# Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments
## Public Engagement Methods
### General Outline

<table>
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<th>Methods</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Project Strategy</th>
<th>Desired Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish broad-based citizens advisory committee (CAC)</td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>CAC serves as a leadership group for project development and support for early and continued public involvement. Meetings are open to the public and membership will represent community stakeholders.</td>
<td>Project will reflect the concerns and desires of the citizens and will obtain support from all sectors of the community. The members of NLCOG nominate citizens as well as at-large community nominations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide opportunity for input on needs via public meetings, standing committees, direct mailings to local governments and key stakeholders, NLCOG website, and written comment</td>
<td>Early and continuous</td>
<td>NLCOG committees include a wide variety of stakeholders, including minority and low-income groups. Additional key stakeholders will be contacted by mail or invited to meetings. CAC considers public comment prior to issuing a formal recommendation for a project.</td>
<td>Plan will be based on community needs and opportunities, plus knowledge of area plans and expected development.</td>
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<td>Make the documents for a project available for review at NLCOG, on the website, at public meetings, and via paper copies at all local libraries, mailed to local governments, or mailed on request</td>
<td>As necessary</td>
<td>Availability of the project’s documents via electronic means (on the website), in addition to traditional means, for wider distribution and greater feedback from the public.</td>
<td>All sectors of the community and interested parties can review the documents and comment as needed.</td>
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<td>Use visualization techniques to describe the plan and important</td>
<td>As necessary</td>
<td>Use maps, pictures, video, and/or displays to make the plan clear</td>
<td>The plan will be understandable, and the public will provide</td>
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<td><strong>information regarding the plan/project</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accept comment on the draft plan via public meetings, the NLCOG website, e-mail, telephone, and in writing. The project’s document will include details on where to send comments, including a specific person who will respond to the comments.</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 – 45 day comment period, as required by legislation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Provide varied methods for all citizens to review materials, and communicate their comments to the appropriate person/agency</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Consider and respond to public comment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Provide public notice of participation opportunities via the website, the NLCOG newsletter, posting public meeting schedule at NLCOG offices, disseminate information to local media and invite news coverage. Invite through special mailers and/or personal invitation as needed.</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 days or as required by legislation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Provide comments to CAC; document responses to all comments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provide public notice of participation opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>As necessary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Widely publicize all participation opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public notice will be available across the entire region from multiple sources</strong></td>
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</table>
Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments
Public Engagement Methods
Participation Tools

In engaging the public in the regional transportation planning process, NLCOG’s objective is to use a variety of effective means of involvement. New techniques are implemented and incorporated as they emerge and their usefulness shown.

**NLCOG Committees**

- The NLCOG MPO Transportation Policy Committee oversees and manages the transportation planning and implementation functions of NLCOG.
- Council membership is structured to represent a wide range of transportation-related interests, levels of government, and geographic diversity.
- All Transportation Council and subcommittee meetings are open to the public.
- Membership in the subcommittees is generally open to all interested parties, with members appointed by the Transportation Policy Committee chair. A short application is requested to help ensure a representative sample of citizens sits on the committee.
- The Council has several standing subcommittees that take an active role in guiding and participating in the planning process:
  - Pedestrian & Bikeways;
  - Citizen’s Advisory subcommittees.

**Stakeholder Committees/Task Forces/**

- NLCOG convenes stakeholder committees, task forces and special-purpose committees for special projects and initiatives.
- Meetings of these groups are open to the public except as otherwise allowed under Louisiana’s Open Meetings Act.

**NLCOG Newsletter**

- The NLCOG newsletter (NWLAinfo) is sent on a quarterly basis throughout the year to a mailing list of 200, including all local government jurisdictions in the area, all committee members and others on request.
- It includes articles on current initiatives and a calendar of meetings and events.
- Information is included on how to register for major public events and public input opportunities for the transportation plan, TIP, etc.
- It references where additional information can be found on the NLCOG website.
**NLCOG Website**

- The NLCOG website, www.nlcog.org, provides information to the public on opportunities for participation.
- Regular features include the calendar of meetings and events, standing committee meeting agendas, and a “contact us” e-mail address.
- In addition, the website includes interactive surveys, details on current initiatives, and informational pieces (plans, maps, and data).
- Visual information including Geographic Information System (GIS) maps, charts, pictures and slide shows.
- The website is used to post draft documents for public comment.
- The goal for the NLCOG website is continual improvement to make it increasingly user-friendly, informational, and interactive so that it continues to be strengthened as a major component of NLCOG’s public participation process. However, it will never replace other forms of involvement and notice, to insure that non-computer users continue to be fully engaged.

**Mail, E-Mail, and Voice Mail**

- All public information pieces, including newsletters and draft documents for public review, will include information on how to contact NLCOG via mail (agency address), telephone number, fax number, and e-mail. As appropriate, a specific staff name and phone extension will be included to increase accessibility.
- In addition, public information pieces will note if comment can be provided via the NLCOG website.
- For special studies or initiatives, a special e-mail box may be set up for public comment.

**Public Meetings**

- Public meetings afford the community an opportunity to interact with NLCOG staff, members and other members of the public and to provide direct input to the planning process.

**Accessibility of Public Meetings**

- All public meetings shall be held in facilities accessible to the disabled and transit-dependent citizens.
- If a series of three or more meetings is held throughout the region to capture general public input region-wide:
  - one or more of the meetings will be at a location served by public transportation, and
the series will include both daytime (regular business hours) and evening or weekend (non-business hours) meetings.

- Five day notice is requested of citizens who require special assistance to ensure NLCOG can accommodate all requests in a timely manner. If special accommodations are requested, NLCOG will provide such persons an opportunity to participate, either by providing special accommodations at the meeting site, or providing an alternative opportunity to participate.

**Notification of Public Meetings**

- Notice of public meetings includes at minimum:
  - Posting at the NLCOG offices.
  - Additional notice of meetings should be made via the NLCOG website calendar, NLCOG newsletter, posting to other local electronic events calendars as appropriate, and/or legal notice to newspapers of record.
  - Press releases will be sent to encourage additional media announcements.

- Any person may, upon request and payment of a reasonable fee, obtain advance notification of any specific committee meetings.

- Any person who inquires, in person or by telephone, concerning the date, time and place of such meetings shall be so informed.

**Components of Public Meetings**

- Public meetings include:
  - A sign-in sheet to document attendance.
  - Information on the meeting topic that will enable participation, for example, agenda, displays, informational handouts.
  - Clearly explained opportunity for public participation in the meeting.
  - Documentation of input.

**Types of Public Meetings**

- Public meetings are defined as including:
  - Public hearings (usually a required hearing, announced via legal notice, with formal rules of participation);
  - Public forums (usually single-topic meetings, with or without speakers, and affording full opportunity for attendee discussion);
  - Public open houses (informational displays, staff available to take written or spoken comments and questions);
Modified open house meetings (including an unstructured open house portion plus a traditional meeting portion);

- Board, committee and task force meetings (primarily for member participation, with public welcome and public comment period provided); or

- Live radio or TV forums (public comment via telephone, e-mail or fax).

**Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups**

- Interviews or discussions with individuals or small groups of stakeholders may be arranged to listen to their concerns on a particular topic or on transportation in general.

**Public Outreach Events, Presentations, and Displays**

- NLCOG will use a variety of other means of providing public information and seeking public comment. Examples are:
  - presentations to area organizations,
  - booths and displays at public events and sites (example, public libraries), and
  - participation in broadcast media events.

**Surveys**

- Scientifically-valid surveys will be used as needed to gauge levels of public opinion.

- When open (non-scientific) surveys are used, NLCOG will distribute via a variety of appropriate means (NLCOG newsletter and website, newspapers, public sites, local government jurisdictions, etc.).

**Public Media**

- For public notice and information, NLCOG will maintain and use a comprehensive distribution list of area commercial news media, including minority and non-English outlets.

**Printed Materials**

- NLCOG will provide clear and understandable printed informational materials appropriate to the particular planning process or event.

- Where appropriate and feasible, these materials will be made available on the website.

- NLCOG may charge for maps, major reports and other materials to cover printing or photocopying cost, based on current NLCOG policy.
- NLCOG may also charge for shipping and handling costs if materials are mailed per citizen’s request.

**Environmental Justice Considerations for the Public Involvement Process**

“Environmental Justice” refers to federal mandates to ensure that federal funds available for projects and programs are used fairly, so that low-income and minority groups benefit along with the rest of the population. In addition, care must be taken so these groups do not suffer disproportionately from negative impacts of transportation projects. As recommended by and in compliance with federal law and rules, NLCOG will:

**Identify and Involve Target Populations**

- Identify low-income and minority neighborhoods.
- Identify organizations and neighborhood leaders who can assist with outreach efforts to those communities.
- Seek out and consider the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services.

**Adapt Advertising**

- Meeting notices and materials communicate clearly, and acronyms and other jargon will be avoided.
- NLCOG will seek assistance from neighborhood leaders and organizations to help publicize meetings, distribute questionnaires, etc.
- Announcements will be sent to ethnic radio stations and newspapers.
- As needed, notices or surveys may be translated into other languages.

**Choose Appropriate Meeting Times and Locations**

- When appropriate to the particular planning process (examples, regional transportation plan update; transit plan), meetings will be held in target neighborhoods:
  - in familiar locations
  - near transit routes
  - all buildings accessible to those with disabilities.
- Meetings may be held in conjunction with a regularly-scheduled community meeting.
- Meetings may be held during daytime to accommodate seniors, second-shift workers, after-dark safety concerns, and transit schedules.
**Structure Meetings to Encourage Participation**

- Refreshments and child care may be provided to encourage attendance.
- The room set-up and meeting structure will aim to provide an inviting atmosphere.
- Techniques may include small-group discussions; recording all comments on a tablet easel; use of a familiar neighborhood gathering spot, for example a library or house of worship.
- NLCOG will strive for diversity in the meeting leadership. Example, neighborhood leaders may be invited to open the meeting.
- Visual images will be used in presentations to make information clear and understandable
- Meetings will be kept reasonably brief.

**Availability of Public Documents**

- Plan or project-related documents will be placed in locations convenient to the low-income and minority target populations (example, public libraries in target population neighborhoods).
- These locations should be open evenings and weekends.
- Copies will be free or low cost.