

1 **Update on the State of the Practice: Public Involvement in the 21st Century**
2 **Prepared by: TRB Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation**
3 **ADA60**
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5

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9 **Introduction**

10 The Transportation Research Board (TRB) Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation
11 is dedicated to the research and dissemination of information designed to improve the state of
12 public involvement practice in transportation decision making. In pursuit of this mission, the
13 Committee issues specific research problem statements and calls for papers for presentation and
14 publication that address current needs and issues related to public involvement in transportation.
15 The Committee coordinates and judges the TRB John and Jane Public Communications Contest,
16 organizes panel sessions for TRB conferences and designs and executes workshops that share
17 and provide practical instruction on the application of public involvement tools and techniques.
18 These activities are implemented in collaboration with other TRB committees in an effort to
19 ensure the relevancy of the Committee’s work as a provider of information that meets the needs
20 of the larger transportation industry.

21 This paper examines the current state of the practice in public involvement in transportation.
22 Reassessing current practice provides a clean view for identifying the issues and practices that
23 will influence and define public involvement into the future. The purpose of this document is to
24 provide an update for transportation practitioners on the state of the practice in public
25 involvement as provided in previous State of the Practice papers that articulate the issues and
26 areas of focus that define the current state of practice, including areas in need of additional
27 research, guidance and examination through TRB and this Committee.

28 This review includes:

- 29
- 30 • Definition of public involvement
 - 31 • Key factors shaping today’s public involvement practice in transportation
 - 32 • Evolution of public involvement in transportation
 - 33 • Tools of the practice and technological changes
 - 34 • Key lessons learned from recent documented experience in the transportation industry
 - 35 • Challenges practitioners face going forward in the 21st century

36 First published by the Transportation Research Board more than a decade ago, “*State of the*
37 *Practice: White Paper on Public Involvement,*” highlighted the “explosion of interest” in public
38 involvement that occurred during the 1990s, resulting in a fundamental shift in transportation
39 decision making that places public input in the nexus of good transportation decision making.
Since that time, more changes in legislation, demographics and technology have affected the

40 practice. In order to better define these changes and understand their implications, TRB's
41 Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation conducted in 2012 a State of the Practice
42 survey of practitioners across the U.S.¹ This document presents an analysis of these survey
43 results and an overview of where the public involvement practice is today. It identifies a number
44 of key issues and areas of practice where the industry is in need of additional guidance and
45 research.

46 **Definition of Public Involvement**

47 Numerous definitions of public involvement are documented and in use, with nearly all
48 conveying the central theme of two-way communication between members of the public and
49 governmental entities engaged in decision making processes. The International Association for
50 Public Participation (IAP2), founded in the U.S. in 1990, views public involvement as “any
51 process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to
52 make decisions.” As the name implies, public involvement refers to the public becoming
53 engaged in transportation decisions, typically through a process of two-way communication
54 between citizens and government. The Committee on Public Involvement is strongly committed
55 to facilitating effective two-way communication that results in substantive discussions between
56 stakeholders and transportation agencies about the issues that influence actual decisions.

57 The IAP2's Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation apply to multiple areas of public
58 decision making. The principles are ones that the TRB Committee on Public Involvement
59 supports as the basic tenants of good professional practice in public involvement in
60 transportation.

61 IAP2 “Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation,” are outlined as follows:

- 62 1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a
63 right to be involved in the decision making process.
- 64 2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the
65 decision.
- 66 3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating
67 the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- 68 4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected
69 by or interested in a decision.
- 70 5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- 71 6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in
72 a meaningful way.
- 73 7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

¹ The 2012 State of the Practice survey was conducted June 22-July 2, 2012 by TRB ADA60, Public Involvement in Transportation Planning Research Subcommittee and State of the Practice White Paper Task Group. A web survey of 18 questions was distributed to public involvement practitioners in transportation across the U.S... A total of 249 surveys were completed with a margin of error of +/- 6.2. A copy of survey results is available through the TRB ADA60 Committee.

74 **Key Factors Shaping Today’s Public Involvement Practice in Transportation**

75 Public involvement as a practice and profession became a key factor in transportation decision
76 making in the latter part of the 20th century, following a number of “lessons learned” from major
77 projects that lacked good public involvement plans and programs in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.
78 As demonstrated by the TRB Committee on Public Involvement’s 2012 survey of transportation
79 practitioners, there is general consensus today among governmental agencies, as well as the
80 public, that a well-thought out and executed public involvement program will lead to more fully
81 informed decision making, particularly at the local level. More than 90% of the survey
82 respondents indicated they believe that gaining the public’s contribution to a project is an
83 important outcome of the public involvement process. But as the practice has matured and
84 become more effective, so too have the challenges practitioners face. Even some of the most
85 effective Public Involvement (PI) programs do not always succeed when trying to gain
86 meaningful input and participation from population groups who historically have not been or are
87 no longer able to be reached through traditional means.

88 Increasingly in the U.S., the term ‘public’ refers to a population that is becoming more and more
89 diverse – in terms of race, ethnicity, income levels, educational attainment, work schedule,
90 access to transportation, and other characteristics. The growing level of diversity in the U.S.
91 population is perhaps the single greatest change affecting the public involvement practice over
92 the past three decades. The U.S. Census Bureau has ‘unofficially’ projected that “America would
93 become a majority-minority country – that is, a population with no single racial group as the
94 majority, by 2050.”²

95 Along with diversity comes a significant advance in communications technologies, which
96 include but are not limited to the introduction of social media into the communications landscape
97 and its integration into the daily lives of citizens around the globe. Social media and other
98 internet based communications have had a profound impact on the practice of public
99 involvement in terms of how input is received from the public, how meetings are conducted, and
100 how governments and agencies are communicating with their constituents. Agencies are also
101 seeing increased communications between stakeholders on their transportation projects using
102 these tools.

103 As much as these factors significantly influence today’s practice, much of the foundation of
104 public involvement in transportation projects was established through the significant legislative
105 acts that took place in the last half of the 20th century. Simply put, for transportation projects,
106 developing and implementing public involvement plans is the law. Yet while these “federal
107 mandates are powerful transforming tools”³, it is important to recognize that these laws often
108 were themselves the result of citizen action and outcry and a general recognition that not
109 including the public effectively in the decision making process can lead to “project delays,

² Angela Glover Blackwell, Stewart Kwoh and Manuel Pasto, *Uncommon Common Ground – Race and America’s Future*, New York: The American Assembly, 2010.

³ Ibid.

110 lawsuits, and public outcry about transportation decisions made without citizen input.”⁴ From a
 111 very practical standpoint, lack of public involvement can lead to a negative financial impact on
 112 transportation projects and programs in a number of ways, including extending the project’s
 113 development timeframe, being sued, reducing public trust in government institutions, creating
 114 controversy, and elevating the environmental document to a higher level.

115 **Evolution of Public Involvement in Transportation**

116 The evolution of public involvement in transportation over the last 60 or so years began with the
 117 Federal Aid Highway Act of 1950 – the first piece of legislation that required “public
 118 involvement.” It required public hearings, proper notification to affected parties, and the
 119 availability of project information. From those humble beginnings a series of legislative Acts and
 120 Executive Orders helped shape the public involvement requirements we follow today. Key
 121 legislation/executive orders/ and federal guidance are highlighted below.

Relevant Legislation or Federal Guidance ⁵	Year	Impact on Public Involvement
<i>Administrative Procedure Act</i>	1946	Required procedures for all federal agencies to develop policy and rules, including notifying the public and others agencies of an action and receiving comments from the public and other agencies. The “notice and comment” requirements were a fundamental component of active participation by the public and other interested parties.
<i>Federal Aid-Highway Act</i>	1950	Became first piece of legislation requiring public outreach
<i>Federal Aid-Highway Act Specific to Planning requirements</i>	1962	Set in place a “continuing, comprehensive and cooperative” planning process that reinforced the concept of providing notice of decisions and providing an opportunity to comment
<i>Title VI of the Civil Rights Act</i>	1964	Ensured that individuals would not be denied equal right to participate on the basis of race, color or national origin
<i>Department of Transportation Act</i>	1966	Section 4(f), the earliest statutory language directed at minimizing the negative effect of transportation construction projects on the natural environment that include local consultation

⁴ O’Connor, Schwartz, Schad, and Boyd, *State of the Practice: White Paper on Public Involvement*, A1D04: Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation, Transportation Research Board, 2000.

⁵ In addition to the legislative actions and guidance listed in this table, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Synthesis 407-*Effective Public Involvement Using Limited Resources*, offers additional guidance and lessons learned for today’s public involvement practitioners.

<i>National Environmental Policy Act</i>	1969	Formalized significant legislation through lead agencies the need for public notification, comment periods, meetings and a process for formal public comments on federally funded projects
<i>Intermodal Surface Transportation Act (ISTEA)</i>	1991	Extended the opportunity for public involvement in the transportation planning process
<i>Executive Order on Environmental Justice</i>	1994	Sought to ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process
<i>FHWA's Community Impact Assessment: A Quick Reference for Transportation</i>	1996	Provided a quick primer for transportation professionals and analysts who assess the impacts of proposed transportation actions on communities
<i>FHWA's Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making</i>	1996	Provided a comprehensive compendium of public involvement tools and techniques; increased emphasis on providing meaningful access to decision-making information
<i>FHWA's Community Impact Assessment and Context Sensitive Solutions,</i>	1998	Adopted as a formal process to identify community characteristics and values and facilitate the decision-making process
<i>Executive Order on Limited English Proficiency</i>	2000	Increased emphasis on providing meaningful access to decision-making information
<i>Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)</i>	2005	Placed emphasis on improved quality of life through exercising flexibility in solving transportation challenges. Expanded public involvement requirements and use of tools like visualization.
<i>FHWA's How to Engage Low-Literacy and Limited-English-Proficiency Populations in Transportation Decision making</i>	2006	Provided practitioners with "best practices" in identifying and engaging low-literacy and limited-English-proficiency populations in transportation decision making
<i>Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21)</i>	2012	Consolidated programs and accelerated processes to fund and implement more projects.

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123 In many respects, the legislation and orders guidance described above *followed* rather than
124 *preceded* the early implementation of these activities. At least some of those working on the
125 "front lines" of public involvement recognized the need for implementing enhanced efforts to
126 meaningfully engage the public. In that respect, these acts and orders codified what was
127 otherwise deemed necessary and appropriate. During the infancy of public involvement practices
128 in transportation, what in hindsight is referred to as a "Decide, Announce, and Defend" (DAD)
129 approach, was most often employed, only to evolve and change as its shortcomings were

130 recognized. Over time, the efficiency and fairness of this approach was questioned, ultimately
131 challenged and changed to a “Public Owned Process” (POP).

132 Public involvement practitioners and public agency decision makers often go beyond what’s
133 simply required or mandated in order to meaningfully engage the public and reach consensus on
134 projects. Communities have become more sophisticated, enfranchised and knowledgeable about
135 the transportation planning process and their role in it. Today, it is seldom the case that the bare
136 minimum will suffice with any project that might have adverse impacts to individuals or
137 communities.

138 The legislative focus in public involvement has shifted toward better serving the needs of
139 traditionally underserved populations in transportation decision making. Presidential Executive
140 Order 12898 established the “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority
141 Populations and Low-Income Populations.” Six years later, Executive Order 13166 called for the
142 improvement of access for persons with limited English proficiency. Changing demographics –
143 “majority-minority” jurisdictions, an aging population, greater number of low-income families,
144 and limited-English-proficiency and low-literacy populations, generational divides - demand
145 different approaches and new techniques tailored to reach and engage different populations.
146 Today, new strategies are needed to effectively and meaningfully engage people as the overall
147 population grows and a greater percentage of people and minority populations are living in urban
148 areas.

149 During the last decade three major unrelated shifts have occurred that have affected public
150 involvement. The first is the growth in the number and use of digital devices that has expanded
151 the array of tools and techniques available to the practitioner. The second is the nation’s rapidly
152 changing demographics which have multiplied the ways in which different age and language
153 groups, cultures, and income and literacy levels want to be engaged. The third is the erratic
154 availability of training for practitioners to learn which tools and techniques are most appropriate
155 for which communities and when and how those should be appropriately utilized in specific
156 communities. Together, these shifts have created challenges for practitioners trying to identify
157 communities and segments within those communities and understand the abilities and constraints
158 of their members to participate. Without expanded cultural sensitivity and training opportunities,
159 practitioners will be challenged to design public participation plans tailored to specific
160 communities and the life and work styles of the individuals within those communities.

161 Uneven access to information provided via new technologies, website standards for ADA
162 compliance and agencies’ ability to fund the cost of compliance are examples. (In some cases
163 this has meant utilizing more traditional face-to-face engagement and other “high touch”
164 techniques rather than the “high tech” techniques of the digital age.) As these challenges are
165 tackled we can expect the evolution of public involvement to continue to influence new
166 legislation and executive orders.

167

168 **Tools of the Practice and Technological Advances**

169 The practice of public involvement requires well trained culturally diverse practitioners equipped
170 with a robust set of tools to effectively address the needs of an almost endless set of unique
171 circumstances that each project presents. Selecting the appropriate tools depends on everything
172 from target audiences, project history, project phase, public involvement objectives and what
173 resources, both financial and in-kind, are available. Conventional wisdom and research tell us
174 there is no effective ‘cookie cutter’ approach that the practitioner can employ when developing a
175 public involvement program. However, there are many traditional tools that have been employed
176 since the first directives for public involvement in transportation planning and implementation
177 were issued several decades ago. These tools have been honed, adapted, combined and otherwise
178 transformed to meet the ever-changing landscape in which public involvement is practiced. At
179 the same time, a sea change in communication generally, and public involvement in particular, is
180 occurring. It manifests itself in the internet, digital media, social networks, mobile devices and
181 other fundamental ways in which we communicate with one another. In addition, advances in
182 technology are allowing sophisticated graphic design and visualization, once only the realm of
183 the engineers, to be adapted and shared in ways that can greatly enhance public involvement and
184 understanding.

185 **Traditional Tools**

186 Some mention should be made of the traditional public involvement tools that, by and large,
187 have served and continue to serve the practice well. One can expect that many of them will
188 continue to evolve and manifest themselves in ways that further contribute to the practitioner’s
189 effectiveness. Discussion of traditional tools can be broken down into three categories:
190 notification, sharing information and public meetings.

191 **Notification:** A fundamental component of effective public involvement is adequate notification
192 of a meeting, event or project development to project stakeholders. Before directives were
193 established, involvement could not be counted upon due to inadequate notification. As such,
194 mainstream newspaper ads, direct mail announcements, ‘flyering’⁶, signage and other traditional
195 means were used to notify the public that a project was being either being considered, developed,
196 designed or constructed. These and other means such as radio and television continue to be used
197 today, and have evolved as well to include ethnic media, use of sign and other language
198 interpreters, translated materials, and other approaches to communication and outreach that
199 reflect cultural preferences. For example, the ability to develop property owner databases for
200 notification purposes is much more accessible than in the past, although property rental databases
201 can still be challenging. As we have migrated to notifications through email, twitter, websites

⁶ *Flyering* - also spelled *Fliering*, defined in the Urban Dictionary as “putting up fliers created for an event.”

202 and other means, reaching people who have or utilize these tools has become much more
203 streamlined. However, with the new technologies come challenges. One obvious one is our
204 ability to gather email addresses and mobile phone numbers of those with access to technology
205 so that we can communicate with them through these means. Where email and the like make it
206 easy to mass distribute information relatively simply and inexpensively, we often need to do both
207 electronic and direct mail notifications – adding to, not diminishing, the effort to achieve
208 adequate notification.

209 ***Sharing information:*** A key aspect of the practitioner’s charge is to assemble pertinent data and
210 information that can be disseminated to interested parties who may or may not speak the same
211 language, and in some cases may not be able to read English or their own language. Traditionally
212 this was done, and continues to be done, through the use of English and translated project fact
213 sheets, newsletters, presentations (today’s PowerPoint), exhibit boards and on occasion, physical
214 models. A tool added to the toolbox for project information, is the website. Again, these
215 traditional and emerging tools for sharing information have served practitioners relatively well.
216 Challenges however continue. The need to provide access to persons with disabilities and who
217 communicate in languages other than English remains an important objective. Complex projects
218 strain the practitioner’s ability to inform in a clear and concise manner, so critical to these forms
219 of communication. Competition with all of the other (usually better financed) messaging and
220 advertising make sharing information a tall order. Yet, well-trained practitioners have found
221 ways to be creative and effective in getting the word out using traditional tools to accomplish
222 their objectives. Technological advances (e.g. visualizations, graphic design) have helped
223 considerably to support this effort.

224 ***Public meetings:*** The public meeting has been the traditional mainstay of public involvement
225 since the early 1950s. Despite murmurings of its imminent demise, it is likely to remain a part of
226 public involvement. For more complex indoor meetings with focus groups, breakout groups, or
227 real time polling, hand held voting devices and other technologies can be used. This is not to say
228 that all public meetings are relegated only to Tuesday or Thursday nights from 7:00pm – 9:00pm
229 at traditional venues such as schools, city hall, and churches. Because of the public’s busy and
230 varied life and work styles, practitioners often send stamped self-addressed post cards to those
231 within their study area asking the public what time, what day or night, and where “meetings”
232 should be held. It also provides an opportunity to tell practitioners what their concerns are. In
233 many cases, this has resulted in practitioners taking the “public meeting” to the public at malls,
234 grocery stores, parking lots, election polling places, retirement homes, and Wal-Mart. When
235 possible, these “public meetings” are piggy-backed on local events such as sporting events,
236 volunteer fire department spaghetti suppers, and turkey shoots where the public is already
237 planning to go. These events allow practitioners to explain displays, distribute handouts, and
238 conduct surveys in different languages, orally or in writing at venues that are convenient and safe
239 to attend. For those members of the public who are not culturally familiar with the concept of
240 the “public meeting,” using non-traditional venues within their communities has provided them

241 with a level of comfort. Public meetings can manifest themselves in many formats, from
242 presentations, to question and answer sessions, to the informal “open house” format with
243 displays, exhibits, and information station. In most cases, it is the flexibility, imagination,
244 knowledge of the practitioner and/or client that determine the effectiveness of the engagement.

245 **Social, New Media and other Technological Advances**

246 With broadband access becoming more widely available and used, internet accessibility is
247 becoming more commonplace among the American public; the digital divide as we once knew it
248 is shrinking. Two other significant trends in recent years are contributing to the shrinking of the
249 digital divide: ownership of electronic gadgets and mobile access to the internet. Mobile device
250 ownership is up and the role of mobile devices, as a way to connect and go online, is growing
251 increasingly critical as a way for Americans to connect with each other. According to the Pew
252 Foundation⁷, 88% of American adults have a cell phone, 57% have a laptop, 19% own an e-book
253 reader, and 19% have a tablet computer; about six in ten adults (63%) go online wirelessly with
254 one of those devices. Mobile access to the Internet is increasing among key demographic groups.
255 Again, according to the Pew Foundation, smartphone owners, young adults, minorities, those
256 with no college experience, and those with lower household income levels are more likely than
257 other groups to say that their phone is their main source of internet access. Beyond smartphones,
258 both African American and English-speaking Latinos are as likely as whites to own any sort of
259 mobile phone and more likely to use their phones for a wider range of activities.

260 Looking ahead into the 2010’s and beyond, these trends open the door to making public
261 involvement more social-focused. Moving forward, opportunities and trends include:

262 ***Social and Mobile-dominated Engagement:*** Social media and social networking emerged in the
263 2000’s as a viable venue for public engagement. Because they are new and in a state of nearly
264 constant evolution, training is needed on when and how best to use them. As social engagement
265 through social media sites is growing in public use they will continue to be used as an
266 engagement tool. Given that mobile devices are increasing in use by all demographics in the US,
267 they offer an opportunity for future focus and investigation as an outreach and engagement
268 channel. Areas for exploration include the use of mobile apps to facilitate engagement,

⁷ Source: Digital Divide (April 13, 2012):

http://www.pewinternet.org/~media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Digital_differences_041312.pdf

269 converting Website design and content for a mobile device, and building platforms for building
270 relationships with target communities.

271 **Multi-mode Engagement—online panels and communities with face-to-face interaction:** The
272 Internet, by nature, is a gathering place of Internet users. Some State Departments of
273 Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and transit agencies are leveraging this to
274 build online communities or panels within their region for the purpose of conversation,
275 engagement, and information sharing. Some of these communities are rigorously designed and
276 are fully representative of transportation agencies’ public constituencies. In these panels,
277 participants are recruited using random sampling techniques to ensure their selection is inclusive
278 and fair; they are then invited to participate in periodic surveys or polls in exchange for a small
279 token of appreciation. While they frequently operate as a web-based venue, they often
280 incorporate other modes for responding to polls including text messaging and telephoning.
281 Combining face-to-face events with online follow up, or visa verse, is an emerging practice. As
282 panels become more prevalent within transportation agencies, they may increasingly become a
283 source for gauging public sentiment and support on issues and projects.

284 **Crowdsourcing:** In very recent years, crowdsourcing has emerged as a venue for using crowd
285 wisdom or collective thinking—largely online. It is a tool increasingly used by planners and
286 public involvement practitioners within the transportation industry for organizing people to work
287 on specific task to problem solve. In traditional crowdsourcing scenarios, a problem is broadcast
288 to a group of “problems solvers” by the sponsor of the problem (the “crowdsourcer”) in an open
289 call for solutions. The members of the crowd (participants) then submit creative solutions which
290 are ultimately owned by the crowdsourcer. Sometimes the solutions generator is rewarded for
291 generating the solution. There are many off-the-shelf free and low-cost software packages
292 available to support crowdsourcing efforts. Some are focused on generating solutions to a
293 problem or creating new ideas, and often crowdsource participants are encouraged to vote and
294 comment on each other’s input. To date, there is scant literature on crowdsourcing as a practice
295 within transportation public involvement activities, but that which exists demonstrates the
296 practice is promising and can contribute to lasting and positive engagement experiences.

297 **Visualization:** Visualization in public involvement is becoming increasingly essential. In recent
298 years, advances in digital technologies have enhanced the ability of public involvement
299 practitioners and transportation professionals to use sophisticated visualization techniques. These
300 advances have transformed both how information is generated, presented, and received and often
301 significantly increase the public’s ability to comprehend and relate to planning ideas, concepts
302 and designs. For instance, practitioners are integrating visualizations that allow members of the
303 public to select vantage points to view a proposed project using their own personal computer or
304 hand held device. Simulators are also employed that allow members of the public to sit and steer
305 through a proposed project to get a real visceral sense of what the future holds. These are not pie-

306 in-the-sky ideas. They are rapidly becoming highly useful public involvement tools that will
307 likely become more and more a part of the public involvement landscape.

308
309 Some might say that investments in the emerging digital engagement tools could lead to the
310 demise of more traditional channels. In the coming years, it will be critical to weigh the
311 inclusivity of an engagement tool with the target audience’s level of receptivity, use and
312 effectiveness of the tool.

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315 **Lessons Learned in the Past Decade**

316 As we look back on the first twelve years of the 21st century, a number of lessons learned can be
317 identified that may help better inform today’s public involvement practitioners going forward.

318 First, efforts to promote transparency through public involvement in the transportation decision
319 making process is becoming more of the norm than not, but this is not something practitioners
320 should assume will happen or that one can be complacent about. In keeping with the White
321 House’s 2009 federal directive, *Transparency and Open Government*,⁸ an open public
322 involvement process will enhance and improve the quality of decisions, and practitioners need to
323 be mindful of this throughout the process. .

324 Second, the growing diversity of populations requires that greater utilization of Public
325 Involvement PI practitioners that mirror these populations as well as improving and
326 implementing cross-cultural training to educate those who are not from these populations. A key
327 lesson learned is that different cultures gather and disseminate information differently, rely more
328 on personal trust with the messenger, use word-of-mouth – it is not enough to simply translate a
329 fact sheet. Practitioners need to continue to work diligently to identify, understand, and address
330 communication barriers that impede the public involvement process.

331 As community activism has often produced positive results in terms of increasing public
332 involvement in decisions, this same community activism has at times devolved into NIMBYism,
333 causing projects to be halted and helping drive development toward greenfield sites. PI
334 practitioners need to be mindful of the balance between encouraging positive public involvement
335 and preventing the process to be used for an individual or group’s personal gain.

336 Finally, public involvement practitioners need to be trained in the skills required to effectively
337 implement successful programs and projects. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

⁸ Barack Obama, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, *Transparency and Open Government*, the White House, 2009.

338 identified this as one of the key lessons learned from the 1980s and 1990s. Unskilled and
339 untrained practitioners are unlikely to produce successful results. As noted in the EPA
340 publication, *Stakeholder Involvement & Public Participation at the U.S. EPA*, “participation
341 processes will not be perceived as credible unless agency staff are educated why such processes
342 are important and how they should be implemented.”⁹

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346 **Challenges For Public Involvement Practitioners Going Forward**

347 The challenges today’s PI practitioners face going forward were highlighted in the 2012 survey
348 conducted by TRB’s Committee on Public Involvement in Transportation.

349 First, securing broad based public involvement across a diversified landscape of participants
350 continues to be a significant challenge. More than 90 percent of those surveyed indicated this
351 was an obstacle to conducting successful public involvement.

352 Similarly, gaining public input from stakeholders in an increasingly complex society with many
353 competing activities may lead to a sense that there is low public interest in a decision.
354 Practitioners need to understand this complexity and not necessarily assume the public is not
355 interested in their project. Better use and understanding of the expanding array of public
356 involvement tools, including burgeoning social media options, may prove effective in this effort.

357 As transportation decisions become more and more complex, the ability of practitioners to
358 convey complex information to a non-technical audience has grown as an area of major concern
359 in the practice. And this is likely to continue to persist as a problem moving forward. Many of
360 the latest tools available to public involvement practitioners, such as visualization techniques and
361 simple graphics, can help alleviate this problem. This is also a reminder to practitioners to return
362 to the basics of preparing and writing documents that are clear, concise and simple to understand.

363 More than a decade ago, TRB’s first State of the Practice document cited a lack of trained staff
364 as a major obstacle to conducting successful public involvement programs. It appears that very
365 little has changed as today 60 percent of the practitioners surveyed continue to indicate a lack of
366 trained staff continues to be an obstacle to conducting successful public involvement programs.
367 There appear to be several reasons for this lack of trained staff including, the limited practical
368 experience and/or academic background of those coming into the profession, the retirement of
369 baby boomers who came into the profession when advocacy planning was at its peak, the

⁹ Nicholas A. Ashford and Kathleen M. Rest, *Public Participation in Contaminated Communities*, Center for Technology, Policy, and Industrial Development. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. March 1999.

370 assumption that technology can supplant face-to-face connections, and the erratic and limited
371 availability of available training courses. The lack of training and trained practitioners affects
372 each of the three challenges mentioned above and is at the core of each.

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