



Identifying Public Outreach Responsibilities for Local Public Agency Projects

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses responsibility for planning and implementing public involvement and outreach efforts for projects administered by the Arizona Department of Transportation for local public agencies during the design and construction phases of the project. The processes and guidelines outlined in this paper were developed by the ADOT Communications' Office of Community Relations, the Local Public Agency section, Multimodal Planning, Project Management and Environmental Planning.

II. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this paper, the following definitions apply:

- **Local Public Agencies (LPA)** are counties, towns, cities and tribal governments in Arizona.
- **Project** refers to the development and construction phases that occur after necessary and applicable environmental studies (such as an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement) have been completed with a Finding of No Significant Impact or a Record of Decision that affirms the Recommended Build Alternative, respectively.
- **Public Outreach** refers to efforts to gather public input, create awareness and/or share information with the public, key stakeholders and highway users. It may include public involvement activities, public relations or public information efforts. Public outreach will vary based on the size, scope and location of the project; the project phase; the local political climate; community demographics and dynamics; and other factors.
- **ADOT-Administered** refers to projects that are funded by the Federal Highway Administration and occur within the LPA's jurisdiction, but ADOT staff administers and manages the contract from start to finish, e.g., from project development through construction administration and through contract closeout.
- **Certification Acceptance Agencies (CA)** are LPAs that are authorized to manage most aspects of the project development process independently in alignment with all applicable agency, state, federal, and tribal laws and construction regulations, and requirements. Currently the State of Arizona has eight CA-approved agencies: the cities of Chandler, Mesa, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe and Tucson and Maricopa County and Pima County.

III. BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been uncertainty about which agency (ADOT or an LPA) should oversee and implement public outreach for ADOT-administered LPA projects. The issue has been more predominant in rural communities. It is also most prevalent during the construction phase, often because of the length of time - ranging from several months to several years - that can lapse between project development and award of the construction contract.

ADOT's unofficial position has been that a LPA should manage outreach because ADOT has limited communications/community relations resources; the LPA knows its own community and its stakeholders the best; and the project "belongs" to the LPA and is not on the state highway system. Conversely, some LPAs have stated they also lack sufficient communications/community relations resources, and consider public outreach to be part of administering the contract.

IV. REMEDY

The ADOT Office of Community Relations will manage public outreach for LPA projects with the following exceptions:

1. Highway User Revenue Fund (HURF) HURF-funded projects (via HURF exchange) as these projects are not administered by ADOT;
2. CA projects
3. Non-CA Local governments that have ample resources to provide public outreach for the project.

Accordingly:

Public outreach, and related costs, for HURF-funded and CA projects are the responsibility of the LPA/CA. In some pre-determined instances, a larger LPA with resources that exceed ADOT's will be responsible for public outreach.

Per Federal Highway Administration regulations, public outreach must be completed in compliance with ADOT's FHWA-mandated Public Involvement Plan (PIP). The ADOT Office of Community Relations is available to provide guidance on how to develop and implement public outreach activities in alignment with the ADOT PIP. The ADOT Civil Rights Office manages compliance with the ADOT PIP.

I. *Identifying Projects that are not HURF funded or CA*

The ADOT LPA Section will provide a list of *non-HURF funded or CA projects* to ADOT Communications, Office of Community Relations. The ADOT Office of Community Relations will coordinate with the ADOT project team and communicate with appropriate staff at the LPA about public outreach efforts.

II. *LPA First Right of Refusal:*

ADOT understands that some LPAs, regardless of CA status and resources, might wish to plan and implement public outreach efforts. The Project Manager, in coordination with the ADOT Office of Community Relations, will give LPAs the first right of refusal to plan and implement public outreach efforts. In doing so, the LPA would incur all related costs. The ADOT Project Manager will document this information in the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). Per Federal Highway Administration regulations, public outreach must be completed in compliance with ADOT's FHWA-mandated Public Involvement Plan (PIP). The ADOT Office of Community Relations is available to provide guidance on how to develop and implement public outreach activities in alignment with the ADOT PIP. The ADOT Civil Rights Office manages compliance with the ADOT PIP.

III. *ADOT Office of Community Relations Support:*

When the ADOT Office of Community Relations plans and manages public outreach for LPA projects, any or all of the following services will be provided with costs incurred by ADOT:

- Develop a communication plan in alignment with the ADOT PIP
- Establish and maintain a project webpage on azdot.gov
- Attend project meetings
- Issue email alerts with updates or alerts to key stakeholders via the ADOT GovDelivery system
- In cooperation with ADOT Government Relations, provide information and briefings to local elected officials and/or community groups, as needed or requested
- Respond to questions or comments via the ADOT Bilingual Project Information Line, email, mail or online
- In cooperation with the ADOT Office of Public Information, coordinate news and/or social media support when appropriate and feasible
- Create and distribute project fliers as needed so key stakeholders and the public know how to stay informed

IV. *Additional Public Outreach:*

Public outreach efforts that extend beyond the scope of what the ADOT Office of Community Relations can provide, and costs thereof, will be the responsibility of the LPA. This will also be documented in the IGA. As previously noted, compliance with the ADOT PIP is required.

ADOT CONTACTS

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RESOURCES

Find the ADOT Public Involvement Plan at azdot.gov/planning/transportation-planning (Click on [Public Involvement Plan](#)) or email KNoetzel@azdot.gov to request a copy.

Visit the LPA Section webpage at azdot.gov/business/programs-and-partnerships/local-public-agency.