
Public Involvement

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, NONDISCRIMINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The National Highway Institute and the National Transit Institute

Effective Practice:

- Educating practitioners regarding the importance and effectiveness of integrating public involvement into each stage of the transportation decisionmaking process.

Participants:

- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- State Departments of Transportation
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Transit Service Providers
- Consultants and Other Transportation Practitioners

Description

Ensuring the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process is a fundamental principle of environmental justice. Establishing meaningful public involvement processes is an integral means for equitably delivering benefits to all communities as well as avoiding disproportionately high and adverse effects of programs, plans and activities on low-income and minority populations. Public involvement and accomplishing environmental justice are deeply intertwined.

The National Highway Institute (NHI) and the National Transit Institute (NTI) conduct adult education training courses for transportation practitioners in the area of

public involvement. The NHI conducts a course, *Public Involvement and the Transportation Decision Making Process (Course Number 14236)*, and the NTI has its own course, *Public Involvement in Transportation Decision Making*. These two courses both touch upon specific strategies appropriate to reaching out to low-income and minority populations.

The NHI Course provides practical information to conduct public involvement processes and techniques. With the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as a backdrop—in addition to related laws, regulations and policies—classroom exercises provide participants with opportunities to design public education, public involvement, advisory and joint planning activities. In addition, there is a focus on interagency coordination and decision-making forums, as well as implementation and evaluation plans. The tools explored in the course include consensus building, conflict resolution, problem solving and process improvement.

The NTI course teaches participants the importance of public involvement in the planning and project development stages of decision making. The course addresses such issues as:

- Developing effective public involvement plans
- Using appropriate tools and techniques
- Tailoring a public involvement plan
- Including minority, low-income, and multicultural communities
- Dealing with apathy
- Resolving conflicts
- Using limited resources efficiently
- Evaluating the effectiveness of a public involvement plan

The FHWA and the FTA both run courses, seminars and/or workshops in nondiscrimination. For example, the FHWA currently runs a course, *Preventing Discrimination in the Federal-Aid Program: A Systematic Interdisciplinary Approach*. This training course emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach for the early recognition of potential adverse impacts that might be discriminatory so as to avoid these impacts and work for alternative solutions in all stages of the Federal-Aid Highway Program (e.g. planning, project development, construction and research). It also stresses the need for interdisciplinary staff to be involved in the development and implementation of Title VI plans that recipients must prepare to meet their nondiscrimination obligations.

The FHWA and the FTA have also jointly developed a course, *Fundamentals of Environmental Justice*. After the completion of this two-day course, course participants will be able to:

- Define Environmental Justice and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Explain the relationship between Environmental Justice and Title VI.
- List and explain the fundamental principles of Environmental Justice.
- Apply the principles of Environmental Justice to their work.
- Explain why the accomplishment of Environmental Justice applies to every stage of transportation decision making and identify how it improves decision making.
- Describe the benefits of Environmental Justice in transportation decision making and the opportunities for partnership among all stakeholders.



Benefits

For the Agencies:

- Adult training courses give agencies a chance to bring together agency personnel, consulting practitioners and other participants to present formal course materials and promote group discussion and reflection about subject topics.
- Courses tend to allow for “hands-on” workshops and participants are given a supportive environment to “retool”. Agencies can pursue excellence when participants understand the evolving regulatory environment, accept the emerging challenges and remain motivated to adopt state-of-the-art practices.
- Adult training courses give the interested participant greater exposure to effective tools and the “cutting edge” of their chosen profession.

For the Community:

- Participants learn the value of incorporating the public into the transportation decision-making processes using several effective techniques. Communities benefit from involvement processes that are sensitized to, and attack, barriers to participation.
- Transportation practitioners who are sensitized to the fundamentals of environmental justice, nondiscrimination, and effective public involvement will be more likely to design programs, plans and activities to reflect community values and concerns in all stages of transportation decision making.

Contacts/Resources

National Transit Institute
120 Albany Street, Suite 705
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-2163
Phone: (732) 932-1700; Fax: (732) 932-1707
Website: <http://www.ntionline.com/Index.htm>

National Highway Institute
4600 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22203 USA
Phone: 877-558-6873
Website: <http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/>