

Tri-County Regional Planning Commission

DEPI PLAN

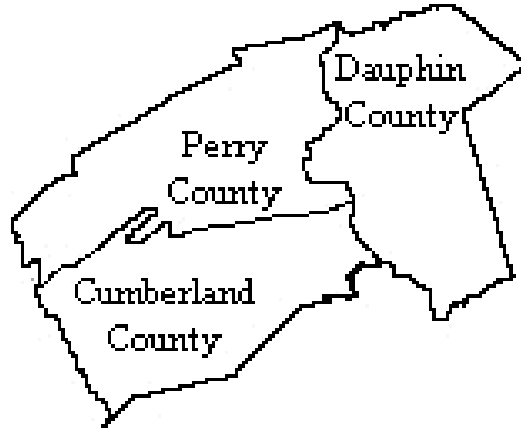
Public

Education

Public

Involvement

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Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
112 Market Street – 2nd Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

(717) 234-2639 (voice)
(717) 234-4058 (fax)

www.trcpc-pa.org



PEPI Plan

Mission Statement

In order to maximize public involvement in important land use issues, techniques and tools need to be identified for planners to engage the community. Many times, the topics of discussion may be foreign to the general public and educational techniques need to be employed. It is the intent of this Plan to create an atmosphere of public involvement within the Commission's planning programs. An opportunity for inclusion into the planning process by all individuals, organizations and agencies in the Tri-County Region is the ultimate goal. It is hoped, through the use of the techniques and tools, this goal can be attained.

Table of Contents

Contact Information	i
Mission Statement	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction	vi
Techniques for Public Education and Public Involvement	
Selection	vii
Application	viii
Maintain and Monitor	ix
Tools & Techniques	
Annual Reports.....	1
Brainstorming	2
Brochures, Poster, Ads and Billboards.....	3
Charrette	4
Citizen Advisory Committees	5
Citizen Referendums	6
Citizen Training.....	7
Conferences	8
Education – Schools	9
Exhibits and Displays	10
Facilitation.....	11
Focus Groups	12
Goals- Achievement Matrices.....	13
Handbooks.....	14
Information Fairs	15
Informational Kiosks.....	16
Key Person Interviews	17
Local Planning Assistance	18
Media Based Issue Balloting.....	19
Networking	20
News Articles.....	21
News Releases	22
Newsletters	23
Nominal Group Technique.....	24

Opinion/Attitude Surveys.....	25
Policy Delphi.....	26
Press Conferences.....	27
Public Access Television.....	28
Public/Legal Notices.....	29
Public Hearings.....	30
Public Meetings.....	31
Public Service Announcements.....	32
Research Committees.....	33
Task Force.....	34
Workshops.....	35
World Wide Web.....	36
Visioning.....	37

INTRODUCTION

From the early days of the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC) it was recognized that the region, its county's elected officials, appointed representatives and residents must be involved in regional and county planning programs. The TCRPC membership itself consists of a combination of elected local government officials and citizen appointees. The purpose of this handbook is to provide a framework for developing individual PEPI (Public Education and Public Involvement) plans for projects, studies, reports, etc. undertaken by the TCRPC planning staff. When developing individual public involvement plans, staff will practice the intent of environmental justice. By including all communities in the PEPI plan, more opportunities for valid public input will be present.

Public education and public involvement are key components to successful planning and decision making. Citizens (residents, business people, and property owners) need and deserve ongoing communication regarding projects and issues that affect their community. While complete consensus is rare, public education and public involvement may bring understanding and dialogue to planning studies and complex issues. The PEPI process provides private citizens and groups an opportunity to participate and influence public decisions. It facilitates two-way communication aimed at incorporating the views and ideas of the public into policies and plans. It seeks the advice and consent of concerned elected officials, planners and citizen leaders. A well organized project specific PEPI plan can provide a number of tangible benefits which are needed for successful and effective planning. These benefits include:

- Collecting information and ideas
- Generating and improving public support for planning policies and decisions
- Reducing isolation of the TCRPC and its staff from the public
- Generating a spirit of cooperation and trust between the TCRPC, its member counties, communities and other organizations it serves.
- Disseminating addition information to the public and other constituencies
- Providing legitimacy to the planning effort and political credibility of the planning process
- Assisting in identifying alternative solutions
- Exploring complex issues from a variety of perspectives rather than one perspective

- Enhancing community understanding when citizens are actively involved, and TCRPC facilitates opportunities for participation, dialogue and interaction

TECHNIQUES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Planning projects, plans and studies should each have their own Public Education Public Involvement Plan custom tailored to that individual project. Listed below are techniques that can be employed. However, it is important to understand that effective and meaningful communication techniques and technologies change and evolve overtime. Techniques that may be appropriate today may not be as effective and meaningful in the year 2020. In choosing techniques to be utilized, effort should be made to seek community-wide representation on issues and engage citizens who are not typically involved.

Successful public education and public involvement requires a combination of educational and participation techniques. The minimum legal requirements are often considered “the final guidelines” for public education and information initiatives. However, in order for the planning process to be more effective and inclusive, efforts should be made to think “out of the box” and include multiple techniques beyond any legal requirements. The techniques described below can be used in a wide variety of planning applications.

The PEPI plan developed for each planning project or study should be developed using a 3-step process:

- Selection
- Application
- Maintenance

1. Selection

Selection begins by discussing and establishing the overall project context and the potential available resources (budget and staff). The following should assist in identifying the list of useful techniques:

- (a) Consider the potential techniques when developing the scope and budget for the plan or project. Costs to be considered are:
 - printing, publication, photo copying, reproduction (color costs substantially more)
 - mailing (and return postage for surveys)
 - publication of legal notices

- clerical, planner and administrative hours involved
 - consulting, facilitator expenses
 - statistics, tabulation expenses
 - meeting locations and expenses (including refreshments and meals)
 - travel expenses
 - report and graphic preparation time
 - equipment and supplies
- (b) Consider the size and scope of the project or plan being developed.
- (c) What are the overall project or plan goals?
- (d) Consider the objectives identified for the particular plan or project.
- (e) Consider the legal requirements of the Municipalities Planning Code, current Federal Transportation regulations and other pertinent legislation.
- (f) Consider which techniques are best suited for the decision making process set forth for the particular plan or project.
- (g) Who are the stakeholders in the project or plan? What techniques are best suited to those stakeholders?
- (h) Throughout the planning process, how may public education and public involvement be useful? At what stages of the planning process?
- (i) Consider the planning process time line. When are the key decision points in the planning process? Solicitation of public input should generally be made prior to any key decisions.
- (j) Consider the usefulness of each potential technique.

2. Application

Public education and public involvement techniques need to be scheduled and initiated. This involves careful planning to ensure each effort is properly incorporated into the planning process or project development. The following should be done early in the initial stage of the plan or project:

- (a) Develop a complete outline and schedule for all public education and public involvement activities. Include any legal notice submittal and publication requirements.
- (b) Identify needed reference materials, educational materials, educational tools, and other resources needed to support the techniques selected.
- (c) Identify the role of specific TCRPC staff, consultants and other participants in each technique being utilized. To what extent will each staff member be involved?
- (d) Consider whether there are organizations, businesses and individuals who may serve as volunteers in the planning process.
- (e) Conclude each public education and public involvement activity with one or more of the following:
 - Prepare a summary report for each activity. List what could have been done differently or better. Share with other staff.
 - Prepare responses, as necessary, to public comments and questions.
 - Amend, revise or incorporate comments and participation results into the plan or project.

3. Maintain and Monitor

It is important that the TCRPC staff maintain and/or monitor the effectiveness of public education and public involvement techniques in the planning process for each plan or project. Mid-course adjustments and changes may be necessary to ensure continuous and/or effective and useful public input. The following should assist with the maintenance and monitoring:

- (a) Are there many people participating in the techniques with good ideas and suggestions?
- (b) Are targeted stakeholders participating in the application of the techniques? Consider asking participants, “who else should be in attendance?”

- (c) Is the general public getting enough information?
- (d) Are the TCRPC staff and decision-makers receiving public information when it is needed?
- (e) Rather than assume non-participants are “not interested”, consider contacting participants missing from the process to determine the reasons for their lack of interest or inability to participate in the planning process.
- (f) Ask the participants if they feel the activity or discussion is full and complete.
- (g) Ask the participants if they feel the TCRPC staff is being responsive.
- (h) Are the results and input from the public able to be incorporated in the decision-making process? If not, what changes need to be made?

TCRPC does maintain a public participation log. As part of this on-going documentation, salient items on each technique will be noted. It will become part of the operating policy of the Commission to react to the use of each of these techniques and add to this handbook by indicating, by use of bullet statements, notations as to the application of the technique. It is the intent of this handbook to not only be a tool for public participation but for education, staff and otherwise, as to the practical application of these techniques.

PEPI Plan Tools & Techniques



Annual Reports

Description

A report issued by a commission, foundation or corporation to provide data and descriptions of its past years activities. Annual reports vary in format from simple typewritten documents listing the year's actions to detailed publications that provide substantial information about the organization's programs.

Positive Aspects

- Gives an overview of entire year
- Documents can be used for education purposes

Negative Aspects

- Can be difficult to portray everything that occurred during the year, so need to rank importance of projects

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

TCRPC and HATS planning staffs produce annual reports for HATS, Cumberland, Dauphin and Perry County Planning Commissions, and Tri-County Regional Planning Commission to document the transportation and land use planning activities that occur during each year. They are distributed to over 300 individuals and agencies by direct mail and are also available by request and on the TCRPC web site (www.tcrpc-pa.org).

Brainstorming

Description

A learning strategy that stimulates thought and creativity and is often used in conjunction with group discussions. The primary purpose is to generate, through a free thinking forum, as extensive a list as possible of ideas, thoughts or alternative solutions which focus on a specific topic or problem. It often brings new ideas to bear on a problem and can help reduce conflict. Brainstorming requires that participants have some background related to the topic.

Positive Aspects

- Can allow for many new ideas
- Can provide many different view points

Negative Aspects

- None known to staff

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Used on a routine basis at regional, county, municipal, group and staff levels. Found to be effective at winnowing down many suggestions. Very effective in use with Nominal Group technique.

Brochures, Posters, Ads and Billboards

Description

Brochures, Posters, Ads and Billboards are materials used in publicity and educational campaigns related to projects, planning and planning related issues. The substance of these materials may be factual or present a point of view. Some of these materials and items are in a versatile one-piece format that can serve as a mailer, a leave-behind or a response to a request for more information.

Advertisement and promotional materials may be geared to a broad audience, while others are more focused to individual recipients.

Printing costs are a factor to be considered, as well as the number and method of distribution. Billboards are usually outdoors but can be inside large arenas or stadiums and the advertisements may be printed, painted or projected.

Positive Aspects

- Provides concise basic information in a clear way to the public
- Easy to update and can be tailored for unique needs
- Can be made to present information in a fun and interesting graphic way
- Easy to use for individuals that have difficulty reading
- Good for quickly and easily gaining information about the plan or project

Negative Aspects

- Quantity of information can be a factor, too much and it won't be utilized, not enough it is overlooked
- Vary type of material so as to not overload the public
- May be expensive to mass produce

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Common practice within the operating practices of the Commission

Charrette

Description

A Charrette is an intensive public workshop that is usually run by professional planners or consultants but is sponsored by public officials. The purpose of a charrette is to solve a problem facing a community or to offer alternatives to current planning practices. The public is invited to attend and participate. A charrette can last for a specific time period culminating with the presentation of a final plan, a compilation of the best ideas offered during the charrette.

For half or full day meetings refreshments or a meal should be served and the cost anticipated.

Positive Aspects

- Charrettes assure a full discussion of issues, interrelationships and impacts
- A chance for participants to rapidly, openly and honestly examine the problem and reach a consensus on solutions
- Can resolve conflicts between groups
- Many groups and organizations are represented
- Format encourage enthusiasm and responses to issues raised.

Negative Aspects

- For success a wide range of interests should attend
- Arranging a date could be difficult, may need Saturdays or evening meeting due to attendees being working individuals
- Resource material may be needed for individual groups to discuss before meeting
- Length may be an issue
- Leader should be adept in keeping group focused
- Requires significant preparation time.

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Has not been used by the TCRPC staff at this time

Citizen Advisory Committees

Description

A Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) is one of the most common forms of public involvement in regional planning. A CAC is a representative group assigned a role in the planning and/or review process. The CAC meets regularly to discuss and review issues of common concern in accordance with its mission. The CAC is normally composed of 10 to 40 members from the public. The members are “partners” with the decision makers in the plan and project review process. The CAC can be used to provide mid-to long-term input into a planning project or study. They can range from informal citizen groups to more formal groups to groups established by federal law.

Positive Aspects

- Agency can present plans, goals and proposed programs for review
- Members have equal statues when presenting and deliberating views and issues
- Local citizens become better educated on issues
- Forum for hearing citizens views
- Member selected from a cross section of professionals, interests and geographic locations
- Provides an important opportunity for two-way flow of information between the public and planning staff
- Attention to composition of CAC can contribute to its usefulness and ability to represent a wider public

Negative Aspects

- Need commitment to meet regularly
- Maintenance required, in order to reflect the commitment to public participation

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Potential to reinstate as per the Federal recertification review team suggestion.

Citizen Referendums

Description

A citizen referendum is a formal process where citizens vote their approval or disapproval of a public measure by official ballots. Structured legal requirements are in place for adding a referendum issue and/or question on the election ballot. This is a democratic process which reflects the wishes of the voting population.

Positive Aspects

- Involves interest groups
- Results are in the hands of the voters

Negative Aspects

- Long process with a lot of time involved in preparing text for the ballot
- Not good for a wide range of issues, should only be used for a single controversial issue within the community
- Specific wording may be challenged
- Advertising and promotional costs need to be budgeted.

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

The wide variety and complexity of issues that may be involved in the Regional Growth Management Plan or other planning activity may not be best resolved through the referendum process.

Citizen Training

Description

During the planning process, and following its completion it is important to train citizens on the planning process and implementation mechanisms which they may use. Through the use of educational material and techniques, citizens are given training in the planning process that enables them to more knowledgeably participate and/or assist in implementation.

Positive Aspects

- Designed for anyone who may be interested in the planning process and implementation activities.
- Professionals and municipal officials charged with carrying out plans can be participants
- Good for encouraging leadership within community
- Useful in keeping citizens informed and capable of carrying out plan policies

Negative Aspects

- Processes can be complex and may be difficult for some to understand
- May need to be done on Saturdays or evenings to accommodate working individuals

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Staff has used this technique as part of training for conservation subdivision. A facilitator led the training and the goals of the training were accomplished.

This technique holds future potential for Subdivision and Land Development training with the Center for Land Use Advisory Board at Shippensburg University.

Conferences

Description

Conferences are highly structured special meetings designed to inform citizens and solicit input on specific policy issues, plans, or projects. Traditionally, conferences have had a formal agenda with presentations and panel discussions on a variety of related topics. They can be a subset of a larger meeting, a half-day session, or they may be a large multi-day event.

Positive Aspects

- Useful at any stage of the planning process
- May set the stage for plan formulation
- Can be used to showcase and refine specific aspects of plan or policy
- Demonstrate conclusions at the end of the planning process
- Wide variety of participants
- Target specific stakeholders and audiences concerned with certain issues

Negative Aspects

- Take time to develop and organize
- May require a substantial time commitment from attendees

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Educational presentations on planning studies and projects have been made by staff at a variety of conferences held by other agencies.

Education – Schools

Description

Getting out into the community to help show planning has real world applications to students. Many students feel that planning does not concern them, however Science (especially environmental), Social Studies and History all touch upon aspects of planning. By going into the schools and helping show how students already have the foundation of planning and this can be used in turn to become good citizens is real world applicability.



Positive Aspects

- Helping to mold students and educators while looking at real world applications
- Get input on projects and plans from students and possibly parents at a later date

Negative Aspects

- Need to know what you are doing before you attempt
- No complete written directions, unexpected questions may come up.
- Need to convince the teachers this is a good idea first.
- Time involved to develop presentations to various class subjects and ages of students

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Several staff members have already made presentations to elementary, secondary and post-secondary classes.

Some additional lesson plans have already been put together and prepared by TCRPC staff. Planning presentations can be incorporated into them.

Exhibits and Displays

Description

Exhibits and displays include maps, photos, models, slide shows, videos and other visually oriented activities designed to inform citizens and develop interest in general and specific topics or projects. Can consists of Billboards, banners, ads (see page 8) and informational kiosks (see page 21)

Positive Aspects

- Graphic information can be useful in presenting messages in a visually interesting way.
- If placed in a convenient location can exposed to a large number of participants

Negative Aspects

- The costs of the exhibits and displays (production and physical) need to be factored into a project budget.
- Exhibits and displays can take a lot of time to prepare.

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine usage by TCRPC staff. Effective at getting large geographically oriented information out to the public. May be effective with non-English speaking communities due to graphics.

Facilitation

Description

Facilitation is a process in which the parties (usually a group), with the assistance of a neutral third party (the facilitator), identify problems to be solved, tasks to be accomplished or disputed issues to be resolved. Facilitation may conclude there, or it may continue to assist the parties to develop options, consider alternatives and endeavor to reach an agreement. The facilitator has no advisory or determinative role on the content of the matters discussed or the outcome of the process, but may advise on or determine the process of facilitation. The goal of both the group and the facilitator is to arrive at a collective decision through substantive discussions.

Positive Aspects

- Utilizes neutral person as facilitator
- Brings out all points of view in the group
- Uses techniques and questioning to stimulate discussion and move towards a consensus.
- Flexible for a variety of group sizes and situations
- Aids in community input

Negative Aspects

- Need to provide a neutral facilitator
- Need to develop some questions before process begins
- Facilitator may need to be compensated. Need to include in project budget

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine operation for TCRPC staff when collecting data.

Focus Groups

Description

A focus group is a small, somewhat informal, yet organized group discussion designed as a tool to assess opinions on a specific topic or topics. Taken from marketing and advertising techniques, a focus group regards a plan, policy, process, or project as a “product.” Focus group members are asked in a discussion format to comment on how the product may be improved for the public. It is a way to identify “citizen/customer” concerns, needs, wants, and expectations. Focus groups can assist in policy and program development and provide to decision makers the attitudes and values of affected citizens.

Discussions are guided by a set of predetermined questions. Focus groups are not a forum for mediating differences or making decisions. Focus groups often bring out users' spontaneous reactions and ideas and let you observe some group dynamics and organizational issues. In the absence of staff trained in focus group facilitation, focus groups are best organized and run by an outside organization in consultation with the planning staff. This helps to insure the impartiality of the moderator and may help to generate trust among the participants. Six to nine members for a group are ideal.

Positive Aspects

- Allows for in depth analysis of attitudes and opinions
- Ultimately may influence resources allocation, confirm or deny established goals and set new directions
- Informal nature spawns spontaneity and candid discussions

Negative Aspects

- Need to find leader that can keep the group on topic
- Need a recorder or someone to write down ideas generated
- Need time to prepare an agenda
- Need to carefully select those individuals invited.
- Facilitator may need to be compensated. Need to include in project budget

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

As part of its strategic planning, TCRPC collected information and insight from groups of individuals. Formed basis for proposed organizational formats.

Goals-Achievement Matrices

Description

A goals achievement matrix is an organized method of assessing project and implementation alternatives. The matrix assesses the alternatives proposed by weighting them according to the citizen group policies, goals and objectives.

Positive Aspects

- Useful in selecting alternatives with limited resources
- Allows for organized and assessed implementation of activities
- Good for decision makers responsible for implementation and funding.

Negative Aspects

- Only involves a selected few members of the public
- Need to carefully select who assesses and weighs the alternatives

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

This technique replicates the traditional planning process. It begins with the identification of an issue, flows through data collection, planning, implementation and returns to identification after a monitoring period.

Handbooks

Description

A handbook is a general information source used independently or as part of publicity and educational activities. A handbook is a well investigated and researched collection of quick referenced factual and descriptive information used to educate, guide, instruct and assist the user to understand and apply a particular subject-specific process and/or activity.

Positive Aspects

- Handbook is useful tool in providing information to a variety of people including the general public and knowledgeable professionals
- Provides concise basic information clearly
- Can be presented in a fun, interesting and graphic matter

Negative Aspects

- Takes time to develop and to put together
- Distribution and production costs important factor to remember. The printing costs for the handbooks needs to be considered when budgeting the project. Color copies may cost substantially more than black and white.
- Must be organized well to facilitate understanding

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine usage by the TCRPC staff for distribution of information.

Information Fairs

Description

Information meetings and information fairs are organized events used to publicize and interest local citizens in planning programs and specific projects. A fair is typically a one-day event, heavily promoted to encourage citizens to attend it. Information fairs focus on visual exhibits, videos, maps and/or models of projects and plans. Often, there is a speaker or presenter to introduce the purpose of the fair. Exhibits (see Page 15) and Billboards (see page 9) are utilized as well

Positive Aspects

- Useful tool in disseminating information and presenting plans and concepts
- Gives people opportunity to view material and provide comments or questions
- Provides citizens opportunity for casual input
- Helps create links with other organizations.
- Open communication

Negative Aspects

- Takes time to prepare exhibits
- Need people and time to “man” the booth
- Needs organization from sponsoring agency and help from other participants

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Every year TCRPC participates in Dauphin County Local Government Day a day to show the public what functions Dauphin County Planning Commission performs. In addition, staff has manned booths at several statewide, county and local officials conferences explaining the Commission’s activities.

Informational Kiosks

Description

An information kiosk is a booth or table display area located in a busy shopping area or centrally located place with informational brochures, displays, exhibits, videos and/or other informational materials. The kiosk may be attended by a staff person to handle questions, or unattended. An information kiosk is designed to house public information materials for distribution to the general public.

Positive Aspects

- Inexpensive and convenient method of publicizing and distributing information
- May be presented over a period of time
- Opportunity for casual exposure to topics presented

Negative Aspects

- Need to watch for possible vandalism
- Need to place in a visible area and get permission to do so
- Need to regularly check to see if more materials are needed for passer-by pick up
- Needs time to organize and put together

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine usage by staff. Recently, Strawberry Square has become an excellent location to distribute information and respond to public questioning.

Key Person Interviews

Description

Key person interviews are a research technique which provides information and insight into local attitudes and opinions concerning agency activities. The interviewees may be elected leaders, traditional leaders, teachers, prominent business people, or others who are involved with and knowledgeable about the local community. This is a very informal method of data collection and relies on personal relationships established between planning staff and local community members.

Positive Aspects

- Assist planners in informally understanding local opinions
- May provide information on issues of importance in local community or points of conflict

Negative

- Not “public” involvement
- Criteria for selection of individuals to interview must be established
- View points need to be assessed based on person providing them

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Key person interviews have been used by the Commission to collect specific information generally limited to a small number of individuals.

Local Planning Assistance

Description

The Local Planning Assistance (LPA) program is an organized professional assistance program, which provides professional staff support to local governments. On a retainer basis, which is financed primarily by the County Commissioners, planning staff attends local planning commission meetings and assists municipalities with a variety of planning activities. Staff planners may be assigned specific plan and ordinance projects, as well as other research and consultation activities depending on the scope of work established.

Positive Aspects

- Staff involvement helps to monitor planning trends and issues around the region
- Can use input given to assisting in addressing regional issues.
- Helps to build bridges of dialogue and information between the Regional, County and local planning agencies and commissions.
- Assistance provided to local governments that choose to request assistance
- Available to some local governments on an “on-call” basis

Negative Aspects

- If no County funding is available, municipalities would need to fully fund program themselves
- Municipal needs may be outside of scope and available cost of the program

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Only planning program in PA with this type of public assistance. Staff participates in this program within the three counties for various Townships and Boroughs as per their requests. This is a vital part of TCRPC assistance and educational activities. A re-examination of services may take place in an effort to further increase the program’s value by offering more flexible opportunities.

Media Based Issue Balloting

Description

Media based issue balloting is an organized anonymous public input effort which uses media sources (newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio, television, Internet) to poll and/or survey the public on particular issues.

Positive Aspects

- Useful method in collecting information about an issue
- Useful in collecting open-ended comments
- Helps to promote plan programs and initiatives
- Has potential to involve a large number of participants

Negative Aspects

- Not statistically sound due to lack of randomness
- Restricted to participants who are able to access the media source
- Individuals with access choose whether or not they will respond

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Not used by staff as of this date.

Networking

Description

An exchange of information for mutual benefit which reflects an initial level of trust and commitment among organizations; usually person-to-person rather than organization-to-organization.

Positive Aspects

- Become more involved within the community.
- Commission name could be identified more in public
- More involvement in public meetings is possible, by inviting organizations to attend.
- Personalizes information and meeting dates

Negative Aspects

- Staff could feel that the Commission was pushing them into organizations for which they feel they do not have time.
- Difficult to bridge the gap between individual and Commission representative.

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine operation at Commission for collection and dissemination of information.

News Articles

Description

News articles are a more detailed summary and analysis of a policy, study, plan or project that may be prepared on a single occasion or on several occasions over a period of time. The newsworthiness of the topic is dependent upon the perceived public interest and the news publications capabilities to cover the story. News articles may also be prepared by other publications related to the topic or for specific constituents who may be interested in the information, policy or decision. Preparation of the news article often is the responsibility of the news/magazine publication.

Positive Aspects

- Convenient method of distributing and publicizing information to a large number of citizens
- Is informative
- it can be designed to provide comment
- Provides citizens and organizations casual exposure to the topics presented

Negative Aspects

- Can be difficult to convince a newspaper to do a story

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

MPO meetings generally have local press in attendance with follow-up articles on impacts of transportation projects.

News Releases

Description

A news release is a drafted informational summary of a decision, initiative, process, study or project. It is used to inform, publicize and spawn the interest of local citizens in planning programs and specific projects. Customarily, a news release is forwarded to a local newspaper for publication or to promote further investigation by the paper for a later date. News releases may also be targeted at other publications related to the topic or to specific constituents who may benefit from or be affected by the information, policy or decision.

Positive Aspects

- Convenient and inexpensive method of distributing and publicizing information to a large group of constituents
- Can be designed to collect comments
- Provides citizens and organizations casual exposure to the topics presented

Negative Aspects

- Time to prepare and write news release
- Need to provide news release to a broad spectrum of media in order to maximize the amount of affected public
- Media may be unwilling to publicize the news

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

While routinely news releases are prepared, many attempts to have this information published by local newspapers have not been perceived as critical by the editors, hence important information is not being published.

Newsletters

Description

Newsletters are a simple form of specialized publications, which focus on the activities of an organization or project. Articles and information in a newsletter are more detailed and provide analysis and information from the perspective of the organization. Newsletters are usually prepared on several occasions over a period of time and distributed to a selected readership either freely or through subscription.

Positive Aspects

- Useful promotional and informational tool
- Offer a convenient method of distributing and publicizing information
- May be designed to collect comments
- Provide a targeted and interested readership with casual contact with the topic
- Maintains information and communication flows
- Generally targeted to interested and/or affected constituencies related to a project, plan or organization

Negative Aspects

- Cost of preparation
- Cost of mailing
- Obtaining enough information/articles to fill a newsletter
- Target readership may not be broad enough

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

TCRPC and HATS planning staff produce a newsletter three times a year, with a distribution of over 650. The focus is on maintaining information and communication flows regarding transportation and land use planning.

Nominal Group Technique

Description

Nominal group technique (NGT) is a decision-making process for a small group. The process is designed to identify issues and priorities. Where there may be individuals and officials of varying degrees of standing within a community, NGT provides a process where all participants are considered equals, thus the term “nominal” is used to define these techniques. Using cards or note boards a facilitator collects ideas and issues generated from the participants. This information is then compiled and registered in organized listings. The participants then discuss what these ideas mean and individually rank each idea or issues. Other variations of NGT are also in use.

Positive Aspects

- Useful in collecting ideas and establishing priorities for controversial and technical issues
- Encourages and allows ideas to affect the substance of the plans and projects
- Variety of people are chosen and can represent the same or different backgrounds

Negative Aspects

- Participants need to be versed in the topics under discussion in order to provide effective input
- Will need to budget for a facilitator

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routinely used as a method of data collection. Used in tandem with brainstorming, this technique creates a very well accepted method of achieving consensus.

Opinion/Attitude Surveys

Description

Opinion/attitude surveys are wide spread public polls administered to a sample group of citizens via a written questionnaire or through interviews in person, phone, or by electronic media. The sample of citizens surveyed is considered representative of a larger group. They can be formal (scientifically designed and administered) or informal in design. Formal surveys give broad applicable results for planning.

Positive Aspects

- Useful in the ability to test and portray citizen opinions
- If done over a long time will be able to see changes in opinions
- Can help the overall understanding of the program or plan
- Results add to substantive discussion of issues deemed important
- In a randomized survey design chosen in a statistically valid manner, the sample may be sorted by geographic location, income level, or other desired information category

Negative Aspects

- Needs careful determination of who to select
- Questions must be carefully prepared and pretested, often adding significant time to a project
- Mailing costs for both initial mailing and postage paid return envelopes
- Time may be needed for responses to be returned
- If not carefully designed, informal surveys tend to bring responses from a self-selected rather than broader group

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

This technique has been used in a majority of comprehensive plans to gather public sentiment towards local issues. In addition, it has been used many times to collect transportation information from the traveling public on both the highways and transit systems.

Policy Delphi

Description

Policy Delphi is the use of a group of knowledgeable individuals to arrive independently at an estimate of the outcome of an uncertain situation. It is an interactive process in which a group of experts, normally not more than twenty, in a particular field is invited to formally prepare advice to decision makers on a related topic, project or issue. The process begins with a survey of the group members followed by a compilation and distribution of the survey results to each expert member. Upon receipt of the results, the experts are asked to meet and discuss the results. The expert group will meet and follow-up as necessary to reformulate positions until a consensus is reached. The findings and results of this process are used and/or forwarded to other decision makers as part of the public input process.



Positive Aspects

- Can be useful in generating values, goals, objectives and other recommendations
- Useful in collecting ideas and establishing priorities for controversial and technical issues
- Allows expert ideas to affect the substance of plans and projects
- Variety of people chosen who have same or different backgrounds

Negative Aspects

- None known to staff

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Not used by TCRPC staff, to date.

Press Conferences

Description

A press conference is a formal public meeting where decision makers (usually elected officials or other appointed leadership) formally and publicly announce or present significant news related information regarding a decision, initiative, process, study, or project. A press conference often is recorded for television and customarily involves organized questioning from the press. Press conference events are used as a forum to publicize and inform local citizens of major planning projects, programs and other community issues, activities and initiatives.

Positive Aspects

- Most useful when publicizing significant events or important community issues
- Good for disseminating to the public when time is an issue
- Provides citizens with exposure to concerns and issues being present
- Provides average citizen with casual exposure

Negative Aspects

- Rarely designed to collect comments
- Although may get media coverage at the conference itself, they often are not subsequently reported in the media

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Individual members of staff have been involved with press conferences on various projects; however, none has been prepared by or for the Commission or MPO.

Public Access Television

Description

Public access television is a broadcast of a public meeting or program, press conference, meeting or other visual or oral message available to the public on a widely accessible public television or cable station. The program is usually video taped and may be broadcasted several times. Like a press conference, public access television is used to broadcast formal public meetings where decision makers (usually elected officials or other appointed leadership) formally and publicly announce or present significant news related information regarding a decision. The broadcast may also be used to present information regarding a local initiative, process, study, or project.

Positive Aspects

- Video coverage of meetings allows citizens to witness activities and discussions
- Television coverage reaches a broad audience
- Provides citizens with exposure to the concerns and issues being orally and visually presented

Negative Aspects

- Rarely designed to collect comments
- May not be viewed by a large audience

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

HATS Coordinating Committee meetings are currently televised using public access television. Feedback from these meetings indicates a diverse audience of viewers.

Consideration is being given to producing an educational video for play on local TV on the topic of linking land use and transportation.

Public/Legal Notices

Description

Public and legal notices are formal summaries and descriptions of the time, date, and location of which public actions will be contemplated or work and bids solicited. These notices are often required by law to be prepared for public notification. A strict requirement for the timing and general content of these ads is common.



Positive Aspects

- Essential in formally informing the public of meetings and initiatives and meeting the basic legal requirements for public involvement
- Provide a variety of potential interest groups and citizens with a casual exposure to the topics presented

Negative Aspects

- Cost money to publish.
- Legal notices are not widely read.
- Display ads may get more public exposure, but may be more costly.

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

This method is used for various reasons at TCRPC to announce transportation news, to request the release of federal funds, and to provide notice of public hearings and public meetings.

Public Hearings

Description

A public hearing is a formally advertised meeting of the local governing body, commission or task force where decision makers (usually elected officials or other appointed leadership) afford the opportunity to the public to express opinions and collect formal comments from the community and interested parties. Public hearings may be prefaced by an organized presentation. In general, these hearings usually constitute the final stages in a public review process or adoption of a policy, initiative or expenditure. A public hearing customarily requires a stenographic (verbatim) record of the proceedings and may be recorded for television. Public hearings may be used as a forum to publicize activities, but their primary function is to formally collect input on pending actions. A strict requirement dictates when public hearings are necessary.

Positive Aspects

- Public hearings offer a formal period for all citizens to provide input
- Provide a variety of potential interest groups and citizens with an opportunity to respond to public proposals
- Provide opportunity to present opinions on issues in a formal manner and within a specific length of time

Negative Aspects

- Due to formal nature there is little or no interaction between the public and board conducting the hearing
- Time and organization necessary
- Place to hold meeting needs to be found
- General public is not always comfortable giving their opinion at a public hearing
- Need to pay to advertise hearing (include in budget)

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Public hearings are routinely held in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and other legislation.

Public Meetings

Description

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code dictates when public meetings are required. Participation at public meetings may include individuals, interested organizations, municipal staff, planning commission members and governing bodies. Public meetings provide an opportunity for interested individuals to participate in the planning process. Public meetings may be prefaced by an organized presentation. Public meetings may be used as a forum to publicize activities, but their primary function is to formally provide information on pending actions. All public meetings need to be adequately advertised well in advance to allow people to plan to attend.

Positive Aspects

- Planning staff can present information to interested public
- Technical staff can describe impacts and how implementation would occur
- Can encourage discussion and feedback
- Designated times staff would present information and be available to answer questions
- Displays and maps can be displayed
- Encourages public comments
- Open house public meetings are becoming increasingly popular
- Forms for public comments or places to leave previously prepared comments can be made available

Negative Aspects

- Time and organization to prepare and present
- May need to hold at multiple locations when presenting information of county-wide or regional interest
- Simple public meetings may take a matter of days to plan and prepare
- More involved open house public meetings may take longer and require the active involvement of more planning staff.
- Need to pay to advertise meeting (include in budget)
- Need to find place to hold public meeting

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

This has been done for Transportation reports and County Comprehensive Plans, before being submitted to the MPO and County Planning Commissions, respectively.

Public Service Announcements

Description

Public service announcements are informational materials of public interest prepared for video, television, radio or newspaper distribution and generally run at no charge. The subject matter of this form of public information can be factual or present a point of view.

Positive Aspects

- Useful in generating publicity on a controversial subject
- Offers a convenient method of distribution and publicizing to large number of citizens and/or specialized constituencies
- Provide a variety of citizens and interest groups causal exposure to topics presented
- Can provide a listing of dates to media to include in local calendars announced.

Negative Aspects

- Need to generate interest of media
- Require the participation of mass media and public access television and radio stations in order to provide further dissemination to citizens and interested parties
- Often at the mercy of media's scheduling

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

PSAs have been used in the past as part of an advertising campaign for the Ridesharing Program. The success of the promotion versus the production cost expended yielded a negative result for this application.

Research Committees

Description

A research committee is a small group of individuals organized for the purpose of discussing and exploring specific topics and critical issues. The committee holds a series of meetings to address and discuss issues. Members are assigned reading materials and other tasks between meetings. The process is very structured, using study guides and questions developed by a steering committee or agency. Participants discuss issues in detail and meet to investigate and debate the issues.

Positive Aspects

- Searches for in-depth answers to specific questions
- Provides a forum for technical issues that can affect the substance of a plan, study or project
- Variety of participants based on similar or different backgrounds

Negative Aspects

- May need to provide a facilitator which may involved a cost
- May be self-selected or invited members

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

This technique is generally limited to in-house staff use.

Task Force

Description

A task force is a group organized to resolve a difficult issue, review and comment on study activities, or come to a conclusion on a particular question that is subject to ratification by official decision makers. The task force is usually organized for a specific time period or target date to provide a framework and guide to decision making. The sponsoring group defines the mission in broad terms. The task force is self-governing, and works on a consensus basis rather than formal voting.

Positive Aspects

- Legitimate process of decision making
- Includes citizens directly in the process
- Useful in resolving organizational impasses
- Can represent a broad cross section of interests, including local governments, environmental groups, civic and business groups

Negative Aspects

- May need a facilitator

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Routine operation by staff. Many projects have been led by a committee or task force, many times requiring additional research to address newly pronounced concerns.

Workshops

Description

A workshop is a brief, intensive, educational program for a relatively small group of people that focuses on techniques and skills in a particular area. Task-oriented meetings are designed to inform people or solicit input on policies, plans, or projects. Workshops may range from a subset of a larger meeting to a large multi-day event. Workshops are longer than traditional meetings, lasting from a half-day to one or more days.

Positive Aspects

- Workshops are useful at any stage of the process to formulate plans
- Better understanding of the project or plan
- Makes it easier to communicate without “going on the record”
- Meetings may target specific stakeholders

Negative Aspects

- May require a facilitator to maintain impartiality
- Background material needs to be prepared in advance
- May be difficult to organize the appropriate participants representing various stakeholder groups.
- Possible need to budget for meals and refreshments
- Neutral location for meeting space

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

A more formal technique used many times by staff to collect or disseminate information.

World Wide Web

Description

The World Wide Web is an integral facet of today's culture. Media is easily accessible by a wide range of individuals. Using the "web" to find information is easy. Two-way communication can be fostered through on-line surveys and public comment forms. Web pages can provide links to other related web sites



Positive Aspects

- Anyone who has the ability to access the internet can participate
- Can be utilized to post drafts of plans and final versions upon adoption; maps; project status reports; meeting minutes
- Can be updated to keep information current

Negative Aspects

- Is an impersonal form of communication
- Not everyone has access to the Internet

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

TCRPC maintains a dynamic web site. In 2004 there were 118,055 "hits" for information. The web site is continually updated to provide the most current information available. The TCRPC web site is a www.tcrpc-pa.org.

Visioning

Description

Visioning is a process of goal formulation which focuses on long-range issues. Using a 20 to 30 year horizon, strategies are discussed and set for achieving the established goals. Priorities and performance standards are also established to distinguish essential goals from less essential ones, as well as to evaluate progress toward meeting the goals over time. Invitations to participate can be given to all citizens or a representative panel. Citizens may also participate through meetings and surveys.

Positive Aspects

- Visioning offers widest possible participation for developing long range plan
- Democratic in search for opinions
- Can identify overlooked issues of quality of life
- Various methods of participation
- Helps to avoid fragmented and reactionary approaches in addressing issues

Negative Aspects

- May involve only a limited number of participants
- Can be rather “pie in the sky” and not definitive

Past TCRPC Application of Technique

Used by staff in conjunction with the task force technique. It helps identify issues that may occur over a longer planning horizon; i.e. Regional Transportation Plan (20 years), Regional Growth Management Plan (30 years).