

*How to Engage Low-Literacy and
Limited-English-Proficiency Populations*
in Transportation Decisionmaking

Prepared by:

PBS&J

220 Stoneridge Drive, Suite 300

Columbia, SC 29210

For:

Federal Highway Administration

Office of Planning, HEPP-20

400 7th Street, SW., Room 3301

Washington, DC 20590

202-366-0106; fax 202-493-2198

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Overview

It is Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) policy to provide “meaningful access” to transportation decisionmaking to all affected and interested people. Executive Order 13166, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*, requires this outreach include people of limited English proficiency. Combined with nondiscrimination statutes, meaningful access would extend to people who cannot read and understand what is read; thus, the need to include outreach to low-literate populations as well. This booklet provides examples of outreach techniques that might be used or modified to outreach to these two groups as well as others.

This report documents “best practices” in identifying and engaging low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations in transportation decisionmaking. These “best practices” were collected

during telephone interviews with individuals in 30 States.

These individuals included 11 national technical experts in adult literacy and limited English proficiency, and 57 national experts from Federal, State, county, and city governments, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and their consultants. Additional information was collected during a 1-day Federal Highway Administration- and Federal Transit Administration-sponsored peer review on *How to Identify and Engage Low-Literacy and Limited-English-Proficiency Populations in Transportation Decisionmaking*.

The information obtained from the telephone interviews and the peer review has been organized into a six-step process that planning and project-development practitioners can employ during planning, project development, right-of-way acquisition, construction, operation

and maintenance. This process provides a range of references, tools, techniques, insights, and/or approaches to address the following questions:

- What do low literacy and limited English proficiency mean?
- What are ways to access reliable data on low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations at a sub-State level?
- What are ways to access documented indicators and/or surrogates of literacy and limited English proficiency at a sub-State level?
- What special approaches are needed to achieve outreach to low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations?
- What are the best ways to contact low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations?
- What are the lessons learned?

- What is the impact of low literacy and limited English proficiency on the population's abilities and constraints to participate in public involvement.
- How to engage these populations and provide them with meaningful access to decisionmaking information and opportunities.

The “best practices” identified in this report are not all-inclusive, and practitioners should use any approach they believe would be best in their communities. *Practitioners should be sensitive to confidentiality and right-to-privacy issues.* While some of the approaches identified may be eligible for funding as part of planning or project-development projects, eligibility of specific approaches should be confirmed with the agency funding that project.

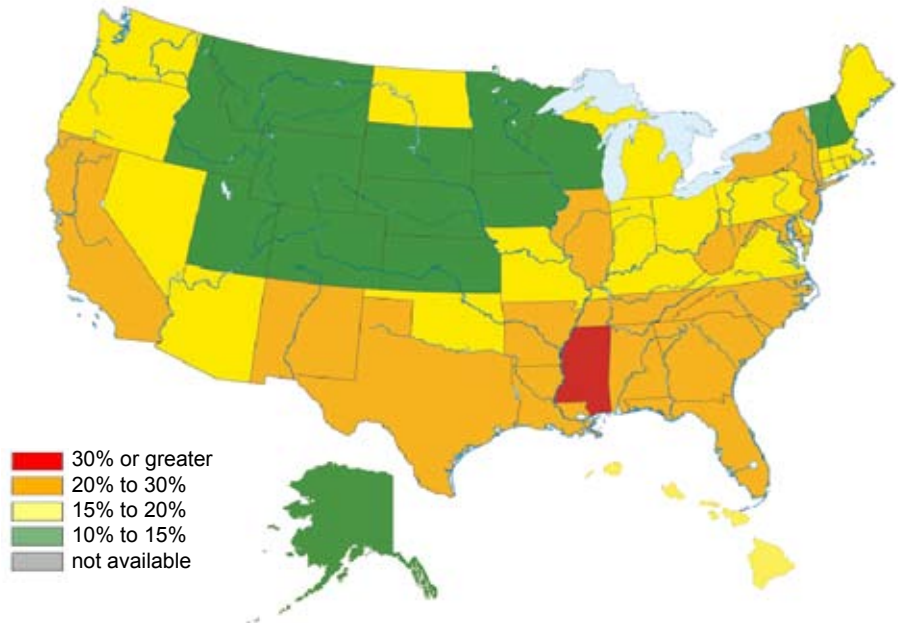
What do low literacy and limited English proficiency mean?

In 1988, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Education to undertake an assessment of the literacy skills of American adults, those 16 years old and older. Three years later, in 1991, Congress passed the *National Literacy Act* that defined literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

Using this definition of literacy, the U.S. Department of Education published the results of its *National Adult Literacy Survey* in 1993. This monumental survey remains the most comprehensive, statistically reliable source on literacy in the United States. Rather than classifying individuals as either “literate” or “illiterate,” this survey created three literacy scales: prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy. These scales profile the

types of materials and demands individuals encounter in their daily lives; for example, interpreting instructions from a warranty, reading maps, balancing a checkbook, or figuring out a tip. By measuring

literacy proficiency for each literacy scale, five levels of literacy were defined with Level 1 reflecting the lowest skills and Level 5 reflecting the highest skills.

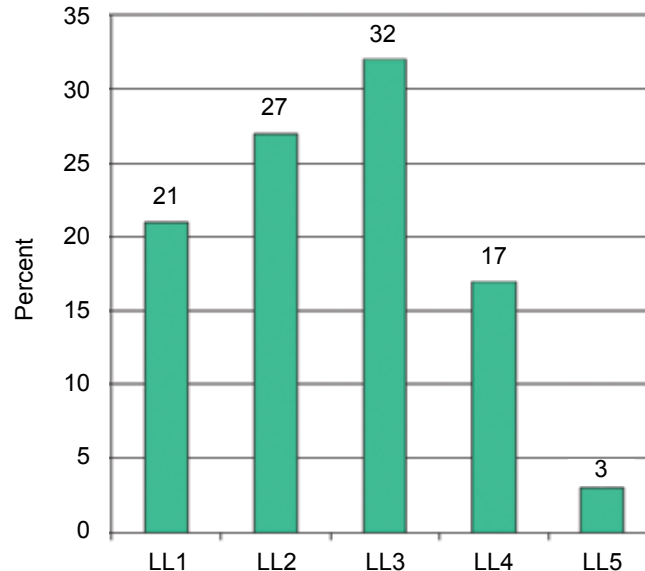


The State of Literacy in America provides the percent of each State’s population at Level 1 literacy.

The *National Adult Literacy Survey* found that 21 percent of American adults had Level 1 literacy skills, and 27 percent of American adults had Level 2 literacy skills. While there are no exact grade equivalents, Level 1 literacy is generally defined as less than fifth-grade reading and comprehension skills, and Level 2 is generally defined as fifth through seventh grades reading and comprehension skills. Although many Level 1 adults could perform tasks involving simple texts and documents, all adults scoring at Level 1 displayed difficulty using certain reading, writing, and computational skills considered necessary for functioning in everyday life. Almost all Level 1 adults could read a little, but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child. While most of these adults are not considered “illiterate,” they do not have the full range of economic, social, and personal options that are open to Americans with higher levels of literacy skills.

For the purpose of this report, Level 1 literacy has been used as the definition of “low literacy.” The predominant reason for this is that Level 1 literacy information is readily available at sub-State levels; whereas, Levels 2 to 5 literacy information is not. In the majority of cases, there is a direct correlation between low literacy, low educational

attainment, and low income. There are always exceptions, such as recent Russian immigrants now living in California, who were well educated in their homeland and have excellent literacy in Russian, but have limited English proficiency. As a result of their inability to speak, read, and write English, they are employed in low-income jobs.



The National Adult Literacy Survey determined the percentage of the adult population for each level of literacy (LL).

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended by the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*, defined limited English proficiency, when referencing an individual, means an individual:

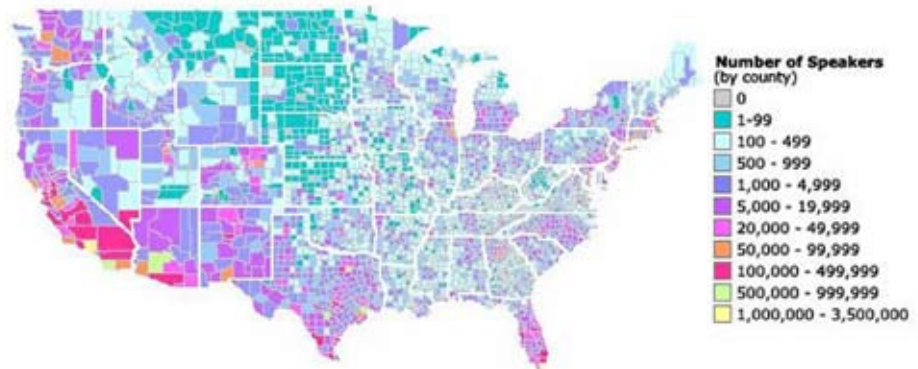
(A) who (i) was not born in the United State[s] or whose native language is a language other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or (ii) is a Native American or Alaska[n] Native or who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on such individual's level of English language proficiency; or (iii) is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (B) who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and who[se] difficulties may deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully

in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society.

These individuals function in English at approximately Level 1 literacy and may or may not function as well or better in their primary language.

Although English is the predominant language spoken in this country, the 2000 Census estimated that 17.9 percent of the Nation's population spoke a language other than English at home. By a large

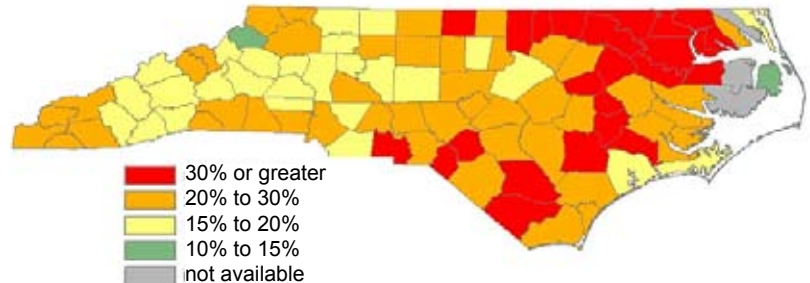
margin, the most frequently spoken non-English language at home was Spanish. Those speaking Spanish at home accounted for 60.0 percent of those who spoke a language other than English at home, and represented 10.7 percent of the Nation's population. Chinese was the second most frequently spoken non-English language at home. It accounted for 4.3 percent of those who spoke a language other than English at home, and represented 0.8 percent of the Nation's population.



Modern Language Association identifies the number of Spanish speakers for every county in the Nation.

What are ways to access reliable data on low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations at a sub-State level?

The National Institute for Literacy's (NIFL) 1998 publication *The State of Literacy in America: Estimates at the Local, State and National Levels* was the only publication identified that provided Level 1 literacy estimates for adults in every State, county, municipality over 5,000 people, and congressional district in the Nation. In addition, thematic maps by county and congressional district showing the percent of adults at Level 1 literacy were provided. Adults were defined as those 16 years old and older; and Level 1 Literacy, or low literacy, was generally defined as less than fifth-grade reading and comprehension skills. The 1998 publication is available by calling (202) 233-2025 or e-mailing edpubs@inet.ed.gov. The text is available online at <http://www.nifl.gov/reders/reder.htm>. An updated version of this publication based on 2003 information is scheduled for release in mid 2006 and will be available on-line at <http://www.nces.ed.gov/naal>.



The State of Literacy in America provides Level 1 literacy information for every county in North Carolina.



A U.S. Census thematic map shows counties in North Carolina with the highest percent of persons 25 years old and older with less than 9 years of school in the darkest color.

What are ways to access documented indicators of literacy and limited English proficiency at a sub-State level?

The National Adult Literacy Survey found that low literacy skills were closely connected to economic, social, and personal issues such as:

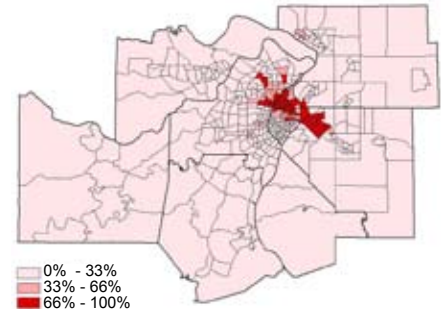
- **Poverty** – Forty-three percent of adults with Level 1 literacy skills were living in poverty, compared to 4 percent of those at Level 5.
- **Welfare** – The likelihood of being on welfare went up as literacy skills went down. Seventy-five percent of Food Stamp recipients had Level 1 or Level 2 literacy skills.
- **Income** – Adults with Level 1 literacy skills earned a median income that was approximately 35 percent of those with Level 5 literacy skills.
- **Employment status** – Adults with Level 1 literacy skills worked an average of 19 weeks per year, compared to 44 weeks per year for those with Level 5 literacy skills.

- **Crime** – Seventy percent of individuals in penal institutions had Level 1 or Level 2 literacy skills.

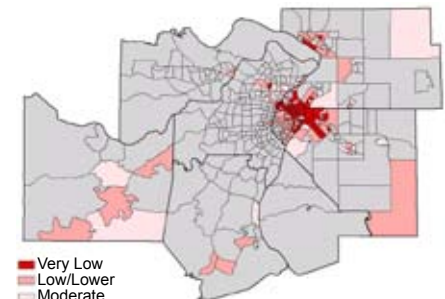
These and other indicators and/or surrogates of low literacy and limited English proficiency are addressed by a variety of Federal, State, county, and city agencies; municipal organizations; private associations; and corporations.

...U.S. Census

The *U.S. Census* website (<http://www.census.gov>) provides information on a variety of indicators and/or surrogates of literacy and/or limited English proficiency. Information is available for county and a variety of sub-county levels in tabular and thematic map formats. Some of the indicators and/or surrogates found in the 2000 Census include:



St. Louis Region identified minority populations by Census tract.



St. Louis Region identified poverty distribution by Census tract.

- Educational attainment by degree level (Summary File 3 [SF 3] Quick Tables, Demographic Profile–2 [DP–2] Profile of Selected Social Characteristics).^{1,2}
- Population by one race and by Hispanic or Latino and race (SF 1 Quick Tables, DP-1 Profile of General Demographic Characteristics).³
- Disability of the civilian non-institutionalized population (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP-2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics).
- Employment (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP–3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics).
- Income in 1999 by households and families (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP-3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics).
- Language spoken at home (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP-2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics).
- Poverty status in 1999 of those below poverty level by families, families with female householder, no husband present, and individuals (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP-3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics).
- Time leaving home to go to work for workers 16 years old and older (SF 3 Quick Tables, QT-P23).
- Units in structure (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP–4 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics).
- Vehicles available per occupied unit (SF 3 Quick Tables, DP-4 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics).

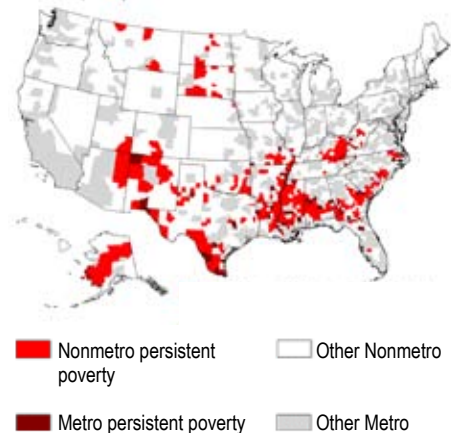
1. U.S. Census Bureau, American Factfinder, Glossary, Summary File (SF), (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_s.html) (accessed December 3, 2005).

2. U.S. Census Bureau, American Factfinder, Glossary, Demographic Profile (DP), (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_d.html) (accessed December 3, 2005).

3. U.S. Census Bureau, American Factfinder, Glossary, Hispanic or Latino origin, (http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_h.html) (accessed December 3, 2005).

...U.S. Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service website (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/emphases/rural/gallery>) provides a variety of thematic maps of county-level information for 1990 and 2000 populations, and migration by Environmental Justice populations, and 1999/2000 labor, education, income, poverty, and welfare.



U.S. Department of Agriculture identifies metro and nonmetro persistent poverty counties (1970 – 2000).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp program website (<http://maps.ers.usda.gov/fsp>) provides thematic maps of county-level information for 1999 per capita poverty and per capita Food Stamp program participation.

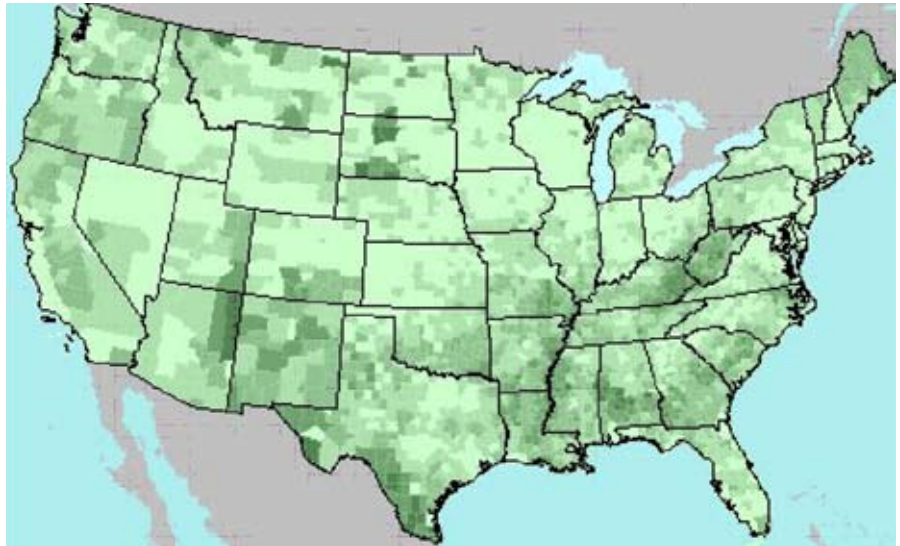
The Free and Reduced Price Meal programs are two low-income programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through public and private school systems. Eligibility for these two programs is based on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' annual low-income standards. Eligibility for the Free Meal program is based on 130 percent of the annual low-income standards, and eligibility for the Reduced Price Meal program is based on 185 percent of the annual low-income standards.

When using the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs eligibility numbers, elementary and middle school numbers provide better accuracy than the high school numbers. High school students are

often embarrassed and do not want anyone to know they are on the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs; therefore, some of them do not accept meal cards and their numbers are underreported.

Information collected at the elementary-school level gives a more focused picture of the population within a smaller area because these schools have a smaller attendance

boundary than middle and high schools. In some cases, such as rural areas, elementary-school attendance boundaries can provide information at almost the equivalent of Census block group or block levels. Some rural counties have only one high school, which will not provide any detailed information as to where the populations are located within the county.



U.S. Department of Agriculture shows the counties with the highest per capita Food Stamp program participation in the darkest color (1999).

...U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education requires that every State Department of Education (or the equivalent) prepare an annual “Report Card” for each public school within that State. They are required to make this information available upon request on their website or through the individual county school system. Some of these “Report Cards” provide information about race and ethnicity, eligibility for the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs, migrant status, number of limited-English-proficiency students, reading scores, and a variety of other topics. Because of the differences in the organizational structures within each State’s Department of Education, this information can be identified in different ways and is sometimes difficult to locate.

Each State’s Department of Education has an Adult and Community Education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) program or an equivalent. The State

Director can provide up-to-date information about adult literacy and ESL at the county level. They can provide the name of the ESL Coordinator at each public school and the name of the county Adult-Literacy Coordinator.

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics website (<http://www.nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch>) provides student information for every public school in the Nation. This information is collected every August at the beginning of each school year and is never more than 24 months old. The website provides contact information for each school, total number of students, number of students by race, number of students participating in the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs, and number of migrant students. This information is available in a spreadsheet for all schools during the past school year by county or city, and for each school individually. In addition, historic information is available for most schools as early as the 2001 school

year. Having yearly information provides a real-time picture of the student population’s diversity.

Information on race provides a breakdown by number of White, African American, Asian (includes Pacific Islanders), Hispanic, and American Indian (includes Alaskan Natives) students. This information can provide insight into the number of families that may speak a language other than English, or in addition to English. Asking the school principal and the ESL Coordinator can provide additional insight into the language capabilities and literacy levels of the students’ parents. It is important to note that the U.S. Department of Education regards Hispanics as a race, whereas, the U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanics as being of an ethnicity.

...individual State initiatives

Each State’s Office of Research and Statistics, or equivalent, compiles information on recipients of low-income programs such as Medicaid,

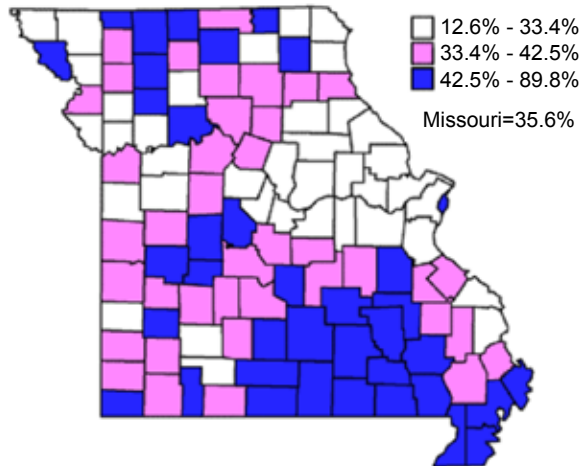
Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. This information can be overlaid on Census tracts and is collected on a more frequent basis than the decennial Census. These State offices will provide this information to other State agencies through interagency agreements. The Office of Research and Statistics is often a part of or associated with a State's Census data center.

...county agencies

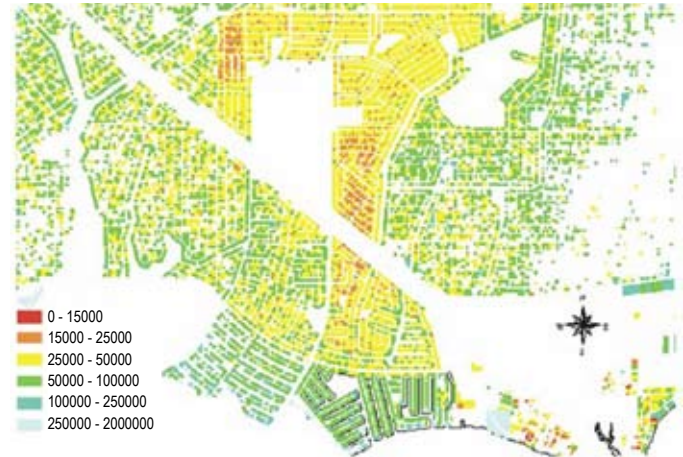
Each State has a Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and an Employment Security Commission or the equivalent. Identifying the county Adult Education, ESL, Social Service, and Employment Security Commission representatives and bringing them to the table can provide a picture of the community and how they serve them.

...municipal organizations

City, county and multi-county organizations such as Councils of Governments (COG) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) often compile information relative to low-income status. The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO in Florida utilizes housing-value information obtained from the county tax assessor's office and maps this information. Those single-family



Missouri identifies the location of Free and Reduced Price Meal programs' recipients by county.



The Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO utilizes housing value information to identify low-income areas.

units assessed at \$25,000 or less were considered to be units that low-income families could afford. This survey resulted in the identification of three previously unidentified low-income communities. Depending upon when tax assessor information is updated or how frequently countywide and/or citywide appraisals occur, this information may be more current than Census information and more area specific.

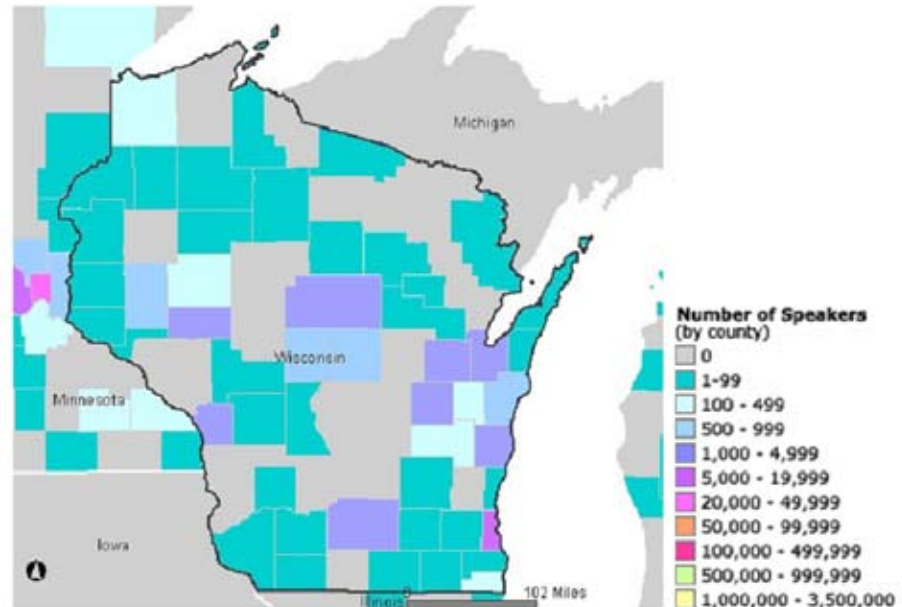
...Modern Language Association

The Modern Language Association is a private association. Its website (<http://www.mla.org>) provides information extrapolated from the 2000 Census on the top 30 languages spoken in every State, county, and zip code in the Nation by the number of speakers. This information is presented in tables and thematic maps. The website also provides the number of speakers by different age groups. This can provide insight into limited English proficiency.

...GreatSchools, Inc.

GreatSchools, Inc. is a non-profit organization. Its website (<http://www.greatschools.net>) provides information about public, private, and charter schools in all 50 States and detailed school profiles for Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New York, Texas, and

Washington. This site also provides State averages for race, ethnicity, and number of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs. In addition, this site provides information about student reading levels that, in turn, can provide insight into their parents' reading ability.



Modern Language Association identifies the number of Hmong speakers for every county in Wisconsin.

What special approaches are needed to outreach to low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations?

An individual who is low literate and/or limited English proficient is more than just a person who has poor reading, writing, and comprehension skills; and/or may not speak English well, or at all. These conditions affect a person's ability to participate in the decisionmaking process at many levels, some obvious and others subtle.

Having poor reading skills and the inability to speak English well, or at all, often relegates a person to low, wage-scale job(s). This affects their access to information online and in newspapers because they cannot afford to own a computer or subscribe to an Internet provider or newspaper.

In addition, being low-income often limits or eliminates having personal transportation. Therefore, they may be dependent on others or public transit for mobility. This can affect

their ability to attend a meeting outside of their community. It can mean that transportation may need to be provided, or the meeting location may need to be near transit or in their community.

Often being low-income also means working second- or third-shift jobs or working two jobs. This affects an individual's ability to attend a meeting; it can mean that meetings should be held on a weekend, during



A public-involvement meeting was held in a community church so everyone could walk to it.

the morning, or piggybacked onto another event they already may be attending. Providing food also encourages attendance at a meeting. It eliminates having to fix a meal at home, or making an extra stop for food on the way to a meeting. In some instances, it may provide the best meal the family has that day.

Low-literate and limited-English-proficiency populations who cannot

read, listen more carefully to what is said, how it is said, and who says it. Asking people “if they have time to talk with you” tells them they will not have to read or write anything, and will not be talked to, but talked with. Since they may not have the option of relying on written materials as an optional source of information, they often rely on radio, television, and word of mouth. Therefore, both the spoken words and the individual

speaking those words are important and should be chosen carefully. The trust in which the speaker is held determines the credibility of the words being spoken.



Interviews were conducted orally so that low literacy would not be a barrier to participation.

Look for clues that people cannot read English or another language

People who cannot read and/or write give physical and verbal clues. Because they are embarrassed by their inability to read and/or write, these clues are very subtle and easily can be overlooked. Often one person will sign in for several people. Other times, people will say, “My arthritis is bothering me, can you sign me in,” or “I need to take the comment sheet home and think about it, then I will mail it back.” Frequently, these comment sheets are never returned. Still other times, people simply avoid looking at a printed page. These and other clues must be recognized and responded to appropriately.

...I left my glasses at home

When asked to sign-in at a public meeting, a resident replied, *I left my glasses at home*. A short time later, a second person said they too had left their glasses at home. Realizing some people in the community could not write and probably could not read, a staff member put a sign-in

sheet on a clipboard and asked a community leader to stand at the entrance to the meeting place. As the community leader greeted everyone by name, the staff member wrote down names and asked for their addresses. It was apparent that if residents could not write their names, they would be unable to provide

written comments. To ensure that the residents’ remarks were captured, comment sheets and a clipboard were given to each staff member. After residents were signed-in, they were divided into small groups and a staff member was assigned to accompany them into the display area.



A sign-in sheet can be a barrier to participation for those who are low literate.

Residents were asked where they lived and shown the location of their homes on the display map. After explaining each alternative, the staff member stepped back, let the residents talk among themselves, and recorded their comments. When the residents were finished talking, the staff member read back the comments to the residents to make sure their thoughts had been recorded correctly. The staff member also asked for their names, wrote these on the bottom of the comment sheet, thanked them for coming, and placed the comment sheet in the comment box.

...tell me what you are planning to do

If written material is put in front of someone who cannot read, they may only glance at it. Staffers should begin talking about the project with them so they will have enough information to ask questions. Give them a map, locate local landmarks, show them where they live, and tell them about the alternatives. By

then, the fact that they cannot read becomes a non-issue. They can be interviewed orally and their remarks recorded.

...I want you to know what I think

The following is an example of the need to be sensitive and observant. At an open house, an older gentleman arrived early and spent a great deal of time looking at the display maps and drawings. He approached three different staff members. Each, in turn, had talked to him and then

pointed to the comment table. Instead of going to the comment table, he approached a fourth staffer and voiced his concerns. Again he was asked to go to the comment table and fill out a comment sheet to document his concerns. Slowly, the older gentleman said he did not write very well. The staffer finally picked up a comment sheet, wrote down the man's comments, and read them back to him. The man said thank you and left the meeting. The staffer added the comment sheet to the comment box.



Residents were taken in small groups into the display area and introduced to the project.

Train staff members and use residents from the neighborhood

Not everyone makes a good interviewer. Many do not feel comfortable talking with those who are not like themselves or in settings that are foreign to them. Others may lack patience or be judgmental. Before sending anyone out to meet the public, engage them in role-playing and present them with a variety of scenarios in which they may be placed. Since opportunities must be seized when they occur, staff members need to be comfortable anywhere—on a front porch, in a back yard, under a clothesline, in an office, over a septic field, or in a Laundromat. Stress that everyone should be shown respect, addressed courteously, and treated with dignity.

...hire local residents

In Denver, CO, local residents were hired to interview people in their own community. This not only provided temporary jobs for many in the project corridor, but also eliminated the need to train outsiders. Non-

residents might ignore or miss the subliminal things that local residents would know; such as, how to talk to people, what kind of respect to show, how to engage them, and how to make them feel comfortable. Local residents also were hired as interpreters for those communities where many did not speak English.

...use someone who knows the people and their culture

A staff secretary, who was a former welfare mother and single parent, was asked to go out into the field and conduct interviews in a low-literate community. She was very effective because she knew what the residents



Local residents were hired to interview people in their own community.

were going through, what was important to them, and the lingo that they spoke. Other team members were able to learn a great deal by watching her.

...seek out the elders

Communities with low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations often do not have written histories because their residents

could not write them. Instead, their histories are oral and kept alive by the community elders. Look for these elders, engage them in conversation, let them share their stories, and ask them to identify others who might be able to contribute to the community's history. This can be time consuming, but the information conveyed in their remembrances will assist in identifying current concerns,

uncovering past discriminations, and revealing familial relationships.

...use staff that reflects others in the community

In Atlanta, GA, the project involved widening an interstate and reconstructing an interchange in a predominantly minority and elderly community that had been divided by the construction of the original interstate. The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) staff sent to conduct interviews with the residents included a mix of ages and races. After visiting a community center and attempting to interview some of the residents, it became apparent that the residents talked more openly with those closer to their ages and of their same race. They wanted to talk with someone who appreciated their life experiences, respected their status in the community, and understood what they had gone through the first time.



Ask the elders to share their stories of the community's history.

Provide food at the meetings

Often, food can serve as a catalyst in getting people to attend meetings. In many cases, it provides a backdrop for social interaction, demonstrates commitment to community vendors, and allows a parent to quickly pick up a child and get to a meeting without an extra stop. Still other times, it is a meal that otherwise might not have happened.

...the food, the chairs, and the tables

While being interviewed, residents in Denver, CO, were asked if they would sponsor a block meeting and invite their neighbors. Many were reluctant because their homes were small and their incomes were limited. They were told that the location and the food would be provided, and all they had to do was pick a day and time, and invite their neighbors. By using the neighbors to invite their neighbors, the invitations were conveyed by word of mouth. This meant that no one had to read

anything and everyone got their invitation from someone they trusted in a language they understood.

The block meetings were held in the middle of streets that had been closed off, in neighborhood parks, and in other convenient locations. The project team provided the food, chairs, and tables; and conducted presentations complete with displays.

These small block meetings formed the foundation for the entire public-involvement effort. After holding more than 60 block meetings, larger multi-block neighborhood meetings were held. Following these, still larger corridor-wide meetings were held that brought together several neighborhoods. At each level, neighbors were still asked to invite neighbors and food was served.



The food, the chairs, and the tables were provided for block meetings throughout the community.

...culturally appropriate food

Food and drink are more appreciated in these settings than in others. It is not necessary to provide a meal, but the food can be used as a good icebreaker. The food should be culturally appropriate to the community. For example, Cuban sandwiches with pork would not be appropriate for a group that includes Muslims, Hindus, Jews, or vegetarians.

...a meal, not a snack

Instead of having just pizza at a meeting, food vendors from the I-70 project corridor in Denver, CO, were used to provide meals. Even though this cost a little more, it showed the community that outside providers were not being brought into the area. These neighborhood food businesses ended up being partners with the project. In addition to food, as many services and products as possible were purchased within the project corridor, including printing services. This demonstrated to the community

that the project coordinator was willing to spend money to strengthen the economic viability of the neighborhoods in the corridor.

...local spaghetti suppers

In Warren and Edmonson Counties, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) asked local emergency management officials, volunteer fire

department chiefs, and firefighters for help in getting the public to come out to meetings. The volunteer fire departments offered to let KYTC “piggyback” onto their scheduled chili suppers, spaghetti suppers, and auctions. This increased attendance by attracting people interested in both transportation and spaghetti. KYTC found this partnership more effective than holding big meetings at the public library.



Residents were served meals purchased from food vendors in the community.

Be aware that public meetings may not be part of some cultures, and/or government may have a negative connotation

Many who have limited English proficiency formerly lived in countries with repressive governments and may distrust government agencies. If providing community members with transportation to a meeting, or using an official government vehicle in the community, be aware that the color and type of vehicle used may have negative connotations. Until becoming part of the Department of Homeland Security, the Immigration and Naturalization Service used recognizable white vans and the Border Patrol used green sedans. State and Federal vehicles may frighten away residents because of the seals on their doors.

...religious activities and ethnic festivals

In Columbus, OH, the Asian and Somalian populations are not predisposed to come to public

meetings. Attending public meetings simply is not part of their culture. Because of their reluctance to attend meetings, churches and ethnic festivals were targeted along with social service agencies, schools, and the malls.

...government buildings

Hispanic populations in Charlotte, NC, have been reluctant to attend meetings in government buildings. They preferred Hispanic-only meetings in safe environments, such



California DOT consultant staff held a project meeting in a local school, accessible to transit, and conducted in Spanish.

as churches. In many cases, they do not feel safe asking about or questioning a government action. When asked a “yes” or “no” question, the answer was generally “yes” because they did not wish to offend. This required that questions be posed in an open-ended format. Often, they came as a family, with the male answering any questions that were asked. The most effective presentations had limited written information, were filled with graphics, and included an interpreter.

...proximity to the police precinct

A neighborhood meeting was held at the local branch library, one of many functions housed in the new community complex. One of the other community functions housed in the same complex was a local police precinct. No one from the public attended the meeting. A debriefing with the neighbors revealed that the proximity to the police precinct kept people from attending.

...meetings just for them

In Milwaukee, WI, the project area was thought to include a Hmong community; however, it was difficult to define it in terms of location and size. The Hmong did not respond to mailings or telephone calls imploring them to attend a public meeting. This close-knit community was skittish among outsiders. Hmong America (<http://www.hmongamerica.com>), a national

group that helps Hmongs assimilate and assists with basic family-service needs, provided assistance in communicating with the local Hmong community. The group’s director, who spoke both Hmong and English, suggested several methods to keep the community informed and recommended a service for interpretation and translation. As a result, an interpreter was used at meetings, and newsletters and fact sheets were translated into Hmong.



Wisconsin DOT held Hmong-only meetings in their community center that improved attendance.

What are the best ways to contact low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations?

An individual who is low literate and/or limited English proficient often needs support services that others with better reading, writing, and comprehension skills in English may not need. Frequently, these services are federally funded; i.e., through USDA's Nutrition Assistance Program (including Food Stamps for groceries) or HUD's Housing Choice Vouchers (commonly known as Section 8 vouchers) for housing. Other times, a person's immigration status requires interaction with government agencies, attorneys, and ministerial associations. New citizens may seek help from ethnic cultural associations, elected officials, and faith-based organizations. Such programs are often identified by word of mouth.

Immigrants often depend on ethnic or mainstream radio and television for information because they may not read or cannot afford "fee

for services." Such media and free ethnic newspapers provide excellent ways to give and receive information about a community. Radio and television call-in shows provide opportunities to exchange ideas or information via two-way communication.

Organizations and municipalities often prepare a calendar of events that identify happenings where people gather and project information can be dispersed. Piggybacking on a scheduled event takes advantage of the public already in attendance. Being a part of a civic, social,



Miami-Dade County (FL) MPO staff appeared on local Haitian television to discuss projects.

educational, or sporting event provides an opportunity to interact with people in a situation where they are comfortable and feel safe. It also provides an opportunity to leverage the trust that an organization may have already established with their community. While elected officials and organizational leaders are appropriate places to start getting information about a community, building relationships with community insiders can provide a more day-to-day picture of the community. School principals, bus drivers, and ESL Coordinators are especially helpful.

Students can be conduits to their parents and sources of information about when, where, and what time meetings could be held. They can also serve as beta-testers for surveys, newsletters, presentations, and displays.

Those with limited funds or who are just starting off in a new place often use Laundromats, discount stores like Wal-Mart, and grocery stores

that accept Food Stamps and sell ethnic foods. They often depend on faith-based organizations for clothes, kitchenware, and furniture.

Each community has places where its members meet and interact. Often locating congregational places is

as simple as driving through the community. Being in the community at various times of the day and night, and on weekdays and weekends is important because activities and varying travel patterns can turn an empty-area-during-the-week into a packed place on a weekend.



Wal-Mart allowed Tennessee DOT's consultant staff to distribute project information and conduct interviews within a store.

Explore websites, national publications, and local newspapers

Federal websites for programs targeted to low-income populations provide information about where these populations may live and shop. National publications that target minority populations provide information on the location of offices of minority health, radio stations, newspapers, faith-based organizations, cultural groups, and political leaders. These provide information about where and how information can be disseminated and collected, and where meetings might be held. Even the *Yellow Pages* and local newspapers can provide insight into communities and their representatives.

...Food Stamp program State field-office contacts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service field office website (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/Contacts/FieldOffices/>) identifies each State's

main field-office address, and phone and fax numbers. Each State's Officer in Charge administers the agency's Food Stamp program and can provide a list of businesses that accept Food Stamps, by zip code or county, with their address, phone number, type of business, and if they are open 24 hours or not. The Officer in Charge can also identify the period

when the Electronic Benefits Transfer takes place in that State. Each State has the authority to designate its own period. During this time period, the U.S. Department of Agriculture electronically transfers benefits to each recipient's Food Stamp credit card, which is the most likely time for recipients to shop.



Cashiers at a grocery store in Maysville, NC, placed project newsletters in each grocery bag.

...U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development websites (<http://egis.hud.gov/egis> and <http://www.hud.gov/apps/section8/index.cfm>) provide information on Public and Indian Housing. The first website, under “Map Your Community,” provides thematic maps and detailed tabular information on multi-family complexes that accept Housing Choice Vouchers, on the elderly/disabled, and on the Internal Revenue Service Low-Income Housing Tax-Credit properties. The tabular information provides the property names, addresses, number of units, and number of Section 8 units. The second website provides a list by county, city, and zip code of all subsidized apartments; for example, those accepting Section 8 vouchers. It also provides a name and address for each complex, the complex manager’s phone number, and the type of complex (elderly, disabled, or family). Contact the complex manager about posting

project information on the bulletin board and holding a meeting in the clubhouse. Using facilities in the complex eliminates the need for personal transportation, and makes it convenient and safe for residents to attend meetings.

...Administration on Aging

The Administration on Aging website (<http://www.aoa.gov>) includes an eldercare locator that

provides the name and location of the local agency on aging by State, county, and/or city of organizations. These local agencies can provide more detailed information on their individual websites; information such as, senior-daycare facilities, housing and long-term-care facilities, and senior centers as well as scheduled events that could offer “piggyback” opportunities. Often these centers have their own buses that take their people to meetings.



Utah DOT staff visited a senior center to conduct interviews.

Shepherd's Centers, a national network of interfaith community-based organizations provides social services and learning opportunities. Their website (<http://www.shepherdcenters.org>) provides location and contact information.

...targeted national publications

There are several national publications that target selected populations. These include, but are not limited to, the *African American Yearbook*, the *Hispanic Yearbook*, and the *People of Color Environmental Groups*.

The *African American Yearbook* is available in paper form and its data online via "Search the Database" at <http://africanamericanyearbook.com>. It provides information about:

- African American members of the U.S. Congress, State Representatives and Senators, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and Mayors.

- African American conventions and events.
- Federal and State offices of minority health within each State.
- Historically Black colleges and universities, African American organizations, publications, radio stations, and faith-based organizations by city within each State.

The *Hispanic Yearbook* is available in paper form and its data online via "Search the Database" at <http://hispanicyearbook.com>. It provides information in English and Spanish about:

- Hispanics in the Nation's and States' legislative branches.
- Hispanic conventions and events.
- Federal and State offices of minority health within each State.
- Hispanic organizations, publications, television stations, radio stations, and faith-based organizations by city within each State.

- Hispanic-serving institutions (those colleges and universities where Hispanics constitute 25 percent of the total enrollment).

The *People of Color Environmental Groups* is available in paper form by ordering on the website (<http://www.mott.org>) under "Publications, browse" and "Special Publications" or for download online at <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/poc2000.htm>. It provides information about environmental groups at the State and city level.

...local agencies, organizations, and groups

There are often many local agencies, organizations, and groups that have inroads to all levels of a community. Some of these include:

- The county and/or city in which the project is located can provide a calendar of local events, fairs, and festivals.

- The Chamber of Commerce can provide a list of its members who represent selected populations.
- Colleges or universities can provide the phone number of their international student association.
- The Public Information Officer at a military base can provide the name and phone number of ethnic associations.

Contact information for many of these local agencies, organizations, and groups can be found in the following places:

- The *Yellow Pages* can provide the phone number and address of ministerial associations, faith-based organizations that have non-English services, ethnic restaurants and grocers, and attorneys that provide immigration, green card, and visa services.
- Internet search engines can provide lists by typing in key words; such as, Hispanic or other

group, plus the city or county of interest, plus organizations.

- The “Black Churches” website (<http://www.theblackchurchpage.com>) includes a church locator that provides the names, addresses, and phone numbers of African American churches; and their minister’s name and telephone number by State and city.
- The National Congress of American Indians website (<http://www.ncai.org>) includes tribal governments by area of the United States, tribe, representative, and contact information; tribal organizations by website and telephone number; Federal government contacts by website and telephone number; and associated organizations by website.
- This website (<http://www.mobilehomeparkstore.com/list.htm>) can provide a list of manufactured-home communities by State and city.

...local and regional newspapers

Reading the local and regional newspapers online provides a convenient and inexpensive way to monitor a project area. Copies of non-online newspapers can be obtained during site visits, and subscriptions can be placed for these newspapers. Through these news sources, a variety of local information can be gleaned about hot topics, local leaders, cultural activities, upcoming sports and special events, shopping locations, letters to the editor, project opinions, and multi-language services at faith-based organizations.

Talk to local officials and community insiders

While most projects begin with visits to formal leaders, such as elected or appointed officials, it is just as important to visit community insiders who have daily contact with the public. Information from these individuals should be verified for accuracy and used discretely to protect residents' privacy.

...elementary school principals

In Jones County, NC, principals at the two elementary schools within the project area said that a high percentage of their students were eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs and 35 to 40 percent of the students' parents could not read or write. This discovery changed the way information was presented and collected—from sole reliance on written materials to the addition of one-on-one oral interviews.

...English as a Second Language coordinators

Through a Cumming, GA, local school's English as a Second Language Coordinator, the Hispanic population was identified. This primarily Mexican population included many illegal aliens, but this was not an issue with the school staff since a high level of trust had

been forged between the parents and the staff. Because members of the Hispanic community could be impacted by a transportation project, the Georgia DOT asked if they could "piggyback" on one of the school's regularly scheduled meetings and address the parents. The Georgia DOT also asked the ESL Coordinator to assist as an interpreter in addition to providing native Spanish speakers



A school principal discussed the number of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Meal programs.

familiar with transportation and its language set. The trust between the school staff and the parents was evidenced by the question and answer exchanges. Parents were comfortable saying “I own my trailer. What will happen to me? I am not legal.” Reaching these residents and being able to discuss an array of project issues with them was possible because of several factors, including:

- The parents’ level of interest in their children’s education.
- The level of trust that existed between the parents and the school’s staff.
- The school staff’s willingness to allow the DOT to leverage this trust and address the parents.
- The utilization of a location where the parents felt safe, and at a time convenient for them.
- The inclusion of the ESL Coordinator and other native-Spanish speakers.
- The minimization of the parents’ time by using one meeting to accomplish two purposes.

...school bus drivers

While driving through a project area in Taylor County, KY, several school buses were sighted. The bus drivers’ names and contact information were obtained through the County school system and they were contacted by telephone about the families along their routes. They were able to identify the race, ethnicity, and size of each household. In addition, they knew if the households were multi-generational, the approximate ages

of those in the households, if any household members had physical disabilities or had special needs, and how long the residents had lived in their homes. Many of the older bus drivers who were long-term area residents knew family histories and were able to identify where members of the same family lived. This information was helpful in understanding the fabric of the community and the co-dependences that existed between households.



A bus driver shared information about those living along her route.

Form alliances with existing organizations

Forming alliances with existing organizations eliminates starting from scratch and provides an opportunity to leverage trust that these organizations have already established in their communities.

These organizations can be helpful in identifying important individuals, being an intermediary between other organizations, and acting as a cosponsor for the project. In addition, these organizations can help distribute project information through their own membership.

...bus drivers' unions

In Cincinnati, OH, interviewers rode the buses. They talked to riders and completed questionnaires with them while on the buses. Both the bus drivers and their union were involved in the process and allowed “tear-off” sheets with meeting times and places to be hung on the fare box. The bus drivers also assisted by telling their riders about the importance of planned meetings in

terms of improving service, and often attended the meetings themselves.

...Native American tribal organizations

In Alaska, the Association of Village Presidents is an important liaison to the State’s 287 federally recognized

tribes. This group provides an understanding of the culture, knows the best times for meetings, and identifies the importance of oral communications. This group has led public involvement, set up meetings, brought people to the meetings, and provided interpreters where necessary.



An Inupiat interpreter facilitates a public-involvement meeting for Alaska DOT.

...health-care and faith-based organizations

Going through health-care organizations and personnel proved to be another successful way of accessing migrant farm workers, as did using faith-based organizations that provided them with housing, clothing, and food. These organizations served as intermediaries, delivering messages between the agency and the farm workers. This was important because the farm workers generally were unable to attend meetings during the day. They did not have “sick” or “vacation” days and could not take time off from work to attend meetings without fear of losing their jobs. This population had a great deal of fear in meeting with any “official” organization that was associated with the Federal or State government. By utilizing faith-based, health-care, and legal-aid workers to assist in meeting with migrant workers, a level of trust was developed. In several instances, the legal-aid workers actually conducted

the interviews and reported the results back to the project consultants. In addition, migrant-worker fairs were used to pass out information in Spanish and English to this population.

...community-based organizations

At California DOT, a variety of community-based organizations were retained to help organize community meetings. Each of these

organizations was familiar with their target communities and had connections within the communities that were respected by others. This respect chain opened many doors that might have been difficult to open otherwise. The community-based organizations reviewed all information that would be sent to the communities to determine its effectiveness, and disseminated information in writing and verbally through their community networks.



Faith-based organizations often assist in meeting hard-to-reach populations.

Attend scheduled and special events

Being a part of scheduled and special events, and fairs provides an opportunity for exposure to a broader cross-section of the public and a larger number of people. In urban and rural areas, local school sporting events draw large, diverse crowds. In addition swap meets, rummage sales, flea markets, and farmers' markets are effective places to rent space and conduct interviews.

...downtown weekly concerts

The website for the city of Mebane, NC, provided a schedule of their Friday night downtown weekly summer concert series. The City Manager was contacted and gave the project team permission to pass out project information across the street from the bandstand. A table was set up and a map of the alternatives was taped to the side of a building. As citizens walked toward or away from the bandstand, they were given a fact sheet and project newsletter, and asked to provide their names

and addresses for the project's mailing list. Local business owners and the general public reviewed the alternatives' map, asked questions, and completed interviews. In addition, a local newspaper reporter stopped by, interviewed the project team, and wrote an article about the project.

...Mid-State fairs

For the California Statewide Transportation Plan, California DOT and AMTRAK formed a partnership. They set up an information booth at the Mid-State Fair in San Luis Obispo and raffled off an AMTRAK round-trip ticket from San Luis Obispo to San Diego. To be eligible



A map of the alternatives was taped to a wall near the bandstand before the concert.

for the raffle, the public had to fill out a questionnaire. As a result, 450 people completed the California Statewide Transportation Plan questionnaire. In addition, California DOT took pictures of children wearing a hardhat and orange vest, and gave these to them.

...voter polling places

During the week of the 2000 presidential election, the project team was in the field in Maysville, NC. The county Voter Registrar was contacted and identified three polling places in the project area. During the previous election more than 70 percent of those eligible to vote had voted in each of these polling places. At each polling place, a staff member was positioned at a table with chairs, project signs, maps of alternatives, newsletters, and questionnaires. For those completing questionnaires, cookies and soft drinks were provided. In addition, information was also distributed about the dates and time for upcoming meetings. At one of the polling places, members of

the National Black Caucus directed voters to visit the project table. More than 80 interviews were conducted that day.

...mud sales

In Pennsylvania, “mud sales” are events that attract farmers and local citizens. This is a colloquial description for auctions that are typically held in the spring during

mud season to benefit the local fire companies. The project was assigned a booth right next to a farmer selling horse manure. Project maps were displayed, a little banner was hung, and team members talked to attendees about the project. In addition, project articles were sent to the Amish newspaper and to local organizations that had their own newsletters.



Residents were interviewed outside of the polling places after they voted.

Visit Laundromats, grocery stores that accept Food Stamps, and discount stores.

Low-income populations often shop at discount stores and grocery stores that accept Food Stamps, and do their wash at coin-operated Laundromats. Wal-Mart has a history of being community-oriented and has been willing to work with local groups. Non-franchised national chains and independently owned local grocery stores also have a history of being civic minded.

...Laundromats

As part of the project's reconnaissance, the only Laundromat in Mebane, NC, was identified. On Saturday morning, team members visited the Laundromat to conduct interviews. Because of the length of the wash and dry cycles, everyone had time to be interviewed. As the day wore on, the customer base began changing from English-speaking Whites to Spanish-speaking Hispanics. This was unexpected since the Census information had not identified any Hispanic population.

Having no interpreter present and no translated materials, the team was unable to interview any of the Hispanic customers. However, the English-speaking customers identified several mobile home parks where Hispanics lived and described a growing Hispanic presence.

...Independent Grocery Association stores

A survey of the project area revealed that the Independent Grocery Association store in Maysville, NC, was the only grocery store that accepted Food Stamps. The manager was familiar with his customers'



Residents at a Laundromat were interviewed as they waited for their clothes to wash.

shopping habits, and identified both the days and actual times of the month when Food Stamp recipients generally shopped. He provided a table and chairs, and allowed staff members to display and hand out project information just inside the store's entrance near the produce section. This location insured that almost all of the store's customers would pass by the display table.

Some customers had children waiting outside in the car or someone at home waiting for a meal and did not have time to complete questionnaires. However, most of them did have the time to answer a few questions. It was possible to determine who had received the project newsletter and whether or not they had heard of the project. Many of the elder shoppers took the time to be interviewed.

Staff members were able to hand out information about an upcoming meeting, add names to the mailing list, and schedule times for one-on-one interviews. In addition, the store manager agreed to place a project newsletter in every customer's bag. He also asked for a project map and displayed it on the wall outside his office at the store's other entrance.

...major discount stores

Wal-Mart allowed Missouri DOT to place a questionnaire on a kiosk in front of a store. The kiosk received 1,000 hits per week during the 2 months it was in operation. One of the questions asked was how had the person heard about the project. Almost every single person who responded said they had not heard about the project before filling out the questionnaire. Using Wal-Mart's huge drawing power provided an opportunity to introduce a large number of people to the project.



Project information was distributed and interviews conducted in a local grocery store that accepted Food Stamps.

Use word of mouth, radio, television, and newspapers

The effectiveness of word of mouth is greatly underestimated. In communities where low literacy and limited English proficiency are common, the trust associated with the carrier of the news is transferred to the news itself. Public-awareness programs and public-service announcements on local mainstream and ethnic radio, television, and cable-access channels are also major news sources.

...announcements from the pulpit

Local pastors in Denver, CO, announced from their pulpits that project staff would be visiting the schools, coming through the neighborhoods, and wearing yellow shirts and name badges with “I-70” stamped on them. Special emphasis was placed on recognition of the “I-70” logo because many

community residents could not read. The ministers beckoned their congregations to open their doors and complete interviews.

...radio reading services for the blind

Radio reading services, while they initially targeted the visually impaired, also serve those who cannot read and are a source of information dissemination. These services can be identified by searching on-line with the key words “reading services for the blind.”

...media directories

Public relations companies, such as Gebbie Press (<http://www.gebbieinc.com>), sell annual State media directories that provide information on print media (all daily, weekly, African American, and Hispanic newspapers) and broadcast media (all radio, TV, African



Live coverage of a public hearings generated larger crowds than expected.

American and Hispanic radio) by format. Also, a variety of online services provide free media directories, including:

- <http://www.radioblack.com> provides a list of African American radio stations by State and city.
- <http://www.shgresources.com/resources/radio> provides a list of radio stations by State, city and format.
- <http://www.shgresources.com/resources/tv> provides a list of television stations by State and city.
- <http://www.shgresources.com/resources/newspapers> provides a list of newspapers by State and city.
- <http://www.blackpressusa.com/Network.asp> provides a directory of local African American press websites by State.
- <http://www.abyznewslinks.com/unite.htm> provides a list of ethnic and non-ethnic newspapers by State and city.

...radio call-in shows

During a field visit to a Maysville, NC, project area, a staff member was approached by the owner of a local African American radio station and asked if the project manager would participate in a call-in show. The project manager agreed, and the

station owner initiated a conference call with the project manager located more than 2 hours away. The call-in show provided an opportunity to reach a focused audience, answer questions, discuss issues, dispel rumors, and provide information about upcoming events.



Miami-Dade County (FL) MPO participated in a local call-in show on Haitian radio.

Involve school students

School students can serve as information conduits to their parents who may not be able to read in any language or speak English. In addition, their involvement in a project often spurs their parents' interest to participate and builds community support.

...an art contest for bridge designs

Through the Great American Teach-in event, Florida DOT asked two art classes from a Tampa high school for help in designing the aesthetics for a new roadway and bridge so it would reflect their community. The students provided 40 out-of-the-box ideas and the project engineer selected the top eight ideas based on concept. The Florida DOT's local district landscape architect and structural engineer then selected the four top designs based on the constructability and maintainability. The four student designers met with the Mayor of Tampa, who awarded

a \$100 gift certificate to the grand-prize winner. As a result of the design contest, community support for the project was created.

...survey design

In Bowling Green, KY, the local Kentucky Transportation Cabinet district office asked a third-grade class to beta-test a survey. The class included a number of students

from low-income households, and recent Hispanic and Bosnian immigrants. They were told about the project and given a test survey to see if they could understand it. The survey was revised to incorporate their comments. Then, they were asked to take the survey home and interview adults, such as their parents or grandparents. The next day the students returned the interviews and were shown how their information



Kentucky Transportation Cabinet staff asked third graders to beta-test a survey before it was given to their parents.

would be used in the project. Later in the process, the students were asked to conduct a second interview to verify the project was on track. The student interviews increased parent interest in the project, the number of visits to project office, and the project mailing list.

...yearly calendar design

Each year the Chicago Area Transportation Study produces a calendar illustrated with student artwork. A theme is identified, and a letter is sent to every elementary and middle school in the six-county area asking them to provide a picture that could be used for one of the months. Additional materials are sent to the schools including a transportation teaching unit and an offer to speak to a class.

...“Where Do Roads Come From?”

The principal asked the project team to make a presentation to the fourth

and fifth graders as a civics lesson in how roads are planned and located. A PowerPoint presentation called *Where Do Roads Come From?* was created and tested for clarity using one 11-year old. The presentation addressed three topics: the variety of professions involved, the impact categories examined, and the Federal laws that governed. At the end of the presentation, each student was given a homework assignment. They were asked to take home a map

of their hometown, Pollocksville, NC, with all its environmentally sensitive areas identified, and talk to their parents about where the road should go. The next day, almost all the students returned the maps. In exchange, a certificate as a “junior environmentalist” was given to each student. This created the possibility of writing the project newsletter at the fifth-grade reading level so the students could read it to their parents if their parents could not read.



Third graders were asked to find out where their parents thought the road should go as a homework assignment.

Let the public choose the meeting time, place, and size

In order to have well attended meetings, a myriad of cultural, social, employment, marital, and psychological considerations must be undertaken. Rather than assume when, where, what size, and what type of meetings to have—ask the residents!

...just ask

The Chicago Area Transportation Study has found that using people from the area was effective in reaching out to other people in the area. Listening to the public simplified their information-gathering process and kept the agency from choosing the wrong venue, the wrong time, and the wrong mechanism for public involvement. The agency let communities tailor the type of public involvement they wanted by asking them three questions:

- What ways do you normally get and give information?

- What successful communication techniques do you use?
- What hours and locations are convenient for you to attend a meeting or other get-together?

...community-based organizations

When updating their long-range plan, the Metropolitan Transportation

Commission in Oakland, CA, gave community-based organizations grants to help design meetings that were appropriate for low-income and minority communities. They advised translating project materials, using large print, and teaching staff how to recognize when someone could not read. In addition, they recommended a number of techniques on how to recognize when someone could not



Door-to-door interviews identified handicapped residents and their need for transportation to a meeting.

read. They also recommended a number of techniques on how to invite people to come to a meeting. Some went door-to-door, while others distributed leaflets, used the media, issued press releases, and tried to get on community calendars. Those with active, large memberships just worked within their organizations. In addition, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission relied on their elderly, disabled, and minority/low-income advisory committees for ideas and oversight.

...locational bias

On a project in Augusta, the Maine DOT held its first meeting at City Hall. It was not well attended. Citizens were asked why attendance had been poor. Several answered that people only went to City Hall to buy a dog license, pay taxes, or get a permit; but they did not go to meetings there. Upon further questioning of the public, the Maine DOT discovered that the poor attendance at the first meeting was

because many residents opposed construction of the City Hall, still harbored resentment that their taxes had been used to build it, and refused to go there. Rather than have one second meeting, two meetings were held—neither was at City Hall. One meeting was on the east side of

Augusta at a local elementary school and the other was on the west side of Augusta at another local elementary school. Both were well attended. Many of those who attended the second meetings had either attended these schools, or their children had attended these schools.



Surveys included questions on where and when to hold public meetings.

...dangerous locations

The first meeting was held at Town Hall in Calhoun Falls, SC, a small town that was 50-percent African American and 50-percent White. Only about 18 of the 90 people who attended were African American, although one of the alternatives went through the African American community. After the meeting, the Mayor, who was African American, said the Ku Klux Klan was still active in the area. While everyone knew where Town Hall was, it was in the middle of a White neighborhood and African Americans were afraid to go through a White neighborhood after dark. The Mayor said there was a community center in the African American community where a meeting could be held. Two weeks later, on the Monday after Easter, a meeting was held in the African American community and more than 90 African Americans attended. In addition, four Whites attended. The attendance showed the African American residents were very interested in the project; however,

they were not willing to put their lives at risk to attend a meeting at Town Hall.

...childcare availability

Childcare, under the supervision of a licensed and bonded caregiver, was provided at the I-70 meetings in Denver, CO, so people could

attend and bring their children. The childcare director had the children write short, one-act plays they performed at the end of the meetings. The children had such fun they encouraged their parents to take them to the corridor-wide meeting so they might do it again. By starting the meetings at 6:00 p.m. and providing a meal, the parents could leave work



Meetings held in a safe location like the community center increased participation.

and pick up their children on the way to the meeting without having to stop and get supper. The meetings were over by 8:00 p.m. so the children could get home in time for bed. If childcare had not been provided, many single parents would not have been able to attend the meeting.

...Sunday after services

In Clemson, SC, when project staff asked to address the congregation at the Wednesday prayer meeting, the minister suggested a better time would be on Sunday after the morning service, when every family brought a covered dish and ate together.



Small meetings with neighborhood groups were held in a community church.

...one-on-one and/or small meetings

During a 2-year study in Milwaukee, WI, approximately 200 one-on-one conversations and small meetings; and four, large, formal public-involvement meetings were held at various times of the day and night. The most productive meetings were the one-on-one and small meetings with neighborhood groups around the community. These were held in their churches or local offices, at whatever time was convenient for them, whether it was day or night.

...small neighborhood meetings

Approximately 60 small meetings were held on the I-70 project in Denver, CO, because many residents were uncomfortable voicing their opinions in front of others at large meetings. These small meetings were attended by 8 to 12 residents, were held in the neighborhoods, and provided the opportunity to address issues and concerns in detail.

Use interpreters and translated materials

Interpreting and translating apply not only to languages but also to concepts, such as noise attenuation.

...dueling blenders

In Denver, CO, at a community meeting on the I-70 project, noise levels were explained using blenders and noise meters. In a silent room, first, everyone was asked to look at the meter readings. Then, one blender was turned on and the meters were re-examined. Following that, a second blender was turned on and the meters were again re-examined. The residents saw the noise levels did not double although the number of blenders did. To demonstrate the effect that distance from a noise source makes, the blenders were moved away from the noise meters at different intervals and the meters examined at each interval. The last experiment moved the blenders behind a blackboard to show the effect of a noise wall on noise reduction.

...language paddles and “fare box Spanish”

At TriMet, the public transit agency in Portland, OR, their bus and light-rail operators work alongside outreach workers from the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization to educate newly

arrived immigrants on how to use transit services. Operators also receive on-going Spanish language tips called “fare box Spanish.” The tips include phrases that operators might use daily; such as, answering fare questions, providing directions, encouraging safe behavior, and informing customers of transfer



Blenders were used to explain and demonstrate the effect of distance on noise levels.

points. In addition, operators are provided with a language paddle that provides key transit phrases in Chinese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Customers are also encouraged to use the Customer Service Call Center, where operators work alongside a contracted local interpretation agency to provide second-language services in 17 different languages.

...limited English proficiency

California DOT asked the California Department of Education to identify the largest student groups of limited-English-proficient students Statewide. Using this information, the California Statewide Transportation Plan's tri-fold brochure was translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

...local interpreters

The New Mexico DOT has one of their information centers in a local business that is off a reservation, but on the main road. The business owner speaks English and the native language, and is known by the locals. When residents come into the store to buy their food, they receive project information from a trusted source in their own language at the same time.



Bilingual staff were able to conduct meetings in both Spanish and English communities.

...bilingual staff

One of the New Mexico DOT Regional Transportation Districts is located where Spanish is the predominant language, so all the staff members speak Spanish. Everything they do is in Spanish and in English. Being bilingual enables them to go out into the community, attend local meetings, and get to know the residents.

Play a public-involvement game

Games that minimize the use of written material and give each participant the same influence provide a level playing field for everyone.

...“Strings and Ribbons”

The Volusia County (FL) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) used “Strings and Ribbons” as their main public-involvement tool for their Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). This game offered a number of advantages over traditional public involvement, such as:

- Leveling the playing field by giving every player the same amount of money and influence.
- Eliminating the conflict between the public and the MPO, or another agency, by requiring the public to reach a consensus among themselves.
- Relying on almost no written information, all populations

including low literacy, limited English proficient, and visually impaired can play.

- Providing project-specific recommendations.
- Constructing maps that visually document the citizens’ transportation choices.
- Letting citizens explain their choices to others.

- Including a mechanism for ranking the choices.

The MPO displayed each map by session on their website (<http://www.vcmo2025.com/input.html>), took the improvements identified by the public, prioritized them based on how many times an improvement was listed. The MPO defined the



Volusia County (FL) MPO plays “Strings and Ribbons” during a Spanish Association scheduled meeting.

“Public’s LRTP” by taking the LRTP budget and applying it to this prioritized improvement’s list until the budget was expended. This list was then given to the MPO Board and modeled along with other plans. High school and college students, Hispanic associations, housing authority residents, emergency response personnel, bicycle and walking clubs, senior groups, faith-based organizations, visually impaired groups, and members of the general public have played. As a result, interest in the MPO process and participation at the MPO meetings have increased.

...Transopoly

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) in Chicago, IL, utilizes Transopoly, a version of “Strings and Ribbons” played with ribbons and dots. It is a good process for identifying transportation infrastructure needs as part of the Long-Range Transportation Planning (LRTP) process. The game documents the public’s LRTP;

then it is sent to the Chicago Area Transportation Study, the area’s MPO. One year, information was collected at each of 19 small group meetings held throughout the area. From this information, a series of small group reports was drafted and returned to the game players for them to verify that their vision, values, problems, and solutions had

been correctly stated. Once public approval was obtained, an area plan was prepared. After all of the area plans were completed, one plan was created for the region. The game has been played with residents who cannot read, do not speak English, are deaf or hard of hearing, and are visually challenged.



The CNT’s Transopoly game allows a player to explain his team’s concept in sign language.

Incorporate magnets, color, and symbols

Project magnets have lasting power, color can increase visibility and provide an element of protection, and symbols easily convey information.

...refrigerator magnets

Maine DOT created project refrigerator magnets and passed these out at public advisory committee, scoping, and public information meetings. On the magnets were the Maine DOT logo, the project name and website address, and the project manager's division telephone number. The magnets proved effective because people kept them and displayed them in an area they see every time the refrigerator is opened.

...colored T-shirts

The mayor asked each of the team members to wear a plain bright green T-shirt to the project's first series of public-involvement meetings. She anticipated a large crowd and wanted

to make it easy for anyone to identify a team member, even from across the room. Although more than 250 residents packed the gymnasium, the public could pick out the team members without having to get close enough to see a name tag.

...visual protection

Everyone going into the Denver, CO, neighborhoods to conduct interviews

wore a yellow shirt with the I-70 logo and a picture identification card around their neck. This was done to protect both those conducting the interviews and those being interviewed. Yellow was chosen because it was easy to spot and could be seen from a distance. For additional safety, two-person teams were used and each team had a walkie-talkie. The 10 or more teams stayed together and moved through



Staff wore green T-shirts so they could be identified without the public having to read a name tag.

the neighborhood block by block. Seeing a large number of yellow-shirted interviewers in their block made it easier for residents to feel safe about opening their doors. It peaked their interest and made them want to know what was going on in their neighborhood. If team members were invited into a home, a project bag was hung on the outside of the front door to let the project manager know their location. All teams waited until everyone was present until moving on to the next block. This strategy kept all the teams in sight of each other and provided a way to keep the length of the interviews within a reasonable time limit.

...squares of paper with pictures

On a small neighborhood project, 2- by 2-inch squares of paper with pictures of stop signs, landscaping, sidewalks, potholes, a speeding car, and water standing in the road were used in place of questionnaires. Street names were written on the neighborhood map because most

people knew how to read and write their address. Residents were asked for their address and shown where they lived. Staff members engaged the public in conversation about neighborhood problems and possible solutions. The meaning of each square was identified, and residents

were asked to tape the squares on the map where they thought improvements should be made. Staff also offered to place the squares on the map for residents. Blank squares were also available to illustrate any other problems the residents identified.



Team members wore yellow shirts to identify themselves while out in the neighborhoods, and at all project functions.

Use photographs, 3D animations, and videos

Pictures are worth a thousand words in any language. They can quickly simplify the most complex concept.

...color-coded roadway alternatives

While people might not be able to read the word yellow, most know it by sight. Rather than label roadway alternatives with written descriptions, each was shown in a different color. Care was taken to make sure colorblind individuals could distinguish the colors used. Each alternative's color was also shown on the corresponding cross-section view that the driver sees. If the red and yellow alternatives were used, then the broad stripes of red and yellow would be shown under that cross-section view. To make the cross-section views look realistic, trees, grass, people, sidewalks, and cars were included.

...before-and-after photos, morphs, and 3D animations

Depending upon the size and complexity of a project, a combination of visual techniques may be used. If the project is a simple widening, before-and-

after photos are used. One photo shows the existing conditions and a photographic rendering shows the “after” conditions. This technique provides a relatively inexpensive way to show several widening alternatives at the same location and/or at different locations.



Each alternative was identified by using a different color, rather than a different name.

If the project is a more complex widening, either before-and-after photos or a computer-generated series of different pictures (a morph) are used. The morph presentation starts out as a still photograph and then slowly adds features; such as, additional lanes, a planted median, bike lanes, sidewalks, or bus pull offs. This presentation is repeated in 30-second cycles.

If the project is a new multi-lane road, a computer-animated “3D drive through” can be used. This shows what it would be like to drive the new facility.

...looped videos at public hearings

Mississippi DOT’s in-house video group produces videos for approximately 85 percent of their public hearings. For most projects, a 10- to 12-minute, continuously running, loop video is prepared. However, larger, more complex projects require longer videos. The video begins with the DOT’s

Executive Director welcoming citizens to the meeting and providing an introduction to the project. The environmental and project-development processes are described, project-specific issues are identified, and the project’s purpose and need are discussed. Footage of the project corridor is shown from a driver’s perspective, and environmentally

sensitive areas are highlighted. The video provides the public with background information before they proceed into the next part of the public hearing, with the viewing of aerial photographs, cross-section views, and the alternatives. To date, the videos have been in English only, although it would be easy to provide voice tracks in other languages.



Mississippi DOT uses a continuously running, looped video at public hearings to welcome residents, introduce the project, and describe the process.

What were the lessons learned?

Several lessons emerged during the research of this “best practices” report.

...some are unaware of the levels of low literacy and limited English proficiency that exist

The first lesson is how many practitioners are unaware of the state of literacy in America and the impact of limited English proficiency. Overall, practitioners are not conscious of the scale and distribution of the literacy and limited English proficiency problems. As a result, they do not understand the apparent correlations to low literacy and limited English proficiency of such characteristics as:

- Low-income.
- Second- and third-shift work hours.
- Transportation dependency.
- Single head-of-household families.
- Level of governmental distrust.

- Importance of meeting location.
- Lack of access to subscription media, including newspapers and websites.

Independent or combined, these factors are barriers that affect the success of outreach and level of public engagement.

Not having anyone attend a public meeting is most likely a sign of lack of effective engagement rather than lack of public interest. Low turnout can be due to the public’s constraints and abilities to participate. In

other instances, it is simply an unwillingness to change the way it has always been done.

...some find creative ways to include those who are low literate and have limited English proficiency

The second lesson is that there are ways to include low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations. It is feasible to consider the correlations associated with low literacy and limited English



Holding meetings at times that conflict with the public’s work schedule often results in poor attendance.

proficiency, and devise solutions to engage these populations. Solutions can involve leveraging, innovation, flexibility, adaptability, creativity, frugality, common sense, politeness, and humbleness. Successful practitioners are alert to the subtleties often overlooked or misunderstood by others. Rather than assume, they ask. They realize that data obtained through conventional sources is two-dimensional, and that a community's true picture and willingness to participate often emerges with face-to-face engagement.

The “best practices” described in this report are a testament to practitioners who use their ingenuity and determination to communicate with and engage the public in whatever manner is necessary.

...educators and literacy counselors indicate that low literacy and limited English proficiency will be a long-term condition

The third lesson is that low literacy and limited English proficiency will continue to be a long-term

issue. Large numbers of students still dropout before completing high school, while many others finish high school but cannot read. Utilizing the data sources and incorporating the techniques identified and described in this report will equip practitioners with valuable, proven tools in providing everyone with meaningful access to relevant information and decisionmaking.

...in closing

This publication ultimately acts as a resource guide for transportation planners and practitioners. While this publication has many detailed examples of “best practices,” planners and practitioners are not limited to these examples. It is re-emphasized that when doing surveys and interviews, confidentiality and right-to-privacy issues must be taken into consideration. It is important to understand the abilities and limitations of low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations when planning outreach.



Considering the public's abilities and constraints when planning public outreach can result in well attended meetings.