FAQ: Documenting Public Input and Engagement Information

Why should MnDOT document public input and engagement information?

As MnDOT engages with the public, our staff interact with numerous stakeholders and members of the public who take time to share their ideas with us. Documenting public input and engagement activities is important for many reasons, including:

- Capturing and transferring public input gathered through engagement activities among MnDOT staff to improve system planning, project scoping, and program delivery, statewide
- Compiling and making accessible lessons learned and promising practices to promote continuous improvement in MnDOT's public engagement work
- Meeting federal obligations under Title VI and Environmental Justice
- Preserving information that might otherwise be lost when staff leave the organization

Having a consistent process and mechanism to document public engagement information will improve staff access to information. It will also help us better understand gaps in engagement activities and provide an efficient way to transfer knowledge among staff.

Where would we document public input and engagement information?

PECS (Public Engagement & Constituent Services) and Operations market research are working with MN.IT to develop an IT solution for documenting public engagement information. MnDOT staff would document public input and engagement activities using an online form with various data fields to complete. Staff would also have the opportunity to link to other existing public engagement documents and reports related to projects (to avoid duplicate entry).

Where will the public engagement documentation be stored for staff to access?

Staff would enter information into an online form that links to a statewide database. Identifying information (e.g., project number (SP) or geographic marker, such as roadway, bridge, intersection) and all content, including any documents uploaded separately, could be accessed and viewed by MnDOT staff through Georilla.

What is Georilla?

Georilla is an interactive GIS map application that displays various types of technical information on maps that can be accessed by project number or geographic location (e.g., signs and striping, lighting and signal systems, utilities, pipes and culverts, natural resources). Georilla is currently accessible to all MnDOT staff.

How will our documented engagement efforts be used?

Information could be referenced:

- to provide community context to project team members at all stages of a project's life cycle,
- to assist in the handoff that occurs with staff turnover,
- when investigating Title VI/EJ complaints, and
- when MnDOT is asked to report to the Legislature and other external entities on our public engagement activities.

Who will be responsible for documenting public engagement activities/events?

Since public engagement is conducted at the local level, each District will handle this differently, depending on staffing resources available and the context of the engagement work. For example, project managers, public affairs coordinators, and/or public engagement coordinators/directors (if applicable) could be responsible for this activity; however, it may vary based on the preferences and decisions of District leadership.

When should public engagement activities be documented?

The expectation would be to document all of the project-related public engagement activities/events that are outlined in your project's Public Engagement Plan in a timely manner, no later than one week after the event's completion.

What kind of public engagement activity/event information will I be expected to document?

The documentation form is still under development, but below are the major pieces of information that would likely be captured. In Phase One of this project, we are focusing on data captured in Manufacturers' Perspectives project interviews, closed Ombudsman cases/notable customer information collected by Customer Experience unit, and Districts' project-related public input and related public engagement information. Phase Two will focus on documenting continuous engagement efforts, such as statewide planning, Two-Way STREETS, and other relevant stakeholder/public activities. This project is designed to establish minimum documentation baselines and ensure that an across-the-board MnDOT standard is adhered to by all districts and offices.

Proposed project-based public engagement information to be documented:

- the Public Engagement Plan;
- targeted audiences;
- project staff involved with the event (e.g., project manager, public affairs coordinator, public engagement director, consultants);
- basic information about the event (e.g., type of event, date, time, location);
- individuals, groups and businesses contacted (e.g., who was contacted, when they were contacted, method of contact);
- public notices, advertising and communications materials;

- demographic information about the community(ies) impacted by the project (e.g., population demographic information such as race, ethnicity, age, income and education level, etc.);
- content distributed at the event (e.g., agenda and handouts);
- record of the public participation activities and techniques used (e.g., interviews, online survey, comment cards);
- input collected at the event (e.g., sign-in sheet, meeting notes, summary of input collected);
- details of any agreements, action items and commitments (including responsible party, proposed dates of completion and completion date);
- description of ongoing or new communications or participation requirements; and
- information about reporting back to the public (e.g., date, method and content shared)

How do we evaluate or measure the *quality* and *outcomes* of our public engagement efforts?

Some Districts are sending **post-project surveys** to community members and stakeholders to assess public engagement efforts. Another way to measure public engagement is to conduct an **internal post-project assessment or debrief**. The two methods are described more below.

Post-project survey: PECS is currently piloting a post-project **survey instrument** (set of questions) that Districts can use after projects are completed to evaluate communication and public engagement efforts and aspects of completed projects in a consistent way. More information and guidance will be shared with Districts after this survey is completed to promote consistency in MnDOT's approach to evaluating public engagement.

Internal post-project assessment: An internal assessment can be done by the project team after a project is complete to evaluate engagement efforts conducted throughout the project and to assess whether Public Engagement Plan goals and objectives have been met. The assessment could be completed in a routinely scheduled post-project debrief meeting and then documented, so lessons learned and promising practices can be shared with other Districts. PECS would also use this qualitative data to draft case studies for sharing with internal and/or external audiences where appropriate.

What is the expected timeline for when the IT solution will be implemented?

PECS and Operations market research are working closely with MN.IT to get this tool developed and ready to use in 2018.

Phase One of the project will focus on creating a data entry form and standard business process for collecting and documenting three types information: 1) interview information collected from manufacturers and related shippers as part of the Manufacturers' Perspectives Study, 2) Ombudsman closed case information/notable customer information collected by the Customer Experience unit, 3) District's project-based public input and engagement information.

Phase Two of the project will focus on creating a data entry form and standard business process for documenting public engagement activities that are part of statewide planning efforts. Updates to the timeline will be shared as the project progresses.

How is unsolicited feedback from the public currently documented by PECS and what else can be recorded in this way?

The PECS Customer Experience unit records and reports unsolicited feedback submitted by the public through an online form hosted on MnDOT's website. Form Stack is the application used to host the online form in a way that is accessible and mobile-friendly. Each online form submitted through Form Stack generates an automated email to the Info Com inbox (**info.dot@state.mn.us**), where the email is reviewed, recorded, and routed to the personnel best-suited to respond. MnDOT's responses are copied to the Info Com inbox for PECS to record closure in Corr Flow.

Corr Flow is the application used by PECS to document MnDOT's responsiveness and to aggregate feedback for reporting purposes. Corr Flow is designed to record and report feedback by content, topic, district, highway, control section, project number, and date submitted. PECS recognizes that not all customer interactions are captured in Corr Flow, especially if they are not initiated through the online submission form or if MnDOT staff are contacted directly by customers. That being said, PECS is available to share, track, and record any customer interactions upon request. If you would like PECS to document your interactions with the public in Corr Flow, simply copy the Info Com inbox (**info.dot@state.mn.us**) on emails to customers or contact the PECS Customer Experience unit to discuss other options (**James.Skoog@state.mn.us** or 651-366-3534).