

Planning Innovative and Engaging Public Meetings

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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.



Legal Guidelines, Requirements

■ **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

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- INDOT Procedures updated every two years.
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Questions?

- **Thank you!**

