

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Briefings

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors
Working Age Adults
Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Educational

Description

Briefings are issue-focused meetings intended to convey information to leaders or community groups regarding a specific subject matter. They are used to communicate specific information to policy makers, agency administrators, board members, or a specific group of the community. Briefings are a good way to establish communication with affected groups since they can be used to clarify issues and demonstrate an agency's sensitivity to local concerns. ¹

Special Uses

Briefings can be used to: ²

- Explain proposed policies and projects
- Address community concerns and answer community questions;
- Prevent or correct misunderstandings; and
- Establish dialogue with community leaders.

When to Use

Briefings are best scheduled during critical phases of a project or at regular intervals to keep leaders or the media informed. Although briefings can be held at any time, it is generally recommended to hold briefings immediately before a major event or decision, after a crisis, after an especially unsuccessful agency effort, or before introducing new strategies or policies. ³

Cost

* Low (up to \$999)

Briefings offer an inexpensive means of communicating and obtaining feedback from community leaders. The primary expense is generally staff time. Other expenses may include research, presentation materials, as well as travel costs and refreshments, if any. ⁵

Low (up to \$999)	*
Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)	**
High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Briefings can be scheduled quickly. Depending on the complexity of the issue and the level of research that may be necessary, briefings can be organized within a few days. The most time consuming aspect of conducting a briefing is preparing the presentation materials and briefing notes, as well as coordinating the meeting date and time, and confirming the attendance of the participants. ⁶

1 to 3 months	*
6 months to a year	**
Multiyear	***

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for implementing a briefing: ⁴

- **Briefings may be initiated by an agency or the public.** Agencies often organize briefings to improve communication with the public. Communities or individuals generally request briefings in order to obtain information regarding an issue of concern.
- **Agencies need to identify the target audience for the briefing and have a thorough understanding of their interests or concerns.** This information is important in preparing for a briefing and preparing the information to be presented.
- **Determine the purpose of the briefing and develop a “briefing note” summarizing the key points of discussion.** Once the target audience and the topic of the briefing have been identified, it is important to develop a brief statement that summarizes the central message of the briefing. The document needs to be short, concise, clear and should be based on reliable data. It should clearly state the purpose of the briefing, provide a brief listing of the facts, discuss key considerations and options, and offer recommendations or conclusions. This document should be provided to briefing participants. See the following link for further tips and examples: http://www.publicsectorwriting.com/?page_id=6
- **Depending on what the agency wants to achieve, briefings may be organized as one-on-one meetings with key stake holders or as meetings with key groups.** If the issue is complex and the agency has sufficient resources, the agency may elect to hold both types of briefings.

- **One-on-one meetings with key individuals:** The one-on-one meetings allow for direct communication with key stakeholders who either formally or informally represent the interests of the affected community. This format allows the agency to provide detailed information and address any specific questions or concerns that the stakeholders may have.

- **Meetings with key groups:** These meetings help establish communication between agencies and organizations in the community. They reach a broader audience and are perceived as a form of community outreach.

- **To encourage open discussion, briefings should be kept informal and the number of participants should be kept small.** Briefings are often held in an office or in a conference room. Depending on the distance that participants need to travel and other factors, it is possible to conduct briefings through conference calls or video conferencing.
- **Knowledgeable staff with public speaking experience should be assigned to facilitate the briefings.** To ensure successful communication, the briefing facilitator should be articulate, have experience with public speaking, and be well versed on the topic being discussed. High-ranking staff members, key project leaders, and technical experts should be present to answer questions and provide additional information that may be needed.
- **Agencies may elect to hold a briefing in cooperation with community leaders.** By inviting community leaders, such as elected officials or board members, to participate in the briefing, community groups may be more likely to engage in public involvement efforts.
- **Briefings can be used to obtain community feedback and establish two-way communication.** This can be achieved by making sure participants have an opportunity for questions and discussion. Since briefings are normally informal and smaller than public meetings, participants may be more likely to offer their opinions.
- **Briefings can help agencies to address the concerns of critics and deal with difficult projects.** Through a briefing, an agency may request feedback from community groups on establishing better communication and cooperation. They also give critics an opportunity to learn more about the project and express their concerns in greater detail.
- **After a briefing, communication between an agency and the community should be continuous.** An agency should continue the communication after the briefing session. This can be done through newsletters, project update emails or mailings, and additional meetings. Furthermore, an agency should make certain that it provides responses to question that may have gone unanswered during the briefing. To ensure that follow up is carried out in a timely manner, agencies should prepare a list of action items with the names of the persons assigned to complete the actions.

Recommended Target Demographics

Briefings are appropriate for all demographic groups. However, underage youth will need to be represented by parents or representatives from youth organizations. If the target audience involves minority groups or underserved populations, care should be given to ensure that the participants include leaders from the affected community, and not just public officials. The same is true for issues that affect the elderly and youth. When the briefings involve issues that affect non-English-speaking populations, translators should be available at the meeting and all presentation materials should be available in the appropriate language. For issues that pertain to persons with disabilities, the briefing should be conducted in a manner that enables persons with mobility restrictions, as well as those who are visually and hearing impaired to participate.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when implementing a briefing: ⁷

- **If the public requests a briefing, an agency should respond quickly to the request.** Response time is a reflection of an agency's sincerity and commitment to work with the community. Failure to respond within a reasonable time period may result in lack of trust and negative perception of the agency. If a briefing cannot be arranged due to time constraints, an agency should provide an alternative to the briefing that will address the community's concerns.
- **Briefings can be a part of a larger public involvement program, but should not be the only means of communication.** Other public involvement strategies should be used to ensure public involvement.
- **Starting a project with a briefing can establish good will and help to get the word out.** Briefings can set the tone for a project and can serve as a means to keep public leaders involved and excited about the project. They can also serve as an opportunity to obtain input on how to conduct public outreach related to a specific project or issue.
- **Input from briefings may help agencies assess projects and identify ways to address community needs.**
- **Briefings can create an appearance of "back-room deals" when the process is not transparent.** To avoid the appearance of impropriety, briefings should be recorded and minutes should be made available.

Case Studies

The following are case studies of how briefings were used as a public participation tool:

- **The Portland, Oregon Metro holds briefings in neighborhoods in order to obtain information regarding community concerns.** They target the chamber of commerce, homeowners' associations and other groups. The briefings are tailored to each group. ⁸
- **The Seattle Department of Transportation serves as a good example of how the internet can be used as a forum for briefings.** On their website, the Department provides a briefing book intended to provide policy makers and the public with background information on the challenges and opportunities facing the existing transportation system, projections for the future (<http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/briefingbook.htm>). ⁸

For Further Information

How to Communicate with the Media: Press Briefings: Provides a handbook for communicating effectively with the media and includes guidelines for briefings, press releases and other media strategies (<http://www.pr.org.mk/eng/tools/briefings.htm>)

Toastmasters International, Technical Briefings: Provides tips for giving technical briefings and other presentations? (<http://www.toastmasters.org/mainmenucategories/freeresources/needhelpgivingaspeech/businesspresentations/technicalbriefings.aspx>).

Sources

¹ Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Briefings." August 2002, FHWA, 29 March 2011
<http://www.planning.dot.gov/PublicInvolvement/pi_documents/toc.asp>.

² FHWA, "Briefings."

³ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁴ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁵ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁶ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁷ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁸ FHWA, "Briefings."

⁹ Seattle Department of Transportation, "Introduction to the Briefing Book," Department of Transportation, 29 March 2011,
<<http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/briefingbook.htm>>.

¹⁰ Macedonian Institute for Media, "How to Communicate with the Media: Press Briefings," 6 June 2011,
<<http://www.pr.org.mk/eng/tools/briefings.htm>>.

¹¹ Toastmasters International, "Technical Briefings," 6 June, 2011,
<<http://www.toastmasters.org/mainmenucategories/freeresources/needhelpgivingaspeech/businesspresentations/technicalbriefings.aspx>>.