

Assessing the Effectiveness of
Project-Based Public Involvement Processes:
A Self-Assessment Tool for Practitioners

Developed by:
The Transportation Research Board
Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation (A1D04)
January, 1999

DISTRIBUTION DRAFT

This document was created A1D04's subcommittee on "Performance Measures In Public Involvement."
Subcommittee members include:

David S. Boyd, Chair, (East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, St. Louis, MO)
Janet Bell (Jefferson County Planning & Zoning Department, Golden, CO)
Dawn Doyle (Texas Department of Transportation, Austin, TX)
Paula Hammond (Washington Department of Transportation, Olympia, WA)
Jennifer Weeks (Parsons Brinckerhoff, Baltimore, MD)
Robert Winnick (Planning Consultant, Rockville, MD)
and
Marcy Schwartz, Chair, A1D04 (CH2M Hill, Portland, OR)

In addition, the authors would like to thank Jessica Greig, a student in the department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY for her valuable assistance in formulating the early drafts of this document.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

How to Use this Guide 1

Indicators 2

Accessibility to the Decision Making Process	2
Diversity of Views Represented	2
Opportunities for Participation	3
Integration of Concerns	4
Information Exchange	4
Project Efficiency	5
Project/Decision Acceptability	5
Mutual Learning	7
Mutual Respect	7
Cost Avoidance	8
Indirect Cost of Time	9
Indirect Opportunity Costs	9
Indirect Costs Associated with Authority and Influence	10
Indirect Costs Associated with Emotional Issues	10

Score Page 12

Score Card 13

References 14

“...the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it because it is good for you...”

Sherry Arnstein

Introduction

Formal public involvement processes are being utilized with increasing frequency as a way to incorporate public opinion into a variety of decision making processes. In some circumstances public involvement is mandated, while at other times it is viewed as a way to enhance the acceptability or expedite a project. Regardless of the initiating reason, there is a growing need among project sponsors, decision-makers, and public involvement practitioners to assess the overall success and effectiveness of the effort(s).

Today, transportation agencies use public involvement programs to incorporate public input into more and more decisions. Legislative and regulatory mandates, such as those stemming from the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and its successor, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA21) require public involvement. Whatever the reasons, transportation agencies, decision makers, and the public are spending growing amounts of time, energy, and resources eliciting and responding to public involvement. However, are these public involvement programs effective? How do you measure their success? In a world of zero-sum budgets, how do you justify a substantial commitment of agency resources on public involvement rather than technical planning or project engineering?

This document is an adaptable and practical guide which produces output in a “scorecard” format. It is intended to provide the practitioner with a means of conducting a self-assessment of the effectiveness of a specific public involvement campaign for a specific planning or project development activity (e.g., the development of a long range plan or a specific capital improvement). It is not intended to evaluate the overall public involvement processes or procedures guiding all public involvement activities such as a State department of transportation or Metropolitan Planning Organization would develop under ISTEA regulations. The guide further develops the ideas of Denise Lach and Peter Hixon found in an article titled “Developing Indicators to Measure Values and Costs of Public Involvement Activities” and published in 1996 in *Interact*, Vol. 2, No. 1.

How to Use this Guide

This tool is composed of three basic three components:

- **Indicators:** The first section of the guide contains the indicator pages. Fourteen indicators are being used to measure the issues of public acceptability, accessibility, good decision making, education and learning, time commitments, trust, and indirect costs of public involvement. Of the fourteen indicators, the first nine deal with the “values and outcomes” produced by the process and the last five focus on the “costs” associated with the process. Each indicator has a brief description, summarizing why it was chosen and how its performance is measured. Each indicator is evaluated by metrics that measure it through the observation of specific behaviors or characteristics. It is these metrics which are given evaluative scores by the user. Each metric is scored on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents the least level of public involvement performance and 5 represents the highest level. Specific examples are not provided for every score, thus in many cases the user must interpolate a score.

- **Score Page:** This page provides a location for recording each of the scores assigned to the individual metrics.

The Score Page is formatted in such a way that two summary scores - “values/outcomes” and “cost” are created. The summary scores are simply the average score by for each of the two categories. These average scores will be posted on the y-axis (vertical) and x-axis (horizontal) of the Scorecard (see below).

• **Score Card:** The scorecard provides a simple, graphic representation of the results of the assessment. Ideally, the results will be somewhere near the center of the scorecard, representing what would appear to be a “balanced” and effective process. Locations outside of these target areas may imply that there is a need to revise the process in order to address issues of effectiveness (“values/outcomes”) or efficiency (“cost”).

Finally, users of this guide may consider the idea of having several other persons (participants, sponsors, or other practitioners) complete the score card and then plot the results on a single scorecard (use of colors or some other coding scheme is suggested). This “scattergram” technique would graphically illustrate concurrence/difference of opinion regarding the “success” of the process. Note that it is possible that extremely divergent responses would be obtained from various stakeholder group representatives. Such diversity in stakeholder responses should be explored further by the users.

Indicators

Accessibility to the Decision Making Process

Having a public involvement initiative that is accessible to the public is fundamental. This indicator is designed to encompass the degree to which decision makers open the process to stakeholders and the level to which they are able to participate.

Metric 1: Timing and Focus of Involvement

The effectiveness of public involvement is frequently tied to how well public consultation is focused on the real issues an agency is considering early and throughout plan or project development. If the public sees that input is sought and heeded on real issues from the start, it is assumed that participation will continue.

Scale

- 1 No consultation - decision is imposed without public involvement;
- 2 Consultation after proposal is finalized, prior to submission to decision making body;
- 3 Involvement focused on issues during definition of problem and development of alternatives;
- 4 Public is involved in designing the involvement process;
- 5 Responsibility for designing and implementing process is delegated to stakeholder group

Metric 2: Influence on Decisions/Process

Allowing the participants to adjust the process increases the degree of influence and gives the participants a feeling of sponsor accountability and flexibility. This generally increases the acceptability of the end decision.

Scale

- 1 Process is pre-defined and rigid;
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Process is fully dynamic and all aspects subject to adjustment or redefinition

Diversity of Views Represented

A major component of a successful process is clearly identifying all of the stakeholders affected by/interested in a project and then getting representatives of those groups to participate. In addition, concerns about environmental and social justice place a special emphasis on the ability of the process to involve minority or other traditionally under-represented stakeholder groups.

Metric 3: Proportion of Stakeholders

One way to measure the diversity of views that are present in a process is to calculate the proportion of stakeholders that are involved in the process. This can be done by calculating the percentage of stakeholder groups that are represented in the process from an assessment or inventory of all potentially-affected stakeholder groups (including those who may not reside adjacent to the project).

Scale

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1 | < 50% |
| 2 | |
| 3 | 50>75% |
| 4 | |
| 5 | 75>100% |

Metric 4: Meeting Convenience

There is a correlation between level of participation and the convenience of participation. Specific factors include: time and date of meeting, accessibility (transportation), availability of day care, etcetera.

Scale

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Inaccessible, meetings during the workday, no day care; |
| 2 | |
| 3 | Evening or weekend meetings available, locations accessible by public transit; |
| 4 | |
| 5 | Easily accessible by car or public transportation, evening/weekend meetings, day care provided |

Opportunities for Participation

An overriding reason that people take part in a public involvement efforts is the desire to contribute in a meaningful way. For a process to be successful, it needs to give stakeholders an opportunity to voice their opinions to decision makers and other stakeholders.

Metric 5: Opportunities for Input

One way to encourage participation is by incorporating multiple instances for stakeholders to comment on the process. More opportunities translate into a more interactive process.

Scale

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | No opportunity for input; |
| 2 | |
| 3 | Some opportunities, generally through no more than one or two means; |
| 4 | |
| 5 | Frequent and regular opportunities through multiple avenues |

Metric 6: Information Exchange

Along with the opportunity to comment on the process, it is vital that participants' concerns and views are heard and considered by other stakeholders and the decision makers. Input from the public is useless if there is no communication or feedback to the public from the agency/decision makers.

Scale

- 1 Limited exchange of information;
- 2
- 3 Ample opportunities for public input throughout the process;
- 4
- 5 Effective two-way communication among stakeholders and with decision makers

Integration of Concerns

This indicator is similar to the ones already established, but serves to emphasize the importance of integrating stakeholder concerns into decision processes.

Metric 7: Shared Decision Making

The degree to which decision making is shared by all stakeholders (from the public participants to the managers and decision makers) drastically influences a project's chance for approval.

Scale

- 1 Public input essentially ignored;
- 2
- 3 The results/decision integrates the concerns of some, but not all parties;
- 4
- 5 The results/decision integrates the concerns of all parties

Metric 8: Reprioritization

Having a Reprioritization of processes and goals at regular intervals serves to reaffirm to participants that their input has been heard and acted on. Not only does this help improve the efficiency of the process but it reaffirms that participant's views are worthwhile.

Scale

- 1 Process and goals are never reprioritized or adjusted;
- 2
- 3 Process is adjusted at few or established points in time;
- 4
- 5 Process is continually assessed and Reprioritization and adjustment occur as needed

Information Exchange

Although information exchange is used as a metric earlier in the assessment process, its importance mandates further consideration. Public involvement processes are based on creating an educated constituency to aid in decision making and increasing the acceptability of projects.

Metric 9: Documentation

Documentation is used to refer to how information is conveyed to participants and whether or not it is effective. Relevant measures are the completeness of the information, its clarity, and the appropriateness of the format (i.e. paper copies, computer format, lecture, translated as needed, etc...), and availability.

Scale

- 1 Format is incomplete, vague, or available for use by a minority of those involved;
- 2
- 3 Partial and/or filtered information is provided only at key points in the process;
- 4
- 5 Complete, clear, flexible format based on needs and available to all participants

Metric 10: Frequency of Events

For the exchange of information to be effective it needs to occur on a regular basis and there needs to be

a format for these exchanges.

Scale

- 1 Little or no dissemination of information other than at the beginning or end of the decision making process;
- 2
- 3 Information is provided at regular, but infrequent intervals;
- 4
- 5 Multiple opportunities for information exchange and in many formats (i.e. meetings, public presentations, workshops, etc...)

Project Efficiency

Public involvement claims to reduce the amount of time required to take a project to completion. Although it results in more “up front” time, the potential for delays or work stoppages due to public controversy (e.g., disputed study results, lawsuits, etc.) are reduced.

Metric 11: Decision to Implementation

This metric encompasses the duration of the time between the decision and when the project is actually implemented. If public involvement has increased the acceptability of a project, the time before implementation should be minimal.

Scale

- 1 More time than anticipated to implement due to public controversy;
- 2
- 3 Implementation is on-schedule;
- 4
- 5 Less time than anticipated due to widespread public support

Metric 12: Duration of Decision Process

As mentioned above, public involvement tends to increase time requirements at the beginning of a project but the duration of the entire decision making process should be shorter.

Scale

- 1 More time than anticipated for a decision due to public controversy;
- 2
- 3 Decision is on-schedule;
- 4
- 5 Less time than anticipated due to widespread public support

Project/Decision Acceptability

The desire to improve chances that decisions will be acceptable to the widest range of stakeholders is a guiding force in public involvement processes.

Metric 13: Stakeholder Response

One way to measure the effectiveness of involvement is to observe how stakeholders respond to the decision. A successful process will be marked by an overall acceptance of the decision as being the best choice.

Scale

- 1 Negative response by community members, agency officials, government officials, and the media;
- 2
- 3 Responses are evenly mixed;
- 4
- 5 Positive response by all stakeholders and the media

Metric 14: Media Participation - Coverage

The role of the media can be crucial to a successful public involvement process. One measure of media participation to be considered is the extent of coverage.

Scale

- 1 Media provides minimal coverage (e.g., final recommendations only);
- 2
- 3 Media provides coverage of only major decision points and events;
- 4
- 5 Media engages their audience through continuing coverage throughout the process.

Metric 15: Media Coverage - Mix

Not only is the extent of media coverage important to a successful process, but having an appropriate mixture is also important. This recognizes that not all persons read newspapers, watch television, listen to the radio or use the internet. However, it is important that an appropriate blend of mediums be employed to provide adequate coverage to those outside of the process.

Scale

- 1 Single medium coverage;
- 2
- 3 Coverage by multiple media;
- 4
- 5 Coverage by appropriately targeted multiple media

Metric 16: Media Coverage - Balance and Neutrality

The media can greatly affect the outcome of a public involvement process through the “positions” it presents. Ideally, the media will present a balanced and fact-based accounting of the process.

Scale

- 1 Media does a poor job of presenting balanced or factual information;
- 2
- 3 Media provides information but takes a singular perspective;
- 4
- 5 Media makes a concerted effort to present issues and events in a balanced, factual and neutral manner; does not attempt to overly influence public opinion

Metric 17: Decision Implementation

A public involvement process may affect degree of acceptance and support displayed by decision makers. For example, a project marked by public controversy may be outright canceled while a project with broad public support may be fast-tracked to implementation. Common criteria for measuring the degree of implementation are if the decision is accepted and if the decision is supported with the

necessary funding.

Scale

- 1 Decision rejected by governing body due to public controversy;
- 2
- 3 Plan or project is given low priority due to weak public support;
- 4
- 5 Plan or project approved due to public support

Mutual Learning

Mutual learning happens when participants learn from their role in a public involvement initiative. This indicator suggests that all stakeholders see themselves as responsible for finding a solution, rather than defending a particular cause or agency position.

Metric 18: Stakeholder Perspective

As mentioned above, a successful initiative is one in which stakeholders feel ownership of the process and decision that comes from it.

Scale

- 1 Participants defend individual positions without compromise;
- 2
- 3 Participants identify real interests, but do not fully embrace the involvement process;
- 4
- 5 Feel responsible for finding and supporting a solution that is best suited to all stakeholders

Metric 19: Degree of Compromise

When participants relinquish their ties to individual interests and concerns they will be more likely to compromise in order to maintain the momentum of the process.

Scale

- 1 Process experienced deadlock, minimal compromise;
- 2
- 3 One-sided compromise is evident;
- 4
- 5 High levels of compromise and consensus by multiple stakeholders

Mutual Respect

Public involvement promotes an integration of stakeholders with viewpoints that traditionally oppose each other. An outcome of a successful process is participants who understand the needs and concerns of other stakeholders.

Metric 20: Level of Contact

When participants understand and accept viewpoints of stakeholders that may be different than their own, they are willing to discuss the issues involved with people of different opinions.

Scale

- 1 Participants refuse to talk to one another;
- 2

- 3 Stakeholders talk among themselves but avoid conversing with decision makers;
- 4
- 5 Communication flows freely between all participants

Metric 21: Verbal Exchanges

Even when individuals with opposing viewpoints communicate, it is important that the exchanges are positive and respectful and don't distract from the tasks at hand or cause participants to feel uncomfortable.

Scale

- 1 Negative, derogatory, and distracting comments;
- 2
- 3 Exchanges are marked by occasional flare-ups or passive-aggressive comments;
- 4
- 5 Positive and constructive exchanges

Metric 22: Transformation

Ideally the participants in an effective public involvement process should gain a new understanding and respect for those persons who have contrary opinions or interests. Ultimately, this new-found understanding should manifest itself through improved relationships and reductions in the level of conflict in this and other environments.

Scale

- 1 Participants seem unaffected by the process and personal relationships remain adversarial and based on polarized positions;
- 2
- 3 Participants are formal and civil, but no natural rapport seems evident;
- 4
- 5 There are dramatic improvements in the effectiveness of this and other public processes due to enhanced understanding and acceptance of the opinions and interests of others among participants

Cost Avoidance

Public involvement is said to lower the cost of a project because many costs associated with controversial projects will be avoided. An example of this would be general acceptance of a decision so that no lawsuits were brought against it.

Metric 23: Process Costs

Traditional accounting procedures may be used to determine the actual costs associated with a public involvement process. Costs include time for preparation, participation and follow-up to public involvement, facilities and services, materials, travel expenses, and consultation fees for specialists or mediators. Dividing the sum of the actual costs by the anticipated costs gives a quantifiable metric.

Scale

- 1 Ratio of direct costs to anticipated costs > 10;
- 2
- 3 Ratio = 1>2;
- 4
- 5 Ratio  1

Metric 24: Controversial Nature of Decision

If a decision incorporates the needs of a wide range of stakeholders there will be minimal levels of

controversy surrounding it.

Scale

- 1 Highly controversial decision that is not accepted by key stakeholders;
- 2
- 3 One or two parties refute decision and may threaten further action;
- 4
- 5 Decision viewed as being “routine”, with minimal controversy

Indirect Cost of Time

A major detractor to participating in public involvement is the time commitment necessary on the part of participants.

Metric 25: Required Commitment

The process will be viewed negatively if personal time commitments exceed those anticipated by participants when they agreed to take part in the process (i.e., the process does not adhere to a communicated schedule).

Scale

- 1 More time required than anticipated;
- 2
- 3 Time requirement were as expected;
- 4
- 5 Less time required

Metric 26: Appropriateness

If participants feel that specific tasks or elements take too long or do not receive sufficient time they will feel the process is flawed. This metric considers the appropriate level of time committed to most effectively accomplish each part of the decision making process.

Scale

- 1 Not enough time spent on the process/ too much time was spent on the process;
- 2
- 3 Some portions of the process had an inappropriate amount of time attributed to them;
- 4
- 5 Time requirements were appropriate to the tasks throughout the process

Indirect Opportunity Costs

When someone commits to participating in public involvement they expend time and energy that they could have devoted to something else. Especially when their experience hasn't been a positive one, lost time and energy are viewed as lost opportunities (and generally lead to feelings of dissatisfaction).

Metric 27: Other Activities

A participant's view of the personal costs of lost opportunities is directly related to their impression of the value of the public involvement activities/process.

Scale

- 1 Participant regrets participating, values other activities instead;
- 2

- 3 Participant is ambivalent about participation;
- 4
- 5 Participant places a high value on the personal investment in the process

Metric 28: Other Public Involvement

Some participants may refrain from participating in other public involvement initiatives because their time must be spent on the project in which they are currently involved. The value of these other projects are a measure of opportunity cost.

Scale

- 1 Other public involvement experiences provided more value than the current project;
- 2
- 3 Similar value levels;
- 4
- 5 Other public involvement experiences have less value than the current project

Indirect Costs Associated with Authority and Influence

In the process of compromising and making concessions (to achieve a decision that encompasses a range of stakeholder interests), individual stakeholders may feel that they are giving up some of their own power.

Metric 29: Continued Involvement

If after one public involvement process, a participant chooses to participate in future projects, it is a good sign that they didn't feel that their authority or influence was unduly compromised.

Scale

- 1 Participants don't pursue further involvement in decision making process;
- 2
- 3 Participants are ambivalent about the process, the decision, or future participation;
- 4
- 5 Stakeholders increase their level of public involvement

Metric 30: Participating Officials

The level and number of participating officials is a relatively good indication of the magnitude of threats felt by officials when they take part in public involvement. A lack of high level managers or a few number of officials indicates that a high cost is associated with involvement (or low esteem for the public's involvement may be present).

Scale

- 1 Only required officials are present, low-level managers;
- 2
- 3 Occasional presence indicates marginal levels of interest;
- 4
- 5 Appropriate number of officials, high-level managers, and decision-makers

Indirect Costs Associated with Emotional Issues

The emotional costs associated with public involvement are a widespread deterrent. Project managers and individual stakeholders all complain of verbal attacks, lack of institutional support, unrealistic demands, and general frustration.

Metric 31: Stakeholder

Although project managers and officials play an important role, their presence is frequently mandated

whereas the presence of community members is voluntary. As a result, the emotional response of stakeholders is a valuable metric of cost.

Scale

- 1 Process is frustrating, intimidating, disillusioning to participants;
- 2
- 3 Participants were ambivalent about the process;
- 4
- 5 Process is fulfilling and worthwhile to all participants

Metric 32: Continued Participation

The retention rate of stakeholders in the decision making process is another way to gauge if the costs of participation outweigh the benefits.

Scale

- 1 Less than 50% of initial participants remain involved in the process;
- 2 50% > 60% retained
- 3 60% > 70% retained
- 4 70% > 100% retained
- 5 All participants stay in the process through the whole project duration

Score Page

Values/Outcomes		Costs	
Metric	Score	Metric	Score
1		23	
2		24	
3		25	
4		26	
5		27	
6		28	
7		29	
8		30	
9		31	
10		32	
11		SCORE	
12			÷ 10
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22			
	÷ 22		
SCORE			

Instructions: Plot the **SCORE** from the “Values/Outcomes” column on the “Y” (vertical) axis; plot the **SCORE** from the “Costs” column on the “X” (horizontal) axis on the following “Scorecard” page.

Score Card

STRONG 10

VALUES/OU

WEAK

9								
8								
6								
5								
4								
3								
2								
1								

LOW

HIGH

COSTS

References

- Kaplan, Robert S. and David P. Norton. "The Balanced Scorecard - Measures That Drive Performance", *Harvard Business Review*, January-February, 1992
- Lach, Denise and Peter Hixson. "Developing Indicators to Measure Values and Costs of Public Involvement Activities", *Interact*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1996
- Crocker, Jarle, William H. Schecter and William Potapchuk. "Making Public Involvement Programs Work", unpublished manuscript, Program for Community Problem Solving, 1996
- Boyd, David S. and Amy G. Gronlund. "The Ithaca Model: A Practical Experience in Community-Based Planning", *Transportation Research Record*, No. 1499, 1995
- "Guiding Principles Project, 1997", International Association for Public Participation (<http://www.pin.org/eval/why.htm>)
- O'Dowd, Carol. "A Citizen-Led Process for Deciding Community Transportation Priorities", paper presented at the 1996 National Conference for Solutions for Small and Medium-Sized Cities (http://www.ch2m.com/trb_pi/trbpapers5.html)
- London, Scott. "Building Collaborative Communities", paper prepared for the Pew Partnership for Civic Change (<http://www.pin.org/library/ppcc.htm>)
- "Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making", prepared by Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc. and Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas for the Federal Highway and Transit Administrations (Publication No. FHWA-PD-96-031), September, 1996
- "Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning", Federal Highway and Transit Administrations, January, 1994
- "Improving the Effectiveness of Public Meetings and Hearings", Federal Highway Administration (Publication No. FHWA-HI-91-006), January, 1991
- Unsworth, Dennis J.. "Redefining Public Involvement", Transportation Research Board (paper #940431), January, 1994
- Roden, David. "Community Involvement in Transportation Planning", North Central Texas Council of Governments and U.S. DOT (Publication No. DOT-I-85-32), May, 1984