

Underlying and driving the ability to include older adults and individuals with disabilities in transportation planning, is the concept of civic engagement. Civic engagement is defined in a general sense as “the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future.” (Adler & Goggin, 2005). While civic engagement strategies may vary based on the community or target audience, the following are key principles for civic engagement can be applied in every setting. Each principle is followed by guidance on applying the principle specifically to civic engagement transit planning.

PRINCIPLE 1: Develop an institutional vision for civic engagement

An agreed upon vision of what meaningful civic engagement entails should be communicated to all throughout the organization. Also, assess the capacity to implement the vision for effective civic engagement considering resources available.

Transit Planning Key Tips:

- Be inclusive and transparent throughout the transit planning process. Determine each person’s role in the journey to better civic engagement.
- The more outreach to citizens, the greater the capacity should be for meaningful opportunities for engagement. The strong partnerships developed in planning will allow for greater reach and resources in transportation planning.
- Transit plans should adapt to reflect community input. The product should change and grow based on what residents and stakeholders share at meetings.

PRINCIPLE 2: Create a framework for the civic engagement process that includes the implementation of a variety of strategies that lead to input from community stakeholders

The civic engagement framework should include a clear vision and agenda for inclusive transit initiatives, a plan to develop mutually-beneficial partnerships with community stakeholders, defined objectives for engagement initiatives, and a connection of transit planning efforts to broader civic engagement community initiatives.

Transit Planning Key Tips:

- It is important to engage community leaders from the very beginning so their values and ideas can be incorporated into the entire process.
- One-on-one face time between staff and community leaders is essential to making great engagement work.
- Organizations should develop a community engagement plan that reflects the inclusive transit values of the group and has specific tools for engaging hard-to-reach populations.

Transit Planning 4 All is an inclusive and coordinated transportation-planning project that has funded a series of pilot projects across the nation, each seeking to increase inclusion in transportation planning and services for people with disabilities and older adults.

The project is a partnership of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston, and DJB Evaluation Consulting Group.

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PRINCIPLE 3: Build a diverse leadership team of stakeholders in the community to encourage active participation and help guide civic engagement efforts

Establishing an infrastructure for engagement that meets the diverse needs of community members is key to encourage active participation. Facilitating collaboration amongst civic engagement leaders is key to maintaining momentum as initiatives evolve.

Transit Planning Key Tips:

- Develop a solid agenda for each meeting and have an experienced facilitator keep the group on task. Meetings with a clear goal and discussion questions will be the most productive.
- Strive for a committee or active group that adequately represents the community.
- Ensure strong communication throughout the group and remind people about meetings and opportunities for engagement.

PRINCIPLE 4: Incorporate civic outreach and engagement tools to highlight key issues and celebrate accomplishments.

Develop a comprehensive communication plan that defines the messaging of your project's transit planning efforts. Research the outlets and language that best reaches your target audiences. Utilize marketing outlets to highlight the completion of short-term and long-term goals, and to continuously identify the range of issues to be addressed through engaging with the community-at-large.

Transit Planning Key Tips:

- Committee leaders should be fully informed on inclusive transit efforts so they can become spokespersons for the project to their peers.
- Outreach and engagement tools should disseminate information to places where citizens are most likely to visit.
- Be creative with the marketing and outreach engagement activities. Engagement tools and activities should make citizens feel part of the process and feel joint-ownership of the impact and outcomes of transit planning.
- Be clear about the process and ensure residents understand what comes next. Layer information gathered at each engagement activity into the following activity to show progress, but with a new series of questions to establish future direction.

PRINCIPLE 5: Implement measures of success by continuously evaluating and improving civic engagement efforts

Establish mechanisms for feedback for to ensure your initiatives meet the interests and needs of the population you serve. Review the input received, and utilize it to guide continuous improvement in your transit planning efforts.

Transit Planning Key Tips:

- Rely on multiple means of communication for outreach and feedback (social and traditional media).
- Conduct evaluations of engagement by participants on a regular basis. Transit Planning 4 All's Pathway to Inclusion is recommended as a scale for evaluation.
- One-on-one engagement and site visits are essential to understanding community issues and persuading critics. While keeping track of these communications can be challenging, it is essential to record key ideas, concerns and questions raised from community members.

References

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