Planning Innovative and Engaging Public Meetings

Rickie Clark, Public Hearing Manager, INDOT
Erin Pipkin, Vice President, Borshoff
Andrea Farmer, Senior Account Director, Borshoff

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Agenda

- Why host a public meeting?
- Legal guidelines
- Public hearings vs. public meetings
- Format, logistics
- Preparing for crowds, media interviews
- Spreading the word
- Innovative tools
Why Host a Public Meeting?

- Legal requirement
- Inform the public
- Gather feedback
- Build goodwill
Legal Guidelines, Requirements

- Post notice at location at least 48 hours before meeting will begin.
- Submit legal notices.
- Public hearing requirements.
- ADA requirements (access, sign language interpreter).
- Interpreters for other languages.
Indiana Code 8-23-2-17 Public Hearings

- Sec. 17 (a) A “public hearing” means an assembly or a meeting by the department for the purpose of:
  - (1) Providing information early in the decision making process.
  - Considering economic, social, environmental, other effects on highway proposals.
Legal Guidelines, Requirements

- (b) Whenever the department holds a public hearing, the department shall allow any person an opportunity to be heard in the presence of others who are present to testify.

- The department, through the commissioner or designee, may limit testimony at a public hearing to a reasonable time.

Source: Indiana Code
Public Hearings

- Public hearings part of the NEPA process.
- Must be held at a critical decision-making point.
- Set requirements for legal advertising.
- Formal proceedings, transcript, comment periods
- Should include ADA accommodations for participants and considerations for non-English speaking stakeholders.
- Feedback requirements following hearing.
  - Requires action when appropriate NEPA document is approved.
Public Meetings

- Held at sole discretion of project sponsor.
- Held to solicit input on project decisions.
- Not required by law or regulation.
- Advertised at project sponsor’s discretion.
- Requires no formal certification or transcript.
- Should include ADA accommodations for meeting participants and non-English speaking stakeholders.
- Held to better serve our customers and to address community concerns.
Meeting Format Options

- **Open house**
  - Several hours, no set activities, project representatives available for questions

- **Presentation**
  - Representative presents information, limited opportunity for questions (unless official hearing)

- **Virtual**
  - Broadcast online or on television

- **Combination**
Logistics

- **Date and time**
  - Remember target audiences.
  - Best to offer a range of hours or host two sessions.
  - Allow time before and after for the media.

- **Be sure the event allows enough time to consider public input.**
Logistics

- **Location**
  - Hold in accessible, public space (usually free).
  - Book room large enough for crowds.
  - Use signage, if needed.
  - Have chairs available.
  - Consider acoustics and lighting.
  - Make arrangements for and advertise American Sign Language or Spanish interpreters, if needed.
Logistics

- **Set-up, flow**
  - Exterior and interior signage leading to room
  - Registration table
  - Exhibits
  - Seating area
  - Presentation staging, podium, A/V
Logistics

- **Staffing**
  - Ensure enough staff to handle crowds.
  - Give team members nametags, “uniform.”
  - Prepare team for tough Q&A.
  - Designate one media contact.
  - Have someone take photos.
Logistics

- Exhibits
  - Boards
  - Videos
  - Maps
  - Hands-on activities
  - Tables for related organizations
Logistics

- **Handouts**
  - Fact sheets, FAQs
  - Maps
  - Distribute at displays, not sign-in table.
  - Prepare extras for those who cannot attend.
  - Leave extras, or take them to public places like libraries or schools.
Logistics

- Expenses
  - Room rental (janitorial fees)
  - A/V needs, personnel
  - Boards/handouts/renderings
  - Signage
Logistics

- Spreading the word
  - Media
  - Newsletter
  - Email
  - Social media
  - Postcard
  - Fliers
  - Advertisement (radio, print, digital)
Logistics

- **Media interviews**
  - Prep messaging, tough Q&As beforehand.
  - Designate someone to greet the media.
  - Be prepared for the media to approach the most vocal in the room.
Crowds and Angry Residents

- **Crowds:**
  - Clearly label tables and sources of information.
  - Use your microphone to direct residents to the right tables.
  - Throw out your agenda.

- **Angry residents:**
  - Isolate the disruptive person, ask them to speak in a quiet area away from the group.
  - Take a 15 minute break.
Innovation

- Accept questions for presenters via:
  - Email
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Phone
Virtual Town Hall

- Broadcast meeting on radio or TV.
- Invite residents to call, email or tweet their questions before or during event.
- Can be rebroadcast several times and placed on your website.
Virtual Town Hall

- **Pros**
  - Small time commitment
  - Allows residents to participate from home
  - Interactive
  - Can be rebroadcast

- **Cons**
  - Monetary investment
  - Need a local partner
Televised Public Meetings

- Conduct public meetings per usual; broadcast or rebroadcast on public access.

- Pros
  - Small time commitment
  - Can be rebroadcast

- Cons
  - Need technology, someone to tape meeting
  - Need a local partner
Tale of Two Meetings

Public meetings:
- Six meetings (20 hours total)
- Three days
- 46 residents attended
- Avg. seven team members/event

Virtual town hall:
- One event (two hours)
- 18,000 viewers
- 34 questions submitted
- 150 page views
- Three team members
Office of Public Involvement

- Rickie Clark, INDOT Office of Public Involvement
  317.232.6601
  rclark@indot.in.gov

- Mary Wright, INDOT Hearings Examiner
  317.234.0796
  mwright@indot.in.gov

- www.in.gov/indot/2366.htm

- INDOT Procedures updated every two years.
  - Next update summer 2014.
Borshoff

- Andrea Farmer
  andrea.farmer@borshoff.biz
- Erin Pipkin
  erin.pipkin@borshoff.biz
- 317.631.6400
- www.borshoff.biz
Questions?

- Thank you!