

FHWA PEER EXCHANGE

2018

Oregon Department of Transportation - Region 1

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DOT Context

ODOT has a central location in the state capital of Salem. This is where policy is developed through agency employees and the state Legislature in collaboration with ODOT's five regions. ODOT's Salem headquarters houses a number of employees in Tech Services (bridge, right of way), Office of Civil Rights, Government Relations, Maintenance and Operations, Office of Pre-Let, Active Transportation and Funding, Planning, Contracts and Procurements, Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, Communications, the State Traffic Engineer and Statewide Project Delivery Manager. In Salem, policy is developed through a variety of multi-disciplinary leadership teams made of up Salem based and Region-based staff and is then implemented with the goal of providing clarity and consistency. ODOT Salem headquarters also is responsible for appointments and for managing statewide advisory boards on issues such as motorcycle safety, transportation safety, bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee and more. ODOT has a statewide director, Matt Garrett, who is appointed by the Governor and reports to the Oregon Transportation Commission; ODOT's policy board is made up of seven members, who are appointed by the Governor from urban, rural and suburban areas of the state and represent different perspectives and areas of expertise. In addition, ODOT has five regions. The five regions are responsible for all ODOT functions within their region and are focused on projects within Maintenance and Operations, Project Delivery and Policy and Development. Regions are responsible for engaging stakeholders in the development and implementation of the capital program, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. ODOT's public information officers report centrally but soft report to Region managers. Additionally, ODOT Region 1 has the only Community Affairs Unit in the state and reports directly to the Region 1 Manager. In other Regions, it is the project leaders and managers who carry out the public engagement functions for projects.



About Shelli

Shelli has more than 26 years of experience working for city, county, state and federal levels of government (including service on the staff of three elected officials) and two non-profit organizations. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Speech: Rhetoric and Communications, and holds a master's degree in Public Administration with a focus on Citizen Participation and Community Relations from Portland State University's Hatfield School of Government. She is a graduate of the Center for Creative Leadership Executive Leadership Institute and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government Executive Leadership Institute in Public Policy. Shelli also holds a Certificate of Completion of the Oregon Project Management Certification Program issued by Willamette University's Atkinson Graduate School of Business and a Certificate in Financial Management in the Public Sector from Portland State University's Professional Development Center. Shelli's career has focused on public policy and administration, government/community relations and engagement, equity and civil rights, housing and transportation, and program/project/people management.

DOT Public Outreach Highlights

The best practices that involve public outreach during project development have taken place in the NEPA phase or Feasibility phase of projects. Such practices include identification of risks and opportunities and stakeholders. ODOT has conducted early interviews with key stakeholders in underrepresented communities to pose questions about how to engage all communities. Through the interview process, ODOT has developed relationships and acquire early information that helps inform and shape projects before they officially kick-off. Such information is put together in a report and put on the ODOT website for others to learn about. The information is also documented in ODOT's Environmental Justice report as required by NEPA and FHWA. The interviews help agency staff learn ways to reach underrepresented communities and design and tailor specific outreach strategies to successfully engage them in projects. Because communities of color are largely relationship-based and not transactional-based, the up-front investment of time by ODOT staff is critical to ensure these communities will continue to be engaged in the project downstream.

Through this work, ODOT has identified Community Engagement Liaisons in a variety of communities who help to recruit people in underrepresented communities to participate in small group discussions, focus groups and/or community project walks to learn more about a given project and to provide feedback. These group discussions are led in a variety of languages and participants are offered a \$40 gift card incentive and provided with a meal for their participation. Community Engagement Liaisons are financially compensated for their time and are responsible for all aspects of organizing the venue and recruiting participants, providing

onsite support and interpretation and purchasing food served at the event. The hiring of Community Engagement Liaisons lends itself to ODOT supporting local underrepresented people in the community and to compensate them for their work.

Biggest Public Engagement Challenges

One of ODOT's challenges is resourcing. In Region 1, there are more than 100 projects in the project delivery business line. There are additional projects in the Policy and Development and Maintenance and Operations business lines. There is a total of six Community Affairs Coordinators to carry out the public engagement work.

A second challenge is that ODOT is a multi-modal transportation agency in an urban area where we balance the needs in our Region from the suburbs, rural/natural areas and urban. The area is growing very quickly. Up to 329 people are moving to Oregon, every day – many in our Region. The amount of development is on the rise, as is congestion. We have competing interests that are often unsatisfied from bicyclists and pedestrians to transit users, freight and vehicular traffic. We have to balance the needs and requests from all stakeholders. ODOT Region 1 is the media hub for the state within a dense urban growth boundary and Region 1 has the largest number of state legislators. This can make carrying out projects very challenging at times.

The city of Portland has long been characterized as a small city, but it is growing into more of a medium-sized city, which has its tradeoffs and impacts. Some people don't like the change, while others are in denial. And yet others feel that, at the rate of new development, it is no longer a small city.

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