



Logo for the 1 Minute Matters educational video series

8. Summary, Results & Recommendations

Public engagement involves the public in giving feedback, solving problems or making decisions that affect them. The TPO staff reviews agency practices and tools to cultivate an effective and useful public engagement experience for everyone involved.

Notable Successes in Public Engagement

1. FLiP Jr.

The goal of FLiP Jr. was to engage children in communities that have historically been underrepresented in urban planning decisions, giving them the knowledge and hands-on experience that would help them serve as planning and transportation safety ambassadors in their homes and community. In 2021, the eight-week program served 60 participants across three locations in Tampa Heights, Palm River, and Town 'n' Country. The program also served an additional 20 participants during a one-hour workshop in Wimauma. Children learned various topics such as bike safety and transportation planning. The highlight of the experience was an outdoor beautification project that involved the creation of a mural. The program also received the 2021 Public Outreach and Engagement Award from the Sun Coast section of the Florida Chapter of the APA

2. Nondiscrimination and Equity Plan

To engage the public for the Nondiscrimination and Equity Plan during covid restrictions, the TPO had to reach people individually and in small groups as opposed to large groups. This led to engagement via door-to-door canvassing and focus groups. As a result, the TPO was able to hear comments from groups they wouldn't normally engage with such as working members of the public and people living in rural areas. The TPO received feedback on its public engagement strategies. Some suggestions called for more community-based public engagement and representation that better reflects communities of concern.

3. Plant City Transit Plan Study public feedback

The TPO partnered with Hillsborough Area Regional Transit (HART) and the City of Plant City to create a Transit Plan for the City of Plant City. The study team hosted public engagement events and a Travel Market Analysis to identify various public transportation alternatives.

4. Hybrid engagement

During the covid pandemic, meetings of the Board and committees were entirely virtual. These meetings then pivoted to a hybrid format with both virtual and in-person components. The TPO established clear procedures and instructions for the public regarding how to participate, maintaining multiple avenues for input, and publishing the instructions in multiple spots

5. TIP Amendment Pilot Program

The TPO greatly increased public feedback on TIP amendments with its pilot program. The program involved the creation of a social media post, newsletter article, dedicated webpage, and road sign for each amendment. Prior to the pilot, agency staff placed notice of TIP amendments in the agenda packets for the Citizen's Advisory Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, and TPO Board, which were published on the PlanHillsborough.org website and distributed to the media. Since the pilot's inception, the TPO has received 18 comments regarding four TIP amendments presented to the Board in 2021.

6. Sponsored videos in partnership with 83 Degrees, including a series explaining why roads are unsafe and what can be done to improve resilience.

Plan Hillsborough sponsored 83 Degrees to create four video stories, two of which were about transportation and featured TPO work. Plan Hillsborough also created the 1 Minute Matters video series, a collection of one-minute shorts that focused on better coordination of transportation and land use (this implements a recommendation from the 2020 report).

Recommendations

Based on this review, the TPO's Public Participation Plan has worked effectively during the 2020 - 2021 cycle. As the TPO is committed to continuous improvement and making the best use of limited resources, the following refinements are recommended:

1. Increase digital and social media tools to increase engagement

Participation through popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and NextDoor can increase opportunities for public engagement. The TPO should use these platforms to expand its reach. It should also use paid advertising for strategic social media posts more often and increase web exposure by posting special meetings in the free online calendars of the Tampa Bay Times and Creative Loafing.

2. Institutionalize the proactive outreach for TIP amendments

In 2021, the TPO tested an engagement strategy for TIP amendments that included the creation of social media posts, a newsletter article, road signs, and a dedicated webpage for each amendment. The TPO should make this strategy a formal policy within the agency while reducing the notice period to two weeks for consistency.

3. Provide more clarity about the TPO's role and responsibilities in the transportation planning process

Now that the TPO has successfully launched the 1 Minute Matters educational video series, the agency should create infographics and additional video shorts to explain the TPO's role and responsibilities. One example would be the creation of a video that explains the TIP process or funding sources for transportation projects.

4. Following successful engagement for the Nondiscrimination Plan, use focus groups more often and consider target demographics

The TPO recognizes that there are challenges in getting responses to online surveys. Although social media plays a huge role in the agency's exposure, the TPO also realizes the value of one-on-one interactions as well as small group engagement. This is evident in the engagement strategy for the Nondiscrimination Plan. Future engagement can involve more in-depth and nuanced feedback by scheduling a 60 or 90 minute zoom discussion with a small group of people who are particularly interested in a specific topic. This strategy can

provide opportunities for people from a variety of backgrounds to weigh in. How the TPO designs the groups, what each group focuses on, who is recruited to participate will become more important if the TPO uses this tool more often.

5. Build culture of awareness

During the 2021 FLiP Jr. Ambassadors Program, the TPO raised awareness in communities of concern by engaging children and families. These voices of these communities were historically absent from the planning process. The TPO should increase awareness in these communities by engaging them more often throughout the year. The TPO should also expand this effort into other communities by engaging low-income workplaces, small community groups, schools, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, and community centers. Therefore, for every planning study, when public outreach is conducted, at least one community group or faith-based organization should be recruited to help spread the word about the study and any opportunities to give input shaping the study recommendations.

