MEASURING THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING: THREE BEST PRINCIPLES

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Corresponding Author
Jason Wagner
Associate Transportation Researcher
Texas Transportation Institute
1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 300G
Austin, TX 78723
Ph. (512) 467-0946
Fax (512) 467-8971
j-wagner@ttimail.tamu.edu

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ABSTRACT

Measuring performance provides a variety of benefits: establishing accountability with the public, enabling management and performance improvements, increasing transparency, and building public trust. The most recent transportation authorization bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), includes a heavy focus on performance measurement. Despite such strong reasons, measuring the performance of public engagement in transportation planning has proved difficult due to a variety of issues, including unclear goals, limited funding, and the situational nature of engagement activities.

To address some of these issues, the author analyzes the literature of best practices for public engagement in transportation planning and derives three principles that encapsulate the contained concepts. The three principles include accessible events, engaging interactions, and an outcome-oriented process. The author developed a performance scorecard rubric to operationalize the three principles. The scorecard provides an intuitive and concise method to measure and display performance information.

This paper organizes the disparate and fragmented literature of recommended practices into a usable framework, which enables practitioners to understand more easily the important aspects of public engagement and better measure the performance of engagement activities. It also progresses the discourse surrounding public engagement and performance measurement. Additional study would provide opportunities for further refinement and investigation of the efficacy of the system the author developed in a real-world setting.
INTRODUCTION
Measuring the performance of public engagement in transportation planning provides a variety of benefits:
- establishing accountability with the public,
- improving performance,
- increasing transparency,
- and building trust.

The most recent transportation authorization bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), includes a heavy focus on performance measurement. Despite these strong reasons, measuring the performance of public engagement in transportation planning has proved elusive and difficult.

Evaluating the success of a public engagement effort can be a daunting task. The goals are frequently unclear, output measures are often highly dependent on situational factors beyond the control of the agency, and funds are not always available for in-depth measurement activities (1). Without a way to address these hurdles, the practitioner may decide not to evaluate performance.

An initial problem in evaluating public engagement in transportation planning efforts is the lack of universal and clear goals for engagement. Different transportation projects will have different objectives. The goals for the engagement process will look very different for a project that seeks to construct a new highway in a major urban area than for the addition of stoplights in a smaller city.

Comparing the success of the two projects would be quite difficult. The wide variety of strategies and platforms agencies could use to engage with the public make it difficult to develop universally applicable recommended practices or evaluative frameworks. The author proposes the use of an evaluative framework that assesses the efficacy of the process itself. Put into practice, this framework would evaluate the level at which an agency engages in and achieves the best practices laid out in the literature.

The author proposes a new evaluative framework for public engagement that will provide a clearer barometer of the agency’s ability to fulfill the best practices laid out in the literature. The author derived the framework from an analysis and synthesis of the literature into three best principles that reflect the literature’s broad themes for successful public engagement. Based on the three principles, the author developed an example performance scorecard rubric that practitioners could use to assess their performance using quantitative or qualitative measures. The author proposes some potential measures that practitioners can use and illustrates how to use the scorecard.

THE THREE BEST PRINCIPLES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
The author reviewed the literature of the best practices in public engagement for transportation planning.

The reviewed literature includes scholarly articles, guidebooks and other articles from federal and state agencies, articles written by private and non-profit organizations, along with other sources. This review uncovered a variety of advice, much of it overlapping, occasionally conflicting, and very frequently with many different objectives and goals. So much different advice for transportation practitioners exists that an individual with limited time and resources might find it difficult to determine and understand the most important aspects, or even simply to sort through it all.

This paper identifies common principles that frequently occur in the literature. Each principle encapsulates the essence of many different individual “best practices” about how to engage the public in transportation planning successfully. Table 1 provides a simplified graphical representation of this process. The value of distilling the best practice literature into principles is that it provides practitioners with a tool to understand quickly the most important aspects of the process of engaging the public.

In this case, the author uses frequency of occurrence as a stand-in measure for “most important.” This measure is justified by the assumption that the most important areas for a practitioner to engage in would likely be reiterated frequently in the literature of best practices by most authors. Stated differently, if an idea were important, most authors would identify it in a list of best practices. The fact that each...
author and paper uses unique language to express ideas in different ways presented a hurdle to overcome. To transcend this obstacle, the author distilled the best practices to underlying ideas or themes, which are illustrated in Table 1. An “X” mark indicates that the best practice or guideline has elements of the corresponding principle. A blank cell indicates that the particular practice or guideline did not have elements of the corresponding principle.

Based upon a review of the literature, the author found that when engaging the public, there are three overall principles that should guide a practitioner’s engagement process:

1. Accessible events
2. Engaging interactions
3. Outcome-oriented process

TABLE 1 Guidelines and Principles (2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines Found in the Literature</th>
<th>Accessible</th>
<th>Engaging</th>
<th>Outcome-Oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply democratic principles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate strategies for appropriate audiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient and interesting</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure audience engages in decision-making</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have proper access to forums/tools</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include minorities and non-English speakers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not just what you say; it’s how you say it</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know your audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make meetings accessible</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make meetings engaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing, two-way exchange</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are aware of opportunities to participate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People understand how they can participate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide continuous contact</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple messages work best</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success requires resources</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To reach all audiences, use multiple channels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use complementary strategies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value people’s input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections briefly define and describe each of the three identified principles.
Accessible Events

There are many challenges to successfully involving the public in transportation planning, but the first—and one of the most challenging—is getting people involved in the event. This challenge can be remedied by providing ease of access to the event for anyone who might want to attend (7). An accessible event starts with holding the event at a time and location that is convenient and familiar, such as a community center, church, or library. Accessibility can also require providing services to enable community members to attend, like the provision of food, daycare, or translation for non-English speakers.

An important aspect of accessibility is “knowing your audience” (8). It is vital to actively seek out the key leaders and important stakeholders, and invite them to engage in the discussion. This includes knowing obvious things such as demographics and languages; but also knowing less tangible aspects like local concerns, community values and leaders, and important motivations. An agency can improve its chances of success by knowing how the community feels about public expenditures, what their most important concerns are, and who the key stakeholders are. This knowledge allows an agency to adequately prepare to discuss the pertinent community issues and bring the stakeholders into the discussion.

Another important aspect of accessibility is ensuring that community members are aware of participation opportunities. Marketing the public involvement opportunities to the community through a variety of methods can inform individuals and increase attendance. Agencies can accomplish this by encouraging media coverage, advertising on the internet and through social networks, mass mailings, or simple word-of-mouth and personal invitation strategies.

Whatever methods an agency chooses, it should ensure they are appropriate to the intended audience. For example, an older, non-English speaking neighborhood may not be likely to receive information distributed in English through social media, but may respond more favorably to a mass mailing, a personal invitation, or an outreach method through the local news source. The message should also provide a compelling reason for attendance—highlighting specific problems that need to be addressed, such as congested corridors or roadway improvements. Without a strong case, individuals may simply disregard the marketing as irrelevant.

An aim of accessibility can be to ensure engagement exercises are representative of the population from which the agency seeks to gain input. If the demographic characteristics of the individuals participating are significantly skewed from the population, groups that are not represented may have an inadequate voice in the discussion. This can result in undemocratic decisions.

Multi-Platform Strategies

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of accessibility is providing a variety of venues or platforms for engagement, thus increasing the likelihood that individuals can easily access and feel comfortable expressing themselves in one (or more) of the platforms (9). When one imagines public involvement, an old cliché is likely to come to mind: a technocrat droning endlessly about esoteric jargon in a musty community center, complete with sparse attendance, minimal interaction and even less interest.

Thankfully, a new age of communication and public engagement has arisen. This new age has agencies utilizing a multi-platform engagement strategy that emphasizes bringing community members into the discussion through familiar and comfortable mediums.

A multi-platform strategy encourages participation by people from demographic groups that may not attend traditional public meetings. It grants people with hectic schedules the opportunity to have a say in their local governance as their schedules allow. It also enables community members to voice their opinions in a way that is comfortable. For example, speaking at a public meeting may feel intimidating for some, and can discourage their involvement. Providing a variety of mediums to communicate can eliminate psychological and logistical barriers, thus increasing involvement.
A key aspect of this strategy is first knowing your audience, and then providing a variety of mediums through which they can easily communicate their opinions and ideas (8). As discussed previously, knowledge of the local demographics is a necessity; but it is only one component of knowing your audience. The identification of important stakeholders, an understanding of cultural aspects, and a familiarity with local concerns will all equip agencies with the knowledge to design a more effective strategy to involve the public. Agencies can use focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and opinion surveys to aid in identification of important issues and message development.

Once an agency has this information, it can begin the process of targeted outreach. Agencies should couple traditional strategies like public meetings and notices with innovative strategies like

- a project website,
- social media sites,
- blogs, or
- text message updates on important project milestones (12).

The traditional and innovative methods should link, as well. Agencies should advertise for public meetings through their websites and social media pages (13). The public meetings should—when possible—provide citizens the option to participate in the meeting electronically through a webcast. Attendees participating electronically can comment on the proceedings by submitting questions or commenting on the webpage. Once the event is complete, the project should post the results of the forum and allow further comments. The project should assign one or more individuals to monitor and update the electronic resources to ensure that they are up-to-date and that people commenting receive responses to their questions, concerns, or input. As a caveat, streaming events live can be costly and difficult to do in some areas, especially in rural communities with limited high-speed internet access. This is a best practice, however, and may not be applicable in all situations.

Online opinion polling is an inexpensive method to gauge the feelings of the public. Agencies can host polls on agency or project websites and through social media, such as Facebook’s polling function. Agencies should take care to note that often the demographics of internet users might not match the demographics of the targeted population, so polling may not accurately reflect the sentiments of the entire populace.

While a useful way to quickly and inexpensively gain input, online polling can result in sampling bias due to self-selection. The self-selection can occur due to disparities in computer and internet accessibility and education. This method can result in an unrepresentative sample. This does not mitigate the value of online engagement approaches, however. Self-selection can occur with any engagement strategy. Events requiring individuals to show up at certain times in certain locations will eliminate individuals who are not able to attend at those times, locations, or do not have transportation. Agencies can mitigate self-selection concerns by using multiple outreach strategies, with online components being only one part of a multifaceted engagement strategy.

A multi-platform outreach strategy allows a more in-depth and comprehensive approach to public involvement. Using multiple, complementary strategies facilitates greater participation and accessibility by decreasing the barriers to public involvement.

**Engaging Interactions**

Once the agency has made sure the event is accessible to all who wish to attend, the search for successful involvement shifts to “How do I best convey information to and receive feedback from those in attendance?” The literature recommends that events should be “collaborative rather than confrontational, engaging and fun, and should provide a learning experience for all involved” (7 p. 1). When community members engage and buy into the process, the result will more likely be one of collaboration and mutual consent. It is important that the working environment is one that encourages discussion, rather than stifling dissent.
Presenting the information through games or interactive exercises can present a different way for community members to approach the project. It can foster discussion and engage the imaginations of the involved individuals. Successes have been reported with a model that used a presentation, followed by breakout and discussion sessions of smaller groups. The discussion groups report to the whole group with recommendations on their issues. This format enables community members to take ownership of the planning process and shape the discussion. Practitioners must take care to know the demographics and local community concerns in which they are working. This knowledge can prevent the perception of condescension through these activities. If a community is receptive to these tactics, they can be a valuable tool. If they are not, however, they should be avoided. Sensitivity to recent political events may help guide these decisions (for example, not making a game out of a plan regarding a controversial proposition).

Meaningful public engagement is open, ongoing and allows for two-way exchanges of information (11). It cannot tell community members what will happen and then allow a cursory comment period. It should provide an opportunity for community members to discuss their views and for the agency to show how it will incorporate their feedback. This creates an iterative discussion loop that encourages and enables communication, so long as both parties continue the dialogue.

The feedback mechanisms, therefore, must be simple and convenient for individuals (14). If barriers exist to communication, members will be less inclined to inform the agencies of their opinions and thoughts. Success also requires agencies to communicate in simple, but informative messages. Inundating the community with technical details and esoteric information is likely to overwhelm and deter the communication process. Agencies should provide the information that community members need to know without drowning them in detail.

Another aspect of engaging interactions is ensuring that the information is conveyed in a conversational and not condescending manner (12). Talking down to community members will breed resentment and hostility—hardly the recipe for successful engagement. A conversational tone will set the audience at ease and encourage communication. If an individual fears they are not “smart enough” to engage with a technically proficient speaker, they may hold back their comments and fail to contribute to the discussion at all. Speakers can prevent this from happening by fighting the urge to use jargon and bureaucratic language (e.g., excessive acronyms, technical terms, etc.). Another strategy practitioners can use to assuage concerns is providing fact sheets that explain the issues at-hand in accessible language, complete with graphics and visuals when applicable.

Outcome-Oriented Process

The final principle emphasizes that all public engagement efforts should focus on achieving desired outcomes. The process should strive to achieve continuous involvement that results in meaningful decision-making that reflects community values (11). It is important that agencies recognize that engagement is more than simply fulfilling a regulation or checking a box on a list of tasks to complete. Public engagement provides a mechanism for communities to have a direct voice in their local governance. It bridges the divide between the bureaucracy and the people—allowing a rare opportunity for real community “buy-in” to the governing process. As such, it is important for participants to see tangible evidence that the input they provide affects the decision-making process in a meaningful way.

This principle touches all aspects of the public engagement activities. Each aspect of the process should focus on involving the public to decide issues in a manner that reflects the community’s values. One part of this process is genuinely listening to community members and utilizing their input in a practical manner. This does not mean that an agency must implement every opinion that participants put forward; but it does mean engaging with the community in such a way that individuals know their input was valuable and their contributions were a factor in the process (8). Agencies should treat individuals in a respectful and courteous manner. For people participating electronically, this can mean responding to a
member’s post, comment, or question, and monitoring any debate carefully so that the discussion remains constructive (13).

Another aspect of outcome-oriented engagement is soliciting involvement early in the process, before the agency makes all the decisions (10). If the public perceives the engagement is an afterthought and that an individual’s comments will have no bearing on decisions, participation will suffer and cynicism will spread. Another important aspect is responding to the input and opinions of the public. If the public overwhelmingly feels that a change is needed and the change is feasible, the agency should attempt to acknowledge the input and adjust their program in response. If there are reasons changes cannot be made, the agency should make earnest efforts to explain why the changes are infeasible.

Additionally, consistent with a focus on outcomes is the recognition that success requires the dedication of resources (14). The amount of resources dedicated to a specific purpose often dictates organizational priorities. If an agency starves the public involvement department of the necessary resources, it will be evident and likely result in poor outcomes.

It takes time and money to “pound the pavement”—meeting with local leaders and stakeholders, discovering the important community concerns, and developing relationships necessary for success. Effective public engagement also requires the dedication of the right people. It is no easy task to lead a public meeting on a controversial topic while maintaining decorum and respect. It is important that agencies carefully select individuals capable of carrying out such a task. Along with that may include the need to hire staff with the experience and ability to meet with all types of communities. The United States has a wide variety of demographic and cultural groups. Ensuring that staff are aware of local sensitivities can go a long way towards establishing credibility and trust.

**Measuring Performance**

A vital part of developing an outcome-oriented public involvement process is measuring the performance of the public engagement efforts. In the private sector, profitability generally measures performance. If a company is unsuccessful, it will face financial difficulty and (possibly) bankruptcy. The public sector does not have a universal barometer for performance, so understanding an agency or program’s success requires careful evaluation.

Performance measurement is the “regular measurement of the results (outcomes) and efficiency of services or programs” (15 p. 3). It enables organizations to manage their performance, focus on customer-service and quality of service provision, and maximize benefits while minimizing negative consequences. Measuring performance will

- establish accountability with citizens and elected officials,
- enable the use of data to guide the dedication of resources, and
- build public trust by increasing transparency and displaying how services are provided to the public.

If agencies do not measure their performance, they may be completely unaware of their progress toward attaining their goals or missions. Performance measurement not only informs agencies of their ability to achieve their goals, but also provides valuable information agencies can use to allocate resources, educate the public, and improve performance (15). Moreover, an agency can objectively report to the public its progress in meeting objectives, thereby building trust and increasing credibility.

If these reasons do not provide sufficient motivation for organizations to engage in performance measurement, recent legislation requires performance measurement and management. The most recent highway authorization act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), includes a heavy focus on performance measurement and management (16). The cornerstone of the act is transitioning highway funding and transportation planning to a performance-based system. The transportation planning section retains an especially strong focus on “incorporating performance goals, measures and targets into the process of identifying needed transportation improvements and project selection” (16 p. 5). This focus from the federal level provides yet another strong reason for organizations to engage in measuring their performance.
Before agencies can begin to measure performance, they must first determine their overarching mission (or goal) and specific individual objectives. The mission identifies the overarching goal of the program. All activities agencies perform should contribute to achieving the overall mission.

Measuring the performance of public engagement requires measuring the relevant inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Table 2 summarizes the definitions of the preceding three terms.

**TABLE 2 Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes (15 pp. 14-17)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>The amount of resource used (funds, employee time, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>The amount of products and services delivered (number of event attendees, miles of roads paved, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>The events, occurrences, or changes in conditions, behavior, or attitudes that indicate progress toward a program’s mission and objectives (ability to develop a community in a manner that reflects the community’s values and ideals, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once agencies identify a mission, they should identify what inputs, outputs, and outcomes to measure. Inputs and outputs are often relatively straightforward, and are most commonly the amount of employee time or agency money dedicated to the program or project. When possible, agencies should tie inputs to processes, outputs, and even outcomes. Doing so provides a measure of efficiency, or the amount of inputs required to produce a process, output, or outcome. For example, a $1000 expenditure allowed the agency to develop a new online tool that increased turnout by 5 percent, and when asked, 80 percent of participants felt this tool increased their ability to participate in engagement activities. This sort of performance measurement provides a logical chain linking how the public’s dollars are spent, what they are used for, and what results are achieved per dollar invested.

Outputs are commonly direct results of the processes; in the case of public engagement, outputs could be

- the number of attendees at an event,
- the amount of comments received, or
- the number of unique hits on a website.

These measures are less desirable than outcomes, as outcomes provide a direct (and not proxy) measure of performance.

Outcomes can be more complicated, as they often reflect the overall goal the program or project wishes to achieve. In the case of public engagement, a measure could be the ability of the community to influence the planning process, how well the final project reflects the community’s values, or another related measure. It can be difficult to accurately quantify outcomes (especially with a process as complex as public engagement) due to their often intangible and more qualitative attributes. Agencies could address this by using opinion polling that asks participants how well the engagement process achieved the three best principles. This is discussed in detail below.

Finally, gathering and analyzing the performance measures are pointless activities if the information is not used. Agencies and programs should take the performance information gained and use it to incentivize performance, allocate resources, and improve performance generally. Agencies should note data that reveal areas for improvement, and further analyze the data to understand why the deficiency occurred and identify strategies for improvement in the future. When appropriate, the data can be used to allocate resources to areas that have the largest return on investment. Agencies can also use performance measures to measure employee performance and tie bonuses or other monetary incentives to encourage employees to achieve higher results. This must be used with caution, however, as some results are beyond employees’ control.
APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES – EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

A set of best principles will help agencies understand the goals of the process of public engagement, but applying them to measure performance can be a more difficult task. As previously discussed, the process of public engagement varies widely depending on the goals, scope, and intent of the project. These hurdles make measuring the performance of public engagement difficult, but not impossible. The framework developed here provides a set of principles that allow practitioners to measure their ability to achieve the best practices laid out in the literature.

The evaluative framework for this paper utilizes the concept of performance scorecards to illustrate the process of measuring performance. A performance scorecard provides a rubric (a framework or procedural method) to understand quickly and intuitively the performance of the organization. The scorecard developed here is a modified version of the balanced scorecard framework laid out by Kaplan and Norton (17).

The balanced scorecard, developed with the private sector in mind, is an alternative way for companies to supplement traditional financial measures with measures from additional perspectives. The original scorecard enabled companies to “link long-term strategic objectives with short-term actions” (17, p. 3). This study adapts the private-sector orientation and applies it to the public engagement in transportation planning. Rather than organizing the scorecard by four perspectives, the scorecard uses three principles to guide the measurement. This shift was necessary modification due to the level of analysis and purpose. Kaplan’s balanced scorecard is a tool to measure the performance of an entire private sector company. The scorecard here is used to measure the performance of a specific activity inside a public organization. These differences warranted the modification. This sort of modification is not without precedent in the management literature (18).

The performance measurement system discussed here relies almost entirely on the use of surveys to poll attendees. The surveys can use a Likert Scale system and/or a yes/no questionnaire. The use of opinion polling will allow attendees to gauge the effectiveness of the engagement activity at achieving the various metrics found in the literature as best practices. As a note, a Likert Scale is a tool used to assess opinions regarding psychological questionnaires and evaluations. The scale consists of a question and answer area, where the respondent selects the option that best corresponds to their opinion. There are usually five or more possible answers with varying levels of agreement, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.

Developing the Scorecard

The scorecard is organized by principles, objectives, measures, and goals, with a column for results. The principle column signifies each of the three best principles identified from the literature. An objective is a narrower aspect of each principle that describes a concept the agency wishes to achieve. For example, an aspect of accessibility is ensuring that individuals who wish to participate can do so without an undue burden. A measure is a quantifiable way to assess the level at which an objective was attained. A goal is the measure operationalized—a quantified target that the agency aims to achieve. The results column provides an area to document the actual level of performance following completion of the public engagement activity.

An agency that wishes to measure its performance using the scorecard develops objectives, measures, and goals as appropriate to its needs. Alternatively, the organization can borrow aspects of the scorecard developed here, and tailor other aspects to fit its needs (maintaining the objectives and measures while changing the goals, for example).

In the example, an agency measuring its performance provided two objectives for achieving accessibility. There are two measures associated with the first objective and one with the second. For the
first measure, the agency hopes that 80 percent of respondents feel that they were able to participate without an undue amount of trouble. In the example, the agency did not meet its goal. Instead, it received 70 percent affirmative responses. This result would provide valuable information that the agency could use to influence future engagement efforts. The agency can develop strategies to improve performance at this measure in the future. Additionally, if the agency maintained the same language in their questions over time, the agency can track performance and monitor any changes. An agency can track when it implemented changes in the engagement process and see if there is an impact from the changes over time. This provides the added benefit of having a larger dataset, which reduces the effects of outliers and improves the data’s robustness.

As another example, practitioners could hold the public meeting, and distribute an exit survey to participants following the meeting. The questions on the survey would all provide data that indicate how well the agency did at accomplishing each measure. An example question posed to participants might ask, “Did you feel that you were able to attend today’s event without an undue amount of difficulty?” The response section would provide a Likert Scale, with options ranked from one to five, with five indicating that the individual strongly agrees with the statement, and a one indicating that the respondent strongly disagrees with the statement. The agency would set its goals beforehand to indicate what level of performance they hope to attain across all measures. After gathering all results, the agency could compare their actual performance to their goals and use those data to identify areas that need improvement. The data would enable practitioners to target weaker areas and increase the amount of time and resources spent improving these specific areas of the engagement process.

Agencies would gather data from participant surveys for each of the measures. Collectively, the data would present a snapshot of how well the agency performed for each measure, objective, and principle. The agency could perform well in the area of accessibility, but not as well in the area of engagement. The agency would know to dedicate more time and resources to improving these areas.

If the agency wished, it could also link inputs to the outputs and outcome measures. To do this, an agency can document how much money it spent on the various areas, and what was the result of those expenditures. If maintained over time, this would provide an ability to track any changes in performance related to expenditures. For example, spending more money developing new platforms for engagement might boost turnout and participants’ feelings on accessibility or engagement measures. Tracking these areas with performance measures that link inputs to outcomes and outputs provides logical (if not causal) evidence suggesting that increases in expenditures helped to increase performance.

Measuring the performance of public engagement for transportation planning activities provides practitioners with valuable information they can use to improve performance, build trust, and increase transparency. While often a difficult process, this paper proposes a performance measurement system that will alleviate some of the burden by establishing three principles toward which practitioners can strive.
TABLE 3 Example Performance Scorecard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>All who wished to participate had the ability to do so without an undue burden</td>
<td>Individuals felt they were able to participate without an undue amount of trouble</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>70 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals who declined to attend, did so out of choice and not inability</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>90 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals felt comfortable providing input in at least one of the platforms utilized</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>80 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals felt the platforms facilitated their attendance and participation</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>80 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Events were democratic and representative of the population</td>
<td>Individuals attending the events roughly represent the population</td>
<td>Minority groups’ attendance rates were within 5 percentage points of their actual share in the population</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>The process fostered an environment favorable for input and collaboration</td>
<td>Individuals felt their opinions were heard and valued</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>70 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals felt the process encouraged collaboration</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>90 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals felt the activities were engaging</td>
<td>80 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>70 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The process was ongoing</td>
<td>Individuals used the feedback mechanisms</td>
<td>50 percent or more of the individuals used the feedback mechanisms</td>
<td>60 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome-oriented</td>
<td>The input provided from the public influenced the decision-making process</td>
<td>Individuals felt their opinions would influence the decision-making</td>
<td>70 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>70 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The process successfully engaged the public</td>
<td>Individuals felt the engagement process, as a whole, was successful</td>
<td>70 percent or more affirmative responses</td>
<td>75 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study reviews the literature surrounding the best practices in engaging the public for input on transportation projects. It provides three principles that encapsulate the recommended practices and a performance scorecard based on these principles. This scorecard will allow practitioners to evaluate their performance at engaging the public, and will produce data to improve further both the practice of public engagement and the ability to evaluate performance.

This study is the initial step in this process. Implementing the three-principle-based scorecard as a pilot study would be an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of using this system, determine the system’s strengths and areas for improvement, and further improve the practice of measuring the performance of public engagement.
WORKS CITED


