COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAYBOOK

Guide to consistent, meaningful, and equitable engagement for Nashville's transportation projects

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NDOT

APPROVED BY

DIANA ALARCON, DIRECTOR

DocuSigned by:

Diana Alarcon

CCA0040554D9401...

BRAD FREEZE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Signed by:

Brad Freeze

5C8347EA7D3E41C...

HAL BALTHROP, CHIEF ENGINEER

Signed by:

Hal Balthrop

AEA0EC4E0342484...

MARTY SEWELL, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

DocuSigned by:

Marty Sewell

F52E3E10DB524A7...

CORTNYE STONE, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, POLICY, AND LEGISLATION

Signed by:

Cortnye Stone

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Impetus

Community engagement makes sure transportation projects are equitable and include everyone. Like many other cities, Nashville has a difficult past with equitable transportation. Historically Black and Brown neighborhoods have been hurt the most, especially by highway construction. NDOT has focused on rebuilding trust and understanding what the community needs.

Value

NDOT must work with the people who use Nashville's transportation system. This ensures projects are successful, the process is valuable, and using Nashville's streets and roads is less frustrating.

Purpose

The Community Engagement Playbook is a consistent guiding framework, a living document, a pillar of the NDOT Community Engagement Plan, and the answer to local, state, and federal community engagement requirements. The Community Engagement Playbook outlines NDOT's engagement methodology for project engagement from planning to design to construction to post-construction. At every stage, NDOT commits to setting clear expectations, seeking equitable involvement, maintaining flexible engagement strategies, and evaluating results.

Framework

The Community Engagement Playbook is based on four main principles. The **Community Engagement Spectrum** shows how much the public is involved. **Engagement tiers** show how intense the engagement should be, based on the project stakes and complexity. **Community touchpoints** mark important moments for getting involved. **Evaluation** defines why we're engaging and what we want to achieve. These ideas help us choose the best engagement strategies and techniques.

Community outreach

NDOT builds relationships through our programs, events, and community outreach. Building trust with the community makes all NDOT's work better. NDOT chooses events to strengthen relationships with neighbors and neighborhoods, especially those that have historically been hurt or left out of transportation decision-making process. We seek partnerships with other public agencies and community groups. NDOT looks for events focusing on key topics like mobility, safety, health, or protecting the environment. NDOT can participate in several different ways: Sharing information, facilitating activities, setting up a table, sponsoring, or just being there. When possible, NDOT brings hands-on activities, like an open streets event, to help people understand key ideas better.

Scoping

Scopes of work for community engagement work best when they acknowledge existing and previous engagement efforts and set clear objectives for building on those efforts. The first step in setting the community engagement scope is to decide the **engagement tier** based on the **stakes** and **complexity** of the project. **Tier 1** projects are high stakes, high complexity, often extending multiple years**. Tier 2** projects are high stakes, low complexity and do not require as many resources to educate the community. **Tier 3** projects are low stakes, high complexity, primarily focusing on communication and education. **Tier 4** projects are low stakes, low complexity, just making sure people know about the project.

Project engagement

The Community Engagement Playbook outlines a clear process for community engagement at every stage of a transportation project—planning, design, and construction. Each phase builds on the last to ensure NDOT maintains trust and support with the community. This framework keeps the public informed and involved from setting engagement expectations in the planning phase to targeted outreach during design and consistent communication through construction. By working alongside the community at an appropriate scale, NDOT ensures projects are successful and reflective of the community needs.

Impetus for NDOT's Community Engagement Playbook

SUMMARY

Community engagement makes sure transportation projects are equitable and include everyone. Like many other cities, Nashville has a difficult past with equitable transportation. Historically Black and Brown neighborhoods have been hurt the most, especially by highway construction. One of NDOT's first initiatives was to fix the damage caused by Interstate 40 in North Nashville. After talking to the community for several months, the community expressed skepticism. NDOT decided to take a different approach. Instead of starting with a specific solution in mind, NDOT has focused on rebuilding trust and understanding what the community needs.

The Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure (NDOT) is often starting from behind when it comes to community engagement. Like many cities, Nashville has a fraught history with equitable transportation planning. Nashville's Black, Brown, and low-income communities bear the scars—most obviously through local and state decisions starting in the 1950s to construct and expand highways and interstates with a disproportionate impact on black and brown neighborhoods.

Transportation decisions during this time caused significant public health, public safety, socioeconomic, and cultural disparities for Black and Brown communities. The impacts are well-documented:

- Civic Design Center: *The Plan of Nashville*
- Tennessee State Library and Archives: *"Mapping the Destruction of Tennessee's African American Neighborhoods"*
- Hubert James Ford, Jr.: *Interstate 40 through North Nashville, Tennessee: A Case Study in Highway Location Decision-Making*
- Benjamin Houston: *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette And The Struggle For Social Justice In A Southern City*
- Linda T. Wynn: *"Interstate 40 and the Decimation of Jefferson Street"*
- *We Are North Nashville*

An infamous example is I-40's destruction of Jefferson Street in North Nashville. Jefferson Street was a bastion of culture for Black Nashvillians, a bustling commercial corridor with musical significance rivaling Broadway or Music Row. The final recommendation relocated I-40 from its originally planned location on Charlotte Avenue

to Jefferson Street, setting up the interstate construction to raze Black-owned homes, businesses, and churches. The massive interstate infrastructure left the neighborhood in fragments and has resulted in decades of deadly volumes of air and noise pollution for community members. The [Environmental Protection Agency has found](#) residents living in proximity to a major road leads to higher rates of asthma onset and aggravation, cardiovascular disease, impaired lung development in children, pre-term and low-birthweight infants, childhood leukemia, and premature death.

One of NDOT's first initiatives as a department was to take a step to repair the damage of I-40 to North Nashville. In 2021, the Mayor's Office and NDOT explored a major project to construct an interstate cap on Jefferson Street over I-40. There was potential funding for an interstate cap to repair the damage of I-40, but the community did not immediately embrace the announcement.

Multiple factors led to community skepticism. The project announcement came as North Nashville residents were advocating for funding for essential resources. They were feeling the pressure of displacement from gentrification. Sensing the community skepticism, NDOT took the cue to re-group with a new approach.

NDOT and Metro Planning have stepping back to conduct a transportation planning process for the Jefferson Street corridor. The focus is to ensure the outcomes of the transportation project reflect community needs. With or without an interstate cap, the work ahead is to rebuild a foundation of trust and chart a vision in collaboration with community leaders.

The ongoing work in North Nashville and Jefferson Street demonstrates the unpredictable paths of community engagement. Success doesn't mean there isn't any controversy or community pushback. Success is reacting to community skepticism appropriately and adapt engagement strategies as needed. This ensures a fair, community-supported decision-making process for transportation projects.

Value of community input for successful project delivery

SUMMARY

NDOT is committed to **Vision Zero** and **Complete Streets**. NDOT must work with the people who use Nashville's transportation system. This ensures projects are successful, the process is valuable, and using Nashville's streets is less frustrating.

Community engagement is not about following processes and checking boxes to fend off community pushback. NDOT has committed to **Vision Zero**, the campaign to eliminate serious injuries and fatalities on Nashville's roadways by 2050. **Executive Order 045, Green and Complete Streets Policy**, charges NDOT to develop a safe, connected, and equitable transportation network that promotes greater mobility for people of all ages and abilities. Achieving Vision Zero and building a safe, connected, and equitable transportation network requires NDOT to meaningfully and thoughtfully collaborate with the people who experience the effects of Nashville's transportation system every day.

Data guides decision-making. Community input is one data point. It provides a check to ensure transportation decisions reflect community needs and mitigate unintended consequences. Quantitative engineering data and best practices like crash history, traffic patterns, MUTCD, and NACTO don't tell the full story of the street. First-hand, lived experiences bring data to life. The project team's role is to accurately record community input for decision makers. Data from thoughtful and proactive engagement avoids costly backtracking on transportation improvements.

Community engagement also includes education. Education provides information on the transportation decision-making process, frameworks like Vision Zero and complete streets, and how infrastructure works. Education ensures engagement is clear, meaningful, and accessible.

How do we do community engagement?

SUMMARY

NDOT engages using transportation planning and studies, program engagement, community outreach, and transportation projects.

Community engagement has several applications at NDOT:

Transportation planning and studies such as the WalknBike Plan, Vision Zero Action Plan, Multimodal Mobility Master Plan, and Jefferson Street Corridor Study. Planning studies focus on high-level community engagement and are the starting point for project engagement.

Program engagement, **outreach, and education,** like beautification's street clean-ups or Vision Zero's safe driving outreach campaign.

Community outreach engages with community members where they are, such as office hours in public spaces, tabling at events, or community walks. Community outreach focuses on building trust with community members and connecting them with essential resources like HubNashville.

Project engagement is for active projects from planning to construction. The Community Engagement Playbook outlines NDOT's methodology for project engagement at each stage of the project.

Why do we need the community engagement playbook?

SUMMARY

> The Community Engagement Playbook is a guiding framework, a living document, a pillar of the NDOT Community Engagement Plan, and the answer to local, state, and federal community engagement requirements.

The Community Engagement Playbook combines common community engagement frameworks with staff experience to outline NDOT's community engagement strategy. It is not a recipe book. There is not a single technique or engagement package that works for every community in Nashville. The playbook is a guiding framework. Its purpose is to equip NDOT staff and consultants with a consistent approach to include the community in the transportation decision-making process. The Community Engagement Playbook is a living and public document with new and updated best practices and learnings.

The Community Engagement Playbook advances NDOT's community engagement objective of **becoming the most publicly trusted and supported department in Nashville,** with four primary focus areas:

Focus	Objective	Playbook
Equity	Establish relationships with communities traditionally left out of the engagement process.	The Community Engagement Playbook sets quantitative standards to ensure equitable involvement in NDOT engagement activities and appropriate accommodations for participation.
Trust	Be recognized as attentive, transparent, and responsive to community transportation concerns.	The Community Engagement Playbook sets department-wide standards for community engagement to ensure impacted communities have an opportunity to share their transportation before, throughout, and after projects occur.
Support	Inspire Nashvillians to embrace and	The Community Engagement Playbook recommends educational engagement to

	advocate for a safe, multimodal transportation system.	equip community members will the framework necessary to meaningful engage and support transportation projects. The playbook also recommends experiential and interactive engagement opportunities to provide value to communities in NDOT engagement.
Consistency	Present with one, unified voice to the public.	The Community Engagement Playbook ensures all NDOT staff and consultants follow the same community engagement processes and principles, so community members know what to expect.

The Community Engagement Playbook satisfies public participation requirements at the local, state, and federal level. State and federal agencies require transportation agencies to have a Public Participation Plan to ensure access to state and federal funding. A publicly accessible engagement plan demonstrates to state and federal leaders NDOT is committed to community involvement. The Community Engagement Playbook also advances community engagement actions items from the Vision Zero Action Plan, such as strategy two to **"engage people living in vulnerable areas in transportation planning."**

The Community Engagement Playbook is a guiding framework, a living document, a pillar of the NDOT Community Engagement Plan, and the answer to local, state, and federal community engagement requirements. This playbook will outline NDOT's community engagement approach.

Community engagement process

The Community Engagement Playbook outlines NDOT's approach to engagement within and outside of the project engagement process. Planning, design, and construction are the three primary phases of project development. Community outreach represents NDOT's efforts to engage with communities outside of specific projects.

PHASE 1   Community outreach

PHASE 2   Scoping

PHASE 3   Planning

PHASE 4   Design

PHASE 5   Construction

PHASE 6   Post-implementation

Community engagement commitments

At every stage, NDOT commits to setting clear expectations, seeking equitable involvement, maintaining flexible engagement strategies, and evaluating results.

Transparency	Equity	Flexibility	Evaluation
• Communicate at every community touchpoint. • Set clear expectations for community involvement.	• Engage a representative sample of the community. • Eliminate barriers to participation.	• Determine engagement strategies in consultation with the community. • Adjust engagement techniques based on community needs.	• Set quantitative outcomes for success. • Track progress, evaluate regularly, and adjust engagement strategies as needed.

Key frameworks

SUMMARY

The Community Engagement Playbook is based on four main principles. The **Community Engagement Spectrum** shows how much the public is involved. **Engagement tiers** show how intense the engagement should be, based on the project stakes and complexity. **Community touchpoints** mark milestones for community involvement. **Evaluation** defines why we're engaging and what we want to achieve. These ideas help us choose the best engagement strategies and techniques.

The Community Engagement Playbook draws from several commonly used public participation frameworks:

- **Community engagement spectrum** using International Association for Public Participation's public participation spectrum.
- **Engagement tiers** reflect ideologies and models from Steph Roy McCallum and Les Robinson.
- **Community touchpoints** build on touchpoints in Veronica Davis's *Inclusive Transportation.*
- **Evaluation** uses a standard logic model framework of inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

Community engagement spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation's community engagement spectrum defines community participation levels, agency commitment, and community power. The engagement spectrum language sets expectations for the extent of engagement.

Community engagement spectrum

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
We will keep you informed.	We will listen to your concerns.	We will reflect your input in the decision.	We will incorporate your input as much as possible.	We will implement what you decide.

NDOT'S PROMISE

→ COMMUNITY POWER

Engagement tiers

Comprehensive community engagement does not always mean **more** engagement. It means **more thoughtful** engagement. Thoughtful engagement scales to the **stakes** and **complexity** of the project.

NDOT uses a four-tiered system based on project stakes (y-axis) and complexity (x-axis) to define the engagement scale.

The first quadrant is in the upper-right hand corner, the second in the upper-left hand corner, third in the lower-right hand corer, and fourth in the lower-left hand corner. **Tier 1** is the **highest** scale of engagement while **Tier 4** is the **lowest** scale.
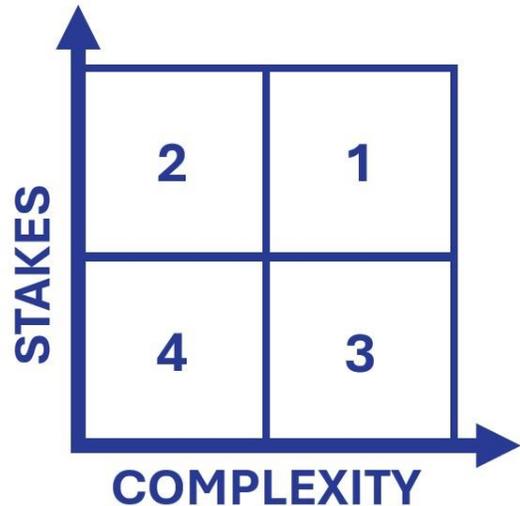
Project stakes

Project stakes anticipate controversy, dissent, and underlying community vulnerability. High stakes projects need more resources to account for more community touchpoints and more resource-intensive engagement strategies.

A high stakes project is one deeply affects community members. It may be controversial. It touches deeply on community needs and values. There may be underlying tension, like gentrification or distrust of government, which intensifies community response. Projects in [promise zones](#) are typically high stakes. Community members in these areas often have a historic of neglect and face more barriers to participation. They may be less connected to city resources, have less leisure time for participation, or require language accommodations to participate. Tap into the wisdom and experience of the NDOT professional network to contextualize the community. What we know about the past, present, and future of the community?

Examples of high stakes characteristics

- **Community socioeconomic factors**
  - Occurring in a [Promise Zone](#)
  - Impacting a community experiencing threats of displacement from rising housing costs
  - Occurring in a community with a high and/or growing unemployment rate
  - Power imbalance in the community, like a group of community members with high social capital or influence detracting from representative participation.
- **Project factors**
  - High construction impact
  - Permanent, physical change to the roadway.
  - Significant change in roadway design and operations.
  - Involves the High Injury Network
  - Impacts vulnerable users, including people who commute by walking, biking, taking transit, or using another form of micromobility.
  - High project budget
  - Access management changes for homes or businesses
  - Multiple streets and modes impacted
  - High volume roadway such as an arterial boulevard
  - Compressed project timeline
  - Impactful construction closures for vehicles, bike lanes, or sidewalks
  - Right-of-way acquisition
- **Cultural factors**
  - Project involves placemaking, public art, or other cultural components.

Examples of low stakes characteristics

- Primarily **maintains** the existing roadway.

- **Minimal construction impact** on safety, access, and mobility
- **Common sense** and **noncontroversial.**
- There is **recent, relevant,** and **representative community engagement** from previous engagement or advocacy efforts.
- Project **upgrades** or **enhances** existing elements, like raising an existing crosswalk, upgrading a traffic signal, or adding delineation to an existing bikeway.
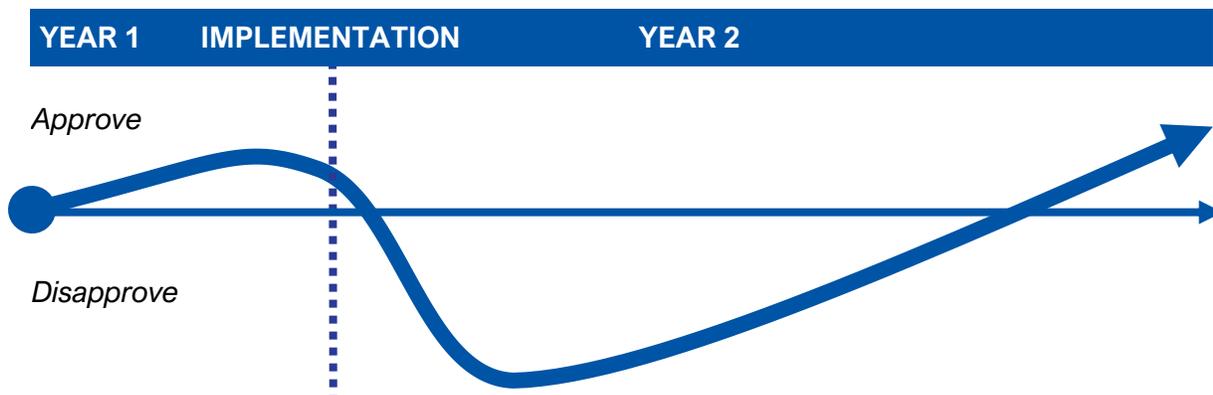
Public opinion valley

With high stakes projects, controversy is normal. NACTO data from peer cities shows public opinion tends to follow a "valley" path, with a sharp response of community concern immediately preceding & following implementation. Normalizing this trend helps prepare project teams to navigate community tension. Proactively anticipating high stakes projects prepares the project team to navigate opposition, doubling down on transparency and consistent opportunities for community involvement.

NDOT's commitment is to communicate transparently at every community touchpoint, not to withdraw when controversy strikes. Effective communication throughout project can mitigate extreme dips in public opinion.

With messaging, NACTO's report concludes **safety** is the most effective message for transportation projects. Emphasizing NDOT's commitment to Vision Zero is key for navigating tense conversations.

Navigating the public opinion valley

Public opinion valley visualized by line graph. The x-axis is the project timeline over two years. The y-axis represents public opinion from "disapprove" on the bottom to "approve" on the top. The line graph shows public opinion starting at neutral, steadily inclining, and dropping sharply to disapproval in the months before implementation. The

line graph shows a steady recovery from strong disapproval to strong approval in year two. Adapted from NACTO's "Green Light for Great Streets".

Project complexity

High complexity projects need more resources to allocate funding needed for effective education throughout the project. Project complexity considers complexity from the community's perspective. A highly complex project requires background knowledge, technical expertise, and/or other context to understand the project and share meaningful input.

Complexity also considers education for users to confidently navigate new design elements. For example, the installation of a pedestrian hybrid beacon may not be complex for the NDOT to design and install, but it is likely new and unfamiliar pedestrians. Education maximizes the efficacy of projects by encouraging roadway users to understand how to use the new roadway design.

For example, shifting or eliminating street parking to accommodate a bike lane may require notifications to drivers who typically park in the area to know where they can park after the change. Educational materials may include Vision Zero education, like using the Dutch reach to avoid "dooring" bicyclists when exiting a parked car. Installing a protected intersection may require education to prepare drivers for making slower and sharper turns and understand the safety benefits of the new design.

Examples of high complexity characteristics
- Roadway reconfiguration
- Uncommon feature in Nashville like a pedestrian hybrid beacon or bus lane
- Impactful feature like a protected intersection or concrete curb extensions
- Significant change in operation such as closing a median to left turns
- Technical and meaningful changes like traffic signal modernization

Examples of low complexity characteristics
- Common and familiar design elements, like crosswalks
- Simple and intuitive change to roadway operation

Community touchpoints

Community touchpoints represent stages of community involvement. The higher the engagement tier, the more touchpoints the project will have. Community touchpoints

invite community participation at every major decision point, a federal public participation requirement for Title VI and NEPA.

A community touchpoint represents a round of engagement, not a single meeting or activity. Each community touchpoint is unique. There is a unique agenda and new information in each touchpoint. Each touchpoint should articulate how community input from previous touchpoints has impacted the project.

High stakes projects, tier one and tier two, invite the community for each phase of the project, from high-level visioning, to exploring concepts, to selecting a final concept, to creating the design. A low stakes project is more streamlined, only requiring a community touchpoint for the final concept in the planning phase.

Touchpoint	Project phase	Decision	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Community planning	Planning	How will NDOT engage for this project?	**Required**	**Required**	Optional	Optional
Concepts	Planning	What design directions will NDOT consider?	**Required**	**Required**	Optional	Optional
Final concept	Planning	What is the design for the project?	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**
Preliminary Design	Design	How will the design impact private and public property?	**Required**	**Required**	Project dependent	Optional

Touchpoint	Project phase	Decision	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
ROW Acquisition	Design	What property acquisition is required to execute the project?	Project dependent	Project dependent	Project dependent	Project dependent
Construction Impact	Design	How will construction impact property and roadway users?	**Required**	Project dependent	**Required**	Project dependent
Construction Updates	Construction	What are the ongoing construction impacts?	**Required**	Project dependent	**Required**	Project dependent
Evaluation	Post-construction	What does NDOT need to change for next time?	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	Optional

In *Roadways for People* Lynn Peterson envisions community engagement as a circular process, testing assumptions with the community and making revisions throughout the process.
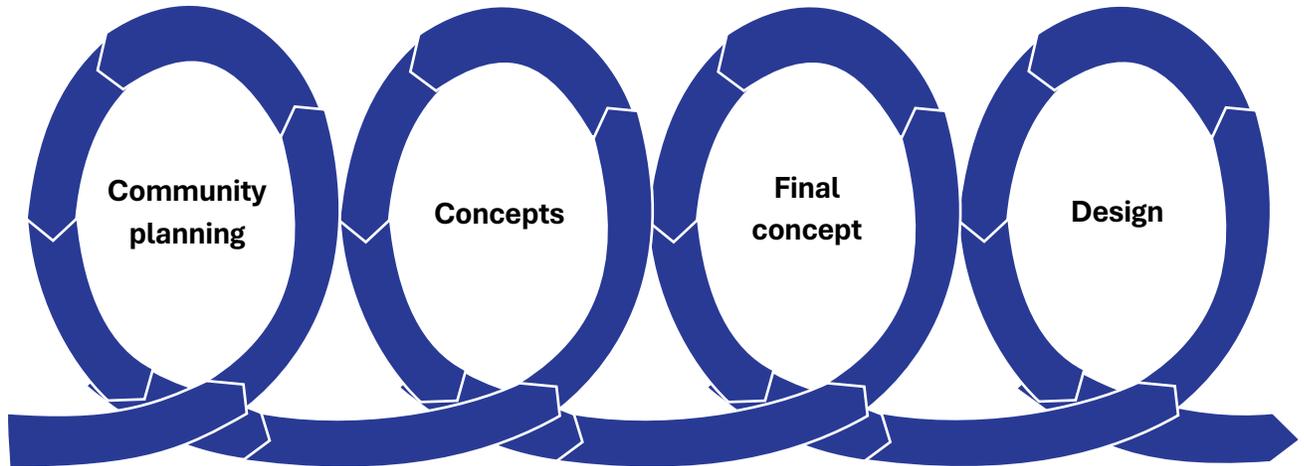
Adapted from Lynn Peterson's Roadways for People

Evaluation

Success for community engagement can be elusive. The goal is to build trust and support for a safer, more efficient, and more accessible transportation system. We won't get it perfect every time.

Evaluation ensures the team is on the same page with engagement goals. Setting clear objectives establishes intention, purpose, and thoughtfulness across the team. Evaluation shows when community engagement isn't working, cuing the project team to pivot to different engagement strategies and approaches. Reflecting on engagement practices that miss the mark builds NDOT's knowledge base of community engagement best practices in Nashville neighborhoods.

When setting engagement goals, we start with **outcomes.** Outcomes **what we want** from the engagement process. **Outputs** are **how we do community engagement**, adapting to the community's needs throughout the process. **Inputs** define what we need for engagement, including funding and staff time.

Example community engagement logic model

Outcome	Output	Input
What do we want from community engagement?	How will we get what we need from community engagement?	What do we need to get what we want from community engagement?

Target results	Strategies and techniques	Resources committed
• **Trust:** Build trust and support with community members and organizations. • **Education:** Foster community understanding of Vision Zero and complete streets principles and techniques. • **Equity:** Achieve fully representative input from people representing vulnerable populations. • **Impact:** Show community impact on final design concept.	• Engagement activities, events, or meetings such as: • Presentation at community meeting • Recorded video with virtual activity • Design charette • Transportation resource fair • Open house • Pop-up table • Canvassing • See Appendix B of US DOT's [Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement](#) for more examples.	• **Funding** for project engagement • **Staff time** for project engagement • **Resources** for targeting outreach to vulnerable populations

KPIs for example community engagement logic model

- **Trust:** # of participants who report more trust and support in NDOT because of project engagement.
- **Education:** # of participants who report better understanding of Vision Zero and complete streets principles and techniques after participating in project engagement.
- **Equity:** % confidence level and % margin of error for community representation

- **#** of community engagement activities
- **#** of community input data points
- **#** of community input data points from community members representing vulnerable communities
- **#** of participants in community engagement activities
- **#** of community partnerships with organizations

- **$** committed to community engagement for project.
- **$** committed to engaging with people representing vulnerable populations.
- **%** of project budget committed to community engagement.
- **Hours** committed to community engagement for project.
- **Hours** committed to engaging with people representing vulnerable populations.

- **Impact:** Community input reflected in project design.

representing vulnerable populations

- **Weeks** or **months** of time open for community input

Example community engagement outcomes by project phase

Outreach	**Build a foundation of trust and support** with community members and organizations. **Build knowledge base** of Nashville communities. **Educate and inform** community members on NDOT priorities and programs. **Empower community members** to improve safety, mobility, and placemaking in their community.
Planning	**Inform impacted communities** of project. **Achieve statistically representative participation** from impacted communities. **Reflect community input** in final concept. **Build community support** for project.
Design	**Fulfill community commitments** from the planning phase. **Inform community of any deviations or changes** from commitments from the planning phase. **Engage with all impacted** property owners. **Communicate expected construction impacts** widely to community stakeholders.
Construction	**Communicate construction impacts** to communities and road users.
Post-construction	**Educate community and road users** on changes to roadway design.

Evaluating community representation

Evaluation ensures NDOT fulfills its commitment to a fully representative engagement process. Consider defining the benchmarks for a statistically representative engagement process, especially for tier one and tier two projects. SurveyMonkey's sample size calculator is a helpful tool to determine the number of community

touchpoints necessary to achieve a minimum standard of 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

Be sure to name who you need to represent in the engagement process. The Greater Nashville Regional Council's "vulnerable populations" approach helps define groups of people we hear from less often.

1. Households in Poverty
2. Total Minority Population
3. Limited English-Speaking Households
4. Senior Population
5. Youth Population
6. Female Population
7. Disabled Population
8. Unemployed Workers
9. Carless Households
10. Renters
11. Housing Cost Burden
12. Active Transportation Commuters
13. Less than High School Education

While quantifying equitable engagement is ideal, collecting sensitive demographic data is not always appropriate. The project team may report equitable outreach strategies instead. For example, the project team may report tabling at an Urban Housing Solutions event, canvassing MDHA residents, or holding a focus group with students or seniors, noting the demographics represented by these groups.

For a broader, community-wide target, consider the total number of participants necessary to achieve statistically significance. For population size, consider the total target population for engagement. Census.gov's data on total residents living in census tract(s) within the project limits is likely the most feasible way to set the target audience size. There are other potential populations that could be calculated, each has its own limitations.

Potential data sources to determine target audience for engagement:

Data source	Measurement	Strengths	Limitations
Replica	**Daily trip takers** within project limits	**Represents all road users** within project area	Does not include demographic data to track equitable representation
Census.gov	**Total residents** living in census tract(s) within project limits	**Provides detailed demographics** to ensure equitable representation	Does not consider road users who do not live in the area. Does not include commercial, industrial, and nonprofit stakeholders
Google Maps	**Number of units** within project limits	**Represents stakeholders** for all land uses	Only represents property owners and lessors. Does not include total residents, consumers, or workers. Does not include detailed demographic data.
TDOT Traffic Count Database System	**Annual average daily trips** for counting stations on corridor	**Represents all drivers** within project area	Does not include demographic data or non-driving road users

Setting clear target outcomes, proposed strategies, and resource limitations are foundational to ensure engagement strategies adapt to achieve equitable representation in the engagement process.

Community engagement strategies

There is not an engagement recipe that works for all communities in Nashville Engagement strategies must be flexible based on community needs and results from evaluation data. There are a range of strategies the project team may employ based on the project tier and participation level.

Consider engagement strategies using the community engagement spectrum stacked on top of community engagement tiers. Participation levels increase with higher stakes and higher complexity projects. Some engagement strategies are best for facilitating different perspectives in high stakes projects. Other engagement strategies are best for providing education in high complexity projects.

STAKES

Collaborate

Involve

Consult

Inform

COMPLEXITY

Communication

A consistent and comprehensive communication strategy is foundational to every community engagement plan. Public communication should extend from beginning to end of every project and at every community touchpoint. A comprehensive communications plan uses multiple communication channels to give the best chance for all impacted community members to know about the project.

Communicate where the community is communicating. Mass communication channels like the NDOT newsletter or NDOT social media can reach community members who are already aware and involved with NDOT. Direct channels are crucial for project communications. Consult with community stakeholders on the best way to communicate with them.

Keep in mind the Rule of Seven when communicating with the community. The Rule of Seven is a long-held rule of thumb in marketing. The theory is a person needs to see information seven times before they commit to taking an action. The goal is to make the community aware of the project and drive participation. Communication strategies support this objective.

The Community Engagement Playbook uses the community engagement spectrum, engagement tiers, community touchpoints, and logic model to support NDOT's commitments to

REVIEW THE COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL TAB OF THE ENGAGEMENT DELIVERABLES MENU TO HELP CREATE YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN.

clear expectations, equitable involvement, flexible strategies, and evaluation. The next sections will outline the implementation of engagement best practices for each phase of NDOT projects, with bookends of community outreach and post-construction engagement to represent the full engagement cycle.

Community outreach

SUMMARY

NDOT builds relationships through our programs, events, and community outreach. Building trust with the community makes all NDOT's work better. NDOT chooses events to strengthen relationships with neighbors and neighborhoods, especially those that have historically been hurt or left out of transportation decision-making process. We seek partnerships with other public agencies and community groups. NDOT looks for events focusing on key topics like mobility, safety, health, or protecting the environment. NDOT can participate in several different ways: Sharing information, facilitating activities, setting up a table, sponsoring, or just being there. When possible, NDOT brings hands-on activities, like an open streets event, to help people understand key ideas better.

Key objectives

- Build a foundation of trust and support with community members and organizations.
- Build NDOT's knowledge base of Nashville communities.
- Educate and inform community members on NDOT priorities and programs.
- Empower community members to improve safety, mobility, and placemaking in their community.

NDOT builds relationships through our programs, events, and community outreach. Participating in proactive community engagement outside of the project process is critical for establishing the foundation for successful project engagement.

In community outreach activities, NDOT partners with community members to develop strategies for improving transportation and mobility. HubNashville is an invaluable tool to equip community members to address immediate maintenance needs and submit ideas for long-term change. NDOT also shares opportunities to engage in relevant plans and projects using tools like the sidewalk tracker, bikeway tracker, and capital projects map. Community-led efforts like open streets, tactical urbanism, and community walks

provide community members with opportunities to take ownership of transportation and mobility improvements in their neighborhood.

Event outreach prioritization

There are four priorities for which outreach events NDOT participates in:

1. Disadvantaged areas

2. Vulnerable populations

3. Community partners

4. Alignment with values

Disadvantaged areas

NDOT prioritizes events with communities traditionally left out of the engagement process. PublicInput, NDOT's engagement tool, has an Equity Mapping feature to identify disadvantaged communities in Nashville.

PublicInput Equity Map
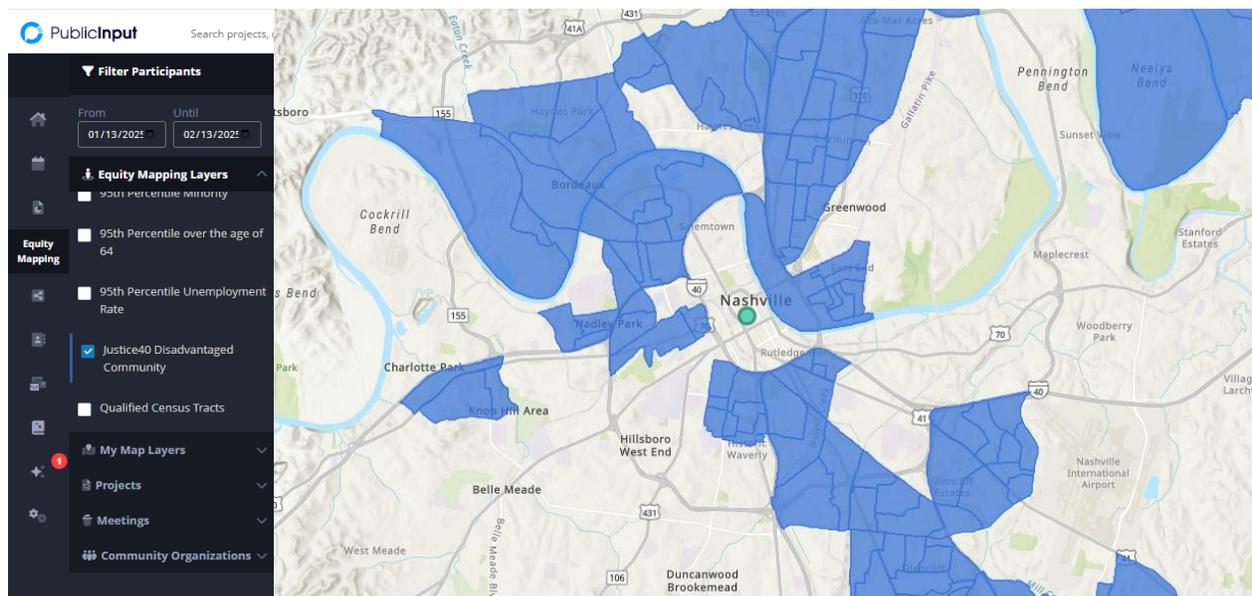
GNRC Defining Vulnerable Populations

Population	Definition

1. Households in Poverty	Poverty, or low income, is defined as personal or household income at or below federal annual poverty guidelines, established as a relationship between income and the size of the family unit.
2. Minority Population	The total minority population includes those of non-white race and/or Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. This includes any non-white race: Black/African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Other Non-White Race, or being mixed race (two or more races), and can include those that are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity defined as "persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race."
3. Limited English-Speaking Households	Limited English is defined in the U.S. Census as having a primary language spoken at home other than English and not able to speak English very well.
4. Senior Population	Any resident aged 65 years or older. This factor was included to account for limited driving capabilities or access issues among the aging population.
5. Youth Population	Any resident aged 17 years or younger. This factor was included to account for children and minors that typically rely on parent or public transportation.
6. Female Population	Analyzes the concentration of female sex population compared to the male sex population. This factor was chosen to add female sex-related vulnerabilities or disadvantages into the analysis.
7. Disabled Population	Census-defined disabilities are divided into six categories: sensory, physical, mental, going outside of the home, self-care, and employment. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides comprehensive civil rights protection for "qualified individuals with disabilities."
8. Unemployed Workers	The U.S. Census defines all civilians 16 years old and over as unemployed if they 1: were neither "at work" nor "with a job but not at work" during the reference week, and 2: were actively looking for work during the last 4 weeks and 3: were available to accept a job. Also included as unemployed are civilians who did not work at all during the reference week, were waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off and were available for work except for temporary illness.
9. Carless Households	Households in which no vehicles are available. This group has severely limited mobility if they do not have access to a vehicle

10. Renters	Those who rent the housing unit they live in rather than owning it. The cost of housing has been rapidly increasing in Middle Tennessee as we have experienced rapid growth. Renters are much more vulnerable to changes in cost of living and therefore can be pushed further out of the region due to affordability, making it more difficult for them to travel around the region.
11. Housing Cost Burden	Cost-burden is defined as spending 30% or more of one's income on housing costs, either rent for renters or maintenance and mortgage costs for homeowners. The cost of housing has been rapidly increasing in Middle Tennessee as we have experienced rapid growth. While unemployment and poverty capture low-income populations, there are also residents that may be making a livable income but struggling to make ends meet. This was included to capture the population that may be struggling to afford a rising cost of living, even if they make a considerable income
12. Active Transportation Commuters	This includes workers aged 16 years or older who take transit, walk, or bicycle to get to work. Previous analysis showed that these commuters typically correlated with other vulnerable populations. Non-motorists are physically vulnerable to vehicle crashes on the transportation system and are at greater risk for severe or fatal crashes.
13. Less than High School Education	This is defined as adults aged 25 years or older who did not graduate from high school or complete a high school equivalency degree program. While we are primarily concerned with transportation access, we recognize that is heavily tied to economic access. Having less than a high school diploma severely limits one's job opportunities and was included to capture access issues to the types of jobs they can attain, or to schooling to advance their careers.

The Environmental Justice and Screening Tool identifies disadvantaged areas. The Greater Nashville Regional Council identifies vulnerable populations. Disadvantaged areas refer to geographical location and vulnerable populations refer to audience demographics.

Community partners

NDOT prioritizes events organized by community partners. Community partners may be other government agencies or departments, community organizations, or neighborhood leaders. For example:

- **Government agencies**

  o Mayor's Office – Community Resource Fair

  o Metro Nashville Police Department – National Night Out

  o Tennessee Highway Safety Office – Operations Hands Free

  o Office of Homeless Services – Resource Fair for Unhoused Neighbors

- **Community organizations**

  o Walk Bike Nashville – Open Streets

  o Civic Design Center – Parking Day

  o Neighbor2Neighbor – Conference for Neighborhoods

- **Neighborhood leaders**

  o Simone Boyd – Arthur Avenue Dinner Under the Bridge

Nashville's community organizations are an asset to NDOT. They are community liaisons, allowing connect with communities who we don't hear from as much as others. NDOT will continue to pursue opportunities to strengthen community partnerships, including paid consultant roles, to improve meaningful and equitable outreach to Nashville communities.

Aligns with values

NDOT considers the department's guiding values to prioritize community events.

Value	Relevant topics	Relevant programs
Sustainability	Reducing carbon footprint with sustainable transportation modes including walking, biking, and transit.	NashConnector WalknBike Traffic management center Beautification

	• Building capacity for electric vehicles with charging stations • Designing green streets to address the urban heat island effect and stormwater mitigation • Taking advantage of beautification efforts to make public spaces greener and cleaner • Using smart technology to improve efficiency of vehicles.	
Public safety	• Making roadways safe for all modes • Bringing eyes to the street with improved walking and biking infrastructure and repurposing car-oriented spaces to human-centered ones • Mitigating crime through community building activities	Vision Zero Traffic calming
Public health	• Designing public spaces conducive to health and wellness • Designing streets to mitigate environmental impacts of transportation infrastructure • Promoting active transportation commuting • Promoting safe neighborhood streets for walking, biking, and playing	WalknBike NashConnector Vision Zero Traffic calming Open/play streets Tactical urbanism
Public spaces	• Repurposing street parking for parklets • Activating public streets with beautification	Beautification Tactical urbanism Parklets
Active transportation	• Promoting walking and biking for commuting	WalknBike NashConnector

Alternative transportation	• Promoting more sustainable commuting modes than single occupancy driving like carpooling, vanpooling, transit, biking, and walking	WalknBike NashConnector
Community	• Greener community with beautification • Public art with beautification • Community clean up with beautification • Community-led transportation improvements with tactical urbanism • Streets for people with open streets and play streets	Beautification Vision Zero

Event participation levels

Once events have a prioritization level based on impact to disadvantaged areas, impact to vulnerable populations, community partnerships, and alignment with values, the Community Engagement Specialist sets a participation level at scale with the event priority. Staff commitment is necessary for each participation level, with higher commitment levels requiring more buy-in and time commitment for staff.

Commitment	Level	Cost	Time	Benefits
Attending	Low	Low	Low	• Build relationships
Sponsoring	Low	Moderate to high	Low	• Foster partnerships
Tabling	Medium	Moderate	Medium	• Educate • Engage • Build relationships
Facilitating	High	Moderate to high	Medium to high	• Educate and build public understanding • Build support
Presenting	High	Low	Medium to high	• Share information • Promote projects and programs

Organizing	Significant	Moderate to high	High	• Establish public presence
				• Forge partnerships
				• Build public understanding

Incorporating experiential engagement

NDOT strives to provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities to community outreach. Experiential engagement is a high-value engagement strategy. As a learning tool, experiential engagement brings concepts to life and activates public imagination. As an outreach tool, experiential engagement offers community value beyond standing at a table. For example, an Open Streets event closes the street to vehicles, giving the community the opportunity to creatively activate the event in a way that's consistent with their neighborhood culture. Open Streets give NDOT an opportunity to interact with more community members and have three-dimensional conversation about street design.

Successful examples

Main Street open street event

In 2022, Walk Bike Nashville hosted an Open Streets event on Main Street. A year later, NDOT began planning for the Main/Gallatin Vision Zero project, building on the advocacy efforts from the open streets event.

Youth Climate Summit tactical urbanism workshop

Community Engagement Specialist Koby Langner built a pallet parklet for a pop-up tactical urbanism demonstration for the Nashville Youth Climate Summit.

Oasis WeGo Youth Action Team traffic calming workshop

Community Engagement Specialist Koby Langner leads a chalk traffic calming workshop for members of the Oasis WeGo Youth Action Team.

NDOT hosted a bike rodeo at the 51ˢᵗ Ave Open Streets event.

NashvilleConnector partnered with Nashville Hidden Gems to do a food tour by bus on Nolensville Pike.

NashvilleConnector supports the annual Ticket to Ride event where participants ride the WeGo Star from downtown to Donelson.

NDOT joins community members for Hub Walks, community walks where participants submit Hub requests for any issues they find.

BikeFun led a community bike ride on East Thompson Lane, allowing community members to ride alongside engineers for the East Thompson Lane bikeway project.

Scoping engagement

SUMMARY

Scopes of work for community engagement work best when they acknowledge existing and previous engagement efforts and set clear objectives for building on those efforts. The first step in setting the community engagement scope is to decide the **engagement tier** based on the **stakes** and **complexity** of the project. **Tier 1** projects are high stakes, high complexity, often extending multiple years. **Tier 2** projects are high stakes, low complexity and do not require as many resources to educate the community. **Tier 3** projects are low stakes, high complexity, primarily focusing on communication and education. **Tier 4** projects are low stakes, low complexity, just making sure people know about the project.

Objective: Set clear expectations and define appropriate resources for meaningful engagement.

The scope of work sets the expectation for community engagement. The potential project stakes and project complexity set the engagement tier. The engagement tier guides the resources for project engagement, ensuring the project team is adequately prepared to engage at the appropriate scale. Consider accommodations, such as language access and accessibility. Responsibilities for accommodations should be clearly defined in the scope of work.

Project engagement should build on existing efforts, not start from scratch. The extent of previous engagement is a factor to consider when setting the engagement tier, considering past outreach efforts, existing community partnerships, and other projects in the area. For example, a new project in downtown Nashville would build on the extensive community engagement efforts from the Connect Downtown study. The planned Charles E. Davis Boulevard bikeway would build on engagement from MDHA's Envision Napier and Sudekum Plan and community partnerships with Walk Bike Nashville and Civic Design Center involving tactical urbanism projects for the Napier Elementary bike bus.

Setting the engagement tier

The first stage in defining the community engagement scope is to set the engagement tier. Determine the expected level of stakes and complexity for the project.

Tier 1: High stakes, high complexity
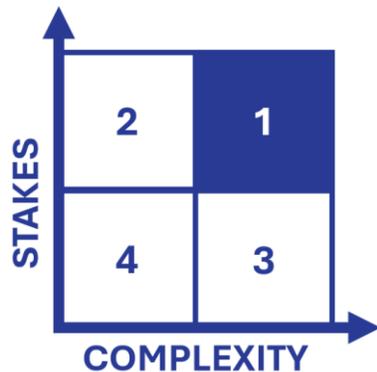
Tier 1 projects are intense, long-term projects, often extending multiple years. Partnering with community leaders is essential. Tier 1 projects come with tradeoffs which lead to community controversy. Tier 1 projects require educational resources to bridge the knowledge gap.

Tier 1 projects require the highest allocation of engagement resources, typically 10-15% of the total project budget, to execute meaningful engagement and education.

Example Tier 1 Project Scope of Work

This contract dedicates 15% of the project budget to community engagement.

Project engagement will seek to inform, educate, and engage a full representation of the community and represent community input in the final design.

Consultant will coordinate community engagement in the following phases:

- Stakeholder coordination
- Community planning
- Project alternatives
- Final alternatives
- Preliminary design
- ROW acquisition
- Construction impact

Consultant will utilize a combination of engagement techniques, including experiential educational engagement, interactive engagement, asynchronous engagement, and virtual engagement. Techniques may include any combination of those listed in Appendix B of U.S. Department of Transportation's "Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making." For example:

- Open streets

- Community walk
- Open houses
- On-site pop-up events
- Stakeholder meetings
- Survey
- Community mapping
- Virtual meetings

Consultant will host all engagement and communication on EngageNashville, NDOT's version of PublicInput, a community engagement platform. Consultant will coordinate communication strategies, including content for an NDOT web page, email list, mailers, and on-site promotion. Consultant will use the NDOT logo and branding on all internal and public-facing materials for the project. Consultant will coordinate with community stakeholders through emails, phone calls, and meetings, including coordinating engagement opportunities in partnership with stakeholders.

Consultant will store all community engagement data in PublicInput.

Tier 1 project examples
- Marquee project like Main/Gallatin Vision Zero Project
- Regional bikeway project like East Nashville Spokes
- Transformative project like Jefferson St interstate cap

Tier 2: High stakes, low complexity
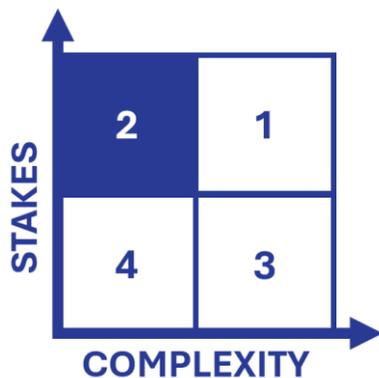
Tier 2 projects have the stakes of Tier 1 projects but not the complexity. Controversy is still expected. The team must prepare to collaborate with the community throughout the project and negotiate community needs with guiding Vision Zero and complete streets principles. Tier 2 projects are simpler and require less education.

Tier 2 projects require a moderate allocation of engagement resources, typically 5-10% of the total project budget.

Example Tier 2 Project Scope of Work

This contract dedicates 10% of the project budget to community engagement.

Project engagement will seek to inform, educate, and engage a full representation of the community and represent community input in the final design.

Consultant will coordinate community engagement in the following phases:

- Stakeholder coordination
- Community planning
- Project alternatives
- Final alternatives
- Preliminary design
- ROW acquisition
- Construction impact

Consultant will utilize a combination of engagement techniques, including interactive engagement, asynchronous engagement, and virtual engagement. Techniques may include any combination of those listed in Appendix B of U.S. Department of Transportation's "Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making." For example:

- Open streets
- Community walk
- Open houses
- On-site pop-up events
- Stakeholder meetings
- Survey
- Community mapping
- Virtual meetings

Consultant will host all engagement and communication on EngageNashville, NDOT's version of PublicInput, a community engagement platform. Consultant will coordinate communication strategies, including content for an NDOT web page, email list, mailers, and on-site promotion. Consultant will use the NDOT logo and branding on all internal and public-facing materials for the project. Consultant will coordinate with community stakeholders through emails, phone calls, and meetings, including coordinating engagement opportunities in partnership with stakeholders.

Consultant will store all community engagement data in PublicInput.

- Neighborhood traffic calming
- Changing curbside use

Tier 3: Low stakes, high complexity
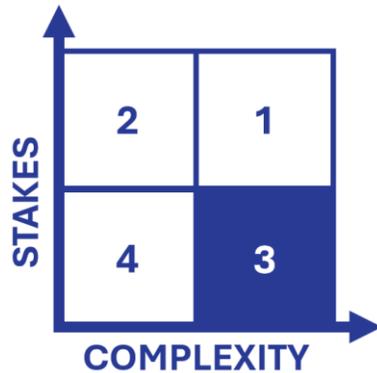
Tier 3 projects do not anticipate controversy. They are commonsense and noncontroversial. Tier 3 projects may add important elements like signal upgrades, crosswalks, bikeways, and sidewalks without changing the roadway capacity or requiring significant right-of-way acquisition. Like Tier 1, they will be complex, requiring educational engagement resources without the expected need to navigate tense community dynamics. Engagement for Tier 3 projects will focus primarily on communication techniques rather than two-way engagement techniques. One-way engagement rarely requires setting up standalone meetings to respect the community's time.

Tier 3 projects require a moderate allocation of engagement resources, typically 3-5% of the total project budget.

Example Tier 3 Project Scope of Work

This contract dedicates 5% of the project budget to community engagement.

Project engagement will seek to inform, consult, and educate the community on the project.

Consultant may utilize any combination of engagement techniques listed in Appendix B of U.S. Department of Transportation's "Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making," with a focus on techniques prioritizing education and awareness. For example:

- Presentation at existing community meetings
- Pop-up tables at events
- Briefings to community stakeholders
- Virtual/on-demand presentation

Consultant will coordinate communication strategies, including creating an NDOT web page, email list, mailers, and on-site promotion. Consultant will coordinate with community stakeholders through emails, phone calls, and meetings, including coordinating engagement opportunities in partnership with stakeholders. Consultant will use the NDOT logo and branding on all internal and public-facing materials for the project.

Upon successful completion of the project, consultant will transfer all data collected from community members throughout the project to the Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure who will remain the sole owner of data.

Tier 3 project examples
- Adding a pedestrian hybrid beacon to a crosswalk
- Quick build Vision Zero improvements like pedestrian infrastructure improvements or bike lane upgrades
- Roundabout construction

Tier 4: Low stakes, low complexity
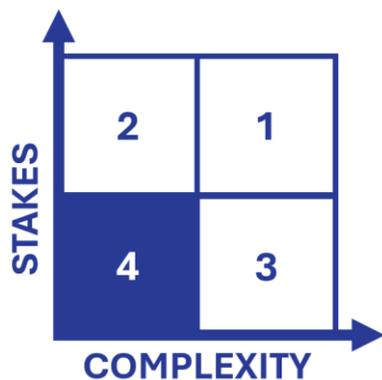
Tier 4 projects are simple, common sense, and noncontroversial. They have a little to no negative tradeoffs. Tier 4 projects may require communication to ensure stakeholders are aware of the project.

Tier 4 projects require a minimal allocation of engagement resources, typically 1-3% of the total project budget.

Example Tier 4 Project Scope of Work
This contract dedicates 1% of the project budget to community engagement.

Project engagement will seek to inform the community of the project.

Consultant will coordinate communication strategies, as needed, including techniques like mailers and door hangers. Consultant may coordinate with community stakeholders to disseminate project information. Consultant will use the NDOT logo and branding on all internal and public-facing materials for the project.

Upon successful completion of the project, consultant will transfer all data collected from community members throughout the project to the Nashville Department of Transportation and Multimodal Infrastructure who will remain the sole owner of data.

Tier 4 project examples
- Roadway resurfacing
- Adding a crosswalk
- Upgrading bike lane protection for an existing bikeway

Defining engagement for scope of work

The scope of work should reflect NDOT's community engagement commitments:

Transparency	Equity	Flexibility	Evaluation
• Clearly define the expected participation level. • Use the community engagement spectrum to identify the level of influence the community will be in the decision-making process.	• Include measures to eliminate barriers to full community involvement. • Clearly state the accommodations like interpretation/ translation,food/snacks, transportation reimbursement, and participant compensation.	• Do not limit the consultant to specific engagement techniques. • Give flexibility for community members to consult on best practices for reaching their community.	• Define success by target outcomes, not completing engagement activities.

The scoping phase sets the initial expectations for project engagement. Once a project begins, the planning stage tests expectations and builds out the engagement strategy.

Project engagement

The Community Engagement Playbook outlines a clear process for community engagement at every stage of a transportation project—planning, design, and construction. Each phase builds on the last to ensure NDOT maintains trust and support with the community. This framework keeps the public informed and involved from setting engagement expectations in the planning phase to targeted outreach during design and consistent communication through construction. By working alongside the community at an appropriate scale, NDOT ensures projects are successful and reflective of the community needs.

Project planning

SUMMARY

The planning team advances community engagement expectations from the scope of work and create a community engagement plan. They coordinate with the Communications & Policy division on their engagement plan and collaborate to share public information on Nashville.gov and EngageNashville. They will set up contact lists and send quarterly updates to the Communications & Policy division and other external stakeholders. They will be responsible for all community engagement touchpoints through the final concept.

The planning phase sets the trajectory for project engagement. The planning team will conduct early coordination with internal and external stakeholders, aligning with the communications team to set up systems for project communications. The planning team is responsible for establishing community engagement at an appropriate scale to produce a design concept.

Key objectives

- Make community stakeholders aware of the project.

- Garner fully representative input from the community.

- Represent community input in project concept.

- Forge community trust and support for project.

Building on the scope of work

Understand staff justifications for the engagement tier, resource allocation, and engagement techniques or strategies in the scope of work. Gut check the expectations and precedent set in the scope of work and make any changes as needed. Ensure NDOT's commitments will be fulfilled throughout project engagement:

Transparency	Equity	Flexibility	Evaluation
• Is the expected participation level clearly defined using language from the community engagement spectrum? • Is the participation level appropriate for the engagement tier?	• Are there clear measures to eliminating barriers to full community involvement? What are they, and who is responsible for them?	• Does the scope of work limit the consultant to specific engagement techniques? • Ensure there is flexibility for the project team to customize community engagement techniques in partnership with the community.	• How does the scope of work define success for community engagement? • What are the target outcomes? • What engagement techniques are in play? • Are there sufficient resources allocated to achieve the target outcomes? If not, what needs to change?

Engagement planning
- Create **Project Engagement Plan**
  - Send to Community Engagement Specialist for review.

- o   Send to Council Liaison to share with council members.
- Create **EngageNashville page** (Tier 1 and 2)
    - o   Send to Community Engagement Specialist for review.
- Send information for **web page** to Content Strategist (Tier 3 and 4)
    - o   Follow the format in the [web page template](#)

Engagement coordination

- **Monthly internal communications updates**
    - o   Any changes to project/engagement timeline
    - o   Any updates in point-of-contact
    - o   Any updates on project engagement and design
    - o   Most recent public documents including
        - ▪   Materials from engagement meetings (handouts, presentations)
        - ▪   Project design
    - o   Update **web page** and **Project Public Engagement Guide**
- **Regular external communications updates**
    - o   Project manager should send regular updates to contacts on the project email list. This may be organized by milestones and/or on a regular schedule. NDOT should send updates at least every quarter even if there are no major updates.

Community touchpoints

Most community-wide engagement will occur during the planning stage. The project team will take point on initial touchpoints through the concept phase. Note the engagement tier for the project determines which touchpoints require an engagement phase.

Touchpoint	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Stakeholder coordination	• Establish relationships with major stakeholders for community consultation and communication. • Gather insights on engagement and	**Required**	**Required**	Optional	Optional

Touchpoint	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
	communication best practices for community.				
Community planning	• Acknowledge previous work and allow the public to add new information. • Get the public to start providing ideas and concepts for the team to explore. • Be transparent about constraints and the decision-making process. • Provide an orientation to the process. • Share community engagement plan and invite input.	**Required**	**Required**	Optional	Optional
Design workshop	• Is there something the community is passionate about for which you can have them form a committee during the design process? For example, a	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional

Touchpoint	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
	committee that selects trees or provides guidance on the color of the rocks or bricks on a retaining wall. Local artists can lead a community painting? • Keep the community involved as part of the process; community input should involve elements of the design that do not impact safety or have a large impact on cost.				
Concepts	• Summarize and explain how you used the community's feedback. • Explain all the concepts you evaluated and the criteria you used to evaluate.	**Required**	**Required**	Optional	Optional

Touchpoint	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Final concepts	• Summarize and explain how you used the community's feedback. • Walk the community through the process and how you determined the final concept. • Share information obtained from the community with the design team as the project moves forward; it should help shape some of the design decisions.	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	Optional

Project design

SUMMARY

The design team focuses on more targeted engagement to impacted stakeholders. They must also ensure they fulfill commitments to the public. If they can't, they must openly communicate with all previous participants. They may need to revisit earlier community touchpoints. They will work with the Communications & Policy division on the Project Engagement Plan, Public Engagement Guide, and web page. They will provide quarterly updates to the Communications and Policy division and the contact list. Their responsibilities include engaging the public during preliminary design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction impacts. They will deliver an Engagement Report to the Communications & Policy division at the end of the design phase.

Community engagement in the design phase focuses engagement to specific project impacts, such as impacts to properties. Engagement includes business and property owners which has potential to intensify project controversy. Controversy at the design stage may focus on property access, economic impact, and construction impact.

The project team keeps commitments to the community top-of-mind through engagement, communicating any changes or updates to participants at least every quarter. The design team builds on engagement from the planning phase. The first focus is to fulfill NDOT's commitments from the planning phase. When the design team cannot fulfill previous commitments, the focus shifts to clear, transparent communication.

Key objectives

1. Fulfill NDOT's commitments to the community from the planning phase.
2. Clearly communicate any deviations or changes from NDOT commitments in the design phase from the planning phase.
3. Engage with all impacted property owners.
4. Communicate expected construction impacts widely to community stakeholders.

Engagement coordination

- **Monthly internal updates to NDOTcommunications@nashville.gov.**
  - Any changes to project/engagement timeline
  - Any updates in point-of-contact
  - Any updates on project engagement and design
  - Most recent public documents including
    - Materials from engagement meetings (handouts, presentations)
    - Project design
  - Upcoming engagement opportunities
- **Quarterly external communications updates to participant and stakeholder list.**
  - Project manager should send regular updates to contacts on the project email list. This may be organized by milestones and/or on a regular schedule, no less than one update per quarter.

Community touchpoints

Once the project reaches the design stage, engagement focuses on individual impacts to property owners, businesses, and residents. Design phase community touchpoints shift to more technical engagement with specific impacts. Any major changes in the design from the planning phase will trigger another community touchpoint and re-engage with participants from the previous phases.

Phase	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Preliminary Design Engagement	• Communicate project impact to public and private property. • Involve property owners in any flexible determinations of property impacts, such as the location	Required	Optional	Required	Optional

Phase	Goals	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
	ot a driveway for access management. • Keep larger community informed of any changes to design from the final concept touchpoint.				
ROW Acquisition Engagement	• Negotiate property acquisition from impacted property owners	Project dependent	Project dependent	Project dependent	Project dependent
Construction Impact Engagement	• Communicate construction impacts to residents, businesses, and other community stakeholders.	Required	Optional	Required	Optional

Construction

SUMMARY

Construction phase engagement focuses on communications. The construction team is responsible for communicating construction impacts and timeline to all stakeholders, previous engagement participants, and the public. The construction team will provide weekly updates to the Communications & Policy division.

Key objective

Communicate construction timeline and impacts to stakeholders, previous engagement participants, and the community.

Construction phase engagement is communications focused. The construction team is responsible for communicating construction impacts and timeline to all stakeholders, previous engagement participants, and the public.

Touchpoint	Project phase	Decision	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Construction Updates	Construction	What are the ongoing construction impacts?	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	Optional

Post-implementation

Key objective

Evaluate success of project engagement, educate roadways users on new design, and provide resources for future needs**.**

Engagement doesn't end when the project is finished. After construction, engagement shifts to behavioral education and final evaluation. For Tier 1 and Tier 3 projects, engagement includes education to road users on new design features. Evaluation is necessary to collect final feedback from project participants to help NDOT improve community engagement strategies for the future.

Touchpoint	Project phase	Decision	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Education	Post-implementation	How will NDOT inform road users of the new design?	**Required**	Optional	**Required**	Optional
Evaluation	Post-implementation	How did the project go?	**Required**	**Required**	**Required**	Optional

Final communication

- Final communications push to project contact list
  - Promote HubNashville
  - Customer satisfaction survey
  - Promote other ways to stay connected and involved
- Ensure all project contacts are in NDOT's central database.
- Update project web page and/or online tracker.

Promotion

- Take final **project photos.**
- Create **Project Case Study**

Conclusion

Effective community engagement is essential to creating a more equitable, inclusive, and functional transportation system in Nashville. NDOT's Community Engagement Playbook serves as a guiding framework to ensure meaningful public involvement throughout every stage of a project. By committing to clear expectations, equitable participation, flexible engagement strategies, and ongoing evaluation, NDOT strengthens trust with the community and ensures projects meet the needs of those who use our streets every day.

As a living document, the Playbook will evolve alongside Nashville's communities, adapting to new challenges and opportunities. Through proactive outreach, thoughtful engagement planning, and transparent communication, NDOT can continue building a transportation network that serves everyone—especially those historically left out of decision-making processes. With this Playbook, NDOT reaffirms its commitment to listening, collaborating, and delivering transportation solutions that enhance mobility, safety, and quality of life for all.

Appendix A - Resources

Benchmarks

- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Austin Transportation and Public Works Department, Strategic Mobility Plan, [Chapter 6: Supporting Our Community](#)

Resources

- [US DOT: Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making](#)
- [*Inclusive Transportation: A Manifesto for Repairing Divided Communities*](#) by Veronica Davis
- [*Roadways for People: Rethinking Transportation Planning and Engineering*](#) by Lynn Peterson
- "[Re-imagining the IAP2 Spectrum](#)" by Steph Roy McCallum
- ["Reflections on the IAP2 Spectrum" by Max Hardy](#)

Appendix B - Requirements for Community Engagement

Federal requirements

Title VI

- [Reference](#)

Requirement	NDOT deliverable	Specifications
Public Participation Plan		- Outreach plan to engage minority and limited English proficient populations. - Summary of outreach efforts made since the last Title VI Program submission. - May include efforts that extend more broadly to traditionally underserved populations, such as people with disabilities, low-income populations, and others.
Notice of Public Participation Activity		
Early and continuous opportunities for public review and comment at key decision points		
Four Factor Analysis for LEP		- Number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or recipient. - How LEP persons interact with the recipient's agency - Identification of LEP communities and assessing the number or proportion of LEP persons from each language group

Requirement	NDOT deliverable	Specifications
		to determine the appropriate language services for each language group. • The literacy skills of LEP populations in their native languages, in order to determine whether translation of documents will be an effective practice; and • Whether LEP persons are underserved by the recipient due to language barriers. • The frequency with which LEP persons come into contact with the program. • The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives. • The resources available to the recipient for LEP outreach, as well as the costs associated with that outreach.
Language Assistance Plan[1]		• Include the results of the Four Factor Analysis, including a description of the LEP population(s) served • Describe how the recipient provides language assistance services by language. • Describe how the recipient provides notice to LEP persons about the availability of language assistance • Describe how the recipient monitors, evaluates and updates the language access plan; and

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[1] DOT has adopted DOJ's Safe Harbor Provision, which outlines circumstances that can provide a "safe harbor" for recipients regarding translation of written materials for LEP populations. The Safe Harbor Provision stipulates that, if a recipient provides written translation of vital documents for each eligible LEP language group that constitutes five percent (5%) or 1,000 persons, whichever is less, of the total population of persons eligible to be served or likely to be affected or encountered, then such action will be considered strong evidence of compliance with the recipient's written translation obligations. Translation of non-vital documents, if needed, can be provided orally. If there are fewer than 50 persons in a language group that reaches the five percent (5%) trigger, the recipient is not required to translate vital written materials but should provide written notice in the primary language of the LEP language group of the right to receive competent oral interpretation of those written materials, free of cost.

Requirement	NDOT deliverable	Specifications
		• Describe how the recipient trains employees to provide timely and reasonable language assistance to LEP populations.
Minority Representation on Planning and Advisory Bodies		• Table depicting the racial breakdown of the membership of those transit-related, non-elected planning boards, advisory councils or committees, or similar committees. • Description of efforts made to encourage the participation of minorities on such committees.
Title VI notice		• Indicates compliance with Title VI • Informs members of the public of the protections against discrimination afforded to them by Title VI. • A copy of the recipient's instructions to the public regarding how to file a Title VI discrimination complaint, including a copy of the complaint form.
Community Participation Plan		• **Goals and Objectives** • **Identification of Affected Communities** • **Focused Outreach** • **Meaningful Education** • **Diverse Communications** • **Comprehensive Engagement** • **Meaningful Participation** • **Accessibility** • **Reported Outcomes** • **Narrative statement** describing (1) the steps taken to produce meaningful engagement with affected communities, (2) the results of those efforts, and (3) how the affected communities' comments and views are or will be incorporated into the decision-making process. • **Communication to impacted communities of project decisions and the underlying reasons**, including

Requirement	NDOT deliverable	Specifications
		whether alternatives existed, the substance of such alternatives, and the reasons for their rejection.
		• **Engagement record** including demographics of the attendees at events, comments from affected communities.

NEPA

- [Reference](#)
- [TDOT Environmental Procedures Manual](#)

Requirement	NDOT deliverable	Specifications
Public involvement plan		TDOT requires only for Level 3 or 4
Public notices		Attempts should be made to solicit the views of the public through hearings, personal contact, press releases, advertisements or notices in newspapers, including minority or foreign language papers, if appropriate, and other methods.
		Provide public notice of NEPA-related hearings, public meetings and the availability of NEPA documents.
Summary of citizen involvement		A summary of citizen involvement and any environmental issues raised should be documented in the EIS.
Stakeholder/coordination list		Develop lists of interested parties at the national, State, and local levels. These would include individuals and community, environmental, conservation, public service, education, labor, or business organizations, who are affected by or known to have an interest in the project, or who can speak knowledgeably on the environmental impact of the proposed action.
Publicly available draft EIS or environmental assessment		Draft EIS or environmental assessment should be made available to the public at least 30 days prior to the hearing."
Public hearing		Hold or sponsor public hearings or meetings in accordance with the agency's statutory requirements. Ensure that the hearing includes an explanation of the project's purpose and need, its consistency with local plans, and its impacts. An explanation of the relocation assistance program and right-of-way acquisition process is also required.
Public comment		

Appendix C – Glossary

Accommodations	Adjustments or modifications made to ensure that all community members have equal access and equal opportunity to participate in engagement activities regardless of race, color, national origin, disability status, English proficiency, socioeconomic status, religion, sex, gender identity, or age.
Checking the box engagement	Superficial or token efforts at community engagement that are done to fulfill a requirement or obligation rather than to meaningfully incorporate community input into transportation decision-making.
Clear expectations	Setting and communicating specific, realistic, and achievable goals and outcomes for community engagement activities so participants understand their roles and the process.
Collaborate	Level on the community engagement spectrum that promises to incorporate community input as much as possible.
Community controversy	Disagreements or conflicts within a community regarding a particular issue, project, or policy.
Community dissent	The expression of opposition or disagreement from community members about a project, policy, or decision.
Community engagement	The process of involving community members in the transportation decision-making process to ensure an equitable and democratic transportation system.
Community engagement activity	Specific actions, meetings, or events designed to share information, educate, collect input, and facilitate community decision-making.
Community engagement spectrum	An authoritative community engagement framework that categorizes different levels of community participation, from providing information to empowering the community to make decisions.
Community events	Public gatherings organized to engage with community members, share information, and gather feedback.
Community input	Feedback, suggestions, perspectives, and any other data provided by community members.
Community members	Individuals who live, work, or have a vested interest in a particular community.
Community outreach	Efforts made to meet and establish relationships with community members where they are.

Community touchpoint	Unique rounds or phases of community engagement based on a project milestone.
Community vulnerability	The degree to which a community has averse social, economic, or environmental factors as defined by the Environmental Justice and Screening Tool.
Consult	A participation level on the community engagement spectrum which promises to listen to community concerns.
Disadvantaged community	Federal classification for communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.
Educational engagement	Activities designed to inform and educate community members about specific issues, projects, or processes.
Empower	Level on the community engagement spectrum which promises to implement what the community decides.
Engagement inputs	Resources, time, and efforts put into community engagement activities.
Engagement outcomes	The results or impacts of community engagement activities, including changes in policies, projects, or community relationships.
Engagement outputs	Engagement strategies or techniques used such as community events, open houses, and pop-up tables.
Engagement techniques	Methods or strategies used to involve community members in decision-making processes, such as surveys, focus groups, or public meetings.
Engagement tier	A categorization of engagement activities based on their complexity, stakes, and required level of community involvement.
Equitable involvement	Ensuring that all community members, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, have a fair opportunity to participate in engagement activities and are fully represented in community input.
Equitable participation	Creating conditions where all community members can engage meaningfully, regardless of their background or circumstances.
Experiential engagement	Engagement activities that involve hands-on, interactive experiences to help community members understand and contribute to projects.
Inform	Participation level on the community engagement spectrum which promises to keep the community informed.

Interactive engagement	Activities that involve active participation from community members, such as workshops, simulations, or interactive displays.
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)	A professional organization that provides guidance and best practices for effective public participation.
Involve	Participation level on the community engagement spectrum which promises to reflect community input in the final decision.
Meaningful input	Community input that is mutually beneficial for community members and the project team, characterized by valuable engagement and sufficient understanding of challenges and potential solutions.
Participation level	The degree to which community members are involved in the decision-making process, ranging from being informed to being empowered.
Project complexity	The level of difficulty and intricacy involved in a project, which can affect the type and amount of community engagement needed.
Project stakes	Controversy, potential dissent, and underlying community vulnerability for a project influencing the level of community interest and engagement required.
Public participation	The involvement of the public in decision-making processes.
Representative sample	A group of community members that accurately reflects the demographics and diversity of the larger community, typically requiring a 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error.
Stakeholder coordination	Community touchpoint where the project team engages with diverse and influential community stakeholders to consult on the project.
Tier 1 Project	Highest engagement tier with high stakes and high complexity, requiring significant community engagement resources.
Tier 2 Project	Second highest engagement tier with high stakes and low complexity, requiring moderate community engagement resources.
Tier 3 Project	Third highest engagement tier, with low stakes and high complexity, requiring some community engagement resources, primarily for education.

Tier 4 Project	The lowest engagement tier, with low stakes and low complexity, with little to no engagement required beyond communication.
Vulnerable populations	As defined by the Greater Nashville Regional Council, people in the follow demographics: Households in Poverty, Total Minority Population, Limited English-Speaking Households, Senior Population, Youth Population, Female Population, Disabled Population, Unemployed Workers, Carless Households, Renters, Housing Cost Burden, Active Transportation Commuters, and Less than High School Education.