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

- INDOT Procedures updated every two years.
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Questions?

- Thank you!