

Public Meeting/Project Open House Do's and Do Not's

The following recommendations were captured during panel and group discussions that were part of the *Overcoming the Bad Public Meeting* breakout session at this year's UDOT Engineer Conference.

VENUE

- Know the meeting goals before hand
- Visit the venue before the meeting
- Make sure that you have adequate space for what you are planning
- Make sure that you are adequately staffed for the meeting/open house
- Put yourself in the audience's shoes when planning layout
- Create a clear and predictable flow for stakeholders to follow during project open houses
- Have one sign-up list that is easy to find at the welcome table
- Be sure to have enough welcome staff available to avoid back-up during stakeholder sign-in
- Set up expectations for you audience early on (what information they can plan on receiving and how it will be received)
- Make sure your venue is accessible to all stakeholders

PROJECT BRANDING

- Capture the essence of the project in your project brand
- Use subtlety to create a better brand
- Use the brand consistently throughout the project
- Use predictable, consistent design that incorporates key brand elements on all materials associated with the project, the project meeting or open house

TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALS

- Help stakeholders identify project team members with name tags that are straight-forward and easy to read
- Keep your informational materials simple and clear
- Be specific in explaining the project elements
- Clearly state the purpose and benefits of the project
- Identify and cover the most important issues
- Keep a consistent look and feel on all of your poster boards and handouts
- Remember, conversation and discussion with stakeholders is the most important part of a project open house
- Don't rely on your materials to tell the whole story
- Avoid abbreviations and jargon
- Don't overload posters or PowerPoint slides with too much information
- Don't use fancy technology and visual treatments unless it will help stakeholders better understand the project

WORKING WITH POLITICIANS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Inform them about the project and public meeting early so that they can plan to ahead to attend
- Know what their vision is and how it relates to the project
- Inform them about “hot button issues” and important facts prior to the meeting
- Understand potential conflicts of interest among decision makers prior to public meetings and open houses

WORKING WITH DIFFICULT STAKEHOLDERS

- Make sure that your meeting/open house staff is well informed about the project elements so that they will know how to correctly respond to stakeholder questions
- Seek first to understand
- Listen, listen, listen...then talk
- Remain calm
- Remember, it’s not personal
- Keep your responses clear and concise
- Document stakeholders concerns
- Good outreach prior to the meeting will allow you to proactively address stakeholder concerns
- Avoid “bouncing” stakeholders from team member to team member
- Don’t use overly optimistic catch phrases with stakeholders who are feeling suspicious and uneasy about the project (e.g.: “We All Win” stickers on project team badges)
- Avoid too much socializing between project team members during project open houses

RIGHT-OF-WAY

- Involve right-of-way prior to the public meeting so that they will understand the project and its ROW issues before-hand
- Project aerial scroll plots mark gathering points for right-of-way information during open houses and help to provide good information for stakeholders
- Clarifying the “unknown” will help to put stakeholders at ease
- Hold a ‘download session’ following the meeting or open house to understand the issues and identify stakeholders that may require special attention moving forward

WORKING WITH MEDIA

- Establish protocol for managing media prior to the meeting
- Assign a media point person
- Have a plan for handling questions related to the project
- Prepare standard responses and practice answering difficult questions before the meeting of open house