

Public Participation Plan Focus Groups

Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is responsible for developing the Statewide Transportation Plan (CTP) and for preparing the Federal Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (FSTIP) on regular cycles. State and federal guidelines prescribe that these planning processes be undertaken with broad, inclusive participation of key stakeholder groups as well as members of the general public.

To ensure compliance with these guidelines, the Department will be developing a comprehensive Public Participation Plan. And to make certain that public, private and civic organizations, as well as individual citizens, have the opportunity to shape the manner in which they will be engaged, the Department is seeking input from those individuals and groups through a multi-strategy outreach and involvement process.

This document outlines one such strategy, the use of a focus-group-style technique to solicit input from members of the general public on the type and extent of engagement they would like to have with respect to the transportation planning processes for the CTP and FSTIP.

Objectives

As stated above, the focus group objectives are:

- to determine the level of knowledge, awareness and interest members of the general public have with regard to the CTP and FSTIP documents and processes;
- to identify preferred methods for outreach and engagement related to the CTP and FSTIP;
- to identify opportunities to build outreach, information and engagement strategies upon existing community conduits.

Methodology

In order to sample public opinion from representative populations statewide, four focus group workshops will be held, one in each of the following cities: Oakland, Sacramento, Fresno and Long Beach. Twelve to fifteen participants from each region will be recruited via an advertisement on the Internet that will provide a brief description of the purpose of the focus group and offering a stipend and food as compensation for their time. Those responding to the advertisement will be asked to complete a brief demographic profile, which will enable staff to screen for appropriate representation on the focus group. (More respondents are accepted than needed because of an approximate 20% no-show rate.)

Each of the focus groups will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 pm on a weeknight, at a local community facility (such as a library, school or community center), and will be staffed by a facilitator and an assistant who will take notes. There may be an audience of up to two Caltrans staffers who will be introduced as interested observers that will not participate in the conversation.

Participants will be invited to sit around a conference table in comfortable chairs, with the facilitator and assistant at one end, and observers positioned outside the table. The meeting will proceed according to the following outline:

I. Welcome/Introductions

Facilitator thanks participants for attending the session; introduces him/herself as the moderator for the group discussion; explains the purpose and structure of the meeting; describes the groundrules for participation. Attendees are then invited to introduce themselves by first name only and say in what community they live and for how long.

II. Baseline Assessment of Participant Knowledge: How Do Transportation Projects Get Prioritized and Funded in Your Region and Statewide?

This question is intended to determine how much participants currently know and understanding about transportation planning and funding in the state.

III. Information Presentation: Overview of the CTP and FSTIP Processes

The facilitator will deliver a ten-minute overview presentation of the CTP and FSTIP processes, using display boards and/or PowerPoint.

IV. Participant Feedback 1: Are these processes of interest to you? Do you think others in your community would be interested in these processes?

Participants will respond to the presentation by indicating the degree of interest they and others in their communities/affinity groups might have in these processes. The facilitator will probe for reasons for the responses; i.e., "why are you not very interested in these planning and funding efforts?" or "what about these efforts might be of interest to you?"

V. Participant Feedback 2: What would motivate you to participate in these processes? What methods would be most attractive to you?

These questions are intended to explore how the processes might be advertised or promoted to encourage more public involvement, as well as which of a list of potential engagement methods might be most attractive to participants.

VI. Participant Feedback 3: What methods of informing you of these participation opportunities would be most effective?

This question will elicit responses as to how individuals tend to receive information.

VII. Summary/Debrief/Additional Comments/Close

The facilitator will explain that the results of this focus group will be utilized to assist Caltrans in creating and implementing a public participation plan that can demonstrably engage key stakeholders and the general public in these important planning and programming efforts. The facilitator will thank participants for their time and attention. S/he will invite participants to finish the refreshments, turn in their comment forms and receive their stipends. Participants will also have an opportunity to ask Caltrans staff any questions, or address comments to them directly.

A summary of each focus group will be prepared, highlighting the findings regarding preferred engagement and outreach methods. This report will be delivered, together with participant profile information to Caltrans for assistance in developing the Public Participation Plan.

Proposed Schedule

Develop Recruitment/Screening Tools	November 8
Secure Focus Group Locations	November 8
Post Recruitment Advertisements	November 12
Conduct Screening	November 19
Confirm Participants	November 26
Prepare Materials	November 1-26
Conduct Focus Groups	Weeks of December 3 and 10
Oakland	
Fresno	
Sacramento	
Long Beach	
Prepare Summary Report	January 11