



**APPENDIX J:  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT  
FOR TRAILS PLANNING**



## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The following presents some decision support tools involving the public in the process as the County continues to plan and develop regional trails.

### **INVOLVING THE PUBLIC**

As specific segments of the trail are further planned, designed and developed, members of the community and specifically those potentially impacted by the trails development will need to be involved in the process. An effective public outreach strategy relies on strong organization, good preparation and consistent follow-through. The following presents an overall framework for developing a targeted and effective public involvement approach that will engage the public and key stakeholders in a meaningful participatory dialogue.

There are three main steps in an effective public outreach strategy: goal setting, audience identification, and strategy development. Step One: Goal Setting – identifies the goal of the outreach effort. Step Two: Audience Identification – identifies who will be the focus of the outreach effort. Steps one and two assist in determining the specific outreach activities and schedule, and inform Step Three: Strategy Development. This section outlines some specific considerations for the implementation of a public outreach effort in Pierce County, and for the various scales of potential trail projects and planning efforts.

#### *Step 1: Goal Setting*

What is being accomplished with the outreach effort? Is the objective to engage a broad range of people in establishing a new trail, or to just keep local residents informed of ongoing projects near their community? Time should be taken to clearly establish the specific goals of the outreach effort. This will help target the audience and ensure that outreach process is efficient and effective.

A goal or goals should include specific tangible end-results as well as more intangible “community-building” aspects. For example, two goals might be established for the outreach effort; one that includes a community empowerment and education component as well as the establishment of a new trail alignment. The goals in this case could be to “develop a public involvement process that educates the community about County trail planning efforts” and “gather specific input to determine the optimal trail alignment.” Goals should guide the development of the outreach strategy. The first goal noted points to a need for creating educational materials for the public. The second goal

suggests a need for one or more community events discussing trail alignment alternatives.

*What is the scale of the effort?*

The goal-setting process should include a discussion of the scale of the effort needed. The scale of the effort will have considerable implications regarding the types of outreach events and activities used. Large scale efforts will require more “expansive” or far-ranging goals that allow the County to pursue a more comprehensive outreach strategy. Smaller, more targeted efforts should have goals that allow the County to work towards more in-depth local-based efforts.

Projects impacting a large number of people, or that are particularly controversial, will require significant investments of time and resources to conduct a meaningful public outreach effort. There is a natural tendency to minimize costs for projects, and outreach components are often a place where savings can be realized. However, cutting outreach costs can lead to unintended consequences (and much higher costs) if the outreach effort does not accurately reflect the scale necessary to uncover hidden issues and effectively engage the public. Ultimately, good outreach is a cost savings measure, when done right. It helps public agencies identify innovative new ideas, keeps projects from being bogged down on controversial issues, and ultimately leads to better projects and more efficient implementation.

*What type of input is needed?*

Public outreach can result in a variety of types of public input. Specific technical information on issues such as alignments, trailheads, access points, etc. can be gathered. Alternatively, more qualitative input on user experiences can be collected. With the wide range of potential input, it is critical to ask what input is specifically needed to ensure that the overall planning effort is successful. This consideration should be built into the goal-setting step and should directly influence the types of outreach activities that will be conducted and the informational materials produced.

*Step 2: Audience Identification*

Once the goals of the outreach effort are determined, the target audience can be identified. Care should be taken to identify organized stakeholder groups, such as the businesses or various leagues and clubs that have an interest in the trails project. Identifying the appropriate audience involves the determining the geographic reach of the project and the corresponding audience. Factoring in the scale of

outreach and audience will guide the outreach effort to reach the desired audience.

Table 7.16: Sample Goal Setting Matrix

Possible Goals	Scale	Input Needed	Audience
Collect input from a wide range of stakeholders and the public to a) set project priorities; b) collect specific technical information based on local expertise; and c) raise awareness and support for the effort.	Large scale, multiple year effort	Need input to set vision and goals for the development of a high profile waterfront trail, as well as specific technical input to guide project implementation.	Multiple constituencies across the County
Ensure the public and local elected officials support the planned trail segment.	Medium scale, locally focused effort	Need community input and buy-off on a segment of a proposed trail.	City of Buckley
Provide an opportunity for local residents to state their needs and determine the best possible alternatives for plan implementation.	Small scale, neighborhood focus	Input on the formation of a public safety plan for a segment of trail running near a neighborhood.	Neighborhood located along a section of trail

### Step 3: Strategy Development

Most public involvement strategies fall into a three-phase structure: visioning and analysis, concept development, and review and approval. During Phase I: Visioning & Analysis, the focus is on gathering input from the public on key issues facing the project and analyzing the findings. In Phase II: Planning, Design & Development, staff or consultants work with the public to develop and refine potential concepts or alternative for the project for consideration by policy makers, technical experts, and the community. Phase III: Review & Approval, includes choosing the best option for the planning effort and moving forward toward approval and adoption.

Implementation of the Regional Trails Plan may involve an addition to an existing trail, the development of a proposed trail or planning for a new trail opportunity. Regardless of the project or planning phase, there are public involvement tools and strategies applicable to multiple project phases. The following describes each of the public involvement phases, and describes potential methods for scaling the activities in each phase to meet the goals and properly target the desired audience for the project. Figure J-1: Public Involvement Template visually depicts a basic public involvement framework with the corresponding public involvement activities.

### *Phase 1: Vision, Issues & Opportunities*

The purpose of the first phase is to introduce the project to the public and key stakeholders, and gather information on their vision and goals for the project and incorporate the public's input into the analysis of the project. This phase is essential to setting the foundation for the planning effort and sets the tone for the remaining project. This phase applies to new planning efforts or trail projects and may not be needed for projects that have undergone a planning and public outreach effort.

#### **Items for Consideration**

- Go where the people are and take advantage of existing popular events, rather than hoping for attendance at a scheduled planning meeting. Intercepting the public at events should include an education component (maps, displays, handouts, etc.) as well as an information gathering component (questionnaires, comment cards, posters to mark up, etc.).
- Hold focus groups that bring together engaged members of the community, the general public, as well as partner organizations and agencies to discuss specific topics regarding the project.
- Include a link to the web address for ongoing project information on all public information materials, including agendas, comment cards, and hand outs. All meeting materials, including handouts, agendas, meeting summaries etc. should be posted to the project website regularly.

#### **Adapting the Template to the Project**

- Scale efforts according to the needs of the project. Small projects with engaged and motivated user groups or community organizations make good candidates for using focus groups and stakeholder interviews in lieu of large scale public workshops and a steering committee.
- Provide a robust outreach effort, such as a strong web presence, public service announcements, mailings and flyers, for dispersed communities in rural areas, or in areas that tend to be less engaged.

### *Phase 2: Planning, Design & Development*

The second phase functions as an opportunity to engage the public in making the project better. This phase provides opportunities for input

Figure J-1: Public Involvement Template



on project alternatives and options. An honest accounting of the constraints and possibilities during this phase makes for a stronger final product.

### **Items for Consideration**

- Hold a public workshop that requires extensive planning and preparation is a central focus for this phase. The workshop should be scheduled when people are most able to attend (weekday evenings or weekends). Consider holding companion workshops at different times and in different locations to ensure a broad cross-section of participants. The workshop should include a detailed discussion of the possible alternatives or concepts, cross-sections and drawings of the concept or design, a discussion or description of how they were developed, as well as scheduling an extended period of time for discussion and feedback from the group.
- Supplement the workshop with focus groups that may provide in depth discussion and feedback of the scale of the project requires a broad base of public feedback. A broader cross-section of the public could provide feedback online through a questionnaire or votes regarding the concepts and/or alternatives to supplement the focus groups and workshop.

### **Adapting the Template to the Project**

- Post the alternatives/concepts online for smaller scale projects and ask people to vote or comment on them instead of holding a full scale workshop. If a workshop is not held, it is especially critical to get buy-in from elected/appointed officials and vet the concepts or alternatives with the appropriate boards and commissions.

### *Phase Three: Review & Approval*

The final phase of the outreach effort is focused on gathering input on the final designs or concept and ensuring that the public is educated about the decision.

### **Items for Consideration**

- Document the public outreach effort. A good public involvement effort influences the planning and design effort, demonstrates to the public that their input has been heard. Project materials, including the final concept and plan decisions should include an extensive discussion of the issues raised during the public involvement effort, and how these issues were considered and addressed.

- Hold a public open house for a large scale planning effort and provide an opportunity to gather input on the final plan or concept. Celebrate the hard work of the effort, and thank the public for their time and dedication.

**Adapting the Template to the Project**

- Consider taking advantage of an existing event, such as a local community fair or a school activity for smaller scale planning or projects. These events may offer a chance to get a few minutes on an existing agenda or provide a place for the County staff to set-up an information table.

Adapt the specific activities of public outreach strategy to the needs of the audience and the goals of the project. Smaller communities or smaller projects may not require the full range of outreach efforts outlined here. Providing multiple opportunities for the public to engage with the process, ensures that the public has a meaningful role and impact on decision making processes.

