



**NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF MPOs  
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

**June 17, 2024**

**Virtual**

**1:30 PM – 3:00 PM**

**MEETING NOTES**

**Participating**

- BMTS – Brian Cohen
- DCTC - Emily Dozier
- DCTC – Tara Grogan
- DCTC - Mark Debald
- GBNRTC – Angelica Gonzalez
- GTC – Lori Maher
- NYMTC - Stephanie Brooks
- NYMTC – Sherry Southe
- NYMTC – Rossana Weitekamp
- SMTC – Meghan Vitale
- SMTC - Joey DiStefano
- SMTC - Thomas Bardenett
- WJCTC – Jennifer Docteur
- Planning4Places – Kathy Ember

**1. Introductions**

Lori Maher summarized the agenda for today’s meeting. Meeting notes were approved for the April 22, 2024, meeting with no changes.

**2. Plain Language: Make it Clear Examples**

Lori Maher shared an example, and the group provided thoughts on how to rephrase to make the language clearer.

**3. Overview of “2024 State of Practice: 10 Public Engagement Trends in Transportation”**

- Tara Grogan discussed the 2024 State of Practice report which can be found here:

[2024 State of the Practice Report.pdf \(hubspotusercontent-na1.net\)](https://hubspotusercontent-na1.net)

[2024 State of the Practice: 10 Public Engagement Trends in Transportation \(socialpinpoint.com\)](https://socialpinpoint.com)

- The effort came out of a TRB conference. They did a survey to get feedback from transportation agencies (431 responses, 211 MPOs). There were 10 key findings. The survey asked why public engagement is important. Responses included it informs plans, builds awareness, and trust. Barriers to progress include limited staffing and resources. The survey asked about the division of labor using in house staff vs. consultants for public outreach. For smaller-scale engagement consultant are used under 20%, consultant support is used for larger studies. Another question was whether there is a staff member for public outreach - at DCTC, the staff shares that role. Some larger MPOs have a dedicated staff engagement person. The report noted that the level of

satisfaction with outreach was scored at moderately satisfied and the number of participants. DOTs were more satisfied than MPOs. MPOs were overall less satisfied with the diversity of participants. It was noted that seniors are not difficult to reach. Tara Grogan noted that offering food, having an accessible location, and having online options help with engagement. Lori Maher suggested finding out if you are reaching participants and the best way to know about that is to ask for demographics. More representation and understanding of public priorities is important. In terms of engagement challenges, there is difficulty enticing people to participate, there are challenges with staff or resources, useful feedback, reaching underrepresented groups, range of opinions. The report discusses each question of the survey. Regarding the future of engagement, a lot of people wanted a stronger transition to virtual engagement and using VR or AI to supplement outreach.

- Tara Grogan asked who has a dedicated staff member at their MPO. The group believes there are about 2-3 MPOs with dedicated public engagement specialists. Mark Debald noted we all need public engagement skill set in our jobs.
- Lori Maher asked how many MPOs contract out public engagement work. NYMTC does that - Stephanie Brooks is a consultant that supports NYMTC, and the staff have NYMTC email addresses. Stephanie will share the NYMTC regional transportation plan under development and she offered to discuss the project at a later date. The project website can be viewed at: <https://www.movingforward2055.org/>
- Mark Debald discussed the challenge of the sense of apathy from the public. Given people's attention spans, he stated that the shorter length of platform is better – i.e., video – shorter is better, videos and other platforms is the way to go. It is important to reach people to whom we usually don't talk.
- Meghan Vitale shared that with the SMTC long-range plan, Tom put together a video which is available on their website and there is also a survey. They have 100 survey responses so far. They had good luck with the Centro survey because of the raffle of Air Pods. For youth engagement for our MTP, SMTC went to two High School government classes in May – in one rural and one urban location. At the City school, they attended 5 classes there (and spent a whole day there). They heard from the students how they use the transportation system and what they want in the future. Lori Maher asked about format for the classes. Meghan stated they did a short overview of the plan, played a video, and then discussed the MTP and asked a few questions from the survey. They encouraged students to take the survey in their class. Tom noted that they wanted to walk the students through the survey so they can fill out the questions.

#### **4. MPO Public Notices Brainstorm**

This agenda item is a placeholder. Please consider sharing about what has worked, what didn't work for public notices at the next meeting.

- Lori Maher and Rossana Weitekamp wanted to brainstorm ideas for Public Meeting Notices. Lori Maher shared some examples that were designed in Canva the images can be resized for different items – for a flyer, a website, Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Rossana Weitekamp uses designs for social media. The general notices are sent via email and are not as graphically oriented.
- Stephanie Brooks asked if Canva could format emails. The issue is that the image also has to be text friendly.
- Lori Maher stated she puts a text version underneath the image. GTC has done postcards to advertise for TIP applications, but most materials are digital. Members can

post the graphics to their Facebook pages. Tara Grogan stated that DCTC uses Gov Delivery for emails and uses brand colors. The IT department preferred Gov Delivery instead of MailChimp.

- Lori Maher said GTC uses publicinput.com.
- Meghan Vitale stated that SMTC uses MailChimp, but they are not hosted by a county. They use templates for consistency across images for the same project.
- Rossana asked if the MPOs do phone outreach or social media targeting for specific groups. The group hasn't done much phone outreach or targeting on Facebook.

## **5. Other Topics**

- Training
  - Kathy Ember shared that the RFQ has been drafted for public facilitation training. This will include two (2) separate training sessions of approximately 5 to 6 hours each. The expected size of the training audience for each session is approximately 15-25 participants. One session will take place in western New York and the other session in a central or eastern location of the State. The first training session may take place as soon as October 2024.
  - Lori Maher asked if staff has done any of the Canva training. She encouraged the group participate in the training opportunities.
- Lori Maher stated that there is a Google Doc for tracking public engagement – the link can be found on the agenda.
- The group discussed that it would be great to have a shorter version of media training for this group. Rossana offered to provide a training at August meeting. The group expressed interest in the larger media training that will be at the NYSAMPO Conference in 2025.
- Emily Dozier asked how the group summarizes open ended comments. Lori Maher noted that PublicInput does summarize comments. The group discussed Word Clouds. Kathy Ember noted that SurveyMonkey will create a Word Cloud. NYMTC uses polleverywhere which creates a Word Cloud, and it can sort data. Tara Grogan may try an AI summary of the responses as they have 1,200 responses. Emily would be interested in hearing from others how the survey summary looks for open-ended comments.
- Lori Maher asked how everyone uses community based organizations for public engagement. She asked if the group had examples of success stories about how you reach out to groups. Emily Dozier stated DCTC is starting a safety action plan and they will be reaching out to equity organizations i.e., local disability rights group. Lori Maher suggested education groups like PTAs are also useful.
- Lori Maher noted that this group is available as a resource.

## **6. High Five/Share a Tip**

- Lori Maher asked if anyone has some High Fives. Meghan previously mentioned the video that SMTC worked on for their long-range plan.

## **7. Next Steps**

- The next meeting will be held on August 22<sup>nd</sup> on Zoom.
- Lori Maher encouraged the Working Group to share ideas with the group.
- Tara Grogan will send Gov Delivery examples.
- Please send survey summary examples to Emily Dozier.
- Kathy Ember will remind the group of the Google Doc link.