know the mobility needs of our lower-income population, there’s no real way we can be sure their needs can be reflected in the Section 5310 projects that get selected.”*

## **Step 2: What preliminary expectations does the planner hold about the input being sought from low-income community stakeholders?**

Once in a while, you'll have a chance encounter through which you're given a wealth of reliable, actionable data about transportation needs and patterns within your low-income community. That's the rare exception, but what do you actually want – and expect – to receive as a result of your engagement with this portion of your area's population?

You're probably after certain types of information, depending on how you framed the first step of this process. Maybe you're seeking to be informed about longer-term trends and priorities over how people get to jobs and other destinations, so you want to know more about travel patterns and challenges. Or perhaps you're beginning to plan a specific project, and you're seeking input on design elements or other aspects of co-creation. Maybe you're trying to determine modal share for getting people to and from jobs, so you want information about working hours, origins, destinations, vehicle use and availability, travel preferences, etc.

In general, at this step, you're trying to complete a version of the sentence, "I'd really like to hear from you about...."

The ways in which you frame your initial expectations and desires will vary a lot, of course, but some examples could be:

- *"How do you get from home to the places you need to go – work, school, doctors, shopping, church, etc. – and what's going to be helped or hurt if we extend and expand a road through your neighborhood?"*
- *"What's working okay, and what's not working so well, about how you get to the places you need to go in our community, and what might make a difference to your trips to work, school, shopping, or the other places you need to go?"*
- *"What do you like, and what don't you like so much, about the neighborhood where you live? How does it compare to other neighborhoods you might like to call 'home'? What ideas do you have about its future, and what improvements would you like to see in this, or any other neighborhood where you happen to live?"*
- *"How often do you walk (or maybe ride a bicycle) to work, to go shopping or run errands, to school or other places? If you're going someplace close to your home, when would you consider walking there, and is there anything that could make you feel better about walking in your neighborhood?"*
- *"How do people in our community get to work if they don't have cars, or can't afford to drive their cars? If we had some kind of transit service in the community, who'd use it, and how could it best meet peoples' needs? Under what circumstances do you think you might take a bus to work or other destinations, if we had a transit service here?"*
- *"Do you think there are problems with transportation in our community that keep people from holding on to jobs, or that keep people stuck in poverty? If so, what do you see as these problems, and what might be some solutions?"*

To be honest, asking open-ended, or technical, questions of “laypeople” invariably will yield a huge number of responses that will strike you as too broad, not very actionable, unrealistic, self-centered, etc. That’s okay. As long as you’re talking to people who know you just want their ideas, know that all you’re doing is collecting ideas, and know that you’re not about to make any promises or commitments to do more than listen to and think about their ideas, it should be okay. Keep in mind that effective engagement depends on knowing and accepting where your audience is at the moment, even if it’s not where you’re ready to be. As a planning professional, you will be able to sort out the useful perspectives and ideas from all that you gather in your efforts of engagement. The point of this step is to know from where it is that you’re seeking to begin the engagement with your community.

### **Step 3: What low-income community has a stake in the subject of this engagement?**

Before you take any further steps, it’s essential to remember that there actually is no such thing as “the low-income community.” Of all the ways that people identify and associate themselves in our culture: age, religion, ethnicity, geography, language, etc., people generally do not identify and associate with one another purely on the basis of economic status, especially not on the basis of low economic status. While there are times when individuals or groups will reflect on times in their history (or present) as not having much money, wealth or other assets, this is presented as a marker for real or pursued improvement, not as an indicator of self-identity.

In other words, to state what is probably obvious, you never speak in terms of wanting to engage with individuals, groups or communities “because they’re poor,” nor do you ever speak about any real or assumed commonalities with “other poor people like yourself.” That doing or saying any such thing is horribly insulting, to put it mildly, should be obvious.

Unless you’re working on a plan to eradicate poverty in your community, your interests are likely to be centered around a specific segment of the community that appears to have a high concentration of households with incomes below the federal poverty line, or some other indicator of what we tend to call poverty (e.g., a closely correlated, but different, measure used in some settings for defining low-income neighborhoods or communities is the number of school children eligible for free and reduced meals under the federal government’s National School Lunch Program). An effective community engagement strategy recognizes your answers to “Step 1” and “Step 2,” above, and works most effectively when you focus on the segments of the community most closely aligned with what you’ve begun to outline.

For instance, if you’re looking to identify the environmental justice risks and possible mitigation strategies related to a specific infrastructure project, you’re probably going to want to focus much of your engagement on the residents and stakeholders of the specific neighborhood or geographic area you’ve identified as being at risk. On the other hand, if you’re aiming to see if transit improvements or other approaches can help increase workforce participation and household incomes across an entire city or other area that’s experiencing economic distress, you’ll probably be wanting to cast a much

wider net in terms of the people and stakeholders appropriate for your community engagement.

In general, at this step, you're trying to complete the statement, "The low-income community members with the greatest stake in this project are..., because...."

Examples of how this statement could play out include:

- *"We need to hear from the people who live near this proposed road project, because their lives may be disrupted through displacement of housing, through short-term health and safety risks posed by the construction itself, or by longer-term health and safety risks posed by the road project and the increased traffic it will bring through their neighborhood."*
- *"As we look at the ways people get around in our metropolitan area, it's easy to assume that almost everyone drives their own car. But it's important that we hear about the transportation issues among people who don't drive, who can't drive, and who want or need cost-effective alternatives to personal vehicle use, as these are the people in our community who may have the most to gain – or lose – from the transportation choices that arise from our metropolitan transportation plan."*
- *"The people who live in our central business district are sure to be significantly affected by some of the ideas being explored for infrastructure improvements and redevelopment. We need to hear from this segment of our community directly, so that we can more accurately gauge the extent of impacts and possible solutions or alternatives to the problems they could experience."*
- *"There are data that indicate a lot of our lower-income residents walk or bike to their jobs, and that a lot children in our "higher poverty" neighborhoods walk or bike to school. We need to learn more about the pedestrian and bicycle travel patterns and concerns of these users of our transportation network, so that we can be sure we're trying to make the right level, and the right kind, of investments in safe and accessible sidewalks and bicycle routes."*
- *"The transit service does a good job of collecting data and ridership surveys from its present users. But in order to determine what transit services may be of best use to those who don't currently use the system, we need to find ways to engage with a greater cross-section of our area's zero-car and low-income households, who we suspect could benefit the most from improved transit services and investments."*
- *"Thanks to the ongoing participation of the local social service organizations in our coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process, we get what seems like constructive input on the priorities of some segments of the community's lower-income population, such as low-income persons with disabilities, low-income seniors, refugees, even our community's homeless population. But we feel the need to find ways to hear about the mobility needs of low-income households who are not clientele of the social services programs in*

*our area, so that they are not at risk of being left out of the mobility solutions we develop.”*

#### **Step 4: What information does the planning agency already possess about the identified low-income community?**

No doubt, you already possess a wealth of relevant data that paint a quantitative picture of the community and issues you're seeking to address. You may even have data that begin to suggest possible strategies or solutions to some mobility challenges. Examples include Census or other demographic data, such as race/ethnicity, LEP status, poverty status, incidence of vehicle ownership, journey-to-work data; you probably also have some degree of employment status and workforce participation data available, as well as information on housing stock and density, educational attainment; your local schools may have summary data that are useful to you, as may your local public health and public safety agencies. There also are likely to be environmental data, in case you're examining an issue with environmental quality or environment justice concerns; these data may address air or water quality, waste and pollution sites. And it should go without saying that you would have transportation system information, including traffic counts, traffic safety data, presumably some level of bicycle/pedestrian travel data, and – at least to some degree – data on the condition of your area's transportation system assets: roads, bridges, highways, pedestrian or bicycle facilities, transit equipment and facilities, etc.

As you prepare for some aspect of engagement with your identified low-income community, chances are that you will not need to carry out any original data collection. More likely, you need to determine what data do you have in hand that help you become best-prepared for engaging with this segment of your community. The challenge rests in selectively pulling and culling from existing data sets, more than in generating or analyzing new data.

Don't let excessive analysis take over at this point! You're simply trying to paint the background of the picture with the information you have; you're not trying to find quantitative solutions to local problems.

In other words, you're basically asking yourself the question “What relevant background information do I already know about the community that will help assure effective community engagement?” Some examples could be things as simple as:

- *What's the population – including density, poverty status and ethnic group identification – of the area under study?*
- *What pedestrian and vehicular traffic counts do we have for this area, and what transportation safety data do we have?*
- *Is there useful information to be gathered from EPA's “EJ screen” tool (<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>)?*

- *What data do we have on zero-car households or other segments of the community with probable transportation challenges?*
- *What can we learn from the area's commuting data, such as represented in Census' "On the Map" tool (<http://onthemap.ces.census.gov>)?*
- *What data do we have on housing availability and affordability in our area?*
- *Do we have data on travel patterns, travel preferences and challenges, and gaps in transportation availability or accessibility?*

### **Step 5: What institutions, organizations, formal and informal social networks, etc., are active within the low-income community being considered?**

This step is important! It's important for two reasons: (1) in many cases, the planning agency won't have the wherewithal to conduct extensive community engagement using its own staff or contractor resources, and (2) the vast majority of low-income community members, like many of the rest of us, are much more likely to trust their known, existing networks as conduits to share concerns, respond to ideas, etc.

Your challenge, then, is to identify the intermediary networks that will be of most help to you as you prepare to engage with community members around your issue, topic, or project of concern. The use of community networks as a means of engagement is not new, and probably is something you already do in a number of settings. As you know, you can't engage through these networks unless you know who they are, since different places will have different networks and organizations.

This, therefore, is an act of discovery for you, the planner, to carry out. The connections you can establish through this discovery probably will yield tremendous long-term benefits for much of your work in the years to come.

Just a few of the networks that exist within low-income communities are:

- School parent networks
- Churches (either singly, or through councils or other networks of churches)
- Business groups, including community-specific chambers of commerce
- Community advocacy organizations (where they exist, these can be incredibly useful, but the planner must remain mindful of advocacy groups' own agendas, perspectives, priorities and biases).

Supporting roles may be provided through some specific channels, such as public housing residents' councils, Head Start parent groups, or publicly funded service delivery networks, such as community action programs, senior services, disability services, etc. These networks can be informative and useful (for instance, they can be great sources of data and contacts), but will be focused around particular populations and/or particular programs, which will introduce a bit of bias of which the planner should be mindful. In addition, the clientele of these services, programs and venues may



respond differently to your engagement efforts, if it seems to them that your efforts are tied to the particular office or service they're access at that moment.

So, your focus at this stage is to answer the question, "What formal and informal networks and organizations can I find in our community that can help provide inroads for engaging with the low-income community?"

As mentioned above, that question has innumerable possible answers. Some of them could include:

- The school- or church-based groups whose students or churchgoers live along a corridor at risk of being affected through roadway expansion, or the business groups whose members or customers may be along this corridor;
- Employers and businesses, or community colleges or technical schools whose constituencies focus on households seeking to educate and work their way out of being at risk of living in poverty;
- Neighborhood or civic associations that focus on helping residents promote the betterment of their local neighborhood; or
- For those neighborhoods with very high concentrations of specific ethnicities or other cultural identification, there may be culturally-associated community or social groups (although you should take heed of who is, and who is not, part of any such network in the community you're seeking to engage).

### **Step 6: What strategies seem most viable for the transportation planner to use these identified intermediary groups or networks to get community stakeholder input?**

This is the central question. Its answer will depend on your area, the issues under examination, and the networks you're using to get stakeholder input. It also depends on how you're using your identified stakeholder networks.

In some places, agencies contract with community organizations to perform outreach, conduct community surveys, hold visioning sessions or other meetings, etc. If you have a topic and an organization for which this sort of strategy makes sense, you'll need to ensure you have the right resources for such a contract, that you're following the proper procurement procedures, and that you're managing the project to be sure you're getting the kind of results that help you and are responsive to the community.

In many other places, the use of intermediary networks is not a contractual relationship. Instead, community groups may agree to offer their meeting spaces for your engagement functions, or may have their community leaders introduce you to members of their community. This can work just fine, but it's important to establish that relationship between you and the community network and its leaders. In other words, it's not sufficient to show up in someone's meeting room and assume there will be an audience, never mind a trusting and receptive audience, just because a community group is letting

you use their space; you have to be introduced, and the network you're using has to do its part to let members know you're to be trusted with their input.

As you know from your other experiences, the nature of the setting sets the nature of what you'll receive from the interaction. Formal meetings can be good for seeing a communal "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" on already-engineered alternatives, or for giving the chance for public ratification of decisions that already have been made, but they generally are not as effective for generating ideas or airing personal or particular concerns. Informational tables or displays can be good for gathering a diversity of spontaneous, candid reactions, and often work for gleaning constructive input on topics or alternatives; note, though, that their value hinges on the amount of preparation you give to the setting. You don't need "flashy," but you do need to be prepared to present ideas, elicit responses, and be seen as trustworthy and receptive throughout the activity.

At this stage, you're essentially completing the statement, "I'll get the involvement I'm seeking by...." Depending on your context, your community, the nature of the involvement you're seeking to have, and the nature of how you plan to interact with your community, whether directly or through intermediary organizations, your strategies of involvement will vary tremendously. A few possibilities, some real, some hypothetical, include the following:

- Got schools? In a neighborhood where a lot of lower-income families' children walk or bike to school across the planned route of a major roadway expansion, meet with the networks you developed as part of your "Safe Routes to Schools" planning to learn more about these trips to school, brainstorm traffic calming or pedestrian safety measures, and otherwise elicit ideas from the community as to how this busy roadway can be made attractive and non-threatening to the neighborhood.
- Trying to get community input to help identify priorities for your next metropolitan transportation plan? Borrow a visualization technique first used by larger planning agencies, but now deployed in many medium and smaller metropolitan areas, in which participants can sit at a computer you've loaded with a range of digital alternatives, and can play with different scenarios in a game-like format.
- Almost every community-oriented planner or organizer will remind you, "to engage with people, find them where they are." Rather than wait for people with input to show up at a hearing or public meeting, use community groups you've trained to help go block by block in a neighborhood whose input is important to you, armed with some questions they'd like to have answered, and have these groups' members (or volunteers) have impromptu "front-porch conversations" with neighborhood residents – on their own "turf" – to hear about issues and priorities. Yes, you'll pick up a lot of feedback that won't be relevant, but you also can tease out the nuggets of what really matters to people. And yes, the best way to do this is by contracting with organizations already on the street and active in the neighborhoods from which you want input, so this will cost money and take time. But the results can be worth it, especially if you're looking at ways to mitigate the disruption of displaced housing stock, jobs, or services in areas slated for development or redevelopment.

- Are you looking for ways to give credibility to pedestrian and bicycle priorities in your area? Take advantage of ways that celebrate local walking or biking, such as “national walk to school day” (typically in early autumn, near the beginning of the school year), “national bike to work day” (typically in mid-May each year), or local events that may help celebrate – or be enhanced by – your area’s own trails, bike routes, parkways or other amenities. Do you have a linear park or parkway in your urban core that people use as a pedestrian thoroughfare? Work with community groups to set up a festival, games, art fair or other event along its route in spring or summer, and then interview attendees and measure pedestrian traffic. Are you looking for ways to promote bicycling as a serious mode of transportation across all ages and income levels? Borrow an idea first pioneered years ago in Colombia, and block off a few miles of streets on a Sunday for a “ciclovia,” at which you can gauge participation, conduct community surveys, perform outreach, etc.
- One of the challenges of transit planning is that many people will say they’d use public transit if available, but not so many people actually take advantage of transit once it actually becomes available. This is especially challenging if you’re considering the inauguration of fixed-route bus service in an area historically served only by demand-response transit. So, try a short-term, limited-scope pilot test of fixed-route transit, just to see what happens. An easy thing that many small cities have done is to launch a one-route “shoppers” service route seasonally, such as in the winter holiday shopping season. Or if you have a small college in town, start some kind of shuttle for students to help them get to or from campus at winter or spring break. The point is to put some buses in front of people, make it easy for them to use, and then develop ways to gauge the results, both from actual ridership as well as from some follow-up survey work. You’re probably going to get one of three possible results: (a) you’ve found a limited transit niche the community actually wants, (b) you’ve “primed the pump” of transit demand by presenting an attractive transit service that the community wants to see in some abundance, or (c) it’s a dud, and you learn that the community, despite what some of its members might have said, just isn’t ready for fixed-route transit.
- Looking for low-income voices in your coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan? You may do best if you focus on the issues surrounding the destinations or purposes of their trips, rather than the modality of travel. Are people challenged in getting to jobs? You might not know, unless you’re able to turn to businesses employing a fair number of lower-wage workers (these might include some service sector, lower-skilled manufacturing, call center, or retail employers); their managers or human resources experts may be the intermediaries you need in this pursuit. A related, but somewhat different network you can use may be your local workforce development service; if they report challenges in getting people to job interviews, or difficulties in job retention, because of transportation, you may have hit a gold mine of useful networks and valuable, actionable data. While you would need to proceed cautiously, you may also be able to use local public health, social services, public housing, or similar networks whose clientele tend to be lower-income as your pathways to participation by lower-income community voices in your coordinated planning processes.

## **Step 7: What are identified as the transportation-related benefits and risks – both real and imagined – among the low-income community?**

Here's the challenge: the things that matter greatly to you in your planning process may have no recognized meaning among the community you're seeking to engage. Similarly, the things that matter greatly to that community may strike you as tangential, or at least beyond the scope of what you're able to address. After all, you're a planner, and what people in the community desire most are immediate results, rather than plans. That's okay, but be sure you're entering the engagement process with your eyes open and your mental attitude ready to receive the unexpected, in terms of what you get from your engagement. Besides, transportation is one of those things that almost no one should have to think much about, if the system is working properly.

However you've come to this step, it's a good reminder that you should "expect the unexpected." In addition to heeding the principle that people tend to view transportation as part of the means to their desired ends, generally not viewing transportation as an end unto itself, it's good to remember that most people find it challenging, if not unnatural, to think in terms of long-term goals or priorities. Even when people recognize long-term community values that can be realized through transportation priorities, plans or projects, they will frame perceived risks and benefits in terms of short-term impacts.

As a result, you're bound to receive input that speaks to community members' interests, which may not always align with the interests you're hoping to address through your community involvement strategies. As you know, what you do in times like this is listen with an open mind and receptive ear to what is being shared; it will be up to you to tease out of that input the information that helps you be better informed in your planning process. This can mean listening to concerns about crime, lighting, pedestrian safety, current traffic issues, weaknesses of the current transit system, noise, siting of businesses or housing, etc. Even if these seem peripheral to what the planner is seeking, listen to these points and search for ways they can translate to transportation priorities. Listen to what is stated as complaints or risks, listen to points that sound untrue or uninformed, and then see about steering conversations or outreach activities into shaping positive benefits to the transportation matters being considered.

In any event, what you're doing at this step is receiving input and responding along the lines of "What you're telling me is that the benefits and risks [or 'pluses/minuses,' 'good things/bad things,' or whatever phrasing makes sense to you and your audience] that you see in this project/issue/topic/community are...."

As mentioned above, this will be open-ended and is likely to introduce information that is important to your audience, even if it's peripheral to your work or not actionable by you. The critical elements for you are to listen, and to acknowledge – at that moment, in real time – what you're hearing. This is important for a couple of reasons. For one, it's socially important that people know they're being heard as they're sharing their thoughts with you. Second, it's entirely possible that you, or the people with whom you're engaging, may need to clarify what's being communicated or understood. This is true in a number of situations, such as cases where there are cultural or language differences between you and your audience, when specific issues or technical topics are being discussed, or when your audience may not have a clear understanding of your role or the processes you're addressing in your engagement with this community.

## **Step 8: How will the low-income community and its stakeholders know that their views were heard?**

There should be some kind of feedback loop, and it should not involve waiting for a project to be built, for a final report to be published, nor for information to be posted to a web page. The planner should have a realistic mechanism for providing periodic and prompt feedback to the community. This feedback does not need to be comprehensive or complete; you just need to do something, and do it promptly.

What you're doing at this step is bringing the loop of engagement full circle, essentially telling your community's stakeholders "What we've done with the input you provided is..." Strategies for this feedback will vary, depending on the plan, the timeframe, the issues, the community, and the very nature of why you sought this input in the first place.

Some ways in which you can close this feedback loop include:

- Simple fliers or mailers that illustrate what's happening in your plans and programs, tied back to the input you received from the community; if it's a long-term or complex plan or project, you may want to focus on immediate outcomes or timelines, highlighting how the community's input will affect what's happening in the immediate neighborhood or in the immediate future.
- If you worked through community networks or community meetings to get input, then it may be wise to use these same networks or meeting venues to give short, follow-up presentations, with opportunities for questions, answers and dialogue.
- If the community input is helping motivate other parties to change or focus their efforts (e.g., persuading a local government to carry out a program of sidewalk or trail improvements, the prompting of changes in service by a local transit agency, or the launch of new services like bike-sharing, mobile phone-based community services, or new transportation options within the community), then you should be sure the leaders of these changes get their messages out in front of the community.

## **Conclusion**

On some topics, there is no conclusion. Engagement with your community is one of those things. It's an ongoing process, one in which you learn more about your community and how it's engaged with every cycle of projects and activities. Even the techniques of engagement will evolve. For instance, one used to assume that low-income communities had limited access to telephones and there was no such thing as Internet access; today, we see that rates of "smartphone" ownership are consistent across all household income brackets, and that mobile data services provide the principal medium of Internet access among lower-income households. Communications media continue to evolve, as do the communications preferences among various sectors of the community.

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But some things remain constant. With respect to involving all segments of your community in transportation planning processes, regardless of their income status, ethnic identity or other factors, the most critical elements are perseverance and the commitment to gain and retain the trust of your community.

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## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study was a straightforward look at how smaller urban and rural planning agencies may be able to better address their public involvement and stakeholder engagement strategies, especially with regard to low-income and minority community stakeholders. Along the way, CTAA became increasingly aware that smaller planning agencies face a host of issues with which they struggle every day, and for which further study could help this network of planners further improve their capacity and efficacy.

In presenting this brief list of topics, CTAA reminds FHWA and other interested parties that the transportation planning professionals in these smaller urban and rural areas repeatedly indicated they need research results and peer-to-peer sharing that speak to the circumstances of transportation planning in areas of populations well below 200,000. With that important reminder, some of the issues and topics these planners shared with CTAA that would benefit from further study include:

- Low-cost techniques for capturing bicycle and pedestrian travel data in smaller communities;
- How to engage stakeholders in setting targets for performance-based planning;
- Strategies smaller agencies can use for harnessing social media, mobile data and evolving technologies in public involvement and other aspects of transportation planning;
- Strategies for taking economic, public health and other community-based factors into account in smaller communities' planning processes; and
- How smaller areas' planning agencies can adapt current plans and models to fit autonomous vehicles, transportation activities and businesses in the "sharing economy," or the changes being wrought through increases in telework and the increasing prevalence of part-time and flexible work arrangements.

## CONCLUSION

In launching this research, CTAA's purpose was to identify one or more strategies that would help transportation planners, practitioners and other decision makers in rural areas and smaller metropolitan areas develop effective, locally appropriate, replicable strategies for public involvement in transportation planning and programming, especially to engage low-income and minority community stakeholders in working with transportation planners to co-create strategies for mitigating or avoiding prospective environmental justice issues.

CTAA wanted to see three things in its research: (1) whether it was possible to create successful, or at least promising, new methods for public involvement in transportation planning and environmental justice community impact assessments among smaller urban and rural planning agencies; (2) the extent to which smaller urban and rural planning agencies are able to engage "non-traditional" community partners in their transportation planning processes; and (3) the extent to which the public involvement and stakeholder engagement methods among smaller urban and rural planning agencies can be replicated by their peers.

CTAA learned that smaller planning agencies want to improve the extent and quality of their engagement with the public and with community stakeholders. These agencies are particularly interested in finding methods they can use for engaging with low-income and minority community representatives, but hold the perception that most of the strategies and methods used by larger planning organizations are neither replicable nor scalable in smaller urban areas. Whether their organizations are large or small, planning agency staff members believe that meaningful public involvement and community engagement is an intrinsic function of their own staff, and generally is not suited for contracting out to consultants or other external partners. However, this belief must be balanced by the need to carefully manage the amount of planning agency staff time that is spent on public involvement and all the other obligatory responsibilities of the agency. Among planning agencies in smaller urban areas and rural areas, there is a desire to learn more about the successful practices of their peers in comparable communities, but there is a perception that existing information-exchange strategies, whether those of FHWA or of the professional associations in the planning area, currently do not provide much information about the practices among these smaller planning agencies.

Responding to what was learned from the planning agencies involved in its field work, CTAA developed the eight-step framework for engagement that is presented in this report, and used that as a model for these sites to use. Following such a framework helped make it possible for the staff of these participating planning agencies to feel less intimidated by the responsibility of engaging with community stakeholders less well known to them.

Upon learning that these smaller planning agencies want to learn more about the practices of their peers, CTAA carried out an informal scan of the planning community, and identified a number of peer practices that it summarized and shared in an informal scanning report that was made available to all the smaller MPOs in the country, which is included as an appendix to this report. CTAA received many favorable comments from this effort, and heard the reinforced desire among these planning agencies in smaller areas to continue learning more from one another's practices.

Increasingly, CTAA heard from planning agencies about their concerns and challenges moving forward, including: (a) how to adjust their established methods of public involvement to fit new media, new technologies, and changing expectations in their communities, and (b) how to



incorporate new principles and requirements, such as those of performance-based planning and programming, into their approaches, including their approaches to public involvement and stakeholder engagement.

In summary, this research has led to these conclusions:

1. Yes, it is possible to create successful, or at least promising, new methods for public involvement in transportation planning and environmental justice community impact assessments among smaller urban and rural planning agencies. This is evidenced by the development of CTAA's eight-step framework for low-income and minority community engagement, and by the sharing of peer practices CTAA was able to facilitate among the transportation planning community.
2. Using techniques such as those described in the CTAA-developed framework, smaller urban and rural planning agencies indeed are able to engage "non-traditional" community partners in their transportation planning processes.
3. If there is a mechanism, however formal or informal, for the ongoing exchange of transportation planning practices and strategies, it is possible for public involvement and stakeholder engagement methods among smaller urban and rural planning agencies to be replicated by their peers.

## APPENDIX A:

# Transportation Planning Stakeholder Engagement “Bookshelf”

### *Websites*

FHWA/FTA Planning Capacity Building Program

<https://planning.dot.gov>

In particular, note their resources and publications on public engagement, at

[https://planning.dot.gov/focus\\_publicEngage.asp](https://planning.dot.gov/focus_publicEngage.asp)

FHWA Planning Office – Public Involvement site

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/)

FHWA Environmental Justice site

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/)

EPA Environmental Justice site

<http://www3.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>

This includes a number of helpful items, plus links to the federal interagency working group on EJ

National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation Coordination “LEP Resources” Bookshelf

<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=2189>

FTA Title VI guidance site

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12881.html>

This site includes several useful documents prepared for LEP purposes, which may be adaptable to other situations

### *Documents*

“Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking,” FHWA, 2015

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public\\_involvement/publications/pi\\_techniques/index.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/publications/pi_techniques/index.cfm)

“How to Engage Low-Literacy and Limited-English-Proficiency Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking,” FHWA, 2006

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/publications/low\\_limited/lowlim01.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/publications/low_limited/lowlim01.cfm)

“Environmental Justice Reference Guide,” FHWA, 2015

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/resources/reference\\_guide\\_2015/index.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/resources/reference_guide_2015/index.cfm)

“Environmental Justice Emerging Trends and Best Practices Guidebook,” FHWA, 2011

[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/resources/guidebook/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/resources/guidebook/)

“Transportation and Environmental Justice Case Studies,” FHWA, no date  
[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental\\_justice/case\\_studies/](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/environmental_justice/case_studies/)

## ***Regulatory/Policy Documents***

FHWA Environmental Justice Order

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/orders/664023a.cfm>

FTA Environmental Justice Circular

[http://www.fta.dot.gov/legislation\\_law/12349\\_14740.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/legislation_law/12349_14740.html)

## APPENDIX B:

### Public Involvement and Environmental Justice Strategies for Rural and Small Communities: A Sampling of Current Practice

As part of its research into effective public involvement and environmental strategies for rural and small metropolitan areas, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) conducted a scan of the 274 MPOs with planning responsibilities for urbanized areas under 200,000 population. In this scan, which took place during January 2016, CTAA asked these MPOs about the successful and potentially replicable strategies that were used to engage with low-income and minority communities as part of these MPOs' planning activities.

CTAA found that MPOs' effective stakeholder engagement strategies fell largely into two categories of activity. This is in addition to a number of information and outreach strategies for eliciting public involvement in traditional meetings or hearings.

Half of the responding MPOs reported their staff carried out a variety of strategies in which they engaged directly with community members, such as through direct interviews, attendance at community meetings, appearances at community events, etc. Half of the responding MPOs reported various forms of using trusted intermediaries (e.g., advocacy groups, community organizations, churches, schools) to host meetings, conduct focus groups, etc. In a few instances, MPOs carried out more extensive activities to include low-income or minority community participation in planning processes, such as conducting day-long workshops or multi-day community charrettes.

Below are just a few of the practices reported by MPOs responding to CTAA's scan.

#### ***Use of Community Groups or Other Trusted Intermediaries***

"We [The Gainesville-Hall MPO] recently updated our regional transportation plan. Our region has a significant low-income Hispanic population. One approach that worked well during our plan update was identifying one influential person in the Hispanic community and utilizing that person to gather others in the community for a meeting to seek input. A short name for this would be a stakeholder meeting. What did not work was online surveys in Spanish. We discovered afterwards that the majority of the local Hispanic community did not own computers or had access to the Internet."

*Contact: Sam I. Baker, Senior Transportation Planner, Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization, Gainesville GA, [770-297-2604](tel:770-297-2604); [sbaker@hallcounty.org](mailto:sbaker@hallcounty.org)*

"During the development of our 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan, adopted in October 2105, the [Charlotte County – Punta Gorda] MPO developed a series of Consensus Building Workshops to gauge public opinions on the perceived of needs of the Community and then cost-feasible options to meet those needs. To engage and

improve participation we invited representatives (using e-mail, phone or direct visit) from a number of organizations who provide and represent EJ populations. These include Habitat for Humanity, the Charlotte County Homeless Coalition, United Way of Charlotte County, Florida, Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul, our local low income health clinic, AND our local Community Health Improvement Program (CHIP) and its subcommittee "Access to Health Care". All of these groups sent representatives to our Workshops and provided input through a remote voting tabulation software. They saw the needs and wants as expressed by representatives from disciplines and backgrounds dissimilar to their own and expanded their perspective on the MPO process, the structure under which the process works and the difficulty in ranking and funding project priorities. We (the MPO) in turn, when time permits, attend some of the meeting and public involvement events held by these groups. This has led to an integrated, coordinated and resource based exchange, with the MPO now a partner in providing factual, timely and informative planning information to the EJ community."

*Contact: Gene Klara, MPO Planner, Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO, Port Charlotte FL, [941-883-3535](tel:941-883-3535); [klara@ccmpo.com](mailto:klara@ccmpo.com)*

"Creating new relationships within the community is the greatest success. We [East-West Gateway Council of Governments] invite staff members of community organizations that effectively represent the underserved population to have a conversation. More often than not they have a constant working relationship with members of their community. A certain aspect of trust is developed between the organization and its publics. For example, we have found that organizations like Shepherd's Center which specializes with the Senior Population, Paraquod which specializes with the disabled population, International Institute that works with the refugee populations and Catholic Urban Programs which serves the low income population have been very successful with connecting us with the people that we want to/need to hear from. We find that the more familiar the organization is within the community the greater response or inclusion we receive.

"Empowerment is another aspect that we feel is a success. Often times the underserved communities are used to information, plans or decisions being forced upon them. It is beneficial to invite the neighbors of the community to sit at the planning/discussion table. Inclusion in the conversation not only brings about the feeling of ownership but it creates an atmosphere of COMMUNITY. They become vested in the shaping or building of their communities. This in turn promotes empowerment of the people, community and the cause.

"East-West Gateway COG has a wealth of research information, database information, demographics, income and economic opportunities information. However we also find the value of accessing information from within the community from the people and by the people. It is definitely a success because it provides opportunity to document the personal experiences; which gives us a better understanding of the viewpoints, the history and sense of pride that is shared throughout the neighborhoods. It also shines light on the many barriers and difficulties, the "hidden circumstances that are over overlooked or not discussed. Often these facts and situations are not considered when gathering data."

*Contact: Roz Rodgers, Community Engagement Coordinator, East-West*

*Gateway Council of Governments (the MPO for the 8 counties of Missouri and Illinois that include and surround St. Louis), St. Louis MO, [314-421-4220 ext 264](tel:314-421-4220); [roz@ewgateway.org](mailto:roz@ewgateway.org)*

“By far the most successful strategy we [the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS)] have employed has been to hold focus-group types of meetings with specific stakeholder groups. Some of these meetings have been conducted in conjunction with existing meetings or events, and others have been meetings convened specifically to have a discussion with us.

“To hold these meetings, we work closely with organizations or agencies who have established relationships with the populations we are reaching out to. The individuals in those agencies are able to assist us not only in organizing meetings, but also in understanding cultural norms, providing translators, and ensuring a sense of trust and comfort among participants. Examples of a few types of meetings/focus groups we have held include:

- Discussions with refugees on transportation needs – one held as part of an English language class for refugees and another as part of a “leadership club” for young adult refugees.
- Discussion with WIC recipients on transportation needs – organized through and held at district health department office; provided child care and healthy snacks for children.
- Discussion with low income Latinos on transportation needs – organized through, held at, and interpreter supplied by a local organization who serves this demographic.”

*Contact: Amy Luft, Communication Coordinator, Community Planning Association (COMPASS), Meridian ID, [208-475-2229](tel:208-475-2229); [aluft@compassidaho.org](mailto:aluft@compassidaho.org)*

## ***MPO Staff Engages Directly with Community***

“We [Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System] have taken proactive steps to reach all demographics in our transportation planning process. This year, we were able to get a table at the Farmer’s Market on a Saturday, which exposed us to a varied demographic. We also had an interview on “The Hawk Shop” (a local call-in television show) on a Sunday afternoon.”

*Contact: Donna Gardino, MPO Coordinator, Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System, Fairbanks AK, [907-459-6786](tel:907-459-6786); [donna.gardino@fmats.us](mailto:donna.gardino@fmats.us)*

“Our [North Front Range MPO] greatest success in reaching out to low-income and minority community stakeholders has been through partnerships. Our Mobility Councils provided good contacts for community stakeholders and distributed the materials from our 2040 RTP outreach. Additionally, we were able to attend open houses and

community events in each community we represent, allowing us to have more personalized conversations with residents. “

*Contact: Alex Gordon, Transportation Planner, North Front Range MPO, Fort Collins CO, (970) 416-2023; [agordon@nfrmpo.org](mailto:agordon@nfrmpo.org)*

“The newly-formed Albany Area MPO has found success by going to where people are at – to their offices, to their committee meetings, and finding community leaders who can help me make those connections. I have learned that it is not enough to hold a public open house meeting and expect stakeholders to come to us.

“As MPO staff, I have conducted stakeholder interviews with people who work with, represent, or are members of transportation disadvantaged groups. To find individuals to interview, I contacted public health agencies, a seniors services advisory committee, a disability services advisory committee, a human relations committee, local agency human relations committees, the ‘welcome center’ at a nearby predominantly lower-income school, and specifically Latino community groups. Having 45 – 60 minute one-on-one conversations helped to build a foundation for future outreach and helped me, as staff, to find ways to connect with low income or minority stakeholders. I explained what an MPO is, what the MPO’s role in the community is, and openly invited input on both community issues and specific transportation-related issues.

“Two groups that have been actively engaged in the transportation planning process so far are a regional Health Equity Alliance and a group of Latina women called Familias Activas who are working to build a healthier community with organizational support from the Oregon State University Extension Service. For outreach to both of these groups, I attend their meetings. I also use interpretive services when attending Familias Activas meetings. Most recently, I had the benefit of simultaneous translation from Spanish to English, so that I was the one wearing the headset and waiting for interpretation (not the Spanish-speaking individuals). “

*Contact: Theresa Conley, Albany Area MPO Coordinator, Albany OR, 541-924-4548; [tconley@ocwcoq.org](mailto:tconley@ocwcoq.org)*

“We’re currently wrapping up a transportation needs assessment for traditionally underserved populations for the Rogue Valley MPO. Beyond mapping and analyzing a number of different factors, we put A LOT of legwork into conducting a survey that ended up involving 39 different local organizations that either work with or represent these target populations. We experienced early outcomes as a result of the outreach survey and the mapping. In two instances, we were able to identify existing gaps and barriers that were within current and future transportation project areas which were not being addressed through the project. We were able to inform the implementing jurisdiction of the found issues that could be fixed by incorporating revisions/improvements to their project plans – and they responded positively. Again, these were immediate results from both the mapping analysis and from having directly involved the community”

*Contact: Andrea Napoli, AICP, Senior Planner, Rogue Valley Council of Governments, Central Point OR, (541) 423-1369; [anapoli@rvcog.org](mailto:anapoli@rvcog.org)*



## ***Use of Workshops or Charrettes***

“The Dover/Kent County MPO was recently involved in a planning study to develop a land use/transportation plan for a corridor that is the primary east-west route in Dover, Route 8. The corridor transforms from a high-speed 2-lane rural route, to a 5-lane suburban section, back down to a low-speed roadway through downtown. As it enters the downtown region, the area lacks a definitive theme, from the land use and transportation perspectives. There are a significant number of vacant, under-utilized, and dilapidated properties, and the area has a rental property rate exceeding 80%. The area is predominantly low-income and minority.

“A primary objective of the study was to develop a master plan so that as the corridor redevelops (there are some government incentives in place), developers can be consistent with the overall vision to come from the study. The other primary objective was to develop an aesthetic gateway into the downtown. Beyond those 2 simple objectives, we wanted the results of the study to be community-driven, so the residents could tell the planners what they envision their area to look like in the future.

“To accomplish that, we decided to use a charrette process. The 4-day charrette was held at the local community arts center, which had just opened up, so it also provided the community an opportunity to see the new facility even before the grand opening. The community arts center is located in the heart of the community, within walking distance of every home in the study area.

“The charrette process exceeded our expectations, as we had great attendance, input, and participation throughout the entire charrette. Food was provided each night by a local restaurant in the community. We also had great participation from City agencies such as the police department, City Council, and public works. Local businesses and property owners were extensively involved as well, and would stop by the community center during the day as the concepts were being developed and refined.

“The charrette process provided us with great local input from the residents and business owners, input that we likely would not have been able to solicit through a "traditional" planning process. The hands-on nature of the charrette process was ideal for soliciting local input, which in turn led us to develop alternatives that addressed the community needs that were identified by the participants.”

*Contact: Rich Vetter, P.E., AICP, Executive Director, Dover/Kent MPO, Dover DE, [302-387-6030](tel:302-387-6030); [Rich.Vetter@doverkentmpo.org](mailto:Rich.Vetter@doverkentmpo.org)*

## APPENDIX C: Profiles in Public Involvement from CTAA Project Sites

### *Profile of Stakeholder Engagement: Lake Tahoe CA & NV*

#### Community Basics

- **Planning Area:** Lake Tahoe, CA – NV (2010 population: 55,489)
- **Major City:** South Lake Tahoe, CA (2010 population: 21,403)
- **Racial Minorities as Percent of Population, 2010:** 26.5 percent
- **Hispanic/Latino Percentage of Population, 2010:** 31.1 percent
- **Percentage of Population Living in Households with Income below Federal Poverty Line, 2010:** 18.5 percent
- **MPO:** Tahoe MPO, housed within the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA); <http://tahoempo.org/Default.aspx?SelectedIndex=-1>
- **Metropolitan Planning Area:** Tahoe watershed portions of Alpine County (CA), Carson City NV, Douglas County (NV), El Dorado County (CA), Placer County (CA) and Washoe County (NV).
- **Local Partners in Transportation Planning (in addition to MPO):** City of South Lake Tahoe, Carson City, Douglas County, El Dorado County, Placer County, Washoe County, US Forest Service, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California

**The Challenge:** The Tahoe MPO's planning area is unique in that none of it has ever been part of a Census-designated urbanized area. Nevertheless, TRPA and the Tahoe MPO are required to follow all the same planning procedures as for any other urbanized area with a population of more than 50,000. One of the more challenging requirements has been that of public involvement and community engagement. TRPA realized it had the building blocks of a more expansive community engagement strategy already in place, if only they could be pieced together to serve this larger purpose. TRPA and the Tahoe MPO have a strong record of involving governments and organized stakeholder networks in their transportation planning processes, but TRPA is discouraged by the lack of citizen involvement. While they recognize the challenges, they are particularly concerned about how to engage with the area's Latino population, as well as other key transportation system user communities, such as older individuals (approximately 12 percent of the area's population is over the age of 65) and persons with disabilities (approximately 13 percent of the area's population reports having a disability).

#### What Was Done?

- In developing its most recent public participation plan (link: [http://www.taohempo.org/ppp/2015/Public%20Participation%20Plan\\_Final\\_Combined.pdf](http://www.taohempo.org/ppp/2015/Public%20Participation%20Plan_Final_Combined.pdf)), the Tahoe MPO committed to regular stakeholder meetings with area transportation management associations, environmental education coalitions, bicycling organizations, chambers of commerce and other business groups, service clubs, the area's community health advisory board, homeowners' associations, and the Spanish-speaking PTA at one of the area's public school districts.
- TRPA and the Tahoe MPO maintain a regular schedule of community venues and events (e.g., the area's Science Expo and Business Expo, five of the area's farmers' markets, public schools' back-to-school nights, the annual Wild and Scenic Film Fest,

and other holiday and community events) at which staff are present with current materials to engage with interested stakeholders.

- In addition to maintaining electronic newsletters and a social media presence, the Tahoe MPO hosts a series of monthly “Tahoe Talks” forums, which are presentations and open discussions of topics related to transportation, the environment, and the economy; these talks are recorded and posted on the Tahoe MPO website (link: <http://tahoempo.org/tahoetalks.aspx?SelectedIndex=1>)
- In developing and implementing its most recent Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (link: [http://www.tahoempo.org/CHSTP/CHSTP2014/CoordinatedHumanServicesTransportationPlan\\_FINAL%2011\\_19\\_14.pdf](http://www.tahoempo.org/CHSTP/CHSTP2014/CoordinatedHumanServicesTransportationPlan_FINAL%2011_19_14.pdf)), the Tahoe MPO established a Regional Coordinating Council, including more than 50 community-based organizations, businesses, social services providers, public and private transportation providers, local government services, and state agencies, all engaged around improving accessibility and availability of transportation for older individuals, persons with disabilities, veterans, members of low-income households. CTAA encouraged the Tahoe MPO to include this coordinating council in its ongoing outreach and engagement, since the coordinating council’s membership includes exactly those networks the MPO indicated were not currently engaged in its public participation activities.
- The Lake Tahoe Sustainability Collaborative was a project of the Tahoe MPO from 2012 to 2014. Although that project ended, its Community Mobility Workgroup (link: <http://sustainabilitycollaborative.org/how-we-work/community-mobility-cm/>) continues to meet, primarily to work on bicycle and pedestrian mobility issues, and to help select the area’s “Safe Routes to Schools” projects. As part of its public participation plan, the Tahoe MPO has committed to meet monthly with the Community Mobility Workgroup

## ***Profile of Stakeholder Engagement: Valdosta GA***

### **Community Basics**

- **Urbanized Area:** Valdosta, GA (2010 UZA population: 79,176)
- **Major City:** Valdosta (2010 population: 54,148)
- **Racial Minorities as Percent of Population, 2010:** 58.5 percent
- **Hispanic/Latino Percentage of Population, 2010:** 4.0 percent
- **Percentage of Population Living in Households with Income below Federal Poverty Line, 2010:** 28.2 percent
- **MPO:** Valdosta-Lowndes MPO (VLMPO), housed within the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC); <http://www.sgrc.us/mpo-home-1.html>
- **Metropolitan Planning Area:** All of Lowndes County (2010 population: 109,233), and some small non-metro adjoining portions of Brooks, Berrien and Lanier Counties. Municipalities in the metropolitan planning area are the cities of Valdosta and Remerton (2010 population: 1,123), both within the UZA, and the cities of Hahira (2010 population: 2,737) and Lake Park (2010 population: 733), both in the non-urbanized areas of Lowndes County.
- **Local Partners in Transportation Planning (in addition to MPO):** City of Valdosta, Lowndes County

**The Challenge:** Although Valdosta has been an urbanized area since the 2000 census, it has not had an urban transit service since before World War II. Lowndes County's rural transit system can bring rural residents to destinations inside the urbanized area, but cannot use its Federal Transit Administration Section 5311 funds to provide transit wholly within the urbanized area's boundaries. Every year through 2016, VLMPO certified to Georgia DOT (GDOT) that its FTA Section 5307 allocation (\$1,034,298 in FY 2016) was not needed locally, allowing GDOT to reallocate those funds to urban transit projects elsewhere in the state. However, SGRC has carried out a number of technical studies on the issue of public transit need within Valdosta, and no longer can certify there is no need for Section 5307 funding. Having identified the existence of transit need in the community, SGRC has sought to increase the level of engagement by local officials and community leaders around the question of how best to provide transit within the urbanized area.

### **What Was Done?**

- To demonstrate the potential viability of transit in Valdosta, SGRC launched a "pilot shuttle" service in the summer of 2016. This is a single-vehicle flexible fixed-route service, using FTA Section 5317 funding awarded to SGRC from the Georgia Department of Human Services, and continues through September 2017. The utilization of this service already has begun to inform local officials and stakeholders about the reality of transit supply and demand in the community.
- SGRC has just updated the VLMPO public participation plan; [link: <http://nebula.wsimg.com/6ebbf94dd0432ebef5a5a7628e9d07f6?AccessKeyId=7599C68BC55095BE1D8F&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>] as part of this updated plan, activities of the MPO are coordinated with the SGRC-developed "Greater Lowndes County Community Vision," [link:

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/8e59aee23b3dd1d6173dc16f17e474a2?AccessKeyId=4581EC54C434D3CB020&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>] which is a stakeholder-driven process that informs the area's priorities around transportation, housing, land use and economic development. Using this "vision" as a reference, SGRC is reaching out to community groups, key organizational stakeholders (such as the local Air Force base and Valdosta State University), and major employers, including some with specific interest in the availability of transit service. SGRC's strategies primarily are those of showing up at community meetings, but have included photo contests, a social media presence, and informal networking via low-income community services organizations in the community.

- SGRC completed a detailed "transit implementation plan" in the summer of 2016, [link: <http://nebula.wsimg.com/8625828b5df709abe64b1a5a0eb4ed5a?AccessKeyId=7599C68BC55095BE1D8F&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>] which it is using to demonstrate to city and county officials that there can be an effective transit program launched in the city of Valdosta.
- CTAA validated the results of SGRC's transit study, and helped SGRC develop the outline of a transit financing plan that local officials agreed would provide a reasonable level of transit service that could be affordable within the context of the city and county budgets.
- The MPO's community engagement strategy has helped Valdosta to be in position to establish its first urban public transit system in 75 years.

## ***Profile of Stakeholder Engagement: Midland MI***

### **Community Basics**

- **Urbanized Area:** Midland, MI (2010 UZA population: 59,014)
- **Major City:** Midland (2010 population: 41,863)
- **Racial Minorities as Percent of Population, 2010:** 8.0 percent
- **Hispanic/Latino Percentage of Population, 2010:** 2.4 percent
- **Percentage of Population Living in Households with Income below Federal Poverty Line, 2010:** 14.3 percent
- **MPO:** Midland Area Transportation Study (MATS); <http://www.midlandmpo.com>
- **Metropolitan Planning Area:** All of Midland County (2010 population: 83,629), and portions of Williams Township (in Bay County) and Tittabawassee Township (in Saginaw County). Municipalities in the metropolitan planning area are the cities of Midland and Auburn (2010 population: 2,087) and Remerton (2010 population: 1,123), both within the UZA, and the city of Coleman (2010 population: 1,243) in the non-urbanized area of Midland County.
- **Local Partners in Transportation Planning (in addition to MPO):** City of Midland, each of the 16 townships in Midland County, Williams Township (Bay County), Tittabawassee Township (Saginaw County), Midland County, Bay County, Saginaw County

**The Challenge:** To increase the extent of public participation in its transportation planning processes. In standing up its brand-new MPO, MATS has succeeded at bringing 20 local government officials on board. However it has not been as successful at finding ways to identify and engage community stakeholders in its transportation planning processes.

### **What Was Done?**

- MATS first created an informal inventory of known or potential stakeholder organizations. Then, with support from FHWA, the Community Transportation Association of America helped MATS conduct facilitated meetings with the MPO's policy and technical committees around identifying opportunities for community collaboration on transportation-related projects and issues.
- MATS community collaboration led to a partnership with the Midland Area Community Foundation which facilitated private funding of a public transportation study for the Midland area.
- MATS and its external partners are looking at a half-dozen other shared priorities for which external funding and support is being pursued.

## ***Profile of Stakeholder Engagement: St. Joseph MO***

### **Community Basics**

- **Urbanized Area:** St. Joseph, MO – KS (2010 UZA population: 81,176)
- **Major City:** St. Joseph, MO (2010 population: 76,780)
- **Racial Minorities as Percent of Population, 2010:** 12.2 percent
- **Hispanic/Latino Percentage of Population, 2010:** 5.7 percent
- **Percentage of Population Living in Households with Income below Federal Poverty Line, 2010:** 19.5 percent
- **MPO:** St. Joseph Area Transportation Study Organization (SJATSO); <http://stjoempo.org>
- **Metropolitan Planning Area:** Cities of St. Joseph MO, Country Club Village MO (2010 population: 2,449) Savannah MO (2010 population: 5,057), Elwood KS (2010 population: 1,224), and Wathena KS (2010 population: 1,364), plus some adjacent non-urbanized areas of Buchanan County MO, Doniphan County KS and Andrew County MO.
- **Local Partners in Transportation Planning (in addition to MPO):** City of St. Joseph, City of Savannah, City of Elwood, City of Wathena, Village of Country Club, St. Joseph School District

**The Challenge:** During the course of drafting its most recent public involvement plan [[link: http://stjoempo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Public-Involvement-Plan-2040-MTP.pdf](http://stjoempo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Public-Involvement-Plan-2040-MTP.pdf)] and bicycle/pedestrian master plan [[link: http://stjoempo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/bpmasterplan.pdf](http://stjoempo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/bpmasterplan.pdf)], SJATSO became increasingly aware that its efforts to elicit stakeholder input worked fairly well for involving local governments, but that participation by community organizations and members of the public felt minimal. SJATSO sought to find organizations or networks that represented key transportation system user communities such as racial or ethnic minorities, low-income populations, older adults, businesses and other employers, bicycling/pedestrian community advocates, and advocates for persons with disabilities, but most of these potential stakeholder groups seemed either dormant, unorganized, uninterested or nonexistent. The city has a particular interest in reaching out to community and business interests as part of a general desire to promote redevelopment of its downtown core, with transportation infrastructure that is appropriate to this redevelopment.

**What Was Done?** While the stakeholder networks one might usually expect to engage in a place such as St. Joseph seem not to be present or active, CTAA helped point SJATSO and the city to those networks that are actively interested in the city's downtown core. Two networks in particular stood out: one of these is the business and industrial community of downtown St. Joseph, and the other is the city's recognized cadre of neighborhood historical preservation organizations.

- CTAA challenged SJATSO and the city to identify avenues of engagement that would be meaningful to these historic preservation groups, downtown property owners and downtown businesses. The result of this challenge was that the city began developing the concept of four to six streetscaped "gateways" on major roads into the downtown core; these gateways will feature improvements in pedestrian accessibility and streetscaping that is in keeping with the immediately adjacent commercial and residential building stock. In one or two of these gateways, "road diets" may be part of the configuration, but most will not see that kind of reduction. Since the bulk of these gateways will be on private property, their establishment depends on cooperation and participation from the affected property owners.

- The purpose of the “gateways” is to take advantage of existing arterials as they pass through the Missouri River valley’s bluffs upon entry to the St. Joseph downtown core: at each gateway, design elements would help travelers – whether motorists, bicyclists or pedestrians – feel they’re making a grand entrance to a remarkable downtown. That concept is consistent with other features around St. Joseph, such as the ring of parks and parkways that were installed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which are now a nationally designated historic district (link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20111203035115/http://www.stjoemo.info/parks/FacilitiesMap.pdf>)
- To test this concept, the city identified one gateway which could be an easy prototype; this initial gateway area has several already-supportive property owners, and cooperative neighborhood associations. The physical components of this gateway would be fairly simple: new, slightly widened, sidewalks, a small, landscaped roundabout or similar traffic calming feature, some benches or other pedestrian amenities, and minor improvements to lane striping, traffic signals, and signage.
- If the prototype is successful, this gateway concept will prove to be a means by which SJATSO can facilitate relations between the city and local community interests in further transportation improvements for the area.



## ***Profile of Stakeholder Engagement: Yakima WA***

### **Community Basics**

- **Urbanized Area:** Yakima, WA (2010 UZA population: 129,829)
- **Major City:** Yakima (2010 population: 91,067)
- **Racial Minorities as Percent of Population, 2010:** 33.9 percent
- **Hispanic/Latino Percentage of Population, 2010:** 41.3 percent
- **Percentage of Population Living in Households with Income below Federal Poverty Line, 2010:** 21.3 percent
- **MPO:** Yakima Valley Council of Governments (YVCOG); <http://www.yvco.org>
- **Metropolitan Planning Area:** Cities of Yakima, Moxee (2010 population: 3,308), Selah (2010 population: 7,147), Union Gap (2010 population: 6,047), and adjacent unincorporated portions of Yakima County
- **Local Partners in Transportation Planning (in addition to MPO):** City of Yakima, Yakima County

**The Challenge:** After many years of community-wide advocacy, funding has been secured for a new thoroughfare, Interstate interchange and Yakima River crossing that will connect the city of Yakima with its eastern suburb of Terrace Heights (an unincorporated area of Yakima County). This “East-West Corridor” will reduce traffic congestion on existing river crossings and highways, improving the movement of both people and freight, and will facilitate large-scale economic development on the site of what used to be a major lumber mill. However, this route passes through a lower-income residential neighborhood, includes environmentally sensitive riparian areas, and touches on land that is important to the Yakama Nation. YVCOG has a 50-year history of facilitating dialogue among its member governments, and developing area-wide transportation plans, but project implementation historically is left in the hands of each jurisdiction. However, this East-West Corridor project is more complex and requires a higher level of coordination among the partners and their stakeholders. So, how will the local governments work together and include the needs and views of diverse and important stakeholders?

### **What Was Done?**

- YVCOG and the local governments created a common set of presentation materials that are displayed at the Central Washington State Fair and at meetings of community groups. These materials are used to stimulate conversation with stakeholders and elicit public input into design elements of the East-West Corridor project.
- YVCOG hosted meetings of local governments and Washington State DOT that led to the development of a unified schedule for the project, broken down in eight distinct phases spanning a 15-year period of construction, and identifying which entity – city, county, state – has the lead for which phase of the project.
- Washington State DOT has contributed the services of its public relations staff to assist with communications strategies, including media and public relations, as well as the development of a website and newsletters once construction is scheduled to begin.
- Washington State DOT has contributed the services of its in-house Visual Engineering Group (<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/business/visualcommunications/default.htm>) to prepare dynamic visualizations of the project area that have been used for presentation to local elected officials

- The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) identified informal strategies of community engagement designed to elicit additional stakeholder input, above and beyond the steps identified in YVCOG's public participation plan. Three of these strategies that YVCOG intends to carry out in 2016 – 2017 are to convene meetings with the neighborhood schools around safe access to school during and after East-West Corridor construction, using the existing presentation materials to set up informal booths at summer activities in the neighborhood park closest to the corridor, and the engagement with area bicyclists and recreational trail users to elicit their input on pedestrian and bicycle safety and trail connectivity associated with design and construction of the East-West Corridor.