Division of Planning Research on Call (ROC) 2020-14 Task 5: Effective EJ and LEP Engagement Strategies and Methods for Statewide Plans

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16. Abstract

Transportation agencies often struggle engaging environmental justice (EJ) and low English proficiency (LEP) populations in their public involvement efforts. This issue becomes worsened when the public involvement if for statewide plans or projects, an already difficult task for public engagement as a whole. This research aims to determine the best practices for engaging these populations and how the Ohio Department of Transportation can adopt these practices to increase EJ and LEP population engagement for statewide plans.

Best practice sources and guidance documents were organized into six groups and reviewed by the project team. Best practices or innovative techniques were recorded, analyzed, and condensed. Common and reoccurring best practices were then distilled into a set of recommendations that will likely work best for the state of Ohio. The results are compiled into this document that summarizes all task activities, findings and recommendations. The results are also documented in a supplementary PowerPoint presentation summarizing the results of the research.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Problem Statement

US federal regulations require agencies received federal funding to follow Title VI requirements from the Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 12898. Inclusive of these regulations is the requirement to engage populations that are typically underserved and underrepresented. Specifically, 23 CFR 450.210 (1)(viii) says that states Department of Transportation (DOT) carrying out public involvement for the statewide transportation planning process shall, "Include a process for seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services." However, engaging with these communities is difficult on statewide plans because they are located across the state and may have difficulty in accessing materials on the internet. Further, these communities may have difficulties even hearing about opportunities to provide input. These difficulties are not unique to Ohio, and a significant quantity of research has been completed on the subject of environmental justice (EJ) and limited English proficiency (LEP) engagement.

This report synthesizes strategies and approaches for engaging EJ and LEP populations, specifically for statewide planning activities from existing and ongoing research into this topic.

Research Background and Approach

The goals of Task #5 are to first synthesize available research regarding effective outreach strategies for LEP and EJ populations, and then develop recommendations for LEP and EJ outreach strategies that would be appropriate to ODOT's statewide long-range planning process.

Prior research on effective strategies for engaging EJ and LEP populations is available from several sources. Additional sources will be required outside of the transportation planning profession, particularly for engaging non-Spanish speaking LEP populations and rural, low-income populations. Health and education agencies' research in these areas may yield strategies applicable to transportation planning. Case studies (not formal research) are also available through organizations such as the American Planning Association, which will be used to supplement areas of limited available research.

Recommendations resulting from this synthesis may be applied to future public outreach for ODOT's statewide, long range plans. Increased effectiveness may lead to improved public engagement. The results of this research may also be utilized by MPOs and RTPOs in development of their area plans. Potentially, the cost for public outreach may be reduced through targeted strategies.

In addition, strategies are likely to be applicable to project planning and may be used to improve EJ and LEP outreach for specific ODOT projects.

Existing research is broken up into 6 different categories to help inform recommendations for ODOT to effectively engage with EJ and LEP populations for Statewide Plans:

- State Department of Transportation Techniques and Strategies
- Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration guidance and best practices (including guidance to state DOTs and MPOs)
- Transportation research body guidance and research (TRB, NCHRP, AASHTO)
- Academic databases
- Case Studies (APA, MPO)
- Health and/or education agencies and associated research organizations
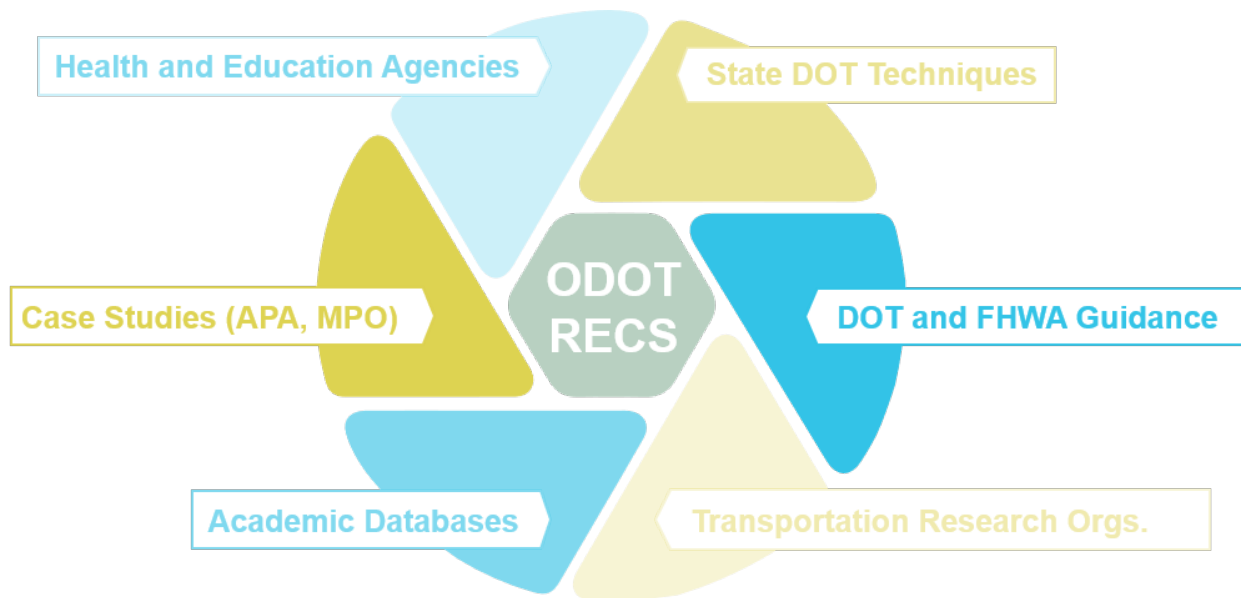
Research Summaries

Applicable research and best practices were reviewed and summarized. If gaps were found related specifically to EJ and LEP populations within each research category, additional sources were pursued, or the scope of applicable research was adjusted.

A full source list and notes from each section can be found in the appendix.

State DOT Techniques/Benchmarking

Lawhon staff contacted several state DOTs to discuss their approaches to involving EJ and LEP populations in their long-range transportation plan development. Additional supplementary documents were also read and analyzed. DOTs were identified, contacted, and interviewed if available. The departments were contacted via phone and email to obtain information on relevant, effective, or innovative/new strategies. The following questions were asked during the DOT interviews to gather standard information across the different state departments:

- *What special efforts did you undertake to involve EJ populations in development of your plan?*
- *Did any of these efforts provide meaningful involvement?*
- *What special efforts did you undertake to communicate the draft/final plan to these populations?*
- *What special efforts did you undertake to communicate with Low English Proficiency individuals in development of your plan?*
- *Did you receive any meaningful input?*
- *What changes have you made to your plan outreach during pandemic?*
- *Lessons learned or things to consider for next update.*

Materials and other documents were collected if recommended or given by the DOT.

The following state DOTs are included:

- Florida
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Oregon
- California
- Michigan
- Tennessee
- Kentucky

Additional examples can be found in the appendix on pages 2-3 and are taken from the NCHRP Report 710 *Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking*. Additional notes on State DOT Techniques and Benchmarking can be found on pages 4-10 in the appendix.

The key findings from review of practices by other state DOTs are discussed below.

Connect with other state agencies, commissions, and committees. These agencies should support or advocate for traditionally underserved populations at the state or regional level. These connections may enhance outreach by reaching people that are comfortable communicating about transportation related issues and also those who are already involved in state level plans to reach other local leaders. Florida DOT connected with the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, an organization that is already trusted by the disabled community. Massachusetts DOT connected with the Refugees and Immigration Office, who provided information on issues and predominant languages in the state. Michigan worked with several other state departments to enhance and improve their connections to EJ and LEP communities.
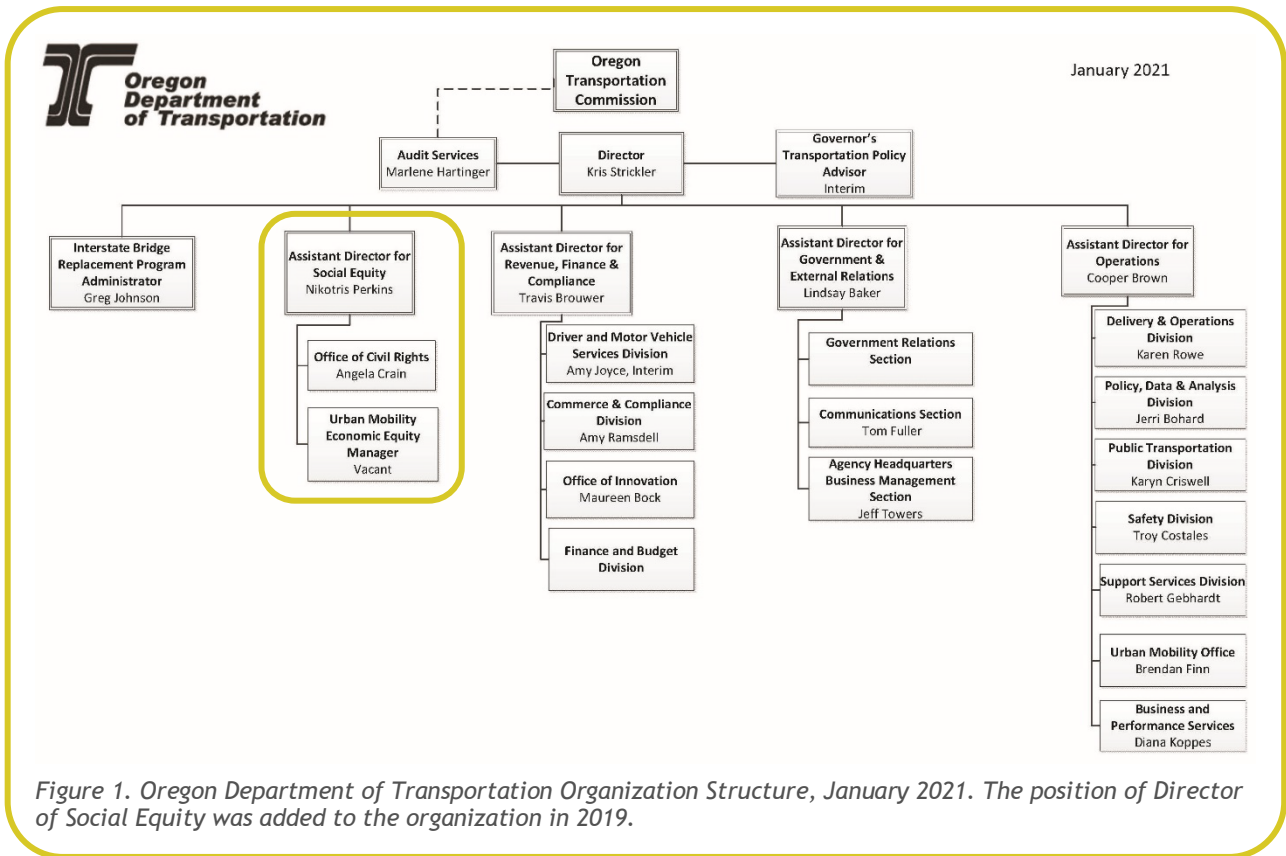
Collaborate with local entities to host meetings and distribute information. Local entities such as Farm Bureaus, county extension offices, county health departments, and libraries can be useful resources because they have existing relationships with community members, will have insight into how best to engage locals in the area, and will likely have existing structures set in place to advertise and distribute information.

Compile data on regional & local community contacts, local meeting locations, non-English language concentrations to link outreach to community/region. Massachusetts DOT built the ENGAGE tool/application which provides community level data on LEP and EJ populations. The tool enables users to designate a project area or "area of influence" and the database will then map local contacts, meeting locations, and primary languages in the area.

Dedicate time and resources at the state level to build long term community relationships/partnerships. Minnesota DOT worked to create Community Conversations by establishing working relationships between community leaders and Minnesota DOT planning staff in each of their regions. The effort started with community leaders known to the district or MPO staff. The planning staff then met in person with each local leader to discuss local concerns and attended community events. It should be noted that each relationship is dependent upon both individuals staying in their designated roles for an extended period. The concept is also dependent upon DOT support of the staff time required to build and maintain these relationships.

Prioritize DOT staff training to better understand and increase outreach to EJ and LEP communities. Understanding bias, culture, and language is critical to effective engagement with LEP and EJ populations. Michigan DOT trains their staff on how to present themselves when attending public meetings to be culturally sensitive to different populations who may be in attendance. The training also includes how to use terms easily understood by the public.

Adopt a comprehensive approach to equity planning. Equity is a growing issue related to EJ and LEP populations but is also a much broader concern. While there remain specific legal requirements to address impacts to EJ populations, changes in the larger world have merged Environmental Justice into Equity. Several state DOTs have included equity in their plan goals & strategies. In addition to dedicating more staff time to LEP and EJ engagement, some states have added equity offices (Oregon, California) or equity coordinators (Minnesota) to their organizations. Oregon updated the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2016 as input into the next Plan update and equity was specifically included as a goal.

Figure 1. Oregon Department of Transportation Organization Structure, January 2021. The position of Director of Social Equity was added to the organization in 2019.

Pursue community members who represent or can speak on behalf of LEP or EJ populations. One of the challenges of outreach to underserved populations is identifying those who can truthfully speak for them. Another challenge is multiple agencies coordinating with these same representatives due to LEP and EJ requirements. Oregon is hosting a first joint workshop between several state agencies and folks representing EJ populations such as advocacy groups, the public, and other organizations that serve these populations. The purpose is to establish guiding engagement principles and format for when, where, and how to involve these representatives.

Communicate how public input is used and incorporated into the plan or process. Broad input is needed from a variety of perspectives to ensure accurate representation of these populations and not the views of only a few. Feedback is critical to building trust and gaining meaningful participation. It is important to demonstrate how input was used to guide decision making.

Be creative with outreach. Reaching many citizens across the state usually requires traveling to multiple in-person events. Michigan and Colorado have borrowed the concept of telephone town hall meetings from political candidates for transportation outreach that enables representation from multiple counties at the same time. Michigan DOT advertised the town hall statewide and participants were encouraged to sign up to join. Telephone numbers found on County voter registration rolls were used to enhance participation and reach people in each county. Just before the meeting started automated calls were

Figure 2. Michigan DOT Michigan Mobility 2045 Plan: Public & Stakeholder Participation Results summarizes the results of their main outreach strategies. This graphic shows the locations of Telephone Town Hall participants by zip code.

made to randomly selected voters until a chosen percentage of participants from each county were on the phone. The town hall meeting included a brief description of the plan, several polling questions on the plan and the transportation system, and an opportunity to ask questions. The Michigan DOT staff gathered in one conference room for the meeting to facilitate answering questions.
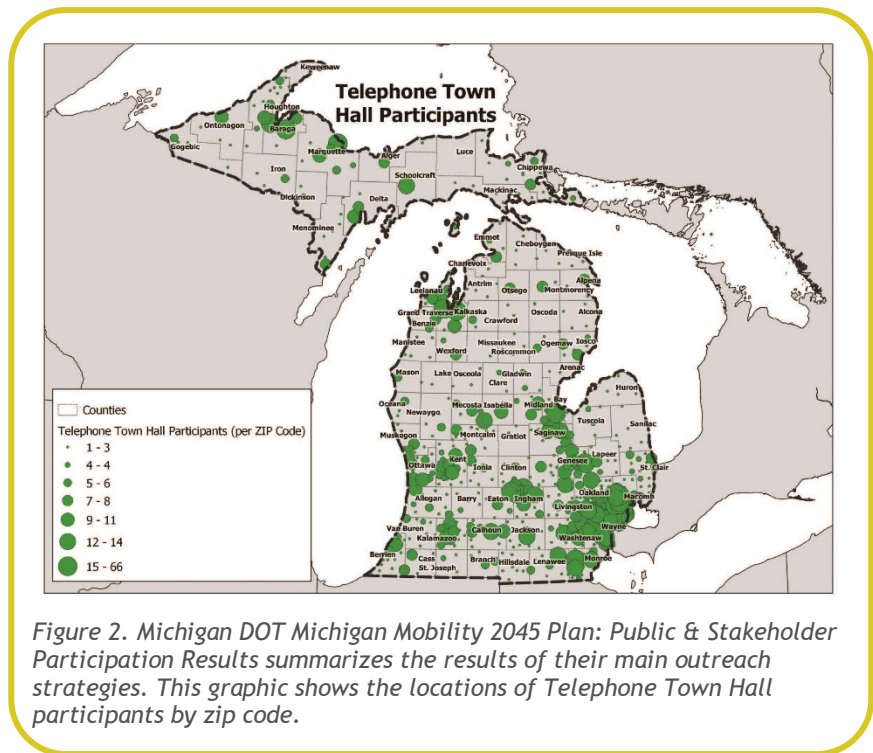
Tennessee created a 'Book-A-Planner' program and assigned one staff person to each of the state's four regions. Any organization or local government could schedule a meeting with their designated person to discuss the plan development, more detailed plan findings, and the draft plan. The meeting included a presentation, interactive polling, and an opportunity to provide input/ask questions. Three rounds of meetings were conducted with no repetition in organizations served.

California held eight focus groups and four Tribal listening sessions to gather public input on views of the transportation system; and two day long visioning sessions with public sector, private sector, community-based groups, and academia to establish a vision and strategies for future transportation system. These events were held early (2018) in the CTP development process. Later (2019) five stakeholder workshops were held to gather input from public sector, private sector, military, Tribal, non-profit, and academic on three cross-cutting topics and their implications for transportation. In-person public workshops were to be held in summer 2020. These were switched to completely online outreach events including a

statewide webinar. The webinar introduced the draft CTP, how to submit comments/questions during and after, and addressed comments as time allowed.

Another tool frequently employed state DOTs is an online survey. Most states conduct routine customer preference surveys on a regular basis, often annually. Some states incorporated questions related to the transportation plan into this preference survey. Other state DOTs created surveys specifically to gather input on their Plan updates.

Tennessee DOT (TDOT) created an online survey which presented the various plan scenarios with an interactive map where comments could be entered for specific projects or general plan comments. The survey was available in Spanish and English. Survey announcements were distributed to churches and libraries in Spanish and Arabic. The English version of the survey also allowed the respondent to select another language from a drop-down menu and the survey would be auto-translated. TDOT could track the number of Spanish surveys completed, but were not able to track which other languages may have been used.
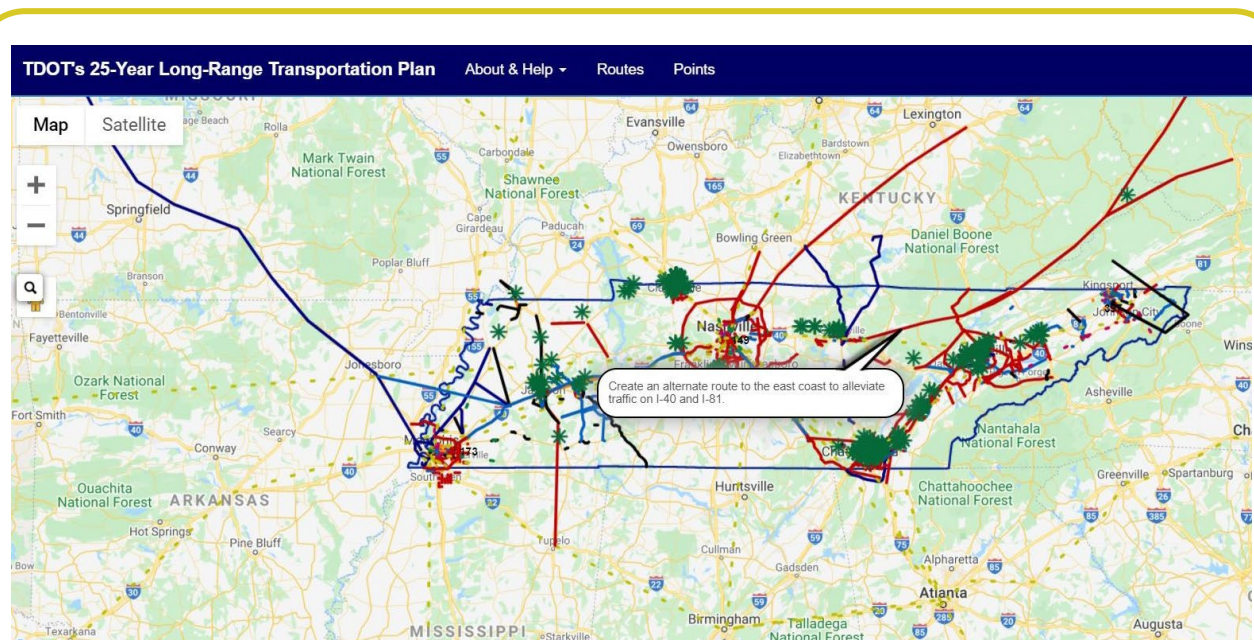
Figure 3. Tennessee DOT 25-Year Long-Range Transportation Plan interactive online survey map. Users can create points or draw different colored routes that relate to safety, congestion, maintenance, freight, bicycle, pedestrian, transit, or other. In addition to marking the route or location, they can also include comments.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's (KYTC) survey used a storybook format. Respondents could leave comments on a project, corridor, or plan. KYTC tracked the respondents to the survey while in progress. Using a partnership with regional Development Districts, they distributed promotional pens & clips, and encouraged additional responses where needed. Some efforts targeted minority and LEP populations with special outreach in these communities with bookmarks at libraries and tables at local restaurants.

Identify languages in the region where outreach is targeted/planned early in the process. Oregon is using the top ten languages of the top twenty active languages provided by the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles to help prioritize translated materials. Oregon DOT also participates in working groups hosted by TriMet, the largest provider of public transportation in the State of Oregon, to gain information on best practices pertaining to Title VI compliance, including serving LEP populations, data collection and analysis, and disparate impact and disproportionate burden policies. The Oregon DOT is also developing a communication plan to change the Department's culture in working with LEP communities. Minnesota DOT works with a public involvement consultant that has staff who speak various languages to translate materials.

Ensure materials and outreach are compatible for the visually and hearing impaired. The visually impaired and hearing impaired are considered underserved populations under ADA. Massachusetts worked with other agencies to assure the webpages used were compatible for screen reader technology (used primarily by the visually impaired). Simple page formats with minimal clutter, less technical language, and headers make for screen reader friendlier webpages. They also use a software that reads their documents and webpages to access how compatible the webpage or document is with screen readers. Free software is available to detect how accessible a webpage or document can be for screen readers or assistive technologies. For example, pasting a website link into webaccessibility.com will develop a compliance score and what specific issues are causing the site to be incompatible with assistive technologies. Michigan DOT created an online survey and, following input from another department, created a sign language video for the video/spoken portions of the survey.
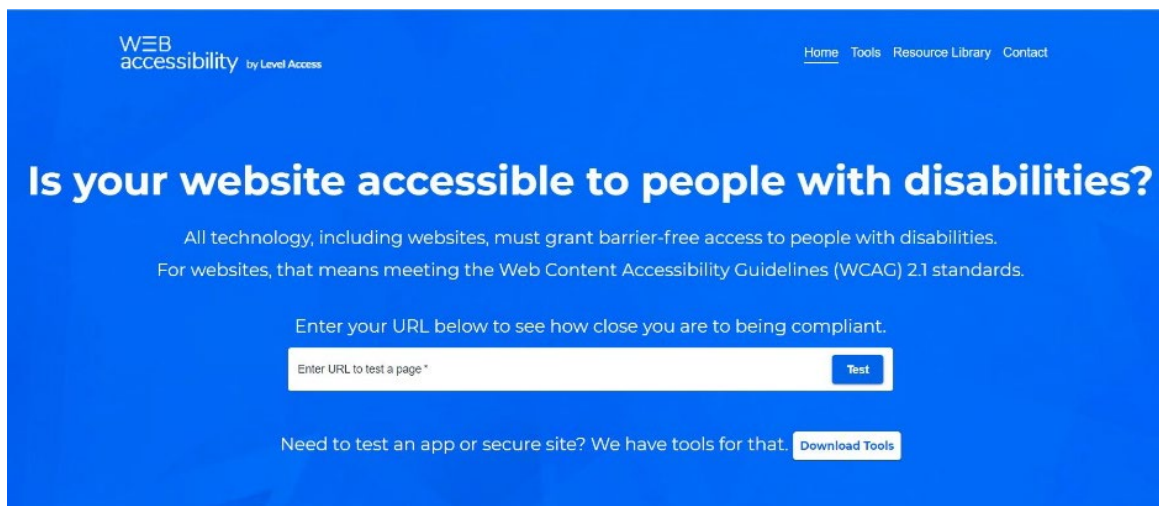

Figure 4. Programs like webaccessibility.com can help make sure websites and other materials are in compliance with assistive technologies.

DOT and FHWA Guidance and Best Practices

Lawhon staff completed a review of guidance documents published by the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), or other related federal agencies guidance relevant to engaging EJ and LEP populations. Guidance document recommendations ranged in scale from the project level to statewide plans. Each document was studied, evaluated, and summarized.

Additional notes on DOT and FHWA guidance and best practices can be found on pages 11-18 in the appendix.

Key Findings

The following provides a summary of overarching findings and recommendations from existing DOT and FHWA EJ and LEP guidance and best practices.

Increase capacity to dedicate to effective EJ and LEP engagement. A dedicated staff member allows for completion and maintenance of many tasks related to EJ and LEP engagement. Many staff members would like to achieve meaningful engagement with LEP and EJ populations, but simply do not have the capacity to do so on top of other responsibilities. A dedicated staff member also demonstrates an agencies dedication to EJ and LEP engagement.

Utilize a variety of identification methods to identify EJ and LEP populations. Accurate and up-to-date data for population identification is key, however, a sole source should not be used to identify EJ and LEP populations. Site visits, phone calls and coordination with regional and local entities can help identify smaller LEP and EJ populations that may not show up on census mapping.
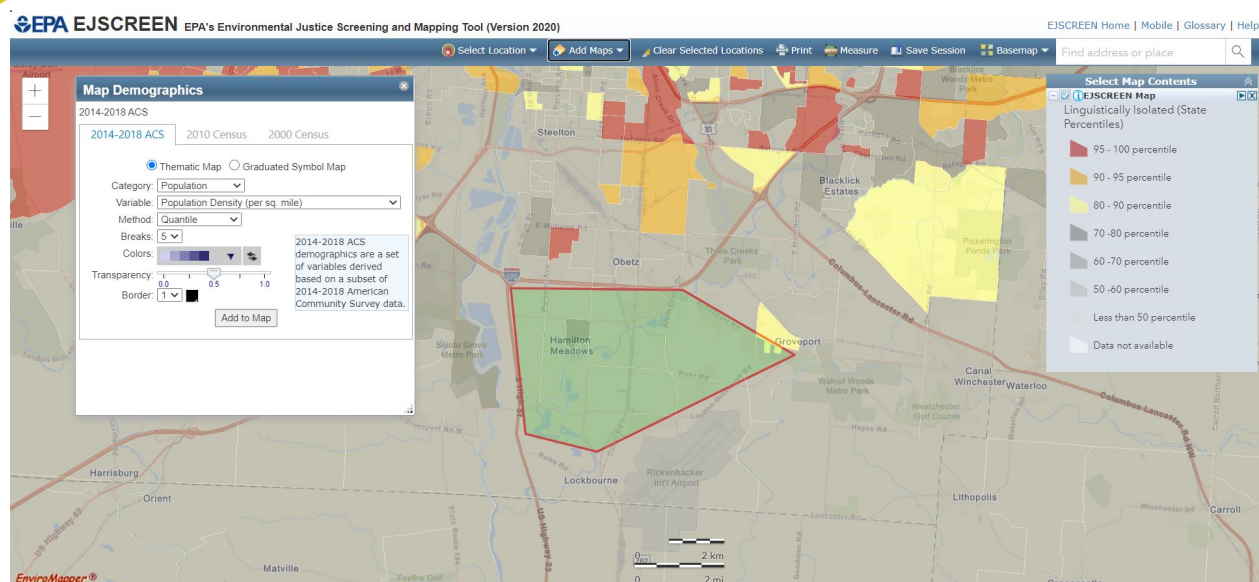

Figure 5. EPA's EJ Screen tool is often used as the primary tool for identifying EJ and LEP populations. EJ Screen and other mapping tools have their limitations and should not be used as the sole identifiers for EJ and LEP populations.

Convene a standing committee for EJ and LEP engagement/issues. An ongoing standing committee can help as a sounding board for ideas and strategies to engage EJ and LEP communities.

Identify and document LEP and EJ agencies and representatives. In addition to a standing committee, keeping an ongoing database and contact list for different agencies and representatives can help streamline the coordination process. The database can be used to contact specific representatives to spread the word about a project or process, especially when tailoring to a specific group or demographic.

Tailor outreach and engagement methods to specific LEP and EJ communities (ie separate public engagement plans for each population/culture). An LEP Hispanic population will not respond to public outreach methods the same way a Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese LEP population will. Public engagement plans should tailor the outreach approach to specific cultures. For example, in Milwaukee, WI, the project area was thought to include a Hmong community, but it was difficult to define the community's size and location. The Hmong community members also did not respond to mailings or telephone calls inviting them to the public meetings. Hmong America, a national group that helps Hmongs assimilate and assists with family- service needs, helped the DOT communicate with the local Hmong community. The group's director, who spoke both Hmong and English, suggested several methods to keep the community informed and recommended a service for interpretation and translation. As a result, an interpreter was used at meetings, and newsletters and fact sheets were translated into Hmong.

Figure 6. Wisconsin DOT Connect 2050 plan fact sheets were translated in Hmong and Spanish. There were also Hmong, Spanish, and English Connect 2050 toolkits for individuals to present to friends or employees, post about on social media, or to distribute more information on the plan.

Hold meetings in a variety of formats. In person, virtual, pop up, and other styles of meetings help ensure that options are flexible for those who may have conflicts. This also allows for multiple ways to provide input. Providing food and childcare can also increase participation. Attending existing gatherings or meetings to engage with their participant base can also be an effective strategy to increase participation.

Advertise through a variety of means. Utilize as many medias as possible and make sure all materials are available in multiple languages and at an easy reading level.
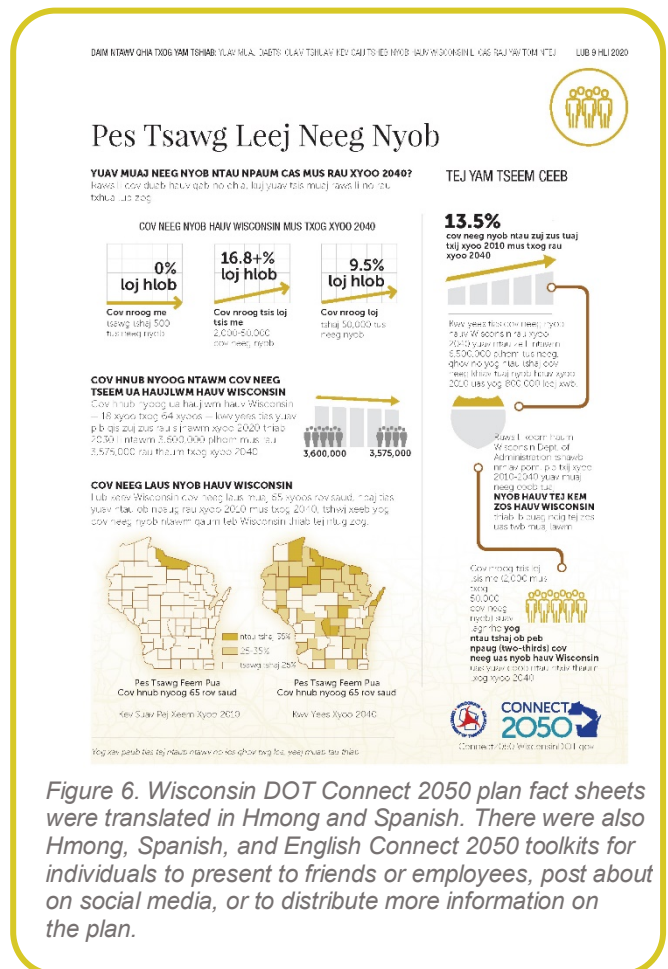
Transportation Research Bodies – TRB, NCHRP, AASHTO

A review of guidance documents published by transportation research bodies was completed. This included organizations such as the Transportation Research Board (TRB), National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP), and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and other related transportation research bodies guidance and findings relevant to engaging EJ and LEP populations. Each document was studied, evaluated, and summarized.

Additional notes on transportation research bodies can be found on pages 19-25 in the appendix.

Key Findings

The following provides a summary of overarching findings and recommendations from existing transportation research bodies guidance and best practices.

Commit additional staff time and resources to improve LEP and EJ engagement. Agencies with effective EJ and LEP outreach have dedicated staff time and resources to do so. Outreach and engagement strategies that tailor to the needs and preferences of a community require staff time and financial resources such as renting a venue, purchasing food and refreshments, translation services, printed materials, and other incentives.

Prioritize building trust. Building trust is a critical component in effective EJ and LEP outreach. LEP and EJ populations can sometimes be distrustful of government. To overcome this obstacle, the agencies must first build trust. This can be done in many ways and include being transparent about how their input will be used and why the community should get involved.

Respect and cultural competency are critical. Any engagement with a variety of cultures requires specialized training for specific communities. Being aware and sensitive to certain cultures helps to build trust and relationships with these communities. Understanding the differences and preferences that make some cultural, ethnic, or racial groups more likely to respond to one kind of outreach than another can boost engagement.

Continue to ask for feedback to improve engagement and outreach methods. The NCRHP research report *Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development* provides a "field-validated and practitioner-ready toolkit to measure the effectiveness of a transportation agency's public involvement activities". This survey provides a vehicle to identify areas for improvement, improves relationships with the public since it has the means to provide feedback, and demonstrates the agency's commitment to meaningful and effective public involvement.

Train staff. Training will likely be required to achieve cultural competency and have staff feel comfortable engaging with certain communities. This is also important for communities to feel respected and comfortable talking to staff members. Ultimately, training can help build trust with the community.

Establish relationships with a working group of state level commission or organizations. Commissions and organizations should work with EJ and immigrant populations. Building these relationships can build trust and encourage survey participation.

Use newest tools and practices to identify EJ populations. It is important to use the most recent data to accurately identify EJ and LEP populations. Having a dense amount of data related to EJ and LEP populations as well as public involvement can help streamline tedious processes. Coordination within the department may be necessary to achieve this. Similar to a Massachusetts DOT strategy previously discussed, staff members of the Data Visualization Office of the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) used Esri tools to identify ideal locations for meetings with the public.

Utilize non-traditional methods for outreach materials, surveys, and engagement activities. Visualizations appropriate to the scale of the study/plan can improve understanding of concepts. Games and non traditional survey sites can

Figure 7. To identify optimal public meeting locations, the Data Visualization Team within Tn DOT overlayed various data layers such as EJ population density, proximity to transit stops, walkability index, interchange accessibility, other weighted factors.

demonstrate plan level funding scenarios while maintaining participant's interest, however the use of wireless devices and computers for completing surveys must account for availability of broadband or cell service in the area. Targeted contact with ethnic media outlets can tailor advertisements to certain demographics. Translated materials should be modified to match language contexts instead of using an automated translation. In cases where LEP populations are expected to participate in an outreach event, interpreters should be on call or on site.
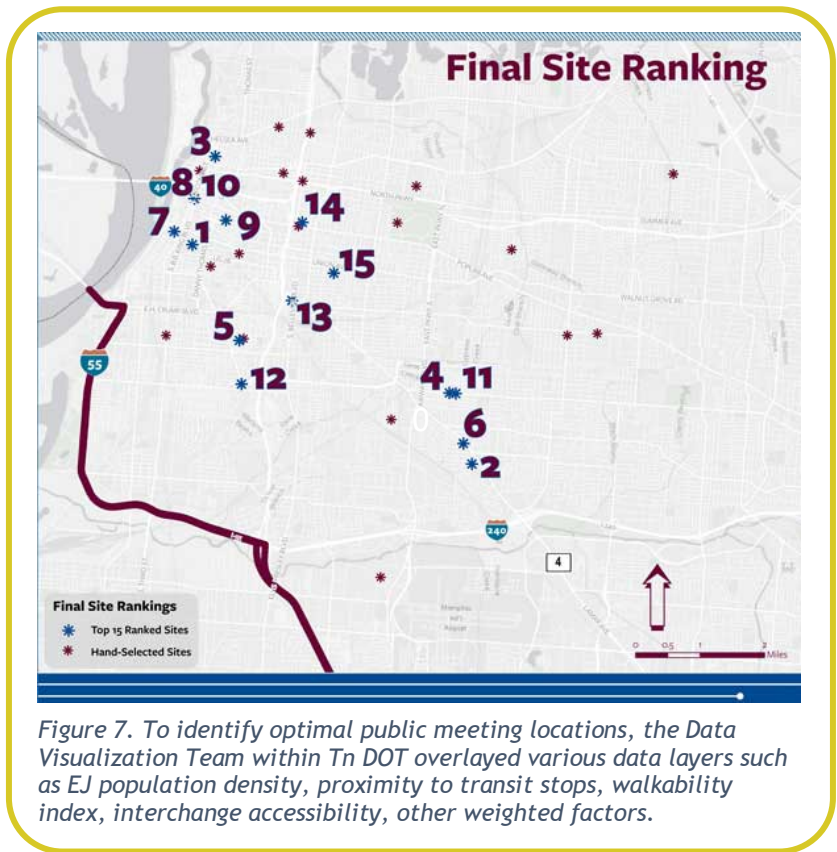
Academic Databases

Documents were reviewed from academic databases involving EJ and LEP populations in long-range transportation plans. The following categories were dissected to gather standard information across the different state's district of transportation (DOT):

- Printed materials
- Technology based tools
- Structure within DOTs
- Relationship with LEP/ EJ communities

Additional notes can be found on pages 26-27 in the appendix.

Key Findings

Adapt printed materials to specific communities. To allow the public to understand impacts to their community regarding transportation, information packets or brochures are often sent out to each resident through mail. Printed materials should be written in bullet point format and written in plain English. Tennessee University State found an increase in participation within the LEP/EJ communities if literature was displayed in plain English and in the form of bullet points. Pennsylvania DOT (PennDOT) decided to use this simple solution when sending out literature and posting documents online. Additionally, PennDOT found avoiding acronyms and transportation terms also increased participation within EJ communities.

Materials, social media posts, and webpages should also be presented in multiple languages. Utilizing a website and other technology- based tools, in addition to literature, has also been proven to increase participation. Website links to submit feedback should be consistent so that individuals only have one spot to see upcoming public hearings, projects, and statewide plans.

Implement technology-based tools to reach out to LEP and EJ communities. Florida International University (FIU) determined technology-based tools aided in LEP and EJ participation. FIU found that using Twitter, Email, Texting, Facebook, YouTube, and SurveyMonkey were the best ways to communicate with LEP populations.

The South Carolina DOT used technology-based tools to visually explain transportation projects, including showing a road change from two lanes to five lanes. Visuals help to explain concepts and impacts with little to no words making them a strong tool for multilingual communities. The Mississippi DOT uses looped videos to help explain project and plan impacts. The looped videos allow the viewer to slowly understand what will be done within the community during public meetings. Having a video on a loop allows the viewer to notice the project in its entirety no matter when they begin to view.

The Arizona DOT found that having automated kiosks at highly trafficked public locations allowed for increased public involvement. Kiosks were placed at shopping centers and transportation stations such as bus stops, train stations, and metro stations. Bystanders or transit users could stop and take a survey at their leisure.

Create structures within the department to cater to LEP/EJ communities. To successfully receive participation from LEP/EJ communities, it is recommended to create a committee within the DOT. The committee's responsibility would be to make, organize, and plan outreach related to LEP/EJ communities. Each committee member should be responsible for a set number of districts or other identified region within the state which will help DOT learn about each LEP and EJ community. More importantly, a committee should be implemented to help advocate for the LEP and EJ communities and to make sure all appropriate resources are utilized. The committee's role would be to:

- Cultivate relationships with LEP and EJ communities to gain trust.
- Understand the challenges LEP and EJ communities have to overcome related to transportation.
- Act as a liaison between the DOT and community by creating literature and technology-based tools that are concise and easy to follow to explain concepts. Document feedback from the communities and relay to ODOT.
- Assist at public meetings to ensure community members understand concepts, potential impacts, and how they can participate.

Build lasting relationships with LEP/ EJ communities. PennDOT found it was beneficial learn about the communities they were seeking input from in-person. PennDOT began using community leaders and networks to spread awareness about transportation projects. Community gathering places such as churches, barbershops, schools, and grocery stores were used to place literature in, in order to reach the maximum amount of people. FIU found that hosting meetings near bus stops, providing childcare, and having meetings take place in the evenings (due to work) allows for more participation from LEP and EJ communities. It is important for the DOT to know where the target communities feel comfortable participating and who they trust.

Planning Best Practices and Case Studies

A review was completed of best practices guidance published by FHWA, the American Planning Association, and related Environmental Justice organizations regarding environmental justice analysis and equity issues in transportation planning. These materials were reviewed for public outreach topics that may be applied to EJ and LEP populations. Each document was summarized.

The following provides a summary of overarching findings and recommendations from existing Planning guidance and best practices.

Additional notes can be found on pages 28-36 in the appendix.

Key Findings

Cultivate and support ambassadors. Recruit community organization members, train them in transportation planning processes, and provide funds for participation costs (printed materials, travel, etc.). Community organizations can function as co-hosts for meetings, however relationships with these entities will need to be built maintained over time. Ambassadors should be diverse in gender, religion, and age and ultimately reflect the demographic qualities of the target EJ or LEP population.

Diversify the outreach team. Assemble the outreach team to include employees and/or consultants with diverse outreach experience and language skills. Consider including local community organizers as paid members of the outreach team.

Identify populations for targeted outreach efforts, including information on geographic location of substantial populations. It is important to understand the geographic areas where EJ and LEP populations may be found. Collect household demographics by zip code or use dot-density mapping as a method for visualizing the regional distribution of EJ and LEP populations. MORPC utilizes dot density maps, which identify the regional distribution of different population groups at a finer population concentration. It should be recognized that EJ and LEP communities are not monolithic. Time and resources should be invested to represent all viewpoints. Consider all marginalized populations such as individuals with disabilities and older adults.

Track effectiveness. Set goals for participation based upon identified communities. Collect and evaluate data on participation for each targeted population to measure effectiveness of public involvement methods ("procedural equity"). Based upon the identified populations, determine areas that are overlooked. Include a process to collect feedback on the outreach process itself.

Use a What/Why two-step approach to outreach. Use broad survey techniques to understand what people are concerned about and use focus groups or interviews to understand why. Surveys should seek a statistically valid sample sizes and be open to anyone.

Make participation convenient. Include strategies and resources to overcome traditional barriers to inclusion, such as accessibility (ADA, transit-accessible), resources (childcare, food, transportation, etc.), language, and access to technology. Combining outreach events with existing community gatherings is one example to overcome barriers. Implement an online strategy that is relevant to the target populations by incorporating technology and media that people already use. Identify other stakeholders that are conducting outreach in the targeted areas to avoid duplication and/or participant frustration.

Show why participation matters. Foster trust by showing how input is used to influence the results. Provide summaries and announcements shortly after input is received.

Prioritize outreach in budget for the plan. Set aside staff time and consultant time to focus on engagement. Include funds for staffing, materials, equipment, food, transportation costs, and translation services. In order to allocate the necessary amount of resources to a project or process, these outreach funds should be incorporated into the planning effort scope up front.

Health and Education Agencies, Associated Research Organizations

Processes that other statewide agencies use in addressing LEP needs as part of long-range planning can be instructive for the Ohio Department of Transportation. Ohio Department of Education provides school districts with guidelines for meeting the needs of LEP students. Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services provides their counterpart county agencies with guidance on serving LEP populations with their medical, jobs, and social service programs.

Additional notes can be found on pages 37-38 in the appendix.

Key Findings

Develop an advisory committee like the state Department of Education. Revisions to Ohio's Title III Accountability Plan for LEP Students: The purpose of the process was to update the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) for LEP students and the criteria for exiting the LEP program. AMAOs are reviewed for update on a regular basis for implementation during each school year. The standing Ohio English Learner Advisory Committee is part of the review process, and provides ODE feedback on best practices, resources, and recommendations to improve educational programs for English learners. Committee membership includes EL program administrators, EL educators from across the state, specialized instructional support professionals, *representatives from state agencies and local community organizations who work with specific populations of English learners and their families*, and representatives from higher education that support teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) (Ohio English Learner Advisory Committee Overview). The English Learner Advisory Committee could provide a template for forming a transportation-related advisory committee that assists ODOT in long-range planning, particularly the criteria used to select representatives from other state agencies and local community organizations with work with specific LEP populations. The Title III Accountability Plan is a standing guidance document similar to ODOT long-range plans, and the work with the standing EL advisory committee in reviewing the AMAOs is similar to the type of feedback ODOT would solicit on transportation issues.

Work in partnership with the state Department of Jobs and Family Services. ODJFS is responsible for supervising the state's public assistance (Medicaid, food assistance, and cash assistance), workforce development, unemployment compensation, child and adult protective services, adoption, childcare, and child support programs. State and federal assistance programs in Ohio are typically administered by local (county) agencies with ODJFS providing guidance and support for the local entities. One area of guidance is the LEP Plan Drafting Guidelines for county agencies. These guidelines prescribe a process for ensuring that agencies are equipped to meet the needs and communicate with LEP populations that they serve. Each agency is required to perform a detailed LEP assessment of each county program to identify what language they may encounter. This assessment will identify if LEP populations meet the "Safe Harbor Provision" threshold of 1,000 persons or 5% of the total population eligible to be served, in which case the agencies are required to maintain vital documents translated into the native language of the LEP population. Agencies are expected to reassess the demographics in its county to determine if the need to adjust their resources to address new or growing populations. LEP populations that do not meet the "safe harbor provision" threshold must still be served with adequate language accommodations, but the agencies are not required to maintain translated vital documents in those languages. County agencies that receive guidance and support from ODJFS are required to maintain data on LEP

populations and languages present. ODOT could potentially access and leverage this information to engage these populations in long-range planning activities.

Enact a standing multi-cultural State Commission and Advisory Council.
The State of Ohio has several standing commissions/advisory councils that advocate for their communities. Members are appointed from the across the state and maintain community-level contacts, with the stated mission of assisting state government activity that affects their constituent populations. Three of these commissions/councils appear in the State of Ohio online directory and have webpages that are associated with State of Ohio web addresses. The Ohio Latino Affairs Commission has the mission to "advise Ohio's state government on matters affecting Hispanic Ohioans," to connect Latino communities across the state, and the build the capacity of Latino community organizations. The commission meets bi-monthly, with more information available at https://ochla.ohio.gov. The New African Immigrants Commission advocates for the development and implementation of policy and programs to address the needs of Ohio's sub-Saharan African population. It gathers and shares information about issues and programs provided by the State of Ohio, and it promotes the delivery of state services to new African immigrants. The commission meets 7 times a year, with more information available at https://naic.ohio.gov. The Ohio Asian Pacific Islander Advisory Council is listed in the State of Ohio directory and has a dedicated website; however, it does not appear to be functioning at this time and may have been replaced by non-governmental organizations.

Collaborate with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Non-profit Assistance Agencies.
NGO and non-profit assistance groups help facilitate communicate between LEP populations and local agencies and school entities. Three prominent ones that are engaged in education and health/social services are listed here; this should not be considered an exhaustive list and do not cover all of the LEP populations. These example groups could provide feedback on developing a process for engaging LEP populations in ODOT's long-range planning process, and they could also facilitate that communication during public engagement activities.

Asian Services in Action (ASIA) appears to operate mostly in the Cleveland/Akron area and serves Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). Its mission is the provide AAPIs and other communities access to quality culturally and linguistically appropriate information, health, and social services. Ohio Hispanic Coalition of Ohio (OHCO) has expanded its range to provide interpretation services for many common languages spoken in the Columbus, Ohio area. They currently serve over 20 languages including Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Nepali, Somali, and Amharic. OHCO also provides assistance with Health and Youth & Education programs and safety/legal assistance for LEP women. Finally, HOLA Ohio is a statewide organization the provides bilingual services and programs for Ohio's Latino and immigrant communities.

Follow WIDAs ABC's of Family Engagement to develop a process for LEP community engagement.
WIDA was created in 2003 as a consortium to support English language learners (ELLs) based on criteria established in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, "WIDA provides language development resources to those who support the academic success of multilingual learners." One resource provided is the document "ABCs of Family Engagement: Key Considerations for Building Relationships with Families and Strengthening Family Engagement Practices" that outlines six key criteria to consider when engaging LEP families in the educational environment: awareness, advocacy, brokering, building trust, communication, and connect to learning. The

following summarizes those criteria and raises issues for ODOT to consider as it develops a process for LEP community engagement in long-range planning activities.

Incorporate awareness into ODOT outreach. ODOT should collect information to better understand how specific communities structure their engagement with agencies and figure out ways to overcome internal implicit and explicit expectations of how LEP communities should engage with the department. Figure out if populations prefer speaking for themselves or designating a community representative. A less formal approach may be needed for communities that already have a distrust of government agencies. Accommodations should be made for different cultures that differ from typical American communication styles. Incorporating awareness into outreach can better equip LEP communities with the knowledge and skills they need to understand how to communicate their transportation planning needs.

Create tools to foster advocacy. Provide activities, workshops, or other learning opportunities to help LEP communities understand the transportation planning process. This understanding will better help representatives or LEP communities advocate for their needs.

Engage with "brokers" of hard-to-reach populations. "Brokers are people with access to the knowledge, skills, and language of school who serve as mediators to provide families access to the school culture and language" (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Hong, 2011). Community liaisons can serve as cultural and language brokers to assist LEP communities in interacting with ODOT. These liaisons should be identified to facilitate communication regarding transportation planning initiatives.

Prioritize building trust with communities. "Trusting relationships consist of the following four qualities: respect, integrity, competence, and personal regard" (Byrk & Schneider, 2002). ODOT can build trust through the four qualities identified. Personal regard may be more challenging at the state level. Creating connections may be most appropriate through interactions with District employees who are located near the LEP communities.

Create meaningful, two-way communication with communities. It is not enough to send out notifications about the opportunity to review and comment on planning documents. Two-way communication to ensure that LEP communities understand the proposals is necessary. Additionally, ODOT should seek to respond to communication from LEP communities to ensure that the agency understands the feedback being provided by the communities.

Connect to learning. Issues of statewide planning should be connected to the needs of LEP communities. Specific needs/concerns related to their culture and or lifestyle should be explored and documented. Make sure to incorporate both the needs of the LEP community and the general community in which they live for accurate representation.

Recommendations and Implementation

Tactics
- Crafting the message
- Utilizing different medias
- Deploying through different conduits
- Gathering feedback

Preparation and Policy
- Research, collecting data, identifying
- Resource allocation, building relationships

A variety of effective outreach methods and policy strategies were identified within the best practices, case studies and existing research documents. After summarizing key strategies, two categories emerged. The first; Preparation and Policy, and second; Tactics. Although both important, successful implementation of Preparation and Policy Recommendations build the foundation for a more successful utilization of the identified Tactics. For example, doing initial research on preferred communication channels and platforms for EJ and LEP populations can better help inform how the process or meetings are advertised, which can increase engagement and create a more efficient and effective outreach process.

Preparation recommendations refer to strategies that should be performed before even beginning the outreach process. Many preparation recommendations are related to data gathering, analysis, and organization. Policy recommendations suggest changes to staffing, funding, and other policy related decisions. Tactic recommendations refer to specific outreach tactics and strategies to improve engagement with LEP and EJ populations. Additional tactic details can be found in the Outreach Tactics and Techniques table at the end of the document. Each recommendation provides a description of the recommendation, suggested time frame for completion, the required resources, and notes for how to measure success.

Implementation Table Key

Time Frame
Ongoing: continual action
Immediate: within 1 year
Short-Term: within 2-3 years
Long-Term: within 3-5 years

Resources Required
Minimal: Policy or Staff Capacity
Low: $0-10,000
Medium: $10,000-50,000
High: $50,000+

Priority Recommendation
ODOT's outreach program cannot practically implement all listed recommendations. To start, we suggest focusing on key strategies marked with a green check mark symbol.

Preparation and Policy

1. Preparation

✅ **1.1 Use newest tools and practices to identify EJ populations. Work to improve these tools if gaps are identified.**

A customized approach should be taken to identify EJ and LEP populations for different areas. Frequently, mapping is used which designates certain areas as "EJ areas" or "non-EJ areas" based on whether the area meets an agency-specified threshold level. FHWA does not recommend the use of bright-line thresholds. Research has found that concentration levels can be an important indicator to consider. Dot density maps, which identify the regional distribution of different population groups at a finer population concentration, are an example of a suggested tool to identify clusters of EJ and LEP

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Immediate*
Resources	*Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *Field visits and discussions with community organizations validate identified EJ and LEP locations*
- *New mapping and data layers are created for EJ and LEP populations*

populations. Data should be maintained as new information is released. If areas of data are missing, coordination with CADD and Mapping Services or Data Governance may be needed to create new layers and databases for future plans, projects, and processes. New layers can include data such as potential meeting locations, ethnic businesses, or local gathering spots. This can help identify where to hold regional meetings, post flyers, or host pop up conversations and surveys.

1.2 Utilize a variety of identification methods to identify EJ and LEP populations.

A variety of methods should be used to identify EJ and LEP populations. One set of data may not show complete details or location of an EJ or LEP population. Census data and ACS data can be useful for EJ populations however block groups are large and have arbitrary boundaries whereas clusters can show the true location of EJ populations. Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services LEP assessments can be useful in gathering languages by county in addition to mapping and research on ethnic newspapers, businesses, and other indicators.

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Immediate*
Resources	*Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *More than one identification method is documented for EJ and LEP identification (e.g. field visit and mapping, mapping and stakeholder discussions, mapping and ODJFS data)*

1.3 Create and maintain a database of contacts for LEP and EJ state and regional agencies, community organizations, or other representatives.

Proper management of a contact database can go a long way in improving coordination and outreach in a public planning process. A contact database with information like contact information, location, affiliation or importance, and who the individual's clients are or who they advocate for can be crucial in effectively reaching out to EJ and LEP populations. Contacts in the database can include members of Jobs and Family Services, Ohio Latino Affairs Commission, New African Immigrants Commission, Ohio Asian Pacific Islander Advisory Council, and other NGOs.

Time Frame   Ongoing / Immediate

Resources   Minimal

Measures for Success:
- *The database can be accessed by all in the department*
- *The database includes at least 10 contacts for each county in Ohio*
- *The database can be filtered by target demographic and location*

1.4 Identify and document community members from other planning processes or projects who represent or can speak for LEP or EJ populations to act as liaisons to the community.

Outreach tactics such as hiring local residents to conduct outreach, supplying meeting-in-a-box kits to community members, and recruiting and organizing community ambassadors, leaders, or trusted advocates requires identification of individuals who can act as liaisons or advocates for the community. Respectful but involved members should be documented so that they can be easily contact for future projects and processes. Information can be gathered from responses in previous statewide planning efforts, regional planning efforts, or even project public involvement. A form can also be created to seek volunteers to be added to the list as a future contact.

Time Frame   Ongoing / Short-term

Resources   Minimal

Measures for Success:
- *The contact database includes involved members of the public or liaisons for LEP and EJ populations*

1.5 Identify platforms/communication channels preferred by different populations

Data should be collected on which communication channels and platforms are preferred by different LEP and EJ populations for Ohio. This can help target which type of outreach tactics should be used to engage the most people in an area. Existing studies can give a general idea of internet and technology preferences for different demographic groups, however specific data should be collected for populations within Ohio. Research and mapping should also identify where technology is not accessible at all (e.g., broadband and cellular dead zones). Connected Nation Ohio published detailed state and county maps of which areas in Ohio receive internet service with at least 10 mbps to 100 mbps (see appendix page 39) and other broadband statistics. Data can also be acquired by adding questions to upcoming transportation surveys.

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Immediate*
Resources	*Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *Data is collected and organized in a document*
- *The data and analysis is available to all in the department*
- *The data is referenced and used in the plan development process*

2. Policy

2.1 Dedicate a full-time staff member or increase staff capacity to focus on EJ and LEP engagement.

Dedicating time and resources at the state level is a key piece in being able to implement goals related to EJ and LEP engagement and to build long term community relationships/partnerships. It is critical to the success of all other steps that Statewide Planning and Research has additional staffing to address stated recommendations. Based upon reviewed case studies and best practices, it is recommended to make a key hire with demonstrated experience in public outreach within minority communities and other underserved populations. Advertise this position through normal channels, as required by ODOT policy, and also publicize among non-governmental agencies serving EJ and LEP populations. The full-time staff person would work to develop relationships with community based organizations, state agencies, advocacy groups, and others. The staff member would ideally be able to act as a facilitator, translator, and consult if needed for various department materials and engagement. Multiple dedicated contacts within ODOT can also be established to

Time Frame	*Short-Term*
Resources	*High*

Measures for Success:
- *A staff member is hired*
- *Contacts within ODOT are established to help build relationships with EJ and LEP populations*
- *EJ and LEP participation increases in the statewide planning effort*

help build relationships. Contacts will be allowed time to speak at local and regional organizations and meetings/events to inform residents about planning efforts or keep regular contact with community-based organizations. They will also be the contact point for questions and coordination outside of statewide planning outreach events.

2.2 Provide cultural competency training or guides for staff members.

Funding and resources should be dedicated to training public involvement staff on cultural competency skill building. Training can help individuals recognize a variety of languages, awareness of unique immigrant and refugee cultural practices when interacting with business and governmental institutions, and which outreach strategies are most culturally appropriate for immigrants and refugees, youth, seniors, communities of color, people with disabilities. Staff that have been trained will be able to provide advice and technical assistance to others in the department. Investing in training will help staff feel more comfortable interacting with diverse

Time Frame   *Ongoing / Short-Term*

Resources   *Low / Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *Staff give positive feedback about training (survey)*
- *Staff feel more comfortable engaging with LEP and EJ populations (survey)*
- *Lessons from the class are utilized in outreach and materials*

populations and help those EJ and LEP communities feel more comfortable interacting with the staff member. Training will also show the community that resources have been dedicated to better understand their culture, which builds trust. ODOT should continue to keep their recently adopted Title VI training updated, and add information regarding building relationships with the LEP and EJ communities.

2.3 Prioritize building trust and ongoing relationships with EJ and LEP communities.

Trust makes communities, processes, and engagement more effective. Communication about a process should be transparent and understanding. Public involvement expectations should be set and information should be provided about how participants input will be used. Regular updates on projects and status on long range plans can also help build trust. After receiving public input, it should clearly be stated how public input was used and exactly what changes were made based on the feedback from the public. Recurring and

Time Frame   *Ongoing / Long-Term*

Resources   *Minimal - High*

Measures for Success:
- *Survey feedback about level of trust with ODOT from LEP and EJ populations improve over time. (Feedback can be requested in customer preference survey)*

repeated interactions with the public and LEP and EJ communities help to sustain trust and a relationship. Many of the other recommendations also work towards building trust with LEP and EJ communities.

2.4 Provide flexibility for allocating funding to overcome barriers to participation.

Allocating sufficient resources for food, refreshments, childcare, and transportation can overcome barriers to participate for some who may not be able to otherwise join. Refreshments and other food items can increase meeting attendance and incentivize participation for some who may need a meal or snack. Having a snack also creates a more relaxed setting and allows for informal discussions and questions to take place outside of the official meeting. Providing childcare or child entertainment at meetings can also increase participation from parents who would otherwise stay home. This overcomes the barrier of needing to find a babysitter to attend a meeting or participate. Although childcare can present certain liability issues, having a community-based organization from the area assist at the meetings to entertain children in the same room while their guardian participates can be an effective way to handle childcare during a meeting. Providing transit incentives such as transit passes or rideshare discount codes can also help participants overcome the cost of getting to the meeting, further increasing participation. Promotional materials such as pens, stickers, magnets, and other items can also encourage participation.

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Short-Term*
Resources	*Low / Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *ODOT secures funding for outreach incentives*
- *Participation is documented and increases when incentives are provided*

2.5 Enact a standing Community Advisory Committee specific to EJ and LEP issues and engagement

Resources and time should be allowed for the creation and structure of a standing committee dedicated to public outreach for EJ and LEP populations. The committee will need a clear mission and identified participants. Based upon research to identify potential partners, select candidates to provide representation of EJ and LEP issues on standing statewide committees and regional stakeholder groups. Note that EJ and LEP populations are not monolithic so multiple representatives will be needed, which will vary depending on the region and topic of the committee. Ad hoc groups within the advisory committee can be formed for particular topics or efforts.

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Short-Term*
Resources	*Low / Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *A standing committee is enacted*
- *The committee is representative of the populations that are being targeted for outreach*

2.6 Create a structure for ODOT to regularly engage with MPO's and RTPO's to leverage their regional connections and data.

If not already engaged through the standing advisory committee, engaging with MPO's and RTPO's can provide useful regional data on LEP and EJ outreach tactics. Regularly scheduled meetings with MPOs and RTPOs should be organized to keep organizations up-to-date with new developments and practices concerning public outreach (specifically for LEP and EJ populations). Many MPO's and RTPO's within Ohio already have their own Title VI and LEP plans. These plans should be reviewed for helpful strategies to incorporate into statewide planning efforts. These regional organizations can also be utilized in the statewide planning efforts to help disseminate information and act as representatives for the outreach process. Additional notes about MPO and RTPO LEP and Title VI plans can be found on pages 40-43 in the appendix.

Time Frame	Ongoing / Short-Term
Resources	Minimal / Low

Measures for Success:
- *A standing meeting time and date is established for regular check-ins with MPOs and RTPO representatives*
- *Findings and data from the meetings and coordination are documented and adopted into plans and policies*

2.7 Issue regular statewide planning updates

Regular updates on the statewide plan should be published and advertised throughout the year, not just during plan development. This allows an opportunity for the public to become more familiar with statewide planning and what it means and influences. This can also be an opportunity to provide an update on how input was received and how it was used or provide a survey on the plan outreach. This can help influence future plans and processes if gaps are identified on if they had even heard or participated in the plan development, how people heard about the plan and process, and what ways the outreach process can improve for the next plan. Updates can also feature what is coming next or future outreach opportunities. Regular contact with the public via social media, flyers, or other means also helps build trust.

Time Frame	Ongoing / Immediate
Resources	Minimal

Measures for Success:
- *ODOT posts about statewide planning at least 6 times a year on various social media accounts*

2.8 Publish a guide on how public input was solicited, used, and incorporated into AO45.

Similar to recommendation 2.6, Access Ohio 2045 is a great opportunity to show why public input is important and how it is used. Utilizing the plan and plan development to show exactly how certain comments received during public outreach made direct changes to the plan can show that public input does matter and does influence plans. An information guide can be created to highlight the plan, public outreach process, feedback received and incorporated, and goals for the next plan update. This acts as an educational tool as well as an opportunity to build trust with the public by recognizing areas of improvement.

Time Frame   *Immediate*

Resources   *Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *ODOT circulates and advertises the guide on social media channels*
- *The guide is sent to all participants from AO45*
- *The guide is used for other regional and statewide plans as an example of how public input is used*

2.9 Create a resource contact list for common LEP and EJ concerns to distribute to the public (torn up sidewalks for wheelchair users, etc.)

Creating a magnet, brochure, postcard, or flyer that lists contact information for how to report common concerns like potholes, sidewalk issues, and other safety concerns can help the community solve local issues and also help cut down on unrelated comments received during public outreach for statewide plans. These materials can easily be included in outreach materials for regional plans or smaller district projects. Making sure the public understands how to reach ODOT when certain problems arise can improve the relationship with the public and ODOT. This can also be an opportunity to explain what issues are within ODOTs jurisdiction and what is not. Most of the information that could be included in the materials is already listed on ODOT's FAQ Page.

Time Frame   *Immediate*

Resources   *Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *ODOT circulates and advertises the list on social media channels*
- *The guide is used for other regional and statewide plans and ODOT projects*
- *There is an uptick in requests and complaints on identified channels*

2.10 Continue to ask for feedback internally and externally on how LEP and EJ engagement can be improved.

Internal conversations and analysis can be helpful in identifying strong and weak spots in LEP and EJ outreach and making a plan to fill gaps and continue effective strategies. Collecting information and feedback externally in the form of a survey, questionnaire, or conversations can supplement these findings and detect other concerns or favored techniques that may not have been found during internal analysis. Implementing new and innovative techniques may require iterations of deployment in which feedback is critical to achieving success. Following WIDAs ABC's of Family Engagement could be helpful to develop a process for LEP community engagement. A solid plan should be made to document internal and external feedback and circulate for additional thoughts and ideas. This document can help inform future public outreach plans and strategies for future plan updates.

Time Frame	*Ongoing / Immediate*
Resources	*Minimal*

Measures for Success:
- *Bi annual meetings are held to discuss LEP and EJ engagement strengths and weaknesses*
- *Survey feedback is provided with suggestions on how to better connect with LEP and EJ populations. (Feedback can be requested in customer preference survey or as a standalone survey to test LEP and EJ identification and outreach methods)*

Tactics

✓ **3.1 Hold meetings, surveys, and engagement activities in formats that are tailored to target populations.**

Giving the opportunity to submit feedback, thoughts or questions in a variety of formats casts a wider net to ensure everyone has a chance to engage with the plan and development process. For a statewide plan, much of the public outreach will need to occur through on-line efforts. This can be more effective if certain tactics are employed to increase participation. Advertise outreach activities through preferred conduits identified in recommendation 1.5. Use community partners to share the information and advertise through identified popular media in targeted areas.

Time Frame	*Ongoing*
Resources	*Minimal - Low*

Measures for Success:
- *The statewide plan has at least 3 to 4 different ways for the community to provide input*
- *Community partners are leveraged to help hold pop up open houses, community conversations, and deliver information/flyers*

On-line efforts will be less effective in areas where there is poor broadband and/or cellular coverage, or where there is limited internet usage among the target populations. Focus limited staffing for non-digital efforts within these areas.

- Set up outreach kiosks in frequently visited public areas (not government offices) during a range of times (weekday midday, weekday evening, weekend midday).
- Ask community partners to host their own pop-ups using provided outreach materials and provide staff to assist if desired.

See Outreach Tactics and Techniques for additional information on specific outreach methods.

3.2 Advertise processes through a variety of means.

Just as increased outreach opportunities increase the chance of willing and available participants, advertisements and notices of the different opportunities should be disseminated through a variety of messages and means. Advertisement strategies should also align with EJ and LEP preferences identified in recommendation 1.5. If it is known that virtual advertisements are not successful in a certain area, direct mailings or radio advertisements may be the best method of notice.

Time Frame	*Ongoing*
Resources	*Low - Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *The statewide plan is advertised through at least 3 to 4 different means*
- *Direct mailings are sent to specific identified locations that may not have access to internet*

3.3 Tailor outreach materials to LEP and EJ communities.

LEP and EJ communities are not all the same. Specific languages and dialects should be identified in the region where outreach is targeted/planned early in the process. Advertisements and outreach materials should be created to be accessible to all audiences. For example, websites should be checked for plain language that is understood by most English speakers, that is accessible for screen readers (for the visually impaired), that is understandable when auto-translated, and is viewable on a mobile device. Manual translations (instead of automated) should be available for the most common languages of LEP populations to avoid offensive connotations or translation errors.

Time Frame	*Ongoing*
Resources	*Low - Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *All materials are reviewed for EJ and LEP accessibility*
- *Websites and pages are at least 85% compatible with assistive reading technologies*

See Outreach Tactics and Techniques for additional information on specific outreach methods.

3.4 Collaborate with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Non-profit Assistance Agencies, and other state organizations or commissions to preform smaller outreach tasks and distribute information.

Because of the nature and scale of statewide planning, it is often necessary to deploy or outsource outreach techniques to implement on a smaller scale. By connecting with community partners or regional organizations, a statewide outreach process can be broken up into smaller regions or by specific demographics. Community Partners and regional organizations likely already have the tools to disperse information about a process. They will also have insights into what methods have been successful in their area and additional resources and contacts to help with outreach efforts. Third parties can also be hired from the targeted communities to serve as points of contact with neighborhoods. They can help facilitate and host meetings, talk to residents, and provide feedback on outreach tools and techniques. Third parties who are interacting with the public should be properly trained before performing outreach tasks. Contacts identified in recommendation 1.3 should be utilized for this recommendation.

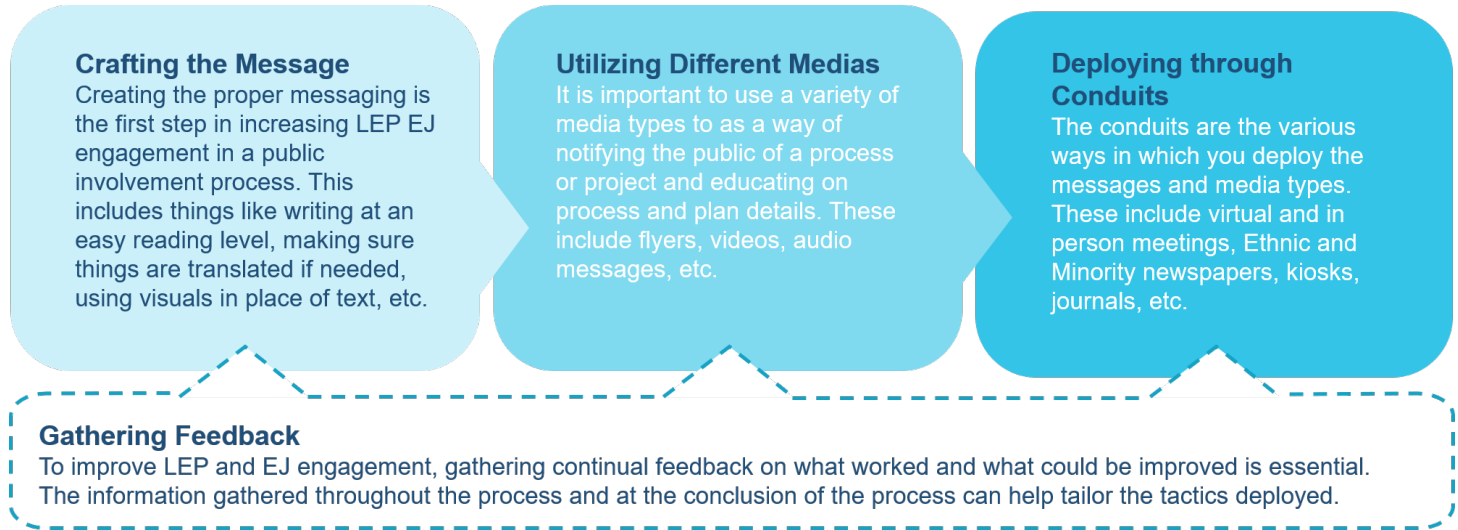|	
Time Frame	*Ongoing / Short-term*
Resources	*Low - Medium*

Measures for Success:
- *Collaboration with MPO's and RTPO's increases LEP and EJ engagement*
- *Additional resources and data are provided by state, regional, and local groups*

Implementation Table Summary

	#	Description	Time Frame	Resources
1: Preparation	1.1	Use newest tools and practices to identify EJ populations. Work to improve these tools if gaps are identified.	Ongoing / Immediate	Minimal
	1.2	Utilize a variety of identification methods to identify EJ and LEP populations.	Ongoing / Immediate	Minimal
	1.3	Create and maintain a database of contacts for LEP and EJ state and regional agencies, community organizations, or other representatives.	Ongoing / Immediate	Minimal
	1.4	Identify and document community members from other planning processes or projects who represent or can speak for LEP or EJ populations to act as liaisons to the community.	Ongoing / Short term	Minimal
	1.5	Identify platforms/communication channels preferred by different populations.	Ongoing / Immediate	Minimal
2: Policy	2.1	Dedicate a full-time staff member or increase staff capacity to focus on EJ and LEP engagement.	Short term	High
	2.2	Provide cultural competency training or guides for staff members.	Ongoing/short term	Low / Medium
	2.3	Prioritize building trust and ongoing relationships with EJ and LEP communities.	Ongoing/long term	Minimal / High
	2.4	Provide flexibility for allocating funding to overcome barriers to participation.	Ongoing/short term	Low / Medium
	2.5	Enact a standing Community Advisory Committee specific to EJ and LEP issues and engagement.	Ongoing/short term	Low / Medium

	2.6	Create a structure for ODOT to regularly engage with MPO's and RTPO's to leverage their regional connections and data.	Ongoing/short term	Minimal / Low
	2.7	Issue regular statewide planning updates.	Ongoing / immediate	Minimal
	2.8	Publish a guide on how public input was solicited, used, and incorporated into AO45.	Immediate	Minimal
	2.9	Create a resource contact list for common LEP and EJ concerns to distribute to the public (torn up sidewalks for wheelchair users, etc.).	Immediate	Minimal
	2.10	Continue to ask for feedback internally and externally on how LEP and EJ engagement can be improved.	Ongoing / immediate	Minimal
3: Tactics	3.1	Hold meetings, surveys, and engagement activities in formats that are tailored to target populations.	Ongoing	Minimal / Low
	3.2	Advertise processes through a variety of means.	Ongoing	Low / Medium
	3.3	Tailor outreach materials to LEP and EJ communities.	Ongoing	Low / Medium
	3.4	Collaborate with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Non-profit Assistance Agencies, and other state organizations or commissions to preform smaller outreach tasks and distribute information.	Ongoing	Low / Medium

Outreach Tactics and Techniques

The following are tactics that were found across all sources. They fall under broad categories at different parts of the outreach process, beginning with crafting mindful messaging, utilizing different medias, deploying through different conduits, and gathering feedback. Some of the tools are primarily used/designed for project level engagement, however some can be adapted to engage targeted populations as part of larger statewide planning processes.

Crafting the Message
Creating the proper messaging is the first step in increasing LEP EJ engagement in a public involvement process. This includes things like writing at an easy reading level, making sure things are translated if needed, using visuals in place of text, etc.

Utilizing Different Medias
It is important to use a variety of media types to as a way of notifying the public of a process or project and educating on process and plan details. These include flyers, videos, audio messages, etc.

Deploying through Conduits
The conduits are the various ways in which you deploy the messages and media types. These include virtual and in person meetings, Ethnic and Minority newspapers, kiosks, journals, etc.

Gathering Feedback
To improve LEP and EJ engagement, gathering continual feedback on what worked and what could be improved is essential. The information gathered throughout the process and at the conclusion of the process can help tailor the tactics deployed.

Crafting the Message	Notes
Avoid words that may sound demeaning	Instead of "here to educate you", "we're here to talk about".
Phrase questions relevant to people's concerns	What are your favorite places to visit? What about them might work here? Where are the places you go/want to go and what is your transportation experience?
Make sure materials are translated if needed	Be sure to consider connotation (culturally derived meaning) vs. denotation (dictionary meaning). Google translate may not translate information accurately or respectfully.
Confirm webpages are compatible with assistive reading technologies	Use clear headings and language for websites. Different sized fonts for headers, sub-headers, and body text make it easier for assistive technologies to read. Run the URL of the survey or webpage through a web screening tool in order to see how compatible the page or survey is with assistive reading technologies.

Use imagery and visuals to help explain concepts	Simple graphics can help LEP and hard of hearing individuals understand concepts and information.
Write materials at an easy reading level. Avoid colloquial phrases, use plain English.	Tips taken from *Plain Language for Rural Transit: Writing for Readability and Clarity written by the National Rural Transit Assistance Program*: • Use the easiest words you can. • Use words with fewer syllables (rider is shorter than traveler or passenger) or the word that most people use (the word bus is used by more people than vehicle). • If you have to use a difficult word, explain it the first time you use it. Example: "We offer a fixed-route service. This means we have a regular schedule for when and where you can get on the bus." • Use short sentences and paragraphs. "Travel training is free" is a shorter sentence than "We do not charge our passengers any fees for our travel training services." US DOT recommends no more than 15-20 words per sentence and less than 7 lines per paragraph. • Break sentences with commas into separate sentences. • Use bulleted lists or tables. • Include images. Use an active voice. Write like you are talking to someone. This sentence uses a passive voice and may be confusing, "Our passengers need to understand our policy that states that they are allowed to bring service animals on the bus." This sentence uses an active voice, "You can ride the bus with a service animal."

Utilizing Different Medias	Notes / Examples
FAQ Sheets	Utilize information already available. Look at FAQ webpages and organize in an easily digestible sheet or flyer.
Short Educational Videos	**Mississippi DOT** Mississippi DOT used looped videos at meetings to help explain what will be done to the community in less words. The looped videos allow the viewer to slowly understand what will be done within the community during public meetings.
Informational Flyers/Handouts	Flyers are a great supplemental tool to provide quick, accessible information. Flyers should be tailored for specific populations.
Social Media Posts	**North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)** NCTCOG experienced a 25 percent higher engagement rate when social media posts used: • Human tone—communicating in a way that is more personable and conversational • Fun, light-hearted content • Content and voice mirror pages followed by staff at NCTCOG • Consistent design, fonts, imagery
Written Surveys	Effective written surveys can be a great tool to collect feedback throughout the public engagement process or at the conclusion to improve outreach tactics for future engagement.
Conversations / Oral Interviews	Conversations and oral interviews are great for low-literate and limited-English-proficiency population. An individual who is trusted in the community should be selected to facilitate conversations.
Audio Messages	Audio messages can provide information to those who are low literate. These messages can be presented at project meetings or provided to radio stations and free and cable access television stations as public service announcements, or as short programs.
Meeting-in-a-box	Provide all meeting materials in a box so that community members and leaders can host their own meetings. Include information to mail or drop the box off so that the responses and materials can be documented and organized. **The City of Austin** distributed "Meeting-in-a-Box" kits in English and Spanish during the development of its Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. In total, 1,242 people participated with these kits during the initial phase—equal to upwards of 150 tables at a typical public input meeting.

Paid advertisements	Paid advertisements (either written or audio) can help distribute information to hard-to-reach populations who may rely on a sole source to receive their news.
Direct mailings	Direct mailings are an effective tool to advertise and inform participants who may be impacted or affected by a project or process; however it should not be used as a primary outreach tool for certain populations. The **Arizona DOT** typically does not use written notices or newsletters in areas where it is known that most of the population uses post office boxes (such as those in Navajo Nation). Depending on the people and where they live, they may not check their post office box regularly, making advertising events through the mail very difficult.
Promotional items (pens, clips, magnets)	Promotional items should include a short URL or slogan to remind participants where to go to share feedback or get information.
Visual Preference Surveys, Photographs, 3D animations	Visual preference surveys, photographs and animations can be used to share ideas and concepts without written words, making it easy for those who speak a variety of languages or are low-literate.
Games	**Kentucky Transportation Cabinet** In 1998 the Charlotte County/Punta Gorda, Florida, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) created a game called "Strings and Ribbons," which gave players money to invest in different transportation elements and projects. The effectiveness of the game and its engagement caught the attention of other regions where it has been applied to long-range transportation plans (LRTPs), short-term transportation plans, Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), and project specific plans. In 2004, the Volusia County (FL) MPO used a variation of Strings and Ribbons to promote public involvement in their 2025 LRTP. They played games at 34 different locations, engaged 670 people, and identified approximately 2,000 projects for consideration. "Blocks and Ribbons," the Miami-Dade County MPO's version of the game, increased public participation in the regional planning process from only 24 people several years before to almost 500 people in 2008. For more information like challenges, benefits, and costs of this approach see pages 4-38 to 4-43 in NCRHP Report 710: Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking.

Deploying Through Conduits	Notes / Examples
In person meetings	In person meetings should be used in supplement with other engagement tactics. See Best Practices for notes on selecting a meeting location for in person meetings.
Virtual meetings	Virtual meetings should be used in supplement with other engagement tactics. Information should be gathered on what platforms are most accessible and popular for certain EJ and LEP communities. Guidance from ODOT's Public Involvement portal should be followed to ensure the virtual meeting is accessible to LEP and EJ communities.
Radio	Websites such as https://worldradiomap.com and https://www.radiolineup.com/locate provides information on radio stations by State, City, and transmitter making it easy to target certain demographics and communities via radio. Radio stations in bordering states may be necessary to advertise to communities along the edges of Ohio. For example, many of the radio stations listened to in Marietta, Ohio are West Virginia Radio Stations.
Television	https://www.stationindex.com provides a list of local television stations by state. They also provide the station ID, City, owner, station information, and the associated market.
Ethnic and Minority newspapers	http://www.abyznewslinks.com/unite.htm provides a list of ethnic and non-ethnic newspapers by State and City.
Planner Presentation Circuit	**Oklahoma City** For Oklahoma City's Comprehensive Plan, city planners spoke to various professional, non-profit, and neighborhood groups to introduce planokc and share ways they could be involved. The Presentation Circuit reached approximately 50 groups and over 1,300 people.
Utility bills	Many cities use their utility bills to advertise certain public services or programs to hard-to-reach individuals.

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	**North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG)** In 2017, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) transportation department developed a social media design guide that provided in-depth details on graphic dimensions, typography, watermarks, layouts, design trends, and photos. The highest survey response rate came from those developed using general professional language and targeted to a general population. However, ads in Spanish targeted to the Hispanic community also had a higher response rate. For those that responded to the survey in Spanish, 90 percent were directed from Facebook advertising, showing that the advertising did help push a higher response.
Pop up kiosks and tables	**Georgia DOT** Georgia DOT conducted surveys at two major malls, Plaza Fiesta Mall and Mercado del Pueblo, that were identified as places to survey Hispanic customers. Representatives from both malls gave suggested times when the malls would be most trafficked. On Sunday between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., surveys were conducted at Plaza Fiesta Mall. The mall provided eight bilingual interpreters, and four set-up spaces with tables and chairs. Shoppers could stop at one of the four tables and complete surveys in English or in Spanish without assistance or verbally talk to an interpreter or team member to give input. Soccer balls and other toys were given to children regardless of whether their parents had filled out a survey. Visualizations of possible design options were provided as handouts. A total of 345 surveys were completed. Mainstream television news media attended the event and showed their coverage during their local evening news programs. On Sunday between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. surveys were conducted at Mercado del Pueblo. As with the Plaza Fiesta event, small soccer balls were given to children regardless of whether or not the parents completed a survey. The four bilingual interpreters roamed the bakery area and administered surveys to shoppers in English or Spanish, while other shoppers stopped at the table and completed surveys in English or Spanish without assistance. A total of 168 surveys were completed. For more information like challenges, benefits, and costs of this approach see pages 4-38 to 4-43 in NCRHP Report 710: Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking.
State organizations websites, journals, newsletters	Ohio Diversity Council, etc.

Existing community events	Sporting events, state and county fairs, "mud sales", conferences
Legal notice in the states journal	Advertising in legal journals is less so for the public to recognize, but to get the attention of policy advocates to spread the word.
Advertise on buses and in transportation hubs	**City of Columbus** For projects and plans, the City of Columbus records 10-15 second audio messages to play on buses whose routes and stops may be impacted by the project. The message includes a brief sentence about the project or plan and how participants can get involved. This can be supplemented by giving transit drivers flyers or additional information to bus riders.
Talk to Service and Transit Providers	Regional public transit providers as well as Private providers of transportation regularly interact with LEP and EJ communities. They can be useful conduits to gather information from and also spread the word to about a plan or process.
Utilize existing non-governmental organizations	Local colleges/universities, bus drivers' unions, tribal organizations, healthcare and faith based orgs, neighborhood HOAs
Tap into offices, districts, municipalities	Administration on Aging, MPOs, Cities, Townships, Villages.
Targeted but randomized phone call surveys (telephone town halls)	**Michigan DOT** Michigan DOT utilized County voter registration rolls (which include telephone numbers) to enhance participation and reach people in each county in the State. Just before the meeting started, automated calls were made to randomly selected voters until a chosen percentage of participants from each county were on the phone. The town hall meeting included a brief description of the plan, several polling questions on the plan and the transportation system, and an opportunity to ask questions. The Michigan DOT staff gathered in one conference room for the meeting to facilitate answering questions.

Public transit "ride-alongs"	**Washington State DOT** To engage Spanish speaking communities for their Statewide Human Services Transportation Plan, members of the DOT and project team, along with interpreters if needed, sat on buses with popular routes in those identified communities and had conversations with transit users while filling out a survey and taking notes.
Visit specific LEP and EJ businesses/gathering spots to drop flyers or have conversations	Post offices, Clinics, Barber shops, Salons, Local clubs, Libraries, Community centers/Rec. centers, Dollar stores, Child care centers, Thrift stores, Schools, (DMV) Department of Motor Vehicles, Churches/Faith based organizations, Public transportation hubs/stops, Laundromats, apartment complexes, mobile home communities.
Utilize School contacts (Principals, bus drivers, ESL teachers)	**Georgia DOT** GDOT visited principals at schools that were known to have a high population of Hispanic students. The principals were asked to distribute flyers to all fifth-grade students with instructions for them to take the flyers home to their parents.
Host community block meetings/parties	**Colorado DOT** The Colorado DOT holds community block parties for projects and local planning processes. Participation increased in LEP and EJ populations because the meetings came to their neighborhoods and food and materials were provided for the meeting. Invitations are mainly spread by word of mouth between neighbors and through informational flyers and mailings.
Billboards, Marquees, and message signs	Billboards can be a great tool to advertise quick messages to the traveling public like a planning process slogan and website or an online survey or questionnaire.

Focus groups / Individual interviews	**Community Planning Association of South Idaho** For its long-range plan update, the Community Planning Association of South (COMPASS) Idaho hosted a series of focus groups targeted to underserved populations or people that do not traditionally participate in the transportation planning process, including minorities, persons with disabilities, college students, and parents with young children. COMPASS partnered with other organizations, actively engaging these groups and going to their venues to meet with them. For example, COMPASS partnered with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to organize a focus group for older and retired people, collaborated with a parents group at a church to meet parents of young children, and worked with the social services agency responsible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC Program) to organize a meeting for low-income individuals. COMPASS also met with a leadership club of teens and young adult refugees. Staff worked with the club organizers and held a focus group at one of their scheduled club meetings.
Form Advisory Boards, Committees, Taskforces, and Working Groups	**The Tahoe MPO in Nevada** created the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) to serve as an advisory body regarding the transit needs of transit-dependent and transit-disadvantaged persons, including the elderly, handicapped, and persons of limited means. **The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District in** California created an Accessibility Advisory Committee to review, to comment, and to advise the board of directors and district staff regarding the implementation of District planning, programs, and services for seniors and individuals with disabilities.
Build Relationships with Community Organizations and Other Local Experts to Understand Communities	Building relationships and alliances with social services organizations, faith-based institutions, community-based organizations, or other groups at the local level that regularly interact with or include members from traditionally underserved populations can help transportation planning processes reach EJ and LEP populations. They can help distribute information, identify important individuals to contact, become an intermediary with other organizations, and act as a cosponsor or facilitator on projects.

Recruit and Organize Community Ambassadors, Leaders, or Trusted Advocates	Leaders should be selected based on their ability to bridge the communication gap between agency practitioners and EJ and LEP communities. They should be trusted members of the community and effective communicators. These ambassadors may be a member of a specific ethnic, racial, and/or cultural group with particular expertise in the culture, language, history, and values of the local community.
Hire Local Residents to Conduct Outreach	**North Carolina DOT** After initial discussions and interviews with elected and appointed officials; neighborhood groups, religious leaders, emergency services personnel; media staff from Black, Hispanic, and mainstream organizations; formal and informal business groups; public school bus drivers and officials; city bus drivers; and other residents it was decided that hiring residents from core neighborhoods could improve communications within specific neighborhoods. Most of the local hires were Blacks and bilingual Hispanics. Having a local staff of 75 people made it possible to have a far-reaching and continuous outreach approach that also grabbed the attention of the public. For more information like challenges, benefits, and costs of this approach see pages 4-100 to 4-104 in NCRHP Report 710: Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking.

Gathering Feedback	Notes / Examples
Collect ongoing data on participation and notification preferences	Collecting ongoing feedback can be valuable to help identify where there are outreach gaps, if messages aren't clear, or which channels are best to deliver and reach key participants. This collected data can also help establish a benchmark to measure effectiveness and allocate resources wisely. Publicinput.com can evaluate location data in real time, allowing team members to identify areas of low participation and tailor additional communication and outreach to those areas.
Evaluate gaps during the process to correct deficiencies in real time	**Access Ohio 2045** AO45 tracked participant locations from users on PublicInput.com and could then reach out and target MPOS and other organizations to try to improve participation in areas that have low involvement.
Seek feedback on the outreach effort itself	Evaluating a process or plan once it has been completed can help improve public engagement with LEP and EJ communities in the future. Both qualitative and quantitative data should be collected to analyze and update communication and public engagement plans for future processes. This can also help build trust between the communities and agency by discussing what worked, what could be improved, and holding accountability for improving the process in the future.
Follow up quickly on what input was received and how it was/will be used	Follow ups to the public are often delayed because of the time it takes to draft and approve responses to comment. Initial follow-ups do not need to be formal and can be sent in the form of meeting minutes or a database/summary. This will ensure that the public knows they have been heard and are informed of what occurred during the meeting or process. A more formal follow up will solidify the importance of their participation.

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