

Richland County Government Public Participation Plan

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This Public Participation Plan (PPP) outlines numerous diverse strategies for obtaining input from and providing information to the public concerning County programs, projects, and program funding in order to ensure the public is informed and has the opportunity to provide Richland County Government (RCG) with input so plans can reflect the public's desire. RCG will review and update its PPP and these strategies periodically as required by law. Various federal regulations require a local government receiving federal funds to establish a PPP to ensure that the public is involved and community concerns are addressed. RCG has a strong commitment to public participation for all projects, services, and reports that receive federal funding. The County's PPP is designed to be consistent with the federal requirements including; the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The PPP identifies methods to expand outreach and engagement to traditionally underserved population groups including minorities, disabled, elderly, immigrants and refugee populations. Additional emphasis is placed on expanding existing partnerships and forming new partnerships with organizations directly working with these important stakeholders.

The PPP has been put in a user friendly format and outline. In addition situations arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken into account and provisions for virtual public interaction have been included in this document.

Goals

The PPP has the following goals:

1. Bring a broad cross-section of the public into the public policy input and decision-making process.
2. Make special efforts to increase the opportunities for involvement by groups of citizens who do not generally participate in community affairs, particularly low-income and minority populations.
3. Provide citizens with opportunities to participate in developing plans and programs for their communities.
4. Make information on government activities widely available to the public.
5. Maximize the use of communications technology to facilitate the exchange of information between public officials and citizens, including use of the RCG website and other electronically accessible formats (email, etc.).
6. Ensure that technical information is available in an understandable form and that all segments of citizens are afforded access opportunity to this information.

Targeted Strategies

In an effort to help ensure participation from special populations, RCG will use special strategies, media tools, and events in special situations for engagement, including but not limited to the following;

- Identify areas in Richland County with concentrations of minority and/or low income populations
- Make certain online information is easily accessed and available on website, easy to read, and available for translation
- Make translation services available when needed or requested
- Use community leaders, community organizations, and/or advisory boards whose members represent low-income or minority groups
- Publish notification of meetings, public hearings in Spanish if requested or needed, as well as English
- Ensure public meetings are accessible
- Engage faith based groups
- Use targeted mailing list
- Develop outreach and education information to inform various parties of the public involvement process
- Post notifications and/or hold meetings and/or workshops in government, buildings, libraries, community centers, public facilities, recreation centers, senior centers, and/or public schools
- Go door-to-door in communities

Media Tools

The County will utilize diverse media tools aimed at reaching a broad cross section of the County's population. And there will be an emphasis on engagement opportunities for low-income and minorities in compliance with federal regulations and/or state laws such as;

- **Media Notices:** RCG will issue news delegations to media outlets to advertise public input opportunities and informational events. The media used may include radio, television stations, government channel, newspapers, and online newspapers. Using this tool is a good strategy for reaching targeted populations by advertising through non-English speaking media.
- **E-Blasts:** An E-Blast is an email sent to a large numbers of recipients concurrently. These emails should include a brief description of the project, informational sources, and opportunities for participation and feedback. RCG may recreate their own discretion list to which citizens may subscribe or staff may choose to coordinate with community organizations, groups, or large employers in the area that already have their own distribution lists.
- **Direct Mail:** Some projects may affect a more concentrated area of Richland County rather than the entire County. In these cases it may be more appropriate to create a mailing list and send information notifies to those most directly affected by the specific project or program. These notices should include a summary of the project or program, potential impacts, staff contacts, informational sources as well as the date, time and locations of any engagement events planned.
- **Social Media:** Social media is an excellent method of reading large portions of the Richland County area, while minimizing advertising costs and staff time. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites may be used for advertising meetings, special events, public comment periods, and more. Local municipal accounts are also an opportunity to help ensure the advertisements are reaching all areas of Richland County. In additions, other organizations may be used to help in targeting special populations.
- **Advertisements:** Coordination to advertise public input opportunities will help to ensure feedback from citizens using County programs and services. This outreach method may be used for an project or service as a tool to reach those directly affected.
- **Bill Notices:** Notices for public input opportunities, services, programs, and/or surveys may be included in bill notices if permission is granted by department or agency sending the notices. The public input notices should be no more than one page if possible and the crucial content should be printed in English and any other language if needed.

Events

As part of the County's strategy, the County may schedule and/or attend various events such as;

- **Public Meetings:** These vents are held to inform and education citizens and businesses owners about programs, projects, services, plans, updates, and/or input opportunities. The meetings should include a presentation on the applicable topic(s) covering the scope of the program, project, or service. Technical information should be in a format which is easy to understand and visual aids are always helpful. The presentation may include discussion, interactive activities, and/or solicit public input
- **Virtual Meetings:** Virtual meetings may be used in situations that did not allow for in-person meetings to take place or in cases where County staff feels they may be able to reach a large population than an in-person meeting. In some cases, it may be beneficial to use both virtual and in-person meetings. Virtual meetings should be programmed similarly to the in-person meetings allowing for, presentation, followed by discussion or question and answer session. The presentation should include instructions on how to submit formal comments and links to any other public input opportunities.
- **Open Houses:** Open Houses provide citizens an opportunity to drop-in anytime during the posted hours with no set agenda. These events will have materials, such as maps, draft plans, program or services fact sheets laid out for public review. County staff should be present to answer any questions or respond to concerns.
- **Workshops:** Informational workshops are designed to educate participants on specific topics associated with the program, project, or service. And provide a means for allowing participates to express their ideas and/or concerns in an informal setting. Though these events are more informal, they should be structured enough to have a set agenda, presentation should be brief if done - because feedback is the goal at this event. Break-out sessions are commonly used at workshops and beneficial at the start of the process while goals and objectives are being developed.
- **Charrettes:** A charrette is meeting to resolve a specific problem or issue and may also be used as a public participation technique. Within a specified time limit, participants work together intensely to reach a resolution. There is normally goals and a time limit announced ahead of time, by the sponsor of the charrette. The leader's responsibility is to bring out all points of Verdi's from concerned residents, as well as County staff and subject matter experts. The common components of a charrette are to define the issue, analysis, data collection, development of alternatives, and consensus on final solution.
- **Outreach at Other Events:** County staff can attend events hosted by other groups or organizations, where they set up a table and/or display. This is aimed to reach citizens who may not attend a County event. The table and/or display information materials should be user friendly. And County staff should be available to answers questions and distribute information, such as flyers.