

**Research Project Title**

Community Engagement in Rural Communities

**Purpose of the Project**

Public engagement provides a significant value as it helps to reach effective transportation solutions by considering a wide variety of viewpoints. It encourages people to speak up and share their ideas, which can influence infrastructure in their community. Effective public engagement activities build credibility and trust between the transportation department and those whom it exists to serve. Rural communities are often distant from the technological, geographically, and socially dense urban and suburban communities, which presents distinct challenge in engagement. As a result, community engagement techniques that may successfully work and yield greater outcomes in urbanized and metropolitan areas may not always translate well in rural and small communities. The purpose of this research project is to identify best practices for engaging small town and rural communities in transportation planning in Tennessee.

**Scope and Significance**

In this project, we will investigate and identify public engagement strategies and practices that are effective in four rural communities. Each of these communities: one from each TDOT region, will be identified based on the recommendation from the TDOT Long Range Planning Division. We will employ a mixed method research approach for this study. We will begin by concurrently (1) conducting an extensive review of scientific literature to learn what rural community engagement strategies are most effective and (2) observing community engagement meetings to establish a baseline of community engagement strategies. Information gained from the literature review and observation of community meetings will be used to develop a quantitative survey that will be fielded among elected officials, RPOs, and leaders in Tennessee’s rural communities.

**Expected Outcomes**

The following are expected outcomes of this research project:

**For the TDOT:** Improved and effective rural engagement will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the state’s rural transportation infrastructure investments and increase the economic competitiveness of the state’s rural regions.

**For the Rural Community:** When rural communities and their leaders are invited to the table to participate in planning and project design processes “early and often”, resulting projects are more likely to reflect the community's own plans and fit more harmoniously into the community.

**Time Period**

The time period for the project is from August 2019 to November 2020.

**Contact Information**

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