# Transportation Outreach Planner

# Public Outreach Strategies

## Speakers' Bureau

## Quick Links

**Toolbox Navigation**

- Recommended Target Groups
- Strategy Class
- Strategy Types
- Description
- Special Uses
- When to Use
- Cost
- Time
- Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions
- Lesson Learned/Challenges
- Case Studies
- For Further Information
- Sources
- Provide Feedback

## 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
- Educational
- Civic Engagement

## Description

Speakers' Bureaus are groups of representatives who are trained to speak on specific subject matters on behalf of an organization. They serve as an on-call resource to requests for presentations from community groups, private organizations, and the general public.  Speakers' Bureaus can help to enhance an agency's public involvement efforts by serving as a form of community outreach, providing a mechanism to address people's concerns and questions, and enabling an agency to communicate a consistent message to the public. [1]

## Special Uses

Agencies can use Speakers? Bureaus to: [2]

- Build or strengthen community relations
- Increase community visibility
- Disseminate a consistent message
- Expand community outreach efforts and opportunities for public participation
- Obtain community feedback and perspectives on a program, project, or policy
- Bridge communication gaps and address specific concerns or special interests
- Recruit volunteers

## When to Use

Agencies can use Speakers? Bureaus on an on-going basis to provide presentations related to their organization and general transportation related issues. They can also be used as part of a public outreach effort to educate the public on a specific project, program, policy, or promotional activity. They are particularly helpful for establishing community relationships, garnering support, or addressing specific community concerns. Speakers? Bureaus also enable agencies to respond quickly to public requests for presentations. [3]

## Cost

### * * Moderate ($1000 to $9999)

Speakers' Bureaus represent a modest expense. Costs include staff time, presentation material, and equipment. The most expensive aspect of a Speakers? Bureau is the staff time needed to manage the program and the volunteers.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Low (up to $999) | * | *Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project. |
| Moderate ($1,000 to $9,999) | * * | |
| High ($10,000 to $50,000) | * * * | |
| Very High (Above $50,000) | * * * * | |

## Time

### * * * Multiyear

Although Speakers' Bureaus can be established in a relatively short amount of time, they require ongoing management. A dedicated staff person is generally assigned to recruit and train volunteers, develop speeches and presentation materials, schedule speaking engagements, and promote the program.

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

## Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for creating and managing a Speakers' Bureau:

- **Assign a staff person to manage the Speakers' Bureau and coordinate volunteers**. A dedicated staff person should be appointed to oversee the general day-to-day operations of the Speaker's Bureau. Responsibilities include: [4]

  - Recruiting and training speakers
  - Marketing the Speakers' Bureau
  - Booking and confirming speaking engagements
  - Developing speeches and presentation materials
  - Collecting and reviewing evaluations
  - Organizing formal recognition for speakers

- **Recruit speakers**. Members of a Speaker's Bureau serve as representatives and ambassadors of an agency; therefore, it is important to recruit individuals who are qualified and committed to serving the public. The qualifications to serve on the Speakers' Bureau should include public speaking experience, a willingness to learn, and ability to deal with the public. When recruiting speakers, agencies should consider their board members, volunteers, community stakeholders, consultants, and staff members.[5] In addition, agencies should also consider recruiting volunteer speakers from the following organizations:

  - Attorney Associations
  - Church Organizations
  - Elks Clubs
  - League of Women Voters
  - Lions Club
  - NAACP
  - Optimist Clubs
  - Shriner Clubs
  - Toastmasters
  - Veteran Organizations

- **Train speakers and assess their skill level**. Once speakers are selected, the agency should organize a training session and orientation for the new members. The training should include instruction on speech delivery, posture, voice quality, timing, use of audio-visual aids, personal appearance, and audience interaction. The training should also include information on the agency, an overview of existing plans and projects, and a discussion of member responsibilities. As part of the training, all speakers should be required to make presentations in order to assess their skill level. This will enable the coordinator of the Speakers' Bureau to assign presentations accordingly.[6] For example, a presentation to an audience who is angry about a project will require an experienced speaker, whereas a novice speaker will be able to manage a presentation on the role of the agency.

- **Develop speeches and presentation materials**. Agencies need to develop presentations for speakers to use that deliver "core messages" on a variety of subjects. The prepared speeches help to ensure that speakers deliver a consistent message. In addition, agencies need to provide speakers the material they will need for their presentations. This includes handouts, maps, videos, and presentation boards. Other materials that agencies need to provide speakers as part of their presentation tool kit include agency brochures, a speaker's bio, sign-in sheets, and evaluation forms.[7]

- **Promote the Speakers' Bureau**. Part of managing a Speakers' Bureau includes promotions. Agencies can promote the Speakers' Bureau by sending information to community organizations and scheduling presentations. Agencies can also use their websites and newsletters to promote the Speakers' Bureau. The goal is to inform as many groups as possible so that they know who to contact when they wish to request a presentation.[8] Below are some of the groups that agencies can contact to promote the Speakers' Bureau:
  - Civic Groups
  - Social Clubs
  - Professional Organizations

- Neighborhood Associations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Churches
- Political Clubs
- Homeowner Organizations
- Regional and Environmental Organizations
- Labor Unions
- Fraternal and Philanthropic Organizations
- Schools and Other Educational Institutions

- **Develop a system for scheduling presentations and assigning speakers**.It is important to have a system for scheduling and assigning speakers in order to avoid coordination issues or scheduling conflicts. The following serves as a basic checklist that agencies can use: [9]
  - Develop a monthly list of speakers that are available to make presentations, indicating the dates and times that they are available.
  - Match request for presentation with speaker availability.
  - Inform speaker of assignment, provide an overview of the request, and confirm speaker commitment.
  - Determine audio-visual needs.
  - Confirm the engagement with program host, preferably in writing. Provide the name and contact information of the speaker, as well as a bio of the person and any other relevant information that may help the organization prepare for the presentation.
  - Organizing formal recognition for speakers
  - Provide the speaker with the material and equipment needed for the presentation.
  - On the day of the event, contact the speaker to confirm attendance. Have a backup plan in case the speaker is sick or has an emergency.
  - After the presentation collect and review all evaluation forms.
  - Follow-up with program host to thank them for the opportunity to make a presentation before their group.

- **Monitor the performance of the Speakers' Bureau**. Agencies should periodically review presentation evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the presentations and the speakers. They should also track the number of presentations provided throughout the year and the number of people attending the presentations. This will enable agencies to evaluate the performance of the Speakers' Bureau. [10]

- **At least once a year, formally recognize volunteer speakers for their participation**. It is important to keep volunteer speakers motivated. One way of doing this is to formally acknowledge volunteers for their work through letters of appreciation. Agencies can also explore other ways of recognizing their volunteers.[11]

**Recommended Target Demographics**

A Speakers' Bureau can serve as an effective strategy to reach a wide variety of demographic groups. Presentations can be tailored to the needs and interests of the target audience. It is also possible to recruit speakers who the target community trust or whom they can identify with. This helps to establish credibility among the target population, allowing for effective outreach. For example, an agency may be able to recruit a leader from the disabled community to give presentations to persons with disabilities on a new Paratransit program.

# Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when creating and managing a Speakers' Bureau: [12]

- Agencies may not be able to control the actions of unpaid volunteers. Although Speakers' Bureaus are created to help organizations provide a consistent message to the public, it is not possible to completely control the information that speakers give the public. As such, speakers need to be carefully selected and monitored.
- Agencies need to guard against demanding too much from volunteers. Agencies need to be careful not to place too much responsibility on volunteer speakers or require excessive travel time. Such practices can burn out volunteers and affect morale.
- When it is important to establish credibility, it is best to use agency staff to make presentations rather than volunteer speakers. In situations where there may be a high level of public discontent or discord, agency staff should be present to address public concerns and establish credibility.

## Case Studies

The City of Austin, Texas actively used its speakers' bureau as part of its effort to inform the community of the city's comprehensive plan. Through its speakers' bureau, the City encouraged organizations to host discussions and succeeded in reaching 1,655 people through this effort. This was part of their "Going Out Into the Community" strategy (http://imagineaustin.net/participation). [13]

The Citizen Advisory Committee of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council provides advice on regional planning issues as well as community outreach. As part of its effort to improve participation, the Public Involvement and Outreach Subcommittee is responsible for the Speakers' Bureau. This ensures that board members are actively involved in the agency's public involvement efforts (http://www.baltometro.org/content/view/419/306/). [14]

The Orange County Transportation Authority effectively uses the internet to promote its speakers' bureau. In addition to providing information on the program, the website includes links to current presentations so the general public can view the information at their convenience (http://www.octa.net/speakers.aspx). [15]

## For Further Information

**Getting the Word Out: About Shriners of North America & Shriners Hospitals for Children**: This is a guide for establishing and maintaining an effective speakers? bureau. It contains helpful tips and sample forms (http://www.truebluetampa.com/Portfolio%20files/EmpInternal/SHC%20SI%20Speakers%20Bureau%20Guidebook.pdf).

**How to Start a Toastmaster?s Speakers? Bureau**: Provides information and tips on how to start a speakers? bureau.?? (http://www.toastmasters.org/127_PDF.aspx).

## Sources

[1] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers," August 2002, 29, FHWA, 17 August 2011 <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>.
[2] FHWA, "Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers."
[3] FHWA, "Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers."
[4] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau," 3 March 2008, Shriners of North America & Shriners Hospitals for Children, 26 September 2011, <http://www.truebluetampa.com/Portfolio%20files/EmpInternal/SHC%20SI%20Speakers%20Bureau%20Guidebook.pdf>.
[5] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau."
[6] FHWA, "Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers."
[7] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau."
[8] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau."
[9] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau."
[10] FHWA, "Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers."
[11] "Getting the Word Out: A Guide for Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Speakers' Bureau."
[12] FHWA, "Speakers' Bureaus and Public Involvement Volunteers."
[13] Imagine Austin, "Community Participation," City of Austin, 9 October 2011, <http://imagineaustin.net/participation>.
[14] "Citizens Advisory Committee," Baltimore Metropolitan Council, 9 October 2011, < http://www.baltometro.org/content/view/419/306/>.
[15] Orange County Transportation Authority, "Speakers' Bureau," OCTA, 10 October 2011, <http://www.octa.net/speakers.aspx>.