

Guidance for public involvement on state transportation projects

Public involvement is a priority for state transportation projects managed by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). Below are resources and methods for consideration in creating Public Involvement Plans (PIPs) and developing strategy for project teams.

- See Facilities Development Manual Chapter 6 for detailed policy guidance on public involvement.
- See Transportation Administrative Manual (TAM) sections COM 101 and COM 105 for guidance on external-facing documents and social media.
- Refer any questions on public involvement to WisDOT Region Communication Managers (RCM) and/or Region Environmental Coordinators (REC).

Approvals processes

Project teams work with RCMs to gain necessary approvals on Public Involvement Plans and communication materials. Approvals can vary depending on the size and complexity of the need.

RCMs are specially trained to assist with needs such as social media, brochures, newsletters, fact sheets, group mailings, meeting handouts, posters, web pages, radio/television messages and audio/video presentations.

- RCMs are accountable for review and approval of public involvement activities as part of the project PIP. Project staff and consultants must work with RCMs on any questions or ongoing maintenance needs to a PIP throughout the life of a project.
- RCMs need to be involved in responses on any media or legislative inquiries.
- Project staff should also consult the RCM on higher-level public inquiries, but don't necessarily need to involve the RCM on day-to-day inquiries about project basics from homeowners, motorists, etc.
- **Project staff should remember that any project-related communication can become public, even if it was meant for just one person.**

Contact information

WisDOT must be clearly identified in all public involvement materials related to a state highway transportation project. Mailings should be under the WisDOT project manager's signature and include a return address to a WisDOT office.

Please note that these bullets apply to state programs only. For Local Program considerations, see the Local Program section below.

- A standard mailer with prepaid return service is available for public involvement on state highway projects. Consultant staff should discuss this option with the RCM for the most up-to-date material.
- WisDOT contact information is the primary contact information on project communications. Any requests to include additional contact information external to the department must be vetted by the project team and approved by the RCM.

- All state highway project brochures, newsletters, and websites must include the name and contact information of a WisDOT project manager and/or the region/project communication manager and/or a subject matter expert. Consultant contact information may also be included at the discretion of the WisDOT project manager.
- Invitations to state highway project public meetings must be on WisDOT letterhead, in WisDOT envelopes with WisDOT contact information. Consultant contact information may also be included at the discretion of the WisDOT project manager.
- News releases or media alerts prepared for state transportation projects/studies are distributed by RCMs and always go out on WisDOT letterhead with WisDOT staff listed as the contact.

Media contacts

It is important that contacts with the news media be handled in a timely manner by the most appropriate WisDOT spokesperson. RCMs serve as a primary point of contact for the media.

- **Only WisDOT staff may speak to the media on behalf of the department.** Consultant resources play a key supportive role in developing informational materials and public involvement meetings, but are not authorized to be spokespeople unless directed by WisDOT staff.
- Media inquiries and requests must be referred to the RCM, who can determine next steps and work with others in the department as warranted.
- The project team has a responsibility to keep the RCM informed of issues and concerns that may garner public or media attention. A best practice is to involve the RCM in regular project team meetings and updates.

Corporate news releases/materials

WisDOT does not endorse or participate in corporate news releases, testimonials, or other marketing materials (annual reports, brochures) issued by consulting firms or vendors. When these materials feature a WisDOT project, WisDOT appreciates being made aware of the materials. The department will review the content for accuracy only and does not provide quotes or testimonials.

When a consultant or vendor submits projects for industry award competitions, WisDOT staff may provide a statement or letter acknowledging the role of the consultant/vendor on the project and confirming other facts about the project. The statement should remain factual so that it does not appear to be a preferential testimonial.

Websites

Project websites are developed during public involvement planning and approved by the RCM. In some cases, additional approvals may be needed at the division or department level. The RCM can provide guidance.

Project managers and leaders play a key role in prescribing what type of content is most relevant to a project website. They should work closely with the RCM and any other project

team members to develop websites. The following considerations should be made when WisDOT staff create a website:

- Strive for simplicity in language.
- Ensure all content is fully accessible to any consumer.
- Consider visuals such as videos, photos and informational graphics when practicable.
- Adhere to standard templates unless otherwise authorized.
- Consider the option of a shortened URL and/or QR codes for projects that may have a longer duration and/or multiple print product needs. RCMs can work on approvals through the department's web services unit.
 - Note that TinyURL and Bitly are not recommended. Project staff should work with the RCM to consult with WisDOT information technology security staff on approved processes only.
- Refer to [WisDOT style guide](#).

Logos

The use of logos on WisDOT materials is tightly controlled. Consultants preparing materials on behalf of WisDOT may obtain the WisDOT logo and use it according to [WisDOT's graphic identity standards](#).

The development of special logos for studies, projects, programs and public awareness campaigns requires department approval, with the discussion beginning through the RCM. Additionally, there may be instances where a local municipality's logo may be incorporated in project materials. Again, check with the RCM for guidance. Consultant logos are not appropriate for public involvement communication materials.

Social media

WisDOT has social media channels throughout the state that may be used to assist with public involvement communications. Use of department social media channels may be considered in the PIP. Reference TAM COM 105 for more information, and consult with the RCM for additional guidance.

Style guide

The [WisDOT style guide](#) supports consistency in print and electronic materials. The style guide includes preferences for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations and other language choices. The style guide is to be used by WisDOT staff and consultants for public involvement materials. The style guide does NOT apply to technical documents, manuals or other design/engineering materials.

Local Program Projects

WisDOT Local Program project information is managed exclusively by the project sponsor. This may include day-to-day inquiries from citizens, elected officials and media to more complex informational needs related to design, construction and project logistics. Throughout the lifespan of the project, the project sponsor is accountable for public involvement, outreach and communication. It is strongly recommended that staff and consultant resources involved in WisDOT Local Program projects review the Local Program materials located on Wisconsin.gov.