

Building a better transit system with public engagement

The Oregon Department of Transportation requires Qualified Entities and Public Transportation Service Providers to engage community members and other stakeholders when deciding how to fund projects with Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) moneys. Your engagement activities can help produce public transportation projects that better meet community needs and improve confidence in how Public Transportation Service Providers use public funds.

What do we mean by “public engagement”?

Public engagement is a broad term that includes informing and consulting with stakeholders about a pending decision so that they may have the chance to help influence the final outcome. Similar terms include public outreach, public communications and public involvement.

Best practices for better engagement

Identify your stakeholders

Identify the people and organizations who could be affected by potential projects funded with STIF moneys. This could include other Public Transportation Service Providers, community organizations, business along a route, advocacy groups, current transit riders and people who don't yet use transit.

Ask stakeholders how they prefer to be involved

Your public engagement process will be more effective if you use tools and strategies that fit the needs of the people you're trying to reach. Ask community members that sit on your advisory committees or other community leaders to offer ideas and provide feedback on your public engagement tactics.

Clarify the public's role in the decision process

As you begin public engagement, it is important your stakeholders understand their level of influence in a decision and who is responsible for the final decision. When you ask stakeholders to share their input or provide feedback, explain how their ideas will be considered. As you announce decisions, describe the range of comments received and how comments and other information affected the final decision.

Meet your stakeholders where they are

Plan your public engagement activities at times and places convenient for the people you're trying to reach. Instead of creating something new, consider attending popular events frequented by your stakeholders and using existing communication channels to distribute information. Contact community organizations that have a relationship with your stakeholders to see if they would be willing to share your information or help you host a meeting.

Be inclusive

Consider the needs of people who face barriers to participation in your engagement process, and ways you can reduce those barriers. These can include:

- Limited English skills
- Difficulty seeing, hearing or moving
- Limited time or work schedule
- Childcare needs
- Low literacy
- Lack of an address

Tools to engage the public in your decision process

Tools to share information

- Website
- Email updates
- Media releases
- Social media
- Mailings
- Fliers and posters
- Information posted at transit facilities
- Presentations to community or business groups

Tools to collect input

- Comment forms
- Online surveys
- On-board rider surveys
- Email comments
- Mail-in comments
- Project voicemail
- Information booth at community events
- Verbal comment at advisory committee or governing body meetings
- Public meetings

STIF Advisory Committees

An essential component of STIF public engagement is the Advisory Committee formed by each Qualified Entity in accordance with STIF administrative rules. The purpose of the Advisory Committee is to advise and assist the Qualified Entity in carrying out the goals of the STIF and prioritizing public transportation projects to be funded by STIF moneys. The Advisory Committee also is an opportunity for the Qualified Entity to build relationships with committee members of various perspectives and strengthen members' understanding about the process and considerations of transit planners.

Advisory Committee meetings can serve as a venue for wider public engagement. Distribute advance notice of committee meetings inviting people to observe committee discussions and provide comments in writing or verbally during designated times on meeting agendas.

Tips for working with Advisory Committees:

- **Provide meeting materials in advance.** Meetings will be more productive if members receive the agenda and meeting materials in advance to prepare for discussions.
- **Allow alternative meeting options.** Encourage members to meet in person. If in-person meetings are not practical, provide options for remote participation using conference calls and webinar technology.
- **Document and post Advisory Committee progress.** Make meeting agendas, materials and notes available for public review online or in other accessible formats to help people understand and track the committee's work. The Qualified Entity should retain public records for six years to comply with Oregon public meeting rules.
- **Develop clear Advisory Committee bylaws that guide the conduct of the committee.** A template for STIF Advisory Committee bylaws is available in the STIF Formula Fund section of the Rail and Public Transit Division's Funding Opportunities page.

Public engagement resources

Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking

Author: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/public_involvement/publications/pi_techniques/fhwahep15044.pdf

Environmental Justice Policy Guidance for Federal Transit Administration Recipients (FTA Circular, 4703.1)

Author: FTA

https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/FTA_EJ_Circular_7.14-12_FINAL.pdf

Resource Guide on Public Engagement

Author: National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

http://www.ncdd.org/files/NCDD2010_Resource_Guide.pdf

18F Accessibility Guide

Author: 18F

<https://accessibility.18f.gov/>

How to Make Presentations Accessible to All

Author: World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/training/>

Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation

Author: International Association for Public Participation

<https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>