



Challenging Stakeholder Situations

Transportation Planning & Programming
(TPP) Public Involvement Section
Jan. 25, 2023





PI Seminars will provide:

- Bite-sized learning and reminders of key fundamentals
- Quick takeaways
- Interactive discussions to encourage cross-sharing opportunities
- New ideas and techniques shared through group participation
- Resources to learn more

This seminar focuses on the following stakeholder fundamentals:



How to approach stakeholders and handle challenging stakeholder situations.

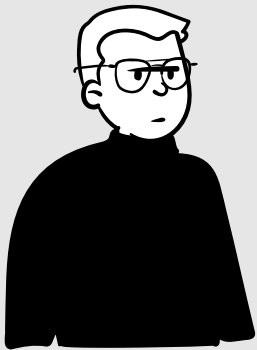


- What is a stakeholder and how to identify issues
- Strategies for challenging stakeholder situations
 - How and when to respond
 - How to reduce outrage
 - Additional considerations
- “What if” scenarios
- Summary
- Open discussion/Q&A





- Identify Stakeholders
 - Make note of the ones that you might consider challenging
 - Identify those most often overlooked (be inclusive)
- Categorize and prioritize them
 - those directly affected
 - those invested the most in the project
- What are the issues?
 - Interests or concerns of stakeholders
 - Expectations of stakeholders
 - Impacts on stakeholders





- Look for something you might agree on; state that and start there.
- Confirm how the person feels. If he or she seems upset:
 - Understand the details. What are the issues, problems and/or concerns?
 - Acknowledge the concern and confirm what the speaker is saying by repeating what you heard
 - Listen carefully to understand the reason for the anxiety
 - Explore possible alternative agendas (be tactful here)
 - Ask the person what they propose the next step might be





Most importantly: Listen more, talk less – and don't jump straight to solutions.



Additional Tips

- Tactfully correct inaccuracies
- Acknowledge their comments
- Ask PI section to develop an online FAQ or follow up email for key stakeholders
- Follow up to build relationships and offer more assistance

“Let me clarify.”

“I’ve heard that concern from others, and [state the accurate information].”

“I’m glad you mentioned that. It may be helpful to know that...”



- Commit to ground rules together; commit to the decision-making process upfront
- Recognize when you're stuck in the C.A.V.E. (Citizens Against Virtually Everything)
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Understand and use the power of questioning



Interest or Position?

Comment 1:

"I want to use the bridge like we used to when we were kids. We used to love jumping off that little bridge when we were younger."

Comment 2:

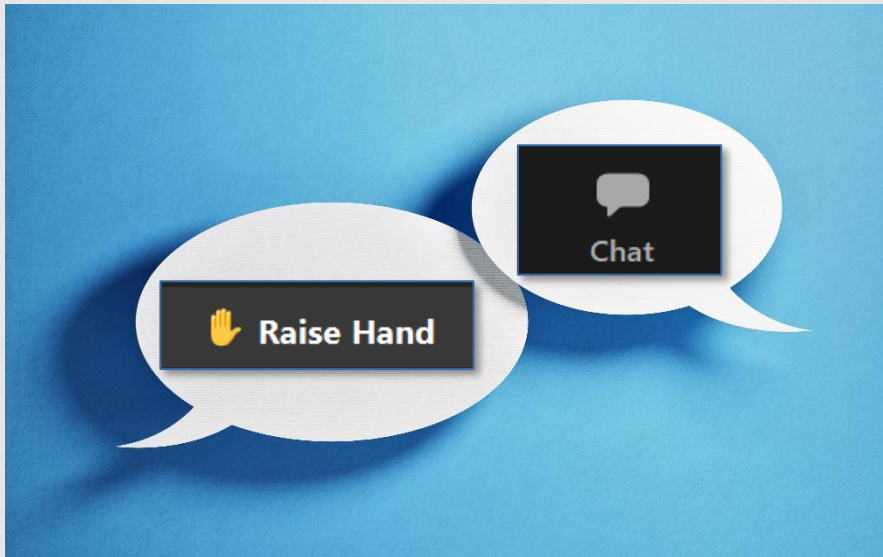
"Stop building the road or we are going to sue!"

The “What if’s:” How can this be handled?



Let’s review some of the more common “what if” situations:

- Member of the public that was part of early stakeholder meeting is now talking to the media and/or getting other stakeholders riled up
- Negative news stories or mistruths reported
- Others?





Managing Your Emotions

- Anger causes an adrenaline rush
- Anger is either released or stored (muscle tightening/tension)
- If angry, try the following:
 - Listen and say nothing for the moment
 - Take three deep, very slow breaths
 - Ask yourself what you are picking up from the communication
 - Identify commonalities and try to agree on possible next steps



Adapted from Southern Rural Development Center, Public Conflict Resolution, www.srdc.msstate.edu/trainings/educurricula/lemons/unit3.pdf



Plan ahead to anticipate and avoid problems.

- Difficult stakeholders are those stakeholders who could disrupt or even bring an end to a project unless you manage them carefully.
- Some stakeholders may be frustrated at the progress of the project or may not seem to be very engaged in the work.
- With a strategic approach and some advance planning, you can help provide for civil discussion and debate on contentious matters.





- Questions?
- Stay tuned for next seminar: *early 2023*
- Reference the stakeholder checklist takeaway
- We'd love to get your feedback about this seminar – what can improve and please suggest future topics:



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/piseminar2>

PI Seminar - Challenging Stakeholder Situations

Strategies for Reducing Outrage

- **State Out the Mission, Not the Solution** - Involve all sides of the alignment, communication and views in your communication
- **Acknowledge Current Problems** - go beyond mere honesty to transparency
- **Acknowledge Prior Stakeholder (and Maligned) - you can build accountability yourself and deal with an existing**
- **Discuss Achievement with Humility** - articulate success of projects based on public input
- **Share Control and Be Accountable** - look for ways to put control elsewhere and if you cannot share control, build in accountability
- **Pay Attention to Unvoiced Concerns and Unlabeled Mitigations** - bring concerns to the surface early

Strategies for Response

- Look for something you might agree on, state it and start from there.
- Confirm how the person feels, if he or she seems upset.
- understand the details
- acknowledge the concern
- listen carefully to understand
- explore possible alternative agencies
- ask the person what they propose as next steps

Additional Tips for an Effective Response

- correct inaccuracies
- acknowledge concerns
- develop an FAQ or follow up email
- build relationships and offer assistance

Plan to Anticipate and Avoid Problems.
Ask yourself:

- What could be done to prevent the situation?
- What could be done during the moment?
- What is it about the project or situation that might trigger resistance?

Managing Your Emotions
If angry, try the following:

- Take one step back (or two) for the moment.
- Take time deep, very slow breaths.
- Ask yourself what you are picking up from the communication
- clarify communication and try to agree on possible next steps.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) commits to purposefully involve the public in planning and project implementation by providing for early, continuous, transparent and effective access to information and decision-making processes. TxDOT will regularly update public involvement methods to include best practices in public involvement and incorporate a range of strategies to encourage (and) participation reflective of the needs of the entire population. As required by the Texas Transportation Development Act January 27, 2011.

Public Involvement Section

• PublicInvolvement@txdot.gov

• <http://www.txdot.gov/transportation/development/public-involvement.html>