

HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS
ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY MANUAL

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Date Authorized: 04/16/2019
Supersedes: 01/29/2019

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Purpose:

This section details how the County notifies the public regarding the development of plans and improvement programs, solicits their comments, and addresses those comments in the final documents. Additionally, this section details how the County manages the Public Participation process.

The purpose and objective of the County's Public Participation Plan is to:

- Provide County departments/offices with a framework to develop meaningful public participation.
- Provide opportunity for interested parties to identify environmental concerns;
- Encourage public participation opportunities in a wide and varied audience, including traditionally underserved groups;
- Obtain meaningful public input and participation to inform the planning and decision- makers; and
- Inform and educate stakeholders and interested parties.

The public participation plan should be developed early in the process.

Public Participation Plan Summary:

The Public Participation Plan (PPP) demonstrates how the County, provides opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points during the countywide improvement planning process as dictated by Environmental Processes for federally funded projects. The process consists of open discussion of planning documents in local government forums, public meetings, informational exhibits, published advertisements and, if required, a Public Hearing.

Types of Public Participation Procedures:

To ensure a rich and diverse public participation process, impacted parties must be informed and educated on programs, projects planned, and projects underway.

Early in the planning process, projects are included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Meetings to discuss the recommended projects included in the STIP/TIP are advertised allowing any interested citizen to provide input in the project planning and programming process. In some instances, these meetings can be considered adequate

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public participation for minor projects constructed in existing right of way and/or general maintenance projects. However, depending on the type and complexity of the project, public concerns, associated social, economic, and environmental factors, additional public participation may be required.

The following strategies are utilized by the County departments/offices to ensure that interested parties receive timely information in a variety of formats. Each department will determine the best form of communication for their programs.

Types of additional public participation efforts may include:

1. Commissioners Court Meetings – Citizens may be present during any of the Commissioners’ Court meetings. The Commissioners’ Court meets every other Tuesday at 9:30 am, unless otherwise designated.

The agenda for the Commissioners’ Court meeting can be found at http://agenda.hidalgocounty.us/agenda_publish.cfm. Furthermore, the meeting can be streamed online.

The Commissioners Court meeting offers the public an opportunity to bring topics and issues to Commissioners’ Court members’ attention. Each regular Commissioners’ Court meeting allows citizens 3 minutes each to speak on a topic. A limited amount of time of no longer than thirty (30) minutes will be set aside during each regular or special meeting of the Commissioners’ Court for Open Forum to allow individuals or groups of individuals who are not listed on the agenda of Commissioners’ Court to address the Commissioners’ Court.

A citizen can sign up to speak during Open Forum by completing a Public Participation Form and submitting the form to the Court Administrator prior to the commencement of the particular meeting of Commissioners Court.

2. Public Outreach – The methods of gathering and implementing public participation for a planning process may differ widely, depending on the type and scope of a project or program.

Partnerships with Community-based organizations provide the opportunity to connect with specific audiences and are an integral part of identifying and reaching out to underserved groups. County departments/offices can reach out to specific organizations to provide these groups with project information and encourage them to become involved.

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Community-based organizations are groups that serve a broad range of community interests. Organizations include senior centers; civic groups; business organizations; community development corporations, churches and other faith-based organizations; service clubs; schools that provide English as a second language programs; service providers for youths, families, and persons with disabilities; and many others.

3. Websites – County departments/offices that have websites that provide for two-way communication can continuously update information about programs and projects.
4. Publications – County departments/offices should maintain a stakeholder list with contact information for organizations and individuals. Electronic newsletters quickly and easily disseminate information to contact lists.
5. Media Campaigns – A comprehensive regional media campaign can be used when outreach is needed to the broader community, if fees are reasonable and the department/office has the available resources.

A media campaign might include press releases; public service announcements; press conferences with community leaders; feature articles; or interviews, depending on the nature of the project and the resources available. To ensure media exposure, the department/office could buy advertisements but should do so strategically to keep costs low.

6. Scheduled Community Meetings – The need for scheduled community meetings during the life of the project or program will vary. A construction project for example could have scheduled meetings during project development, design, at the start of construction, and at various times during construction. Each department/office will make the determination of what is needed.

Selection of Meeting Places: When determining locations and schedules for public meetings, the department/office will:

- Schedule meetings at times and locations that is convenient and accessible for minority, low-income, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities
- Employ different meeting sizes and formats including town hall type meeting formats;
- Coordinate with community organizations, educational institutions, and other organizations to implement public engagement strategies that reach

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out specifically to members of affected minority, low-income, and/or LEP communities;

- Provide opportunities for public participation through means other than written communication, such as one-on-one interviews.
- Meetings are conducted in locations that are always ADA accessible and convenient to public transit, when possible;
- Sign language interpreter requests can be accommodated if requested in advance. Each department will determine the amount of notice required.

7. Direct Notification – The use of door to door delivery of information should be used when required by federal, state or local law or depending on the nature of the program, project, or activity and the resources available.
8. Social Media – Social media and social networking websites including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs. It is important to choose the social media and networking platforms that have the best chance of reaching the intended audience.
9. State And Regional Organizations – The County receives funding through various state and federal agencies with their own public participation plans. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) website states “public hearings and meetings allow you to participate in the transportation planning process and help you better understand the road, rail and aviation projects that affect your community.” Further details about the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) public participation process can be found at <http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/get-involved.html> .

Use of Public Comment:

All public input should be derived from as diverse a range of sources as possible. At the department’s discretion, as appropriate and whenever possible, public comments may be used to revise work scopes, plans, and programs. (Sample: Attachment 12).

Effectiveness Assessment:

County departments/offices should use the information obtained through its public outreach efforts to review the effectiveness and progress of its programs. In turn, the public participation plan should be updated periodically to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and executive orders for Environmental Justice and individuals that are Limited English Proficient. The Title VI/Nondiscrimination Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating any plan updates.

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Record Retention:

The records shall be maintained for a period of ten (10) years or pursuant to the requirements of the Texas Library Archives Records Retention Schedules, whichever is longer.