# LRSP/VZAP: Engagement Plan

The purpose of an engagement plan is to serve as a road map for community and stakeholder engagement and communications in support of the LRSP/VZAP planning process. In developing the plan for community and stakeholder engagement, jurisdictions should consider the purpose and objective of the engagement, target audiences, the nature of outreach strategies, and schedule for deployment and feedback gathering. Although not a required element of an LRSP, an engagement plan may be developed as a standalone document to help formalize and achieve consensus on the engagement approach.

Below is a short list of components that may be identified by the engagement plan:

* Engagement objectives
* Target audience(s)
* Outreach strategies
* Engagement phasing and scheduling

Detailed recommendations related to each item are provided below.

## 1. Objectives

The objectives for the engagement plan set the tone for stakeholder engagement and help determine which outreach strategies are appropriate for inclusion in the plan. Example objectives include:

* Identify community-based organizations (CBOs) and others with a stake in the development of the plan and consider establishing a formal partnership with one or more CBO(s) to support the engagement process
* Identify outreach techniques for engaging community groups and the broader public
* Ensure all stakeholders have open access to and input into the decision-making process and have timely information about the project as it moves forward
* Provide reasonable public access to technical and other information about the project
* Ensure the concerns, issues, and preferences of stakeholders are understood and reflected in the final plan document

## 2. Target Audience

Engagement should be tailored to include the wide range of LRSP/VZAP internal and external stakeholders.[[1]](#footnote-1) Each target audience has a unique constellation of needs regarding how, where, when, and with whom engagement will be conducted. Furthermore, each target audience has its own unique familiarity with different facets of plan content (e.g., engineering knowledge, political knowledge and concerns, personal experience with safety issues). Audiences should be engaged in an order that best leverages and builds upon available information and solicits feedback that supports the next phase of engagement or plan development.

The composition of advisory teams and technical stakeholder groups will vary one jurisdiction to the next, but may include representatives of the following groups:

* Local Transportation Departments (planners, engineers, maintenance)
* Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) / Rural Planning Organization
* Federal Highway Administration Division Office
* Bureau of Indian Affairs
* Local Law Enforcement (Police Department, County Sheriff’s Department)
* Local or Regional Emergency Management Agency
* Local Public Health Department/Injury Prevention Agencies
* Hospitals
* Fire Department
* School District (facilities and/or transportation)
* Transit Operators
* Railroad Operators
* Elected Officials
* Local Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Agency

Example target audiences for public engagement include:

* People who use active transportation (i.e., walking, biking, rolling, mobility devices, etc.) as a frequent mode of transportation
* People who are interested in walking or biking but perceive barriers
* Households with no/low access to motor vehicles
* Residents of Communities of Concern and other disadvantaged populations
* Youth/children (students)
* Seniors (residents over 65 years of age)
* People who take public transportation

## 3. Outreach Strategies

There are numerous ways to engage stakeholders and the broader community in plan development and solicit feedback. Approaches may include:

* Establishing an Advisory Team comprised of City/County staff to provide technical feedback on different phases of project development. This group can provide crucial insights into the mechanisms behind existing conditions and the feasibility of recommended safety interventions and implementation strategies.
* Partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs) and neighborhood or district groups to receive input and feedback via small group meetings. CBOs can serve as trusted liaisons between city/county staff and consultants the general public who create a comfortable and familiar small-group context in which community members feel comfortable asking questions and sharing feedback.
* Community workshops and public forums. Large workshops and forums (virtual or in-person) provide opportunities to share information with the public, get the word out about draft plans, and advertise upcoming engagement opportunities. In-person workshops provide opportunities to gather nuanced insights from the public via hands-on idea-generating activities (e.g., mapping and sketching).
* Online outreach via a project website and surveys. This medium provides the opportunity to engage individuals who cannot attend in-person or timed events. It is important to be aware of language barriers (i.e., provide the website in commonly spoken languages) and acknowledge who cannot access this medium based on digital divides in the community.
* Tabling activities near key community services and gathering spaces. This strategy can help reach individuals not otherwise reached by mailers, digital notices, social media, and other traditional means of government communication. This strategy can be used to directly share information about a plan and solicit feedback or direct individuals to engage via one of the other available activities mentioned above.

Ultimately, engagement best serves the project when it is designed to meet all unique stakeholder groups where they are and provide flexibility in how people engage with and provide feedback on project materials.

Resources which may help determine the best strategies to employ include the following:

* [**NACTO Public Engagement that Counts [Webinar]**](https://nacto.org/event/nacto-webinar-public-engagement-counts/) – Publicly available webinar exploring strategies for creating community engagement processes that allow for open conversation and dialogue, avoiding pointed debate and frustration.
* [**Smart Growth America Improving Public Engagement**](file:///\\Fpok03.fpainc.local\Data\Projects\2021\OK21-0422.00_MTC_VMT_Reduction_Planning\Deliverables\Task%202%20-%20Toolkit\Draft\•%09https:\smartgrowthamerica.org\wp-content\uploads\2019\03\Improving-public-engagement_FINAL.pdf) – A resource discussing the merits of community engagement and strategies for cultivating robust outreach that generates valuable input.

## 4. Engagement Phasing & Scheduling

The most successful engagement plans are designed to facilitate iterative improvement of the plan via knowledge sharing and receipt of feedback. Though each project has its unique engagement needs and capacities, outreach can generally be structure to align with these project phases:

* Phase 1: Existing Conditions & Vision/Goal Setting
* Phase 2: Proposed Infrastructure Improvements & Priority Projects
* Phase 3: Draft Plan Review & Adoption

The following is a proposed outreach schedule, which shows how engagement events can be scheduled to complement one another, gather important layers of feedback, and support plan development.

Table 1. Example Outreach Schedule

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Study Phase | Outreach Strategy | Target Audience | Communication Goals | Date(s) |
| Entire Project | Project Website | General public | * Introduce project and maintain a public record of plan content * Promote engagement activities * Gather contact information |  |
| Opportunistic Advertising & Engagement Events  (e.g., community pop-ups, neighborhood council meetings) | General public | * Leverage existing community events to advertise the plan and website, and share plan content with, and gather feedback from, other segments of the public |  |
| Phase 1 –  Existing Conditions Review & Listening Sessions | Project Website & Interactive Map | General public | * Present findings virtually * Advertise upcoming engagement opportunities * Collect location-specific information on transportation issues and needs |  |
| Advisory Team Meeting #1 | Technical stakeholder group | * Familiarize participants with the plan structure * Confirm existing plans and policies to include in analysis * Develop a clear vision and set of goals for the plan |  |
| Advisory Team Meeting #2 | Technical stakeholder group | * Present preliminary existing conditions findings * Gain feedback and insights from technical staff on transportation issues and needs prior to community workshop |  |
| Community Workshop #1 | General public & stakeholder groups | * Present existing conditions findings * Gain feedback and insights from the public on transportation issues and needs |  |
| Phase 2 – Recommendations and Draft Plan | Project Website & Interactive Map | General Public | * Present findings virtually * Advertise upcoming engagement opportunities * Collect location-specific feedback on project recommendations |  |
| Advisory Team Meeting #3 | Technical stakeholder group | * Present preliminary project recommendations * Gain feedback and insights from technical staff on projects prior to community workshop |  |
| Community Workshop #2 | General public & stakeholder groups | * Present project recommendations * Gain feedback and insights from the public on recommended projects |  |
| Phase 3 –  Final Plan Adoption | City Council Meeting | Councilmembers & general public | * Present final plan * Receive and respond to councilmember feedback |  |

1. The Federal Highway Administration provides helpful guidance on potential stakeholders to engage and include at different levels of LRSP development, depending upon a jurisdiction’s unique context and internal capacity for plan support: acc: https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/LRSPDIY/potential.cfm. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)