

# Transportation Outreach Planner

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## Public Outreach Strategies

### Mailing Lists and Direct Mail

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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

- Promotional

## Description

Mailing lists and direct mail represent some of the most basic but important tools that agencies can use to communicate with key stakeholders and the community, in that they allow for direct communication with the target audience. If used effectively, mailing lists and direct mail can be used to manage, retain, and attract new participants in public involvement efforts.<sup>1</sup>

## Special Uses

Mailing lists and direct mail can be used for the following purposes:<sup>2</sup>

- Market research and surveys;
- Event and meeting announcements and invitations;
- Newsletter distribution;
- Dissemination of reports and public awareness material;

## When to Use

Mailing lists and direct mail can be used whenever there is a need to communicate with the public or a specific target group. They can be utilized to maintain on-going communication with community leaders, stakeholders and other constituents. Agencies can also use their mailing lists and direct mail to create awareness, introduce new policies or projects, solicit comments, provide updates on special projects or policies, and identify possible leads, volunteers and advisory committee members.<sup>3</sup>

## Cost

### **\* \* \* High (\$10000 to \$50000)**

Costs for creating and managing a mailing list and conducting direct mail campaign can be high. Labor constitutes one of the greatest expenses, as developing and managing a mailing list can be labor-intensive. Other expenses include software and computers, as well as design, printing and postage costs. The costs will vary depending on the number and the types of mailings that are performed. It may be possible to reduce expenses by using email whenever possible to disseminate information; utilizing mail only for those who do not have an email address.<sup>10</sup>

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

### **\* \* \* Multiyear**

The staff time needed to create and maintain a mailing list and conduct regular direct mail campaigns can be considerable. Depending on the size of the mailing list and how often it is used, a staff person can spend an average of five to ten hours per week in managing a list. Additional staff time will be needed to design and process mailings. As

such, it is recommended that a dedicated staff person be assigned to for mail management. <sup>11</sup>

1 to 3 months	*	<i>Disclaimer:</i> The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.
6 months to a year	**	
Multiyear	***	

## Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

- **Before starting a mailing list, determine how the mailing list will be used, the information that will need to be gathered, and how the list will be maintained.** A basic mailing list should include the information listed below. It is recommended that each information field be categorized whenever possible to facilitate data searches (e.g. Under “Stakeholder Category”, the following categories could be used: citizen, elected official, business owner, activist, agency representative, etc.). <sup>4</sup>

- Name
- Organization
- Title
- Stakeholder Category
- Address
- City
- State
- Zip code
- County
- Home telephone number
- Business telephone number
- Cell phone number
- Fax number
- E-mail address

If an agency will be using the mailing list for targeted communication, additional subsets of information will need to be gathered for each contact. The more details an agency has, the more that they will be able to customize their communication to those who are more likely to be interested. Such information may include:

- Occupation
- Demographics
- Affiliation (government official, interest group, etc.)
- Meetings attendance
- Requests for information
- Statements or other response made
- Interests and opinions
- Membership on committees
- Source of information if names are as assemblage of other mailing lists

- **Compile names and addresses to be included in the mailing list.** It is possible to obtain mailing lists of specific demographic groups from public records or purchase them from a list broker or organizations, such as business associations. Agencies can also use a variety of sources to build their mailing lists, including websites, hotlines, and meeting sign-in sheets. However, persons should not be added automatically. Whenever a person provides their contact information, the public should be given the opportunity to decide if they want to be included in the mailing list or not. It is also important to include a disclaimer indicating how the mailing list will be used and if the names will be made available to other organizations. <sup>5</sup>
- **Create a protocol for the use of the mailing list.** The protocol represents the agency’s policy for how it will utilize the mailing list and whether the information will be shared with other organizations. It should include information on how privacy will be protected.
- **Establish a process for updating contact information.** The usefulness of a mailing list depends on its accuracy. Information needs to be updated and cleaned on a regular basis to make sure the contact information is still valid and the names, titles and other important information have not changed. Outdated information can be

costly if mailings are sent to invalid addresses. Below are suggestions for maintaining contact lists clean: <sup>6</sup>

- Conduct a detailed audit of the list at least once a year to confirm the accuracy of all the contact information;
  - Use the US Postal Service(USPS) National Change of Address (NCOA) service at least once a year to check the accuracy of your addresses. They charge a small fee for every 1000 addresses checked.
  - Schedule periodic reviews of the list to purge returned addresses, delete duplicates and make needed corrections. If first class mailing is used, the undelivered pieces will be returned and these pieces can be used to clean up the list. However, first class rates are more costly than bulk rate.
- **Determine if the mailing list should be maintained by staff or by a mailing house.** Most agencies will be able to assign a dedicated staff person to be responsible for maintaining the database. However, if the mailing list is too large (10,000 or more names) and too time consuming to maintain in-house, it may be more cost effective to contract a mailing house to manage the mailing list. Whether done in-house or contracted out, what is important to remember is that someone needs to be responsible for managing the mailing list; otherwise, the information can become obsolete quickly. <sup>7</sup>
  - **Categorize the mailing list by “hot, warm, and cold” contacts.** Hot contacts include people who are actively engaged, such as advisory board members, community leaders and other primary stakeholders. Maintaining such a list will enable you to contact your key constituents quickly. Warm contacts are people who have requested information or attended at least one meeting in the previous year. These are people who have demonstrated an interest and are likely to be interested in receiving updates. Cold contacts are individuals who have not had any contact with the agency for over a year. These contacts should be eliminated from the list, or maintained on a separate list for general mailings. <sup>8</sup>
  - **Prior to using the mailing list for direct mail, make sure there is a clear objective for the communication and a method for monitoring the success of the objective.** The following questions will help agencies to utilize their mailing lists effectively in communicating with their constituents: <sup>9</sup>
    - What is the message?
    - Who is the target audience?
    - What is the best way to communicate with the target audience? (Letter, brochure, newsletter, etc.)
    - What method should be used to disseminate the information? (Regular mail, email, twitter, etc.)
    - What is the budget?
    - How will success be measured? (Meeting attendance, response to a survey, etc.)

## RECOMMENDED TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS

Mailing lists and direct mail represent some of the most effective methods of communicating with all demographic groups because the information only reaches the target audience. By being able to reach people directly through their mailbox or email, agencies are able cater their message to the needs and interests of each demographic group. It is possible to obtain customized lists of demographic groups from direct mail service providers and public agencies. However, it can be cost prohibitive to send information to everyone in a particular community or demographic group. Therefore, most agencies rely on their in-house mailing lists to reach their constituents. Unfortunately, these lists may not adequately represent key stakeholders and community leaders from underserved populations. Agencies can address this issue by working with public officials, community leaders, and other agencies to develop a representative contact list of stakeholders from underserved groups.

## Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when using mailing lists: <sup>12</sup>

- **Mailing lists should be maintained on a well-organized computer spreadsheet or database in order to help**

**reduce clerical workload and facilitate data management.** Although word processing programs may be used to create tables and labels, it is best to utilize programs that enable the data to be sorted and queried with ease.

- **Although agencies are encouraged to share names and addresses, privacy concerns may be an issue.** To address this issue, agencies should develop a protocol of how the mailing lists will be used. Should an agency decide to share its list with other organizations, it should develop an agreement stipulating how names will be used. The agreement should include a provision requiring that the people on the list be made aware that their names are being shared with other agencies, and providing them the opportunity to opt out.
- **Caution should be used when using mailing lists for surveys.** Agency mailing lists represent a self-selected group, and not a random sample of the population. Such lists should not be used to represent the views of the general public.
- **Agencies should avoid relying excessively on mailing lists and direct mail.** If too much information is disseminated to persons who are on the contact list, they may start to view the information as junk mail.

## Case Studies

The Portland, Oregon, Metro integrated tax assessor's information and various other databases of property owners using geographic information system (GIS). This data system is used by Metro and other organizations, including community groups, for planning purposes and to inform people of projects and policies within specific geographic areas ([http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/winter0910articles/files/arcnews31\\_4/arcnews-winter09.pdf](http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/winter0910articles/files/arcnews31_4/arcnews-winter09.pdf)).<sup>13</sup>

The Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) managed over 70 independent email distribution lists which were used to disseminate information to residents and stakeholders. Maintenance of the lists was labor-intensive, resulting in unreliable, communications. The department addressed this issue by creating an automated email process, opt-in subscriptions, and a system for sending messages to mobile devices ([http://www.govdelivery.com/docs/pdfs/WSDOT\\_CaseStudy.pdf](http://www.govdelivery.com/docs/pdfs/WSDOT_CaseStudy.pdf)).<sup>14</sup>

## For Further Information

**Build a Direct Marketing Mailing List:** This article, by Microsoft Office, provides useful information and guidance on how to develop a mailing list (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel-help/build-a-direct-marketing-mailing-list-HA001142578.aspx>).<sup>15</sup>

**Mailing Lists Direct Blog:** This blog provides information on the latest trends and technologies in the use of mailing lists (<http://www.mailing-lists-direct-blog.com/>).<sup>16</sup>

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Mailing Lists," August 2002, FHWA, 29 March 2011 <<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>3</sup> The Community Tool Box, "Promoting Interests in Community Issues: Using Direct Mail," 31 July 2011, [http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section\\_1076.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1076.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>5</sup> The Community Tool Box, "Promoting Interests in Community Issues: Using Direct Mail."

<sup>6</sup> The Community Tool Box, "Promoting Interests in Community Issues: Using Direct Mail."

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>8</sup> The Community Tool Box, "Promoting Interests in Community Issues: Using Direct Mail."

<sup>9</sup> The Community Tool Box, "Promoting Interests in Community Issues: Using Direct Mail."

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA, "Mailing Lists."

<sup>13</sup> Luccio, Matteo. Portland, Oregon, Trailblazes a Successful Regional GIS, ArcNews, Winter 2009/2010, page 1, ESRI, 31 July 2011, <[http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/winter0910articles/files/arcnews31\\_4/arcnews-winter09.pdf](http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/winter0910articles/files/arcnews31_4/arcnews-winter09.pdf)>.

<sup>14</sup> Washington Department of Transportation (DOT), "Washington Department of Transportation Streamlines Communication Strategy, Sends Over 2 Million Updates to Stakeholders in 5 months: Case Study," Washington DOT, 31 July 2011, <[http://www.govdelivery.com/docs/pdfs/WSDOT\\_CaseStudy.pdf](http://www.govdelivery.com/docs/pdfs/WSDOT_CaseStudy.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> Microsoft Office, "Build a Direct Marketing Mailing List," 31 July 2011, <<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel-help/build-a-direct-marketing-mailing-list-HA001142578.aspx>>.

<sup>16</sup> Mailing Lists Direct Blog: Marketing & Business News, "Archive for the 'Mailing Lists' Category," Mailing Lists Direct, 31 July 2011, <<http://www.mailing-lists-direct-blog.com/>>.