

**NCHRP 25-25 TASK 80:
POTENTIAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NEPA PROCESS**

Requested by:

American Association of State Highway
and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)
Standing Committee on the Environment

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ABSTRACT

NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 identifies and evaluates how state departments of transportation and other transportation agencies are utilizing social media and web-based tools during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, specifically in regards to public involvement. The research included an online survey and case study interviews to inform recommendations for implementing social media during the NEPA process. Although transportation agencies agree that social media has potential use for public outreach during the NEPA process, the survey revealed that agencies are waiting for proof of effectiveness and demonstration of utility to the NEPA process. These concerns demonstrate the need for suggested practices and training on how to use social media effectively for the NEPA process if the potential offered by these techniques is to be advanced. NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 begins to fulfill that need by presenting four project case studies and a first edition of suggested practices guidance resource for NEPA project teams. The research also provides a compilation of information on the applicability of various social media platforms as public involvement tools for NEPA public outreach in the form of an online tools matrix.

S U M M A R Y

Social media is booming in popularity and has tremendous potential to supplement the public involvement aspects of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 research was designed to help project teams understand how social media might be used to reach stakeholders who might not otherwise participate in the NEPA process. Although each project context has a unique set of conditions and communications needs, social media tools and collaborative websites present a significant opportunity for improved communication.

Social media tools are constantly evolving. Perceptions and applications of a single common tool, such as Facebook, may change greatly in only a few years. At the same time, new social media tools are emerging and others fading, presenting challenges to public involvement practitioners as they assess applicability to projects and other uses of social media within transportation agencies. NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 focuses on applications for NEPA studies, and although the tools of the trade will fluctuate and change, the basic approach as reflected in the suggested practices presented in this report is expected to remain relevant over time.

More than fifty transportation NEPA practitioners and communications managers responded to an online survey of 40 questions related to how transportation agencies have used social media and the issues they face in using social media as a public outreach tool during the NEPA process. Half the survey respondents said they used social media to support the NEPA process. Nearly 75 percent of agencies who used social media said they used social media to broadcast information or build awareness in support of the process, such as announcing the availability of information for public comment or the time and date of a public meeting. Sixty percent said they used social media to encourage public discussion of a NEPA project. Forty percent said they used social media to gather public comments or engage stakeholders in dialogue on a topic related to the project.

Although transportation agencies seem to agree that social media has potential for use as part of public outreach during the NEPA process, the survey suggested that they are waiting for proof of effectiveness and demonstration of utility to the NEPA process. These concerns indicate a need for suggestions and training on how to use social media effectively for projects. The leading response as to why agencies are not using social media was that they are not sure how to implement it. Case studies presented in Chapter 4 and suggestions in Chapter 5 begin to address that need.

In-depth interviews among transportation NEPA practitioners for this research project found:

Social media is being used to supplement existing public involvement programs. Social media is not a replacement for other forms of outreach, but it can help broaden outreach, increase awareness and education, and provide engagement opportunities to stakeholders who might not otherwise participate. Social media does not stand alone and does not negate the need for traditional outreach tools such as public meetings, workshops, stakeholder committees, grassroots outreach and hard copy information materials such as fact sheets and comment forms.

There is not yet a consistent practice for handling comments received via social media. Some project teams document all social media interaction as part of the project file. Many projects, however, utilize social media as an informal space for real-time information exchange and then refer

people to other specific websites or email addresses to provide comments for the project file. Interview participants noted there is currently no specific federal guidance on how to document and respond to input received via social media.

Social media is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall public involvement program and identify areas where public involvement needs to be improved. Many project teams interviewed for the research study indicated that they track social media trends, such as geo-coding participation based on zip codes and analyzing other demographic information available on many social media sites. NEPA project teams also summarized the content of social media comments for comparison with formal comments to check for consistency, particularly when social media posts were not considered part of the project record. Thus, social media was a tool to perform real-time evaluation of project information and locate geographic areas with higher or lower levels of stakeholder participation. However, none of the project teams had performed a thorough evaluation of measurable results or specific contributions of social media to the NEPA decision-making process.

Suggestions for implementing social media tools as part of NEPA public involvement programs are included as Chapter 5. In addition to providing descriptions of the range of tools and potential uses for social media, these suggestions provide practical insights for project teams. The checklist for defining the purpose of social media outreach, determining tools and developing policy, protocol and communications strategy, form the basis of a sound approach to social media that can effectively support the NEPA decision-making process.

Based on the case study interviews, social media has proven worthy as a public communication tool where meaningful outreach can occur. Project teams should consult with their own legal counsel and regional federal agency representatives to address the protocol for documenting and responding to input received via social media.

Social media tools used in combination with other forms of public outreach can enhance public involvement programs in providing timely notification, sharing complete information and providing a mechanism for a broad range of stakeholders to provide input. Social media outreach can benefit the public involvement process by broadening outreach, creating a more informed public and hearing issues and concerns earlier in the NEPA process when topics can be more readily addressed.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Social media has changed the communications landscape. The increasing effectiveness and reach of social media in the communications culture has created new opportunities and challenges for the public sector, both in providing access to information and in establishing and maintaining relationships with members of the public. The instantaneous access to information available through the Internet has increased demands for transparency in government decision-making.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is changing with the advent of social media as well. While expectations and requirements for substantive stakeholder engagement are well established in NEPA, this study identifies how public expectations and outreach methods are shifting to include social media as a public outreach and input tool.

Social Media in the Regulatory Process

Public Involvement Requirements

Public involvement, a process of proactively engaging stakeholders in public decision-making, is mandated to support several key phases of the transportation planning process. For instance, regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) require public involvement during the process of preparing an environmental impact statement. Although public involvement is required at specific development phases for particular project types, regulations do not prescribe how to perform public outreach. Project teams can design public involvement programs that are responsive to the project needs and local context. This flexibility allows adoption of new tools that can provide access to project information in a timely manner to a broad range of stakeholders.

FHWA regulations emphasize the importance of public involvement in accordance with the NEPA process. These include the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 12898, *Environmental Justice of Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* and Executive Order 13166, *Improving Access to Service for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*.

The Addition and Advantages of Social Media

While social media and web-based tools can clearly support public involvement during NEPA, the dynamic and evolving nature of online interaction has raised questions about how best to use it in a constructive manner. There are times when face-to-face interaction best establishes trust and rapport or offers the best forum for exploring complex and sensitive issues. Social media and web-based tools can provide the opportunity for cost-effective outreach to a broader segment of the community, though, particularly to those who may find the Internet to be a more convenient or comfortable means

of communication. Early adopters of new communications technologies have recognized the degree to which social media and web-based tools offer transportation agencies the potential to access a broad and diverse public, including traditionally hard-to-reach populations.

DOT Needs and Challenges with the Addition of Social Media

Decisions made by a federal agency - for example, a Record of Decision issued at the conclusion of an environmental impact statement - are subject to challenge in federal court under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). In the event of a legal challenge under the APA, a federal agency submits its “administrative record” to the court, and the court reviews the agency’s decision based on the information contained in the administrative record. In general, an administrative record includes all of the documents considered by the agency in reaching its decision. Thus, one of the emerging issues for federal agencies to consider is whether content from social media should be included in the administrative record -- and if so, what exactly should be captured from those sites, and what format should be used for including it in the record. Other legal issues may include how to respond to comments provided by members of the public via social media and copyright issues related to the posting and sharing of material over the Internet.

Many agencies face obstacles in implementing social media as a public involvement tool. These challenges range from institutional barriers, such as policies restricting access to social media sites at the workplace, to lack of staff, skills or knowledge of how to effectively use the tools. Some agencies have expressed concern regarding social media’s rapid communication context relative to agency decision-making processes that are sometimes slow and deliberative. Others have expressed concerns about how to respond to inbound messaging. NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 research attempts to assist transportation agencies in understanding and addressing these issues.

CHAPTER 2

Research Approach

Research Objective and Scope

The objective of this study was to identify and evaluate how state DOTs and other transportation agencies are utilizing social media and web-based tools for public outreach throughout the NEPA process and to provide suggestions for project implementation.

The research team conducted a review of the current use of social media during the NEPA process. Specifically, a survey of communications, environmental and project development professionals and managers from state DOTs and transit agencies was issued to gather information about their use of social media and other web-based tools to support NEPA public involvement.

The research team then analyzed the range of social media strategies that have been adopted and implemented by state DOTs and other transportation agencies to determine how the programs were established and implemented. This was accomplished through interviews with five project teams at various stages of the NEPA process across the United States. Finally, the research team assembled suggestions for using social media during the NEPA process, drawing upon input from the case study interviews and the team's professional knowledge.

Methodology

Agency Survey

The project began with a review of current use of social media during the NEPA process. The project team surveyed a range of state DOTs and transit agencies regarding their use of social media and other web-based communications tools. The survey had a total of 52 respondents representing more than 30 agencies nationwide. It was completed by transportation professionals at the executive, management and staff levels with responsibility and oversight for NEPA environmental analysis, project planning and development and public communications and involvement.

For the purpose of this survey, social media was defined as any publicly available technology that allows for interaction including posting and commenting on content such as text, photos, video, internet links and information from other sites. Facebook and Twitter were cited as examples, but agencies were allowed to include other applications. "Web-based tools" included specific applications of the Internet that enable interactive communication with the public such as online comments or chats, interactive mapping such as Google Earth, or online surveys. Mobile applications to provide access to project information or interface on mobile phones and tablets were considered web-based tools as well.

Conducted in November 2012, the survey questions were informed by a review of literature regarding the use of social media by the transportation industry. Questions were chosen to identify agencies' use of social media during the NEPA process, including:

- The type of tools used;
- How or if social media is employed during the NEPA process;
- The purposes of social media tools relative to an agency's other public involvement, communications program or project development process;
- The agency's policies and procedures in using social media tools;
- How the agency handles communications on social media relative to the project record;
- An assessment of who the agency is reaching through social media with a focus on demographics;
- The extent to which agencies feel they are reaching targeted audiences using social media and interactive web-based communication;
- An agency's evaluation of the benefits and challenges of using the tools; and
- What factors would influence them to use social media and interactive web based tools more often.

Agencies that reported that they did not have experience using social media to support NEPA processes were asked questions to determine the reasons why they have not done so and what factors would lead them to use social media tools. The complete survey is included in Appendix A.

Interviews

The data collected from the screening survey informed the development of interview questions. Interviews investigated specific details regarding projects and experiences with regard to the challenges agencies face in adopting social media into their NEPA public involvement processes.

The case study interviews included five project teams at various stages of the NEPA process for highway and transit projects. The interviews helped define key issues for NEPA project teams and also provided illustrative examples of how social media can be used to support NEPA decision-making. In particular, interviews sought to identify:

- Purpose and scope of social media outreach;
- How social media fit with an overall outreach program;
- Contributions to the NEPA process obtained by using social media;
- Evaluation of effectiveness, issues or questions generated by using social media;
- Methods used for collecting, recording and responding to public input;
- Procedures or practices put in place to address legal considerations; and
- Methods and techniques used to evaluate the breadth and depth of stakeholder outreach using social media, including assessing who is participating through social media.

The interviews also explored suggestions for using social media on future NEPA projects and what is needed to support staff training and knowledge.

Five agencies were interviewed, including representatives from the Alamo (Texas) Regional Mobility Authority, North Carolina DOT, Missouri DOT, Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Maryland Transit Administration. In addition to these five agencies, the research team held a roundtable discussion with representatives of the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. Early in the study, the research team noted a difference of perspective between the agencies with oversight of transportation project development under NEPA and the agencies conducting these studies. The discussion with federal officials was intended to identify the federal perspective as a means to provide a balanced perspective of benefits, challenges and needs with respect to using social media to support NEPA public involvement.

Narrative summaries of the case studies along with qualitative assessment of social media strengths, weaknesses, contributions and costs are presented in Chapter 4.

Suggested Practices Guidance Resource

The research team collected and organized suggested practices found among the DOTs, MPOs and transit agencies interviewed to produce a resource for social media implementation with NEPA project teams in mind. Prior industry research, including the team's literature review and experience as project-based social media practitioners, also contributed to understanding challenges and opportunities of utilizing social media and interactive web-based media as NEPA public involvement tools.

The guide includes suggestions for social media implementation and provides a process checklist for project teams considering social media as a public involvement tool. An accompanying social media tools matrix is available online for project teams to become more familiar with leading social media platforms and analysis tools that may benefit public involvement processes. Appendix D contains the link to the social media tools matrix.

CHAPTER 3

State of the Practice

This chapter describes the current state of the practice for use of social media during the NEPA process based on a literature review, the online survey and case study interviews conducted for NCHRP 25-25 Task 80. It should be noted that social media and mobile technology are rapidly changing, and cutting-edge communication practices just a few years ago may have been replaced with new tools and methods. Part of being effective in the world of social media is to stay informed of new tools and trends.

This state of the practice summary represents a snapshot in time, namely 2012-2013. At this point in time, social media is commonly used for transportation service updates and customer service, but examples of social media being used to its full potential for planning and NEPA projects is limited.

The NEPA transportation decision-making process operates under the assumption that decisions made with input from diverse groups of people are almost always better than decisions made by narrower groups.¹ Social media holds out the promise of broadening the base of public involvement to involve more people in what is hopefully ever more informed and judicious public sector decision-making.

Social Media Definition

Social media has many definitions and can take on many forms. Social media has been defined as interactive platforms via which individuals and communities create and share user-generated content. According to a recent Transit Cooperative Research Program study², social media “refers to a group of web-based applications that encourage users to interact with one another.” NCHRP Report 710³ discussed the terms new media and Web 2.0 as labels for tools that allow on-demand access, user feedback, creative participation and community

Social media inherently invites interaction and is viewed as a democratizing space where people from all backgrounds can converge and build communities around common interests.

¹ This assumption is born out in social research, a recent notable example of which is *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Surowiecki, J. *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies and Nations*. Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc., 2004.

² Susan Bregman, TCRP Synthesis 99, Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation: A Synthesis of Transit Practice http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_99.pdf, 2011, p. 1.

³ NCHRP Report 710, Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decision-making, 2012, p. 2-37 and 2-38. http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_rpt_710.pdf

formation around digital media content; its applications are user-driven and emphasize collaboration and user interactivity such as wikis, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites. A simple way to determine what is or is not social media is the question, does it allow people to share comments with others? For example, a traditional website is not social media because it presents information in a static way with no opportunity for posting comments. A website that allows comments on its pages becomes social media and could be defined as a blog.

Social media is also distinct from traditional media, such as newspapers, television and film because anyone with the access and knowledge to use it has the ability to publish information. The common denominator is the ability to share information and contribute to an online community through words, photos, videos or games. Social media inherently invites interaction and is viewed as a democratizing space where people from all backgrounds can converge and build communities around common interests.⁴

Government Use of Social Media

Social media is becoming standard practice for local, state and federal governments. It is a way for people to connect with government services, ask questions, find information and bring concerns to the attention of agencies and elected officials. Transparency in government initiatives have become priority at all levels.

President Obama issued a memorandum on transparency and open government in January 2009 directing federal agencies to develop new tools to enhance government accountability, openness and collaboration. The Open Government Directive (M10-06)⁵ that followed requested that executive departments and agencies offer increased opportunities to participate in policymaking, to provide the benefits of their collective expertise and information, and to solicit public input on how to increase and improve opportunities for public participation in government. The directive explained three principles that form the cornerstone of an open government:

- Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the government is doing.
- Participation allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise so that their government can make policies with the benefit of information that is widely dispersed in society.
- Collaboration improves the effectiveness of government by encouraging partnerships and cooperation within the federal government, across levels of government and between the government and private institutions.

With this executive order, government expectations for public involvement substantially surpassed the tendency for disclosure as practiced in some NEPA projects.

⁴ Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P., & Silvestre, B.S. "Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media". *Business Horizons* 54 (3): 241-251. 2011.

⁵ Orszag, P. Memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies. December 8, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-06.pdf.

Social Media Audiences

A December 2012 Pew survey⁶ found that 67 percent of online adults use social networking sites. Young adults age 18-29 are the most likely to say they use social media sites followed by adults age 30-49. More than half of adults age 50-64 also said they use social networking sites. Black and Hispanic groups use social networking more frequently than white groups, and those with a household income less than \$30,000 a year are more likely to use social networking sites than other income brackets. The high level of social media use among minority groups and lower income brackets reflects the growing prevalence of mobile devices and the ability for these groups to access the internet using smart phones. As of May 2013, Pew Internet research on mobile devices⁷ showed that 91 percent of American adults have a cell phone, 56 percent have a smart phone, and 34 percent have a tablet computer.

Although the Pew studies have noted that usage of the internet and social media applications via mobile phone connections increased significantly and minority groups continue to outpace their white counterparts in the use of the cell phone as a tool for internet use and data applications,⁸ other research points to the different ways in which income and racial groups use such access. Pew found that those who earn a higher wage and achieve a higher education are more likely to participate in online political or government-sponsored activities.⁹ Surveys by the Pew Center also suggest that minorities use the Internet for different reasons, such as job searches and online banking.¹⁰

Increasing Use of Social Media by Transportation Agencies

The transportation industry has responded to these opportunities by adopting the use of social media and web-based tools as a means of connecting with the public. An AASHTO survey of state DOTs completed in September of 2012 found that 41 state DOTs are using social media, up from 38 DOTs in 2011. Of that number, 37 use Twitter and 32 use Facebook. Other popular applications include YouTube, Flickr and other photo sharing sites. A total of 31 percent of DOTs offered mobile applications and 62 percent said that information is viewable on mobile devices. MPOs, local governments and transit agencies are also users of social media.¹¹

Part of an Integrated Communications Strategy

Social media works best when integrated with other public communication and outreach tools. It does not replace the need for other forms of public outreach, but can supplement existing public involvement tools and techniques in order to broaden outreach and provide additional public information and input opportunities. As practitioners on the GovLoop Communications & Citizen Engagement Council have noted, “agencies are starting to do a really good job of understanding that social is just one component

⁶ The Demographics of Social Media Users, 2012. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Social-media-users/The-State-of-Social-Media-Users.aspx>

⁷ Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, April 17-May 19, 2013 Tracking Survey. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Infographics/2013/Cell-Phone-Ownership.aspx>

⁸ Amanda Lenhart et al., “Social Media and Young Adults,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, February 3, 2010. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Social-Media-and-Young-Adults.aspx>.

⁹ Smith, A., Lehman Schlozman, K., Verba, S., and H. Brady. The internet and civic engagement. Pew Internet & American Life Project. September 1, 2009. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement.aspx?r=1>.

¹⁰ Gant, J. P., Turner-Lee, N. E., Li, Y., and J. S. Miller. National minority broadband adoption: Comparative trends in adoption, acceptance and use. February, 2010. http://www.jointcenter.org/publications1/publication-PDFs/MTI_BROADBAND_REPORT_2.pdf

¹¹ Lloyd Brown, AASHTO Director of Communications: DOTs and Public Engagement: Social Media in the NEPA process, Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, Colorado Springs, CO, June 21, 2012.

of an integrated communications strategy. As agencies now have started to figure out social media, communications plans have become more robust and integrated. People are able to find information through a variety of channels, integrated and timely.”¹² Camay, Brown and Makoid conclude that:

Transportations projects subject to NEPA will likely continue to include public meetings as part of the public involvement process, but social media tools may help to publicize these meetings, disseminate information during and after the meetings, distribute recordings of the meeting and build relationships and social networks outside of the meetings. Practitioners can use brief surveys before, during or after these public meetings to measure whether social media was an effective advertising tool.

Social media can effectively supplement other forms of public outreach.

NEPA Public Involvement

The CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1506.6) establish several basic requirements regarding public involvement in the NEPA process. Section 1506.6 states that agencies shall:

- Make diligent efforts to involve the public;
- Provide public notice of hearings/meetings and the availability of documents, so as to inform those persons and agencies who may be interested or affected;
- Hold or sponsor public hearings/meetings, where there is substantial environmental controversy concerning the proposed action or substantial interest in holding the hearing; and
- Solicit appropriate information from the public.

While public involvement is now a “fundamental element of the decision-making processes for transportation agencies,”¹³ much public involvement has been one-way public information, delivered in public meetings. Camay, Brown, and Makoid note the need for a shift in public involvement approaches in general:¹⁴

The premise of public involvement is the process of two-way communication between customers and government by which transportation agencies and other officials give notice and information to the public and use public input as a factor in decision-making. However, in practice, public involvement is often implemented as a one-way process that informs customers of transportation planning efforts, but does not gather feedback, record responses or allow for influence in decision-making.

Social media can similarly be used for one-way communication, but it is a tool that can also fulfill the need for public input and feedback.

NCHRP Report 710 notes that, “Transportation agencies are exploring new ways to inform and interact with their customers or the public through social media and new media applications that blend traditional media (e.g., film, images, music, spoken and written word) with the interactive power of

¹² Pat Fiorenza, Outlook for Social Media Innovation in Government, GovLoop Communications & Citizen Engagement Council, March 15, 2012.

¹³ Stephanie Camay, Lloyd Brown, Meghan Makoid, “Assessment of Social Media in the NEPA Process,” November 15, 2011, p. 1. <http://trb.metapress.com/content/k564733mgt4x39xl/?p=1c60403add404e6cadd9832138d9c22b&pi=1>

¹⁴ Camay, Brown, Makoid, “Assessment of Social Media in the NEPA Process,” TRB, 2012 Annual Meeting, p. 3. <http://amonline.trb.org/1s8cm3/1s8cm3/1>.

computers and communications technologies particularly over the Internet.”¹⁵ The report further states, “Social and new media applications have the potential to effectively involve traditionally underserved populations with their innovative approaches and accessible content.”¹⁶

DOTs have been investing in understanding how to conduct more effective public involvement for years.¹⁷ Now, “new tools like social media may help practitioners transform the process of public communication and involvement by increasing access to information and opportunities for participation in the NEPA decision-making process.”¹⁸ Public expectation for government transparency, increasingly fast and easy access to information on the internet and increasing emphasis on the effects of transportation on the human environment, have driven greater online visibility of state DOT action and decision-making. In Camay, Brown, and Makoid’s view, social media tools “expand the public involvement practitioner’s toolbox and allow for large scale, remote interactions. Social media allow community members to participate in the planning process without having to leave work or social settings.”¹⁹

Types of Social Media Most Applicable to NEPA

For the purposes of this NCHRP research, the types of social media discussed with NEPA practitioners focused on social networking; collaborative websites; and crowdsourcing, a collaborative problem-solving method that seeks input from online users. Blogging, online polling and surveying were also used by NEPA project teams. Sites for sharing photos and videos had some utility during the NEPA process, but projects interviewed for this study indicated that it was difficult to sustain regular visual posts over time. Online games also hold potential for providing information and education in fun, interactive formats while gathering data about people’s preferences and choices,²⁰ but this is largely untested in a NEPA project phase.

Online Survey Results

This NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 research effort included an online survey, which was designed to collect the breadth of experience by transportation agencies in using social media and other web-based tools to support projects’ NEPA public involvement, analysis and documentation. Agencies that reported that

¹⁵ NCHRP Report 710, p. 2-43.

¹⁶ NCHRP Report 710, p. 3-32 and 3-33

¹⁷ Lewis, J. and S. Lane. Public Outreach in the Pedestrian Plan for Durham, NC: Effectiveness in a Diverse Community, in conference proceedings for the 2007 Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, 2007. Howard-Stein Hudson Associates, et al. “Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making.” Report FHWA-PD-96-031. FHWA, U. S. Department of Transportation, 1996. Cunningham, L F., Christensen, K., Diane Dunn, Gonzales, E; and M. P. Hirsch. Recommendations for Developing Customer Focus in Statewide Transportation Planning Process. In Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1552, TRB of the National Academies, Washington, D. C., 1996, pp. 19–26. Khisty, C. J. Education and Training of Transportation Engineers and Planners Vis-à-Vis Public Involvement. In Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1552. TRB of the National Academies, Washington, D. C., 1996, pp. 171–176. Lorenz, J. L. and R. Ingram. “It’s Not Just for Projects Anymore: Kansas Department of Transportation’s Innovative, Agency-wide Public-Involvement Program.” In Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board, No. 1685. TRB of the National Academies, Washington, D. C., 1999, pp. 120–127. O’Dowd, C. A Public Involvement Road Map. National Transportation Library. In conference proceedings for the Sixth National Conference on Transportation Planning for Small and Medium-Sized Communities, 1994.

¹⁸ Camay, Brown, and Makoid, 2011, p. 2.

¹⁹ Camay, Brown, and Makoid, 2011, p. 1.

²⁰ See the 2013 TRB John and Jane Q. Public Communications Award winners for examples of online games to gather input about budget decisions: <https://sites.google.com/site/trbcommitteeada60/jjpcompetition/2012-transportation-finance-and-policy-related-solutions>

they did not have experience using social media to support NEPA were asked questions to determine the reasons why they have not done so and what factors would lead them to using the tools.

The survey was distributed to state DOT environmental, project development and communications professionals as well as to similar individuals from several large transit agencies currently or recently engaged in NEPA project development for major capital investments. Contacts were generated from several sources including the AASHTO Subcommittees on the Environment and Communications in Transportation. Additionally, the team consulted TCRP Synthesis 99 on the use of social media by transit agencies supplemented by an internet search to identify transit agencies within the New Starts pipeline that also have social media programs at their agencies. The survey had a total of 52 respondents representing more than 30 agencies nationwide and was conducted in November 2012.

Identified Social Media Uses during the NEPA Process

One objective of the online survey was to evaluate current use of social media. Half the survey respondents said they used social media to support a NEPA process; this was a higher rate of use than anticipated. Additionally, 75 percent of agencies using social media were using it to broadcast information in support of a NEPA process, such as announcing the availability of information for public comment or the time and date of a public meeting. Also, 60 percent said they used social media to encourage public discussion of a NEPA project and 40 percent said they used social media to gather public comments and/or engage stakeholders in dialogue on a topic related to the project. Tools identified in the survey included Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Storify, blogs and website comments forms.

Table 1: Current uses for social media during the NEPA process reported by state DOTs and transit agencies

-
1. To broaden awareness
 2. To inform the public
 3. To encourage public discussion
 4. To gather public comments
 5. To target certain audiences
 6. To monitor public discussion
 7. To host online events
 8. To engage stakeholders
 9. To identify public values
 10. To engage project partners
 11. To share data
-

Barriers to Use of Social Media by Transportation Agencies

Another objective of the online survey was to identify barriers to agencies engaging in social media as an outreach tool during the NEPA process. The literature review confirmed that many agencies face obstacles in implementing social media as a public involvement tool. These challenges range from institutional barriers, such as policies restricting access to social media sites at the workplace, to a lack of skills and knowledge on how to effectively use the tools. Some agencies have expressed concern regarding social media's rapid communication context to support agency decision-making processes that are sometimes slow and deliberative. Others are concerned about how to respond to inbound messaging.

In 2011, AASHTO conducted focus groups and interviews with state DOTs to assess their use of social media. State DOTs reported several barriers to implementation of social media, including:²¹

²¹ Brown, AASHTO social media survey, 2011.

- Organizational culture
- Budgets
- Legal concerns

Several respondents to the 2011 interviews cited time as the biggest obstacle to using social media, followed by a lack of accessibility to many web-based platforms because of computer system restrictions; little support from leadership; the day-to-day challenges of managing the different tools; maintaining fresh content; and keeping current with new and changing technology.²²

In contrast to the 2011 AASHTO survey, which sought information about state DOTs’ use of social media in general, the online survey for this research report focused on state DOTs’ use of social media in the NEPA process. In their response to the online survey, agencies agreed that social media has potential for public outreach during the NEPA process, but respondents indicated they are waiting for proof of effectiveness and demonstration of utility to the NEPA process. Barriers to social media implementation during the NEPA process are listed in Table 2, ranked in order according to the frequency with which

they were mentioned in the response to the online survey.

Table 2: Barriers reported by state DOTs and transit agencies to use of social media during the NEPA process

-
1. Not sure how to use it to support NEPA
 2. Inexperience/lack of skill
 3. Staff skills required
 4. Organizational culture not supportive
 5. IT upgrades required
 6. Concerns about legal issues
 7. Concern about staff misuse of online accounts
 8. Perception of limited access for minorities
 9. Perception of limited access for low income persons
 10. Ability to collect and manage comments
 11. Legal concerns
-

A surprisingly low number of respondents identified legal concerns as barriers to implementing social media during the NEPA process. This online survey finding was inconsistent with the findings of the 2011 AASHTO case study interviews and other sources within the existing literature. The discrepancy might be explained by a tendency to focus on how social media might function in general before considering the specific legal implications of social media in the NEPA project phase.

The top reasons for not using social media during the NEPA process, or barriers, demonstrate the need for suggestions and training on how to use social media effectively for NEPA. This research report seeks to address that concern by presenting a checklist for implementing social media during the NEPA process and offering a webinar for industry practitioners.

Interview Findings

Case study interviews investigated the costs of implementation, evaluation of success (including what criteria and measurement tools are used to establish “success”) and issues encountered at start-up of social media outreach and in ongoing activity. NEPA-specific topics were also covered in more depth, including:

²² Brown, AASHTO social media survey, 2011.

- Outreach related to environmental justice, low-English proficiency populations;
- Agencies' experiences with negative comments on social media; and
- Strategies and concerns relative to the project record, recording and responding to comments in the NEPA process.

Interview Themes and Lessons Learned

The case study interviews indicated that protocols for documenting and responding to social media inputs are being determined on a case-by-case basis. Most projects have a disclaimer posted on social media sites that states social media interaction is not considered formal comment and redirects stakeholders to submit a formal comment using other sources.

Some interviewees expressed concern that social media will not be used to its full potential if agencies discourage the public from using social media to submit comments during the NEPA process, or communicate the social media comments will not be included in the project file. These interviewees noted that, while social media can be used to share information such as the date and time of an upcoming public meeting or the availability of a draft document for review, this "one-way" use of social media misses the opportunity for two-way and interactive communication. Some interviewees felt that a project may benefit from reaching new audiences with social media, but only disseminating information misses social media users' expectations for interaction.

Fears about negative comments or mismanagement of social media accounts were also discussed during the case study interviews. These fears are especially heightened in NEPA processes as the project team needs to demonstrate objectivity, fairness in evaluating all alternatives and cannot appear to be predisposed to a particular outcome. Interview participants pointed out that the real-time nature of social media seems almost inconsistent with the methodical and deliberative character of the NEPA decision-making process. Thus, a fundamental question is, how can social media for NEPA projects be engaging, interactive and provide timely information of value to users and the project team?

Narrative summaries of the case studies along with qualitative assessment of social media strengths, weaknesses, contributions and costs are presented in Chapter 4. The following section summarizes the principal themes and lessons learned from the interviews with five NEPA project teams using social media for NEPA public involvement.

DOTs, Transit Agencies and MPOs' principal purpose for social media in NEPA processes is to broaden and improve public involvement

Agencies talked about using social media to broaden the reach of their public involvement processes. DOTs, transit agencies and MPOs emphasized both in the survey and in interviews that social media can and should be allowed to extend public involvement and enable discourse. In the spirit of transparency and accessibility, agencies described adding social media to public involvement programs so that all possible tools are employed in communicating with the public. When members of the public responded to each other online, this was considered an indicator of success. The common goal for social media outreach was to increase project understanding as well as encourage dialogue among members of the community.

Most agencies felt that social media did not necessarily change or alter the decisions that they made

Most agencies felt that social media facilitated greater public discussion and understanding of the NEPA process and specific studies, but that social media did not necessarily change the outcomes of studies. Many project teams cross-checked the content of online dialogue with comments submitted using more traditional methods to verify that all public concerns and suggestions had been addressed. Some interviewees noted that discussion on social media sites was very consistent with content of other comments and it was difficult to distinguish where a particular concern or idea had originated. Social media was viewed as another source for making public participation available to a range of interested stakeholders.

Social media is generally not used to meet environmental justice requirements at the present time

Agencies generally don't see social media as a tool for specifically reaching EJ audiences or other targeted stakeholders. That being said, more than one agency said that they make social media and other web-based communication available in more than one language. Most agencies viewed social media as broadening their reach, but not necessarily to engage a particular population or stakeholder group. Many social media sites allow tracking demographic information and geo-targeting specific areas, but based on the scope of this research project, these tools had not been used to specifically perform outreach to an identified EJ population.

Social media is being used to help evaluate public involvement programs as a whole

Some agencies ask social media participants to volunteer their zip codes as a means to determine the geographic reach of social media. This in turn can be compared with data indicating the demographic composition of the study area by zip code. In cases where zip codes demonstrated a low participation rate, the agencies could target those geographic areas for other forms of public involvement. Other agencies indicated that they monitor discussion on social media sites for feedback after new information is presented to evaluate whether key pieces of project information were understood. This feedback was used to adjust public presentations and improve maps, graphics and other explanations related to the project and NEPA process.

Comments obtained through social media are treated differently from project to project at this point

Federal agency representatives recognized that transportation agencies lack formal federal guidance on how comments via social media should be treated as part of the project record. Some agencies used disclaimers to note that comments posted on social media would not be considered "formal" comments for the record. Instead they directed members of the public to other sites, such as email addresses or e-comment forms. Interviewed agencies said that this area needs formal attention by the US DOT to assist in developing protocols regarding the handling of input received through social media.

Results of Using Social Media During the NEPA Process

In addition to the themes listed above regarding the current use of social media, the study team asked each set of interviewees about their perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities

and costs of using social media. This section summarizes the information gathered to provide a snapshot of current standards of practice.

Strengths and benefits of social media during the NEPA process

Interviewees agreed that social media broadened the reach of NEPA public involvement and engaged stakeholders who might not have participated otherwise. Several agencies noted that social media was particularly effective in reaching commuters who do not necessarily reside in the study area but are impacted by the transportation decision being made. It also enabled participation from stakeholders with interest in a project, but who might not be able to attend a public meeting due to work schedule, family life or travel distance. In all cases, social media was viewed as a good tool to broaden public involvement in combination with other outreach tools.

In addition to broadening the reach of public involvement, social media was implemented in order to be part of the public conversation. Several project teams observed that agencies and projects are going to be discussed regardless of their presence on social media. One agency said they implemented social media as a natural fit to a department-wide transparency initiative. As part of their mission to be accountable to the public and openly share what they are doing, social media was a logical tool in today's world of communication.

Several project teams said that they had a more informed public due to social media outreach. Project social media was likened to a rehearsal that resulted in higher quality and more meaningful formal public input. Stakeholders were better educated about the project and had vetted out their thoughts and concerns on social media forums before submitting formal comments. They had fewer comments stating opinions for or against a project and more substantive comments with meaningful input.

Challenges, logistics and cost considerations

Agencies expressed concern about having regular content to share on social media; several interviewees described identifying a steady stream of information to share as a challenge. Because technical data and other information is often considered preliminary and not appropriate for public distribution prior to formal publication of a Draft EIS, for instance, some project teams found it difficult to sustain regular posts during periods of technical work. Several project teams tried visual sites such as Flickr and Pinterest, but found it difficult to sustain a regular flow of new images. Several teams also tried blogs, but later turned to other formats such as e-newsletters due to difficulty in providing timely information in this format.

Most project teams had some kind of policy in place to guide social media implementation, whether it was following an agency communications policy or developing a protocol specific to the project team. Some of the early adopters were using social media before agency policies were in place and another agency based their policy on existing internet policies. Policies addressed who was allowed to represent the agency in posting on project or agency sites as well as formulated guidance for users such as disclaimers about the status of social media comments and/or the right to remove comments with inappropriate or threatening language.

Many online platforms are available with no fee, so the primary cost is staff labor. Logistics for staffing and responding to online interactions was discussed in the interviews. Some agencies used internal staff

to manage social media while others hired consultants. All noted the need to have dedicated staff focused on monitoring and responding to social media along with a desire to maintain a 24-hour response time. Most project teams viewed social media as a low-cost tool that added value to their public involvement program. Staff would be dedicated to public involvement for the project in one form or another, so social media was perceived as a reasonable addition.

Evaluation of effectiveness and need for federal guidance on social media use

Although NEPA project teams were tracking data trends such as demographics and number of click-throughs on posted links, none of the interviewed project teams had performed a comprehensive analysis to measure effectiveness or quantify the unique contribution of social media outreach during the NEPA process. Evaluation was anecdotal, to the extent it occurred. Most teams noted that social media seemed to be working and bringing benefit to the public involvement process, so they continued using it. Areas in which agencies could use additional support were also in evidence, and agencies and practitioners called for further guidance and research in some areas. In particular, several interviewees noted that protocols need to be developed to improve consistency in collecting and responding to comments received via social media.

CHAPTER 4

Case Study Examples

Each of the project teams interviewed for NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 highlighted a unique aspect of social media during the NEPA process. As an early social media adopter, the Loop 1604 project in Texas faced challenges associated with legal concerns and formulating a disclaimer statement that would not deter online participation. The Driving 95 project in North Carolina revealed the important role of organizational culture in shaping acceptance for social media as a public involvement tool. Metro I-70 in Missouri demonstrated using social media as a promotional tool to refer people to an online collaborative website where users create a log-in and password. The Westside Subway Extension project in California demonstrates the contribution of interactive social media engagement to create a well-informed public who can provide meaningful comments.

In addition to the narrative summary, highlights of the project’s approach to social media during the NEPA process and representative results in terms of strengths, weaknesses, benefits and costs are presented to provide insight to what worked for these NEPA project teams and how they navigated barriers to social media implementation.

Loop 1604: NEPA Early Adopter

The Loop 1604 project (<http://www.morefor1604EA.com>) is a NEPA study in Texas that started in 2009 (Figure 1). It was initially approached as an EIS, but FHWA and TxDOT have recently agreed to issue notice that the project will be an EA with a change in limits. Among the first projects in the nation to use social media during the NEPA process, the project posted a disclaimer on social media pages that indicated social media discussion would not be considered formal comment. In retrospect, team members felt that this disclaimer deterred engagement and was counterproductive to the potential for social media as a public involvement tool. Project team members felt that the disclaimer may not be as stringent if it were written today.

“The biggest impediment to social media actually helping in the NEPA process is the disclaimer. If NEPA is truly intended to engage the public, having a disclaimer saying we will not count it is antithetical to public engagement.”

Loop 1604 Project Team Member



Figure 1: Loop 1604 Social Media Site

The Loop 1604 project team provided social media training at their public meetings to raise awareness of the social media pages and equip stakeholders with the ability to use them. Because the project started in 2009 when social media was still emerging, the project provided training guides that helped people understand how to sign up for an account and interact on social media.

The Loop 1604 project team attempted a blog to keep stakeholders informed, but it was discontinued and replaced with an e-newsletter that could be circulated to interested parties, contained more complete information and could be stored for historical reference on the project website, as well as linked to social media sites. Facebook and Twitter were used to share information about the study. Constant Contact was used for e-newsletters and to engage users in online surveys to support study data collection. The team also used Flickr for hosting project images and to allow stakeholders to also share their images.

The project team's primary intent in using social media was to reach a broader audience, including a university student population. They did not realize the degree of success in engaging university students as they would have liked, but social media met their needs for a relatively low-budget way to reach a large audience. They said, "We wanted to promote a message on a limited budget, so we looked at low-cost, even free, social media services to get information out." One of the greatest benefits of social media outreach for the Loop 1604 project team was local media using graphics linked from social media posts. "It was gratifying to see our graphics on the nightly news. The graphic was from our e-newsletter and had worked its way through social media when local news media picked it up. It gave us a whole new reach."

Members of the project team felt that the disclaimer and use of social media as a tool to broadcast information, but not necessarily engage in dialogue, were barriers to utilizing social media to its full public involvement potential. “It is hard to attract fans and followers when you are not engaging social media the way it is intended to be used. It is a billboard with no response.” As a result, the project team noted that the dialogue never got going on social media: “We had a goal for engagement, but it was used more to inform.”

Table 3: Loop 1604 Social Media Approach

Purpose	Inform a broad base of stakeholders about the study and opportunities for involvement
Tools	Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, blog, online surveys
Policy	A carefully worded disclaimer noted that social media posts were not part of the project file.
Protocol	Consultants prepared a weekly posting log for client review and approval.
Strategy	Social media was used to promote information on the project website and opportunities for input.

Table 4: Loop 1604 Social Media Results

Strengths	Loop 1604 used social media to engage a broader group of stakeholders at their convenience.
Weaknesses	Although social media was used to inform the public, members of the project team viewed social media as a missed opportunity because the project format did not enable interactive dialogue.
Outcomes	One of the project’s greatest successes on social media was traditional media picking up project graphics, thus broadening the reach of the project.
Benefits	The project team cited the way social media links with the project website and provides access to project information and data as a benefit. They viewed it as a low-cost way to reach a broad audience.
Legal considerations	The project team monitored social media comments for consistency with incoming formal comments.
Cost	The Loop 1604 used free online platforms and had consultant staff monitor the sites.

Driving 95: Organizational Culture Makes Social Media a Natural Fit

After concerns about how to fund improvements to a 25-mile section of I-95 were raised in the early 2000’s, the North Carolina DOT engaged in an economic study to determine an appropriate funding mechanism which then led to a financing study examining tolling. The intent was for an Environmental Assessment to provide a broad view and various projects could then fall under it. However, the resulting economic study and tolling analysis is a pre-NEPA study and the federal action relates to determining a financing method. See the project website www.driving95.com.

Social media has been implemented as a natural fit to the department’s goal for transparency with the public and commitment to use every possible tool available to provide information and opportunity for input. They viewed social media as a necessary tool to effectively communicate in today’s culture. “We just accepted that we were going to use social media. It is a process of making it the norm; you send letters everyday ... that’s been the history; then we went to email, then we went to texting; it is rolling with changing technology.” They noted that without social media, the agency might miss a significant demographic group.

Facebook and Twitter were effective tools for reaching commuters who travel I-95, with input received from individuals from Canada to the UK as well as neighboring states. Figure 2 illustrates the project Twitter site. NCDOT viewed I-95 as a corridor that serves much of the East Coast and believed the study needed the public process to extend beyond North Carolina. “We have seen increased awareness and increased level of involvement over traditional public involvement. It broadens the audience and we were able to reach out further than we would have otherwise.”

The Driving 95 team considers all input via social media as being subject to public records and meetings laws. Input is geo-coded by zip code based on voluntary information provided by participants. All external communication goes through NCDOT’s communication office and the Driving 95 project manager, but they rely on a consultant in order to meet a standard of service of responding to posts within 24 hours. The project team has developed standard Frequently Asked Questions and elevates responses to the project manager only when responses go beyond pre-approved topics.

Communications staff internal to the department is trained and knowledgeable about current communications tools and consultants have been knowledgeable as well. This is consistent with the department’s goal to keep up with new technology and outreach tools. They also viewed young people as a resource for understanding social media as a tool and said recognition that the “upcoming generation” communicates in this way showed that NCDOT needed to make a culture change.

“I don’t think we had any problems implementing social media because the culture of the department had changed prior to the project taking off. The success of the I-95 job in this realm has spawned off similar outreach programs for other planning studies.”

Driving 95 Project Team Member



Figure 2: Driving 95 Social Media Site

Table 5: Driving 95 Social Media Approach

Purpose	The Driving 95 project team used social media to facilitate two-way communication for input and dissemination of information related to the economic study.
Tools	Facebook, Twitter, online surveys
Policy	The project has a posted policy notifying people that their comments are subject to public record.
Protocol	All external communication, including social media outreach, goes through NCDOT's Communications office. However, in order to improve response time for this particular project, a consultant is tasked with managing the social media accounts with a goal of responding within 24 hours. The consultant is allowed to respond with approved messaging.
Strategy	The project team chose Facebook and Twitter because the department already had accounts on these sites. The success of the project social media sites has been due, in part, to other department social media pages that could retweet and repost information to gain followers for this specific project.

Table 6: Driving 95 Social Media Results

Strengths	Social media reached commuters who use the interstate but don't live in the immediate study area, facilitating participation from drivers in surrounding states.
Weaknesses	They noted the need to keep up with changing communications technology in order to effectively engage stakeholder groups and the general public.
Outcomes	Social media helped shift public perception from "we don't need to do anything" to understanding that work needs to occur on the corridor over the next 20 years.
Benefits	Social media has been a positive and personal way to stay relevant to stakeholders. It is a way to demonstrate that the agency has used as many opportunities as possible to interact with the public.
Legal considerations	Social media input is treated the same as an email or letter. Any information gathered and collected is treated as being under public records laws.
Cost	The project team felt that social media is a cost effective way to reach the thousands of people who travel the I-95 corridor.

Metro I-70: Collaborative Website as the Primary Place of Online Engagement

The Metro I-70 Second Tier EIS (<http://www.metroi70.com/>) is considering roadway improvements for a 7 mile stretch through Kansas City, Missouri. Anticipated to be a 2-1/2 year process, the project was conducting outreach for alternatives analysis at the time of the case study interview. The project team structured their public involvement around outreach at three key milestones: Purpose and Need, Alternatives Analysis and the Draft EIS public hearing.

The I-70 project team is using an online integrated platform called MindMixer as an online source of public information and input (Figure 3). It serves as the project website. MindMixer provides a ready-made package that can be customized with project information and selected input tools. It requires participants to log-in and create a profile, which allows the project team to track involvement and evaluate geographic dispersion of participants by zip code. It also means participants log-in to specifically engage with the project.

They point out that the online public involvement tool is one tool among many other more traditional outreach methods. They said, "For us, it is another tool in the toolbox." Social media tools have been particularly effective in helping verify where stakeholders need to be engaged using traditional, grassroots methods. "We are using the demographic information from MindMixer to make decisions about where else we need to do outreach on the ground."

"We use social media to drive people to the collaborative website as the tool we really want them to use for engagement online."
Metro I-70 Project Team Member

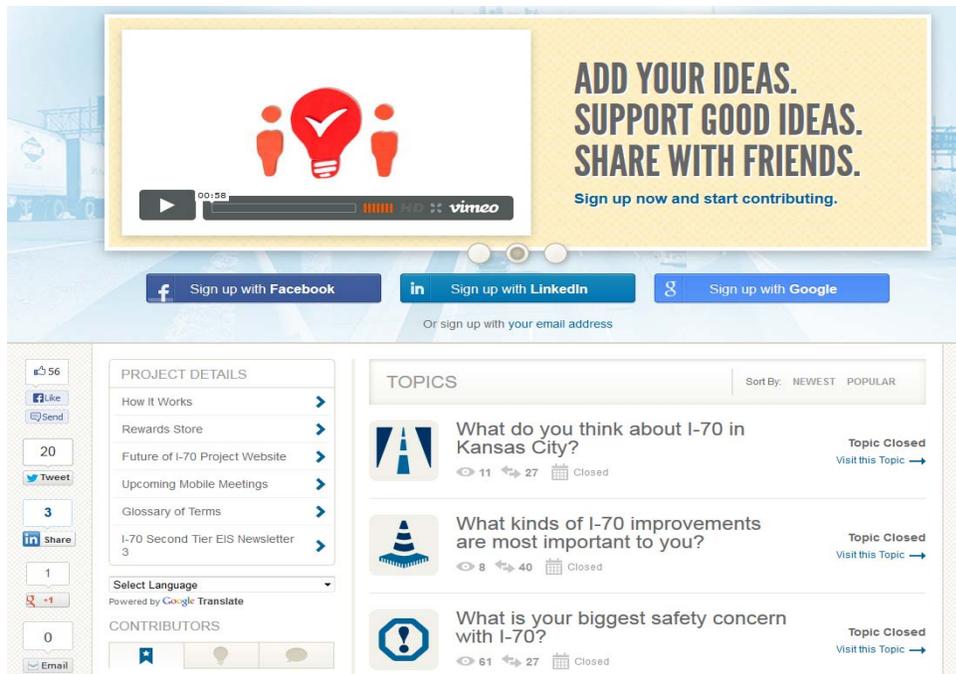


Figure 3: Metro I-70 MindMixer Site

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are used to promote the collaborative website. “We use social media to drive people to MindMixer as the tool we really want them to use for engagement online.” Thus, Facebook and Twitter are used to push information about the site and provide links rather than for engagement. They explained, “Social media posts are little, quick hits where people reach out; but we use it as opportunities to drive people to the online tool.” Social media is integrated with a variety of other tools for a comprehensive public involvement program.

Table 7: Metro I-70 Social Media Approach

Purpose	The Metro I-70 project team uses social media to publicize opportunities for providing input and to direct people to participate in the MindMixer site for interactive dialogue, project information and input to the study process.
Tools	MindMixer, Facebook, Twitter, blog
Policy	The policy gives guidance in terms of use and removal of obscene, profane or abusive language as well as promotional and political posts unrelated to MoDOT.
Protocol	The project public involvement lead, an internal MoDOT communications staff person, monitors social media accounts. As she sees relevant comments posted, she captures those with a screen shot and distributes them to the team.
Strategy	As part of their outreach, the project team has posed questions for discussion and used a polling feature that is part of the MindMixer site. They developed a set of six themes and moved toward asking more specific questions over time.

Table 8: Metro I-70 Social Media Results

Strengths	A primary value of social media and interactive media outreach was the ability to identify areas that needed grassroots outreach.
Weaknesses	They noted that Facebook and Twitter are not the right tool for a lengthy comment about a study.
Outcomes	The Metro I-70 team said that they did not see dramatically different results due to social media.
Benefits	The I-70 team has been able to reach commuters who use the corridor with their online tools. They have seen an increase in the variety of zip codes throughout the city and have representation from places that would not exist without the online tool.
Legal considerations	The team has not yet decided how to treat social media comments and interaction on MindMixer during the formal comment period for the Tier 2 Draft EIS. They will consult with FHWA and legal counsel.
Cost	The project team chose MindMixer due to a relatively low cost and the inclusion of management, a marketing playbook, assistance launching the site and collateral such as posters and postcards that came with the site. They are contracted with MindMixer for 30 months for less than \$10,000.

Westside Subway Extension: Achieving Online Engagement

The Westside Subway Extension EIS in Los Angeles, Calif., demonstrates the potential for social media engagement during the NEPA process. Now renamed as the Purple Line Extension, the Westside Subway Extension project

(<http://www.metro.net/projects/westside/>) began a robust social media program in 2008 that built a community of stakeholders engaged in the project development and environmental review process. Social media was used by the project team in addition to more traditional forms of outreach (see Figure 4). Among the first NEPA studies to employ these tools, social media comments were not included in the formal project file, but the project team felt that online dialogue created a better-informed public and they received more meaningful comments from stakeholders due to sharing information online and fostering conversation around various aspects of the project.

“Social media is another tool to engage the public and let people know what is going on. The goals of this are no different from other outreach tools like public meetings.”

Westside Subway Extension project

The project utilized the agency’s communication staff to interact with the public and respond on social media. Learning to sit back and allow social media followers to talk and respond to each other was an important part of their approach. They noted that this approach spurred on dialogue and that a peer

response to a posted question or comment built credibility and demonstrated broader community ownership in the process.

Social media was key to engaging stakeholders who lived outside the study area. Because one purpose of the subway extension project is to bring commuters to work, social media enabled broader participation from stakeholders who lived outside of the study area. Social media gave people a way to be involved in the NEPA process without having to attend a meeting.

As part of their social media outreach, the project team posted questions such as “What do you think about the alignment?” or “What do you think about a station at Crenshaw?” This invited interaction and provided a topic area for people to respond to. Whenever they had a public meeting, new information to share, or a new fact sheet it would be noted on Facebook and Twitter with links provided to the new information on the study web site. Posts were not always directly related to the project, but might provide information about infrastructure policy, transit elsewhere, or other topics of interest to the community.

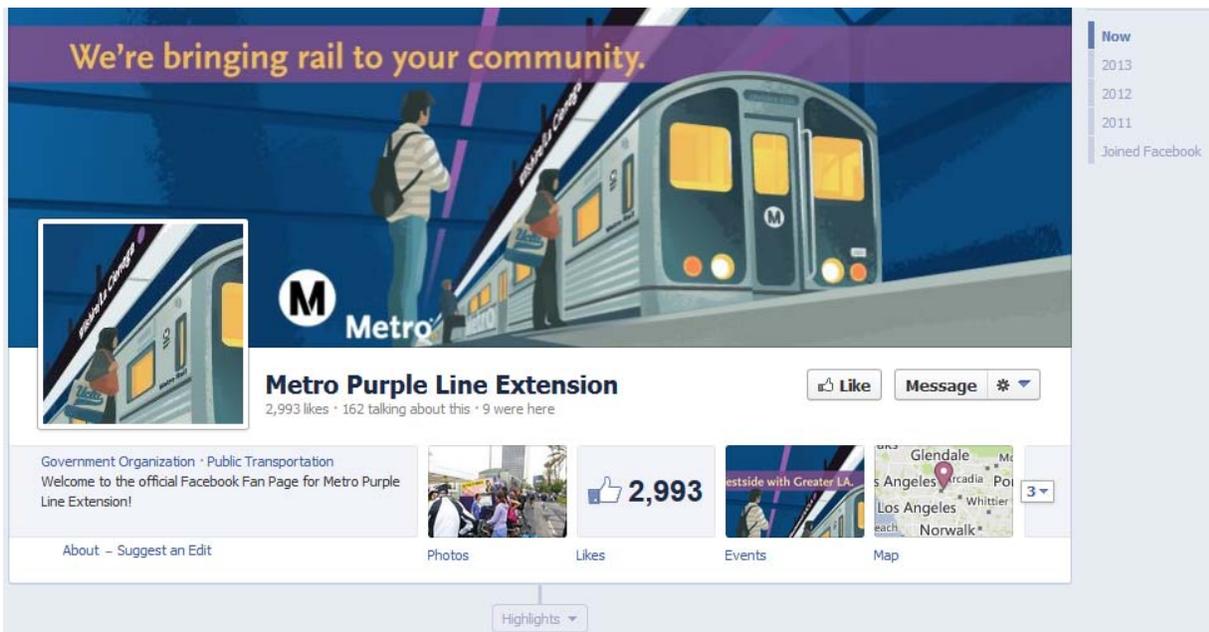


Figure 4: Westside Subway Extension Social Media Site

The success of the Westside Subway Extension’s social media outreach relied on daily posts that gave people something new to look at and interact with every day. Social media broadened the pool of input and allowed the communications team to evaluate the effectiveness of their messages at public meetings and other channels. It provided real-time feedback about people’s impressions of aspects of the project and whether the team’s presentation of information was understandable to the public.

Although social media comments were not considered in the formal project file, outreach coordinators counted, categorized, and summarized comments. They said this was a difficult task because social media discussion is nebulous and fluid. Many posts are free-associating comments that are hard to categorize. They found it easier to ask people to submit formal comments by directing them to an online comment form or designated email address

Ultimately, the Westside Subway Extension team arrived at consensus on alignment and stations due, in part, to the robust online discussions. People understood the reasons why decisions were made. The project team said the measure of social media success was when members of the public responded to each other.

NEPA decisions were made in a traditional manner with formal letters from homeowners groups and community groups as well as technical information and public hearings. But social media provided decision makers with another source to see the level of support from the public and created a more informed public that understood the project process and decisions.

Table 9: Westside Subway Extension Social Media Approach

Purpose	Broaden public understanding and outreach using all available tools.
Tools	Facebook, Twitter, blog
Policy	The agency’s communication staff is responsible for social media. There are outreach consultants who assist as needed.
Protocol	Although social media comments were not considered in the formal record for the Westside Subway Extension project, outreach coordinators count, categorize and summarize comments. The project team acknowledges comments on social media and invites people to participate in the formal comment method.
Strategy	As part of their social media outreach, the project team posted questions that invited interaction and provided topic areas for people to respond to.

Table 10: Westside Subway Extension Social Media Results

Strengths	Social media was important in reaching out to commuters who worked but did not live in the project area and gain immediate, real-time feedback on public meetings and communications.
Weaknesses	The project is subject to changes in format and terms of use of free online social media platforms. For instance, when Facebook introduced “pages” in 2010, the project ran both the group and the page for a period of time because the group followers could not be automatically transferred.
Outcomes	Social media helped people understand the reasons why decisions were made and provided decision makers with another source to see the level of support from the public.
Benefits	The Westside Subway Extension project said formal comments were better quality because of the informal interactions online. People could dialogue about the project with each other on social media forums and then when it came time to submit a formal comment, it was based on good information and was well-formulated.
Legal considerations	The project team was not certain social media could be adequately documented due to the fluidity of online interactions, but they felt that the benefits outweighed legal concerns.
Cost	Agency staff were assigned to manage social media for the project as part of their duties.

CHAPTER 5

Suggested Practices Guidance Resource

Guidance Resource for using Social Media during the NEPA Process

This chapter is written as a guide that can be reviewed by project managers, environmental task leads and public involvement practitioners. This Guidance Resource is prepared with two complementary parts:

- Suggestions for implementing social media during the NEPA process, organized in a checklist format for project teams to discuss and agree upon the many factors that go into effective social media outreach while also paying attention to the unique needs of public involvement during the NEPA process.
- Matrix of tools available for social media and web-based interaction, including descriptions, features and suggested uses during the NEPA process, presented as an online resource at www.NEPAandSocialMedia.com.

The checklist with a link to the staged tools matrix is included as a stand-alone Appendix that can be distributed and made available for use within the industry.

Checklist of Considerations for Implementing Social Media

Prior to introducing social media outreach, considerations related to purpose, process, content and how it fits into an overall public involvement plan should be addressed. Three key documents form the basis of agreement on approach and an action plan for social media: an agency's social media policy, a workflow protocol and a project-specific social media communications strategy as part of the public involvement plan.

Social media can be leveraged as a tool for engagement where interactive communication takes place in addition to building project awareness, as indicated by case studies for this research in early 2013. A robust use of project-based social media can broaden stakeholder outreach, create a more informed public yielding more substantive and meaningful comments and generate

A robust use of social media can broaden stakeholder outreach, create a more informed public yielding more substantive and meaningful comments, and generate valuable discussion and input to the NEPA decision-making process.

Social Media Checklist Overview

- ✓ *Purpose*
- ✓ *Tools Selection*
- ✓ *Policy*
- ✓ *Protocol*
- ✓ *Strategy*

valuable discussion and input to the NEPA decision-making process. Social media provides an opportunity to gauge real-time reactions to project information and can serve as a key tool for assessing public sentiment about the study process and project alternatives.

The checklist of considerations presents a series of decisions a project team can address in order to implement a social media outreach program to meet goals for public involvement. The term *social media* is intended to apply to the most prevalent and populated social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter; however, these social media tools could be substituted with other social media platforms and collaborative websites.

The five checklist considerations are iterative and interactive in the sense that decisions about each may influence or change aspects of the others. These considerations must be flexible and reviewed periodically in order to address changing social media practices and respond to the type of interaction occurring on the project's social media sites.

Defining the Purpose of Social Media Outreach

Public involvement planning begins with defining goals and objectives for engaging stakeholders in the NEPA process. An initial stakeholder analysis and assessment of the study context provides valuable information for selecting a range of outreach tools. Social media is one of the options for public involvement tools and lends itself well to fulfill the intent for NEPA public involvement due to its interactive nature. Social media can be used to provide timely public notification throughout the study process, provide access to documents and comment forms for public review and use, and serve as a central point of communication for early and continuous public information. As social media continues to grow as a readily available and common communication tool, NEPA project teams should consider the opportunities to use social media to engage with project stakeholders in interactive dialogue as a method of public input.

Like any other public involvement tool, project teams should consider how social media can best support the NEPA public involvement process and define the purpose of its use. Due to the broad base of users and the interactive format of social media, it can be a prime vehicle for posing questions and soliciting input from project stakeholders.

One-way, Two-way and Interactive Communication

Social media can be used for one-way, two-way or interactive communication. One-way communication refers to sharing information with no opportunity for feedback. Although one-way communication can fulfill the NEPA requirement for public notification such as publishing a legal notice, it does not facilitate public input.

Two-way communication describes a traditional public involvement model of sharing information and receiving comments. A public meeting, for instance, is often approached as a two-way communication tool where information is presented to stakeholders for their review and comment. Project information is prepared to create a more informed public with the expectation of feedback in return.

- Possible Social Media Purposes**

 - ✓ *Monitor public discussion*
 - ✓ *Broadcast information*
 - ✓ *Gather information*
 - ✓ *Receive comments*
 - ✓ *Engage stakeholders*

Social media presents an opportunity for interactive communication, where stakeholders can view and respond to each other’s comments in a multi-directional online conversation. Social media can be compared to a virtual dinner party, where conversations run in fits and starts with interruptions, divergences, emotions and opinions.

The move from using social media as a one-way communication tool to an interactive public participation method holds great potential. As public expectations for transparency and accountability continue to grow, social media provides an efficient forum to share information and hear people’s reactions during the study process. Going beyond two-way communication, social media facilitates a layered discussion that can give voice to multiple viewpoints

and engage stakeholders in holding their own conversations about what’s important and what trade-offs are acceptable when examining a proposed action. Providing a social media site enables the project team to host the project discussion and provide reliable data to inform stakeholder discussion.

Table 11: Potential Uses for Social Media during NEPA Processes

Potential Purpose of Social Media Use	One-way, Two-way or Interactive Communication	Description
Monitor discussion	One-way	A project team without social media presence can engage in monitoring discussion of the project and/or agency on social media to understand public sentiment and the public involvement context within the community. For example, Los Angeles MTA spent time reading external blogs and comments prior to launching their own agency blog and project social media sites.
Broadcast information	One-way	Social media can be used to share links and make announcements such as information about an upcoming public meeting or availability of a draft document for public comment. For example, Missouri DOT used social networking sites to link people to the Metro I-70 collaborative website.

Potential Purpose of Social Media Use	One-way, Two-way or Interactive Communication	Description
Gather information	Two-way	Social media can be used to gather data relevant to the NEPA study through polling, surveys or other qualitative and quantitative analyses. Social networking can help promote the opportunity to participate and link people to a survey site or social networking discussions may help project teams identify valued community resources and priorities. The Loop 1604 (Texas) and Driving 95 (North Carolina) projects utilized online surveys for data collection.
Receive comments	Two-way	Social media can be used to receive both formal and informal comments during a NEPA study. It is important that the NEPA project team decide, in consultation with legal counsel and federal agency representatives, whether social media comments will be part of the project record. Regardless, social media sites can be a source for early and ongoing input on various aspects of a NEPA study. Many projects, such as Loop 1604 (Texas) and Westside Subway Extension (California), referred people to other sources for formal comments but actively invited users to post comments on project social media sites.
Engage stakeholders	Interactive	Social media can be used to build an online community of stakeholders engaged in the NEPA decision-making process. As an interactive forum, social media participants respond to each other and do not necessarily rely on the project team or agency representatives to keep the conversation going. Los Angeles MTA and Missouri DOT noted their desire to allow participants to respond to each other and considered it a mark of successful online engagement.

Social Media Tools Selection for NEPA Public Involvement

As confirmed in this NCHRP research, NEPA project teams are generally using social media to supplement other forms of public involvement. Social media does not stand alone and does not negate the need for traditional outreach tools such as public meetings, workshops, stakeholder committees, grassroots outreach and hard copy information materials, such as fact sheets and comment forms.

A matrix of social media tools prepared as part of the NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 research is available online-- www.NEPAandSocialMedia.com -- and is organized by seven types of social media platforms: social media monitoring; blogs and publishing; polling and surveys; social networking; photo and video sharing; aggregators and data tracking; and collaboration sites and crowdsourcing. A brief overview of each type is described below.

A consideration that crosses all tools is whether the project will set up a project-specific page or utilize the agency's brand identity for social media interaction. If the NEPA project team intends to have robust conversation, it is best to establish a project-specific site to engage stakeholders directly interested in the project. If the project team intends to use social media only occasionally to share information or notify the public, utilizing an existing agency account may work and even be preferable as a way to tap into the agency's overall reach.

Social Media Monitoring

Several platforms are available to monitor the internet for information about an agency or project using key words. Even if the project is not going to engage in proactive social media outreach, it is wise for project teams to monitor what is being said online, just as a project team might monitor local news sources for stories about the project. Simple examples of social media monitoring are Google Alerts, RSS feeds and keyword searches in the applications themselves or use of free social media management tools like HootSuite or TweetDeck which allow saving keyword searches. There are other more sophisticated programs and paid services to aid in monitoring online dialogue across one or more social media channels.

Blogs and Online Publishing

Many options exist for publishing information online in accessible formats that have an option for allowing reader comments. When using blogs or other online publishing, the project team will need a plan for promoting the site in order to generate traffic. Most blogging sites have built-in analytics that allow authors to view how many people have seen a given post and provide an option for administrative approval of comments. Even if project teams are not using blogs or online publishing for interactive comments, NEPA project teams may want to explore online publishing as a method to make information accessible in today's digital communication climate where reading on mobile devices including smart phones and tablets is becoming common practice.²³ Example tools include Wordpress, Blogger, Flipboard and Flipsnack.

Online Polling and Surveys

Although NEPA is a decision-making process that is not a vote, polling and surveys can be conducted on specific topics or resource areas to support the NEPA decision-making process. Several online services exist to easily build and distribute online surveys as a method to evaluate public perceptions on specific topics or gain input regarding preferences between a variety of options. Polling and surveys can be an educational outreach tool, as well, as the survey process may require sharing relevant background information and may lead the user through a thought-process of consequences and trade-offs between

²³ 34 percent of American adults own a tablet computer according to the 2013 Pew Internet and American Life study, up from 3 percent in 2010: <http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/February/Pew-Internet-Mobile.aspx>.

various options under consideration. Surveys must be carefully crafted and should be pre-tested to ensure questions gather the data desired by the project team. Survey Monkey, PollEverywhere and Textizen are examples of online polling and survey platforms that have reporting functions that display the results in real-time. Other vendors can be paid for additional sophistication or assistance in crafting survey questions; many collaboration website developers include polling functions in its range of tools.

Social Networking

Social networking refers to the most prevalent forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+. They provide spaces for virtual gatherings of people with common interests and allow multi-directional, interactive conversations. Establishing agency or project presence on a social network allows it to be part of the public conversations that are taking place. It also provides ready access to potentially thousands of stakeholders who are already on a given social network. A drawback of utilizing popular social networking sites is that the project is subject to changes in format or policies of the site. For instance, when Facebook shifted format from groups to pages, the Westside Subway Extension (Calif.) project had to run two sites for a while and request their followers to “like” their new page. Similarly, when Facebook changed its algorithms for sharing among members, project teams were no longer guaranteed that all users who had “liked” the page would actually see the project’s post come up in their feed unless they paid a nominal fee for a “promoted” post.

Photo and Video Sharing

Several social media platforms are dedicated to sharing photos and videos. Although some sites may be treated as online storage or cataloguing, most visual platforms have comment capabilities and can tell a relevant story in a visual way when used well. Many also have “tagging” capabilities that can then be used in search functions. YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Vimeo, ShowYou and Pinterest are example sites that people use for photo and video sharing. These sites can be more effective when enhanced with other social media or online activities such as cross-referencing with Facebook, Twitter or a project website. The latest video-sharing platforms are designed for mobile application use with a focus on brevity and simplicity. Twitter’s Vine limits a video to six seconds and is easily shared on social networks.

Aggregators and Data Tracking

A growing number of online service providers offer ways to track information on the internet with special attention given to social networks and other interactive forums. Some of the tools are free of charge and others might have a fee associated with its use. Aggregators and data tracking sites provide user statistics such as gender, age group, location, time of day and day of week of peak use, and number of clicks on a particular post or link. Tracking statistics becomes more useful as the project team gathers information over time and works to interpret shifts in activities and interests. Example aggregators and data tracking services include TweetDeck, HootSuite, Buffer and Klout. These tools can help the project team assess the effectiveness of social media outreach on other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Collaboration Sites and Crowdsourcing

Another option for online interaction is establishing a collaborative website. Several companies provide ready-made templates for creating password protected sites where stakeholders come to specifically

engage in conversations pertinent to the project. This allows the project team to have a high degree of control over the format and content of the site. Members of the site can be limited to those who are invited; for instance, it could be used to support a stakeholder group or community advisory committee that meets throughout the NEPA process. Or, it can be opened up to members of the general public where anyone can register as a user and participate in online dialogues, surveys and other collaborative activities. For some projects, such as Metro I-70 (Missouri), the collaborative website serves as the project website. In this case, other social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter are used to invite users to the site; thus, social networking is used to share information, but interaction and engagement with stakeholders is referred to the collaborative website. A variety of vendors provide templates, web hosting and support for collaboration sites and crowdsourcing such as Granicus, Open Town Hall, MetroQuest and MindMixer.

Ultimately, the selection of tools should be based on the public involvement goals and objectives. Consideration of stakeholder demographics and accessibility of the internet will also factor into the selection of social media tools.

Social Media Policy: Agency Guidelines for Social Media Implementation

Before engaging in social media outreach, NEPA project teams should consult agency communications staff to understand how project social media accounts or interactive sites fit with other agency online activities. Established by the agency, a social media policy outlines intended use, who has authority to represent the agency, create accounts and manage accounts; and provides guidelines, rules and regulations for projects and initiatives within the agency in order to have a coordinated effort and consistent online presence.

Because using social media for public involvement during planning and environmental phases is fairly new, the NEPA project team may need to discuss the interpretation of the agency's policies with communications staff and executive leadership. Importantly, in order for social media to be a successful public involvement tool, the project team needs the flexibility to be social. In part, this means that posts should tend to be written in an informal tone with a human voice.²⁴ Posts also need to be interesting and relevant to the audience the project is trying to reach, which means that not all posts are necessarily going to be directly related to the project or agency. Taking a step toward interactive communication may require expanding definitions within existing policy and talking with agency officials about the degree of interactive discussion they are willing to support.

Taking a step toward interactive communication may require expanding definitions within existing policy and talking with agency officials about the degree of interactive discussion they are willing to support.

²⁴ The 2013 AASHTO social media survey noted a shift in tone and a growing number of transportation agencies discovering the effectiveness of a more informal, human voice. A quoted survey comment read: "We used to be very rigid and formal in all our responses. Now, we're trying to humanize the feed. We ... answer the feed as people (saying I and we) instead of an agency (DOT says...). It has helped tremendously and we've received really good public feedback!"

If a social media policy does not exist at the agency, the team should confirm logistical support as well as public communication expectations that apply department-wide to make sure social media outreach aligns with the agency’s goals and has adequate support. Basic considerations include:

- Ability to implement social media and comply with Information Technology policies;
- Knowledge and ability of staff regarding social media;
- Access to social media sites by agency employees in order to participate;
- Availability of staff resources to manage social media; and
- Support for appropriate training or hiring skilled staff to implement social media outreach.

Social media is quickly becoming a standard communication tool that blends the public forum of traditional newspapers with the personalization of email. It is prudent for agencies to have a policy in place to address how to use it as a significant interface with the public.

Social Media Protocol: Process Considerations for the NEPA Project Team

A second key document is a protocol for implementing social media. Established by the project management team with communications staff input, a social media protocol can provide an outline of roles and responsibilities, workflow and approval processes for proactive and reactive posts. It can establish expectations for timing, tone and how online activity will be documented in order to effectively manage a project social media account.

Roles and Responsibilities

The protocol should establish who manages social media accounts for the project. A member of the project communications team can be designated as responsible for monitoring social media discussions, designing proactive posts and preparing responses to users’ posts. They will interface with other project team members to gather and verify information on a variety of topics. It is particularly important that the social media manager understand the nuances of media relations, as reporters and other news sources regularly follow social media accounts for government agencies and projects. Every post is a mini-news release and should be treated with the expectation that it could generate a story on the topic.

The social media manager should be able to designate others on the team to post in the absence of or at the direction of the primary manager. Social media can easily be managed remotely on a mobile device, but it is important that multiple staff members have capabilities to post and share on social media sites as back-up. Other project team members need to support timely response on a variety of topics. Phone calls and emails from social media staff tend to involve the same time-sensitive importance as media calls.

Protocol Checklist

- ✓ *Roles and Responsibilities*
- ✓ *Time Commitment*
- ✓ *Workflow and Approvals*
- ✓ *Timing and Tone*
- ✓ *Justification for Comment Removal*
- ✓ *Crisis Communication Plan*
- ✓ *Feedback to Project Team*
- ✓ *Documentation Process*

Time Commitment

Project social media requires daily attention. A skilled social media manager can monitor online activity using a variety of tools with designated key words related to the project. Based on case study interviews and project experience, social media staff can expect to spend 1-2 hours a day at start-up followed by 30-60 minutes a day for an experienced social media manager on a well-established project. Aside from this planned time, social media staff should have flexibility to prepare responses with unpredictable timing. The social media manager needs to use good judgment in determining how to use existing approved material and when posts need to be elevated for approval (see *workflow* below). The time needed to gather new information and gain on-the-fly approvals can be mitigated with good planning anticipating key topics of interest to stakeholders. It is important that the project social media pages are accurate and speak with authority. Some situations will require altering plans for the work day in order to address an unanticipated topic or crisis. Because workflow is unpredictable and can fluctuate based on a variety of circumstances, time estimating is best achieved with an allotment of hours per week that can be adjusted based on the demands of social media interaction over time.

Workflow and Approvals

The dynamic nature of social media can be addressed by creating a weekly planned posting log and other tools that mitigate the unpredictability of online comments. Rather than sending planned posts for approval on a daily basis, the social media manager can prepare a weekly outline of planned posts for review and approval. Planned posts can draw from existing public involvement materials and seek out other relevant information in advance.

Based on the level of social media activity and the community context of current events, the social media manager should have the freedom to alter planned posts or make additional posts. For instance, when a natural disaster occurs, planned posts might be supplemented or replaced with a post like “Our hearts go out to Monroe, Oklahoma.” Posts that show emotion and concern for the community ought to be acceptable based on the local context (see *tone and timing* below).

The project team should discuss who approves planned posts and when content needs to be elevated to the project manager. If posts are based on approved project messaging developed with the project manager, a communications manager is likely appropriate to approve the weekly posting log. Topics that go beyond previously approved messaging likely require input from the project manager or other technical staff. The project manager may want to determine how hands-on he or she wants to be with regard to the social media outreach. The level of the project manager’s involvement should be consistent with how he or she approaches approvals for other public involvement activities. If the communications team is trusted with response to emails and phone calls, they also likely can be trusted to respond on social media.

Approvals for response to users’ online posts should be addressed in the protocol. The protocol can outline under what circumstances social media staff can respond without additional approval and when reviews and approvals are needed. As noted above, the unpredictability of social media comments can be mitigated with good planning. Social media staff should be familiar with all approved public materials such as basic project descriptions, frequently asked questions and fact sheets. Repurposing project information for social media is one strategy to maintain a consistent message and provides a good resource for material to post in response to online dialogue.

Due to the time-sensitive nature of social media, however, the project team should anticipate the range of comments, questions and topics that could be discussed on social media before launching social media sites. As resource material for responding to online posts, the team can develop a statement and some supporting facts for each anticipated topic. These are approved reactive messages, not intended to be proactively shared, but vetted for use in responding to posts if particular topics come up.

At the start of the project, the team should have frequent interaction and discussion about content and err on the side of gaining approvals. Once the workflow is established and a level of trust is developed, the number of approvals may be reduced; however the various stages of the NEPA study and fluctuation of changing conditions require that social media staff stay in regular contact with other aspects of the project team.

Timing and Tone

The social media protocol should outline the frequency of planned posts, expectations for timing of comment response and example source material and posts in order to demonstrate the expected range of topics and tone of posts. The frequency of planned posts will depend on the complexity of the study and how robust the project team wants social media interaction to be. Concerns about bias or predisposition of the project team can be mitigated by posting regularly on a variety of topics related to the NEPA study. Although no single social media post can contain “complete information” to the extent of a formal published document, a steady stream of daily nuggets of information can demonstrate the range of topics being addressed in the NEPA process. If the project team cannot sustain content material for daily posts, two to three posts a week can show followers that the project team intends to actively engage users on the social media site.

In addition to determining the frequency of planned posts, the project team needs to determine the expected response time to users’ posts. Social media is designed for real-time interaction and a 24-hour response time is standard. Depending on the topic and content, responses might be posted within minutes or hours; or, in some cases, the response post might acknowledge the comment within 24 hours, but then require additional research and approvals for a more detailed response later. The key is to identify an expected standard time for response and readily acknowledge when specific posts should be treated as an exception.

Timing for response to posts may also change depending on the stage of the NEPA study as well as the nature of interactive discussion on the site. Part of the social media manager’s job is to learn when to watch and listen, allowing interaction between users rather than responding immediately.

The type of social media posts, including tone – or voice – of the posts, can also be addressed in the protocol. The project team should discuss the level of formality or humor that is acceptable, working to strike a balance between a professional voice that represents the credibility of the project team and a friendly voice that invites discussion and speaks in plain language. The best way to describe the team’s approach to acceptable tone is to include several example posts in the protocol to demonstrate the range of topics and expected level of formality or informality. The agency’s social media policy may already contain guidance and examples related to tone.

The protocol can outline the range of topics and source material for planned posts and responses. In order to be effective, social media sites need to share information of value to users including

information that is not directly related to the project or agency. Sharing other types of information builds goodwill and provides a sense that the project team is part of a larger community that cares about local events, sports teams, weather and other local interests. Again, a perception of unfairly advocating a particular organization, business or event is mitigated if the site shares generously and makes this type of content a regular part of its planned posts.

Part of identifying source material and the range of topics for posts is creating guidelines for who the project will follow on sites like Twitter and Facebook or actively seek to engage in the case of collaborative websites. Start with project partners and identifiable stakeholder organizations. Following these entities or inviting them to participate in a specific online platform notifies them that the project social media site exists. Following a broad base of users also provides content to share and contributes to understanding the community. Social media analytics can help identify what types of posts are most viewed and liked by the site's users (see *evaluation measures* under the social media strategy section).

In order to be effective, social media sites need to share information of value to users including information that is not directly related to the project or agency.

The social media protocol outline of representative posts, topics and sources for posting material should not be viewed as a comprehensive or prescriptive list, but as a starting point for the team to agree on the social media approach.

Justification for Comment Removal

A key concern for many project teams venturing into social media is how to address negative comments, misinformation and inappropriate comments. Negative comments and misinformation will be discussed under the communication strategy since it addresses messaging and content, but it is important to note that allowing negative comments is necessary to demonstrate transparency and willingness to listen. Removing or being overly sensitive to negative comments will undermine the credibility of the site and affect its value as a NEPA public involvement tool.

The key protocol to include in the process document is a clear definition of what constitutes an inappropriate comment that justifies removal from the site. This portion of the social media protocol can detail who determines a comment is inappropriate by what standards and what actions to take.

It is standard social media practice to remove comments with foul language or threatening remarks. As staff at the Missouri DOT stated, "Keep it clean and kind." Los Angeles MTA's strategy for follow-up after removal of an inappropriate comment is a model for communicating that the stakeholder is still welcome to participate on the site. Los Angeles MTA sends an email or direct message to the person who made the inappropriate post letting them know it was removed. Along with this *acknowledgement*, they invite the user to repost their thoughts using different language.

Judgments about distasteful humor can be vetted out through discussion with members of the project team. The Maryland Transit Authority described having regular conversations about posts in questionable taste, striking a balance between removing offensive content and allowing users to speak

in their own voice and vernacular. They described having a healthy debate about whether a specific post is abusive or contains a personal threat. If references are general and reflect accepted local cultural references, they leave it up.

Crisis Communication Plan

Social media can be used to quickly disseminate information in a crisis situation. The team can consider what constitutes a crisis situation and identify the team members who need to collaborate on strategy and messaging when an unexpected event occurs that has implications for the project. A complex, multi-year NEPA study may have a crisis communication plan in place and social media can be included in the tools detailed within that plan. Addressing the risk of misinformation or social media sites being hijacked by an individual or interest group will be discussed in the social media strategy section as it pertains to content and messaging.

Feedback to Project Team

The social media protocol can detail how the social media manager will communicate online interactions and activities with the broader project team. Summarizing the content of posts for the project team provides value to the overall public involvement effort and input to the NEPA decision-making process. Outline the frequency with which the social media manager will provide feedback to the project team; depending on the complexity and stage of the study, it might be weekly, monthly or quarterly. A content analysis of general themes and concerns with example posts illustrating common comment topics is a practical way to share this information.

Working within the communications and public involvement team, it is valuable to compare the tone and topics of social media discussion with other methods of public input to check for consistency. If a new topic emerges online, it may indicate reaching a new audience who has not previously been engaged or a new issue that has not been vetted out in the NEPA process. Social media can serve as a real-time feedback mechanism to make sure key issues are addressed and that project messaging is understood.

Documentation Process

A significant topic in the social media protocol is documentation of online interactions. The team should consult with legal counsel regarding whether to retain all or selected interactions in the project file. There is currently no federal guidance regarding the protocol for documenting and responding to social media posts, although **NCHRP 20-06 Study Topic 19-04, *Transportation Agencies' use of Social Media*** is engaged in ongoing research regarding legal considerations for social media sites sponsored by transportation agencies. From a communications viewpoint, the inclusion of social media posts in the project file depends on the purpose for using social media as part of the public involvement process. If social media is being used for one-way communication and there is little interaction, it is good to document the reach of social media followers as part of the public notification process, but there is minimal need to document posts as formal comments in the NEPA process.

Several project teams interviewed as part of this NCHRP research indicated that they utilize social media as a space for informal discussion and they redirect users to an online comment form or specific email address for formal comments. With this approach, social media serves as a “rehearsal” for formal

comments where users learn about the project, ask questions and test their ideas among their peers before formulating a formal comment. Just as NEPA project teams often meet with resource agency representatives to build project understanding and grasp overarching concerns in informal dialogue prior to the agency submitting a formal comment letter, social media can serve as an interactive space for discussion prior to submitting separate formal comments. If using this approach, the project team should consider providing a disclaimer or statement of user guidelines on the social media site in such a way that it does not deter discussion and participation. (Also see discussion of the *disclaimer* in the strategy section.)

Regardless of whether social media is included in the project file, the project team should maintain a record of planned posts and user interactions. Some aggregating services are able to provide this documentation or the communications team may keep a social media posting log by copying and pasting the information into a table format with a date and time stamp. Some social media sites, such as Twitter, will archive posts upon request. The social media site Storify is designed to organize social media posts from various platforms into a story. Guidelines for documentation may also be contained in an agency's social media policy and used as starting point for a NEPA project team.

Social Media Strategy: Communication Plan for Audience, Message and Evaluation

The social media strategy outlines a plan for defining audiences, developing messaging and content and evaluating results. Established by the project communications team as a subset of the overall public involvement plan, the social media strategy is a communication plan for utilizing social media to engage the public in the NEPA decision-making process.

Audience

Defining the audience for social media outreach can help the project team select appropriate social media tools and develop an effective approach. It is important to note that the increasing utilization of mobile devices and wireless networks has introduced the opportunity for minority and low-income groups to be more engaged with online outreach methods.²⁵ Although this NCHRP research process did not find documented use of social media to specifically support environmental justice outreach, it is possible that for some projects social media might be an effective tool to engage traditionally underserved populations. For example, a new toll facility project in California has utilized a social media strategy to reach Spanish-speaking and bilingual audiences with some measurable success.

Strategy Checklist

- ✓ Audience
- ✓ Messaging and Content
- ✓ Evaluation

Knowing the intended audience is critical to developing an effective brand identity, building relevant followers and successfully encouraging engagement. Implementing social media might be different depending on age group, gender, cultural group, race or ethnicity. If you know who you are trying to reach, the project

²⁵ See <http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2010/September/Technology-Trends-Among-People-of-Color.aspx> 2013 research by the Pew Internet and American Life project shows that 91 percent of American adults own a cell phone and 56 percent own a smart phone. See <http://www.pewinternet.org/Infographics/2013/Cell-Phone-Ownership.aspx> and <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Smartphone-Ownership-2013.aspx>

team can more readily hone in on topics, messages and develop a project “personality” that resonates with the audience. Building a following also depends on engaging relevant organizations and opinion leaders; sharing information from credible sources within the community; and building trust with users through timely and accurate responses.

Messaging and Content

Once the intended audience is clearly defined, the communications strategy can focus on the message. Messaging on social media should be consistent with messaging across all public involvement tools. Messaging is a process by which the communications team works with the project management and technical staff to determine how to best describe the project in understandable terms. Providing good information to the public about the NEPA process and relevant facts help facilitate meaningful participation in the decision-making process. The NEPA public involvement lead can work closely with the social media manager to ensure that messaging is consistent and appropriate.

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User guidelines or disclaimer. One of the key messages unique to social media outreach is communicating how the project team is using social media tools. This is often summarized in a short statement that can be posted in a social media profile and can be labeled “user guidelines” or a “disclaimer”. Since disclaimers sometimes have a negative connotation and tend to focus on what is not acceptable on the site (including a definition of inappropriate comments subject to removal), it may be more productive to positively state how the NEPA project team is utilizing the social media site. Examples might include:

- To share information and answer your questions;
- To gather information and input; or
- To engage in dialogue.

The user guidelines or disclaimer can clearly state whether social media interactions are included or not included in the formal public record for the NEPA process. The decision of whether to include social media posts in the project file should be made by the project manager with input from legal counsel. Once that decision is made, it is up to the communications team to convey it appropriately.

Promise to the public. The user guidelines or disclaimer also makes a promise to the public²⁶ about how the social media site will engage with stakeholders. In order to build trust, the project team should deliver on its promise in terms of fulfilling the stated purpose for public involvement using social media. A key distinction that should be clearly stated is whether the primary function of the social media site is one-way, two-way or interactive communication.

²⁶ The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum notes an implied “promise to the public” based on the level of outreach and communication about how public input will be used in a decision-making process. See <http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/spectrum.pdf>

Another important aspect of the promise to the public is communicating how information discussed on

Regardless of whether social media is included in the project file, the project team should maintain a record of planned posts and user interactions.

social media will be addressed in the NEPA decision-making process. It should be noted that although there is no federal guidance regarding the handling of social media interactions in the project file, there is no rule against allowing social media comments to be part of the record. In the spirit of transparency and inclusiveness, some believe that social media comments should be part of the public record. Regardless of whether social media posts are included in the project file, the project team should be prepared to demonstrate how online interactive discussions contributed to the study process. Just as a key part of holding effective public meetings is following up with attendees about how their input was used, the virtual community engaged in social media also wants to know how their input is being used.

Integration with other outreach tools. The effectiveness of social media outreach can be amplified by integrating it with other tools. Repurposing project messaging, graphics, photos and charts creates project efficiency, helps with consistency and allows stakeholders to engage with project information at their convenience. Information presented at a public meeting can be shared online for ongoing discussion and reaching additional stakeholders. Questions posed at a workshop can be posted to the social media page for additional discussion and reactions from followers – in real time if desired. Survey links, draft documents and comment forms can be linked from social media pages to increase awareness of public involvement opportunities. Likewise, project social media sites can be promoted at public meetings, workshops and within other outreach tools so that stakeholders are aware of participation opportunities online.

Various social media tools can also work together to better accomplish public involvement goals. Note that the tools matrix identifies social media tools that can enhance or be enhanced by other tools. For instance, photos shared in an Instagram account can be posted to Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. Links to a YouTube video can be shared via these media, on a project website or on a password protected collaboration site. Social media has many forms and an outreach campaign might be strongest by tapping into several platforms for a multi-media approach.

Off-topic conversations, negative comments and misinformation. A unique aspect of social media is the layering of conversations over time and the ability for users to talk to each other by commenting on each others' posts. Social media has the potential to be a multi-vocal forum for interactive discussion. There will be off-topic conversations and posts that do not make sense. There will be criticism of the project, technical work, process and sponsoring agency. Similar to a workshop with people seated at multiple tables to work on a common problem, there is going to be some discussion and opinions about the weather and community events. Another analogy is that social media pages are gatherings of people with common interests, similar to a group of regulars who gather at the local coffee shop.

As a result, negative comments will most certainly occur. A negative post can turn into a positive conversation based on how the project team responds; a disgruntled stakeholder can change his or her attitude when he or she feels acknowledged and heard. Furthermore, the NEPA public involvement process seeks out public input, which commonly comes in the form of negative statements. The difference with social media is that the project team can quickly acknowledge the issue and respond with information about how the concern is being addressed as part of the study. Negative comments are a valued part of NEPA public involvement. They offer the project team an opportunity to better understand their constituents.

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Misinformation is another common concern. This is a growing issue whether the project chooses to implement their own online social media tools or not. The fact is, the conversation about the project will occur online with or without the project team participating on social media sites. Although project teams often discuss the risks of having a social media presence, the team should also consider the risks of not participating in social media sites. These are strategic decisions that must be made early based on demographic analysis and research.

Misinformation posted by the public can proliferate across the internet quickly using social networks, damaging an agency and project reputation quickly. When uncertain about the level of potential consequence, the social media manager should consult with the public involvement manager and project manager for guidance.

A first step to addressing misinformation is to evaluate whether a social media post with incorrect information has negative consequences to the project process. A typo or slight oversight may not have any consequence and can just be let go in the flow of a social media feed. If a social media post clearly has misinformation that has consequence to the public perception of the project, there are several approaches to consider. One is to watch the post for awhile to see if other users correct the misinformation. Regular users familiar with the project are often quick to correct misinformation. Another approach is to directly engage known regular participants in sharing their thoughts and reactions to the post. This can be done in a comment on the post tagging or naming regular participants, inviting them to comment on the post. In some cases, the social media manager may want to directly correct the information by sharing a link or fact; but this should be done with tact and respect.

A case where misinformation was generated in a Twitter feed by a large daily newspaper in a metropolitan area can serve as a good example of how to quickly correct a potential social media backlash. In this example, the social media manager saw through normal keyword monitoring an important project fact incorrectly stated by a newspaper on Twitter. The social media manager alerted the project manager and together they drafted a 400-word “notes” post created in Facebook. Within three hours the note was posted on the project’s Twitter and Facebook pages, an “@ reply” sent to the newspaper with the link to the note, and more “@ replies” sent to individuals who retweeted the original incorrect newspaper Tweet. Significantly, the newspaper retweeted the correction, sharing it with all their followers. Acting quickly prevented the newspaper from posting the incorrect information

on their Facebook page, so in a strategic decision, the project decided not to directly post to the newspaper site. The result was that no further dissemination of the incorrect information occurred.

Ultimately, building an engaged community of social media users from the start of the NEPA process can help mitigate misinformation. If the project fosters interaction and sharing, the online community will develop trust and a strong community network. The more regular participants are already familiar with project facts and processes, the more equipped they are to respond when misinformation occurs. In addition, the more activity on the project social media page, including sharing more than just project information but also community information as noted above, the more a misinformed post is a blip in the social media feed during the course of a day.

Given the limitations of a public social media site, the team also could establish an online collaborative site with its own log-in and user profiles. This allows the project team to have more control over the design and functionality of the site and creates a more controlled space for detailed and purposeful discussion. Participants log-in to the site to specifically engage in discussion about the project. The trade-off of setting up a separate collaboration site is that the communications team will need to invest more effort in raising awareness and promoting use of the site, whereas Facebook and Twitter already have thousands of users.

Anti-project social media campaigns and misinformation on other sites. Social media can be a new space for organizing project opposition; an individual can create their own group and recruit hundreds of members in a matter of hours. Such opposition groups can fizzle as fast as they grow unless there is substance behind it. Social media users quickly see through unsubstantiated claims. At times, it is best to take a contentious interaction off-line and invite the user to call the project public involvement team or set up an in-person meeting. If the opposition group continues to grow and has a presence over time, it may be an indication that one individual's concerns are shared by many. Such concerns have hopefully already been heard in other aspects of the NEPA public involvement process, but if not, the social media opposition campaign can be a catalyst for better understanding the stakeholder group's interests and concerns.

The social media manager can monitor discussions of the NEPA project on other social media sites, as well. This social media "listening" is crucial; it should start early in the process and be incorporated in the public involvement process whether the project eventually creates social media pages itself or not. If misinformation is shared on a site not hosted by the project team, the project social media page can be used to introduce correct information and invite people to participate in the NEPA process. In other cases, it may be best to simply note the misinformation for the project team so that project messaging can be adjusted accordingly. Deciding what approach to take depends on a variety of contextual factors including stakeholder influence and reach, whether the misinformation is perceived as an oversight or intentional and other factors, such as recent media coverage.

A key to keeping the peace on social media is to develop brief "comment guidelines". This is standard practice for many agency project social media sites. The comment guidelines are typically vetted through legal counsel and similarly applied in other public involvement efforts.

Finally, if the project team implements social media as part of its outreach, it is important that the project "owns" its own pages. "Owning the page" means not letting abusive or otherwise inappropriate posts overtake the page. Guidelines for taking charge of the page include:

- Disagree when necessary;
- Be diplomatic when necessary; and
- Ask people to behave better when necessary.

If someone uses an expletive or makes a personal attack, call them out, tell them it's not acceptable and give them an opportunity to correct the behavior. This approach assures others that the social media site has a presence and a personality; in short, it's about treating online interactions with the same courtesy and respect as in-person interactions. At an extreme, social media managers can block users from sites who continue to demonstrate bad behavior or do not follow the comment guidelines.

Evaluation

A complete communications strategy includes a plan for evaluation measures. Project teams can consider what data they want to track over time so they can start that process from the first day social media sites are launched. Common data to track include number of followers; number of posts; rating posts as positive, negative or neutral; and number of clicks on links. In addition to numerical data, social media posts by users provide real-time feedback on project messaging and the public involvement process.

Several project teams using social media during NEPA studies use demographic and geo-spatial information to evaluate where project participants reside. This in turn allows the project team to identify areas where participation is lacking. For the Missouri DOT, this analysis helped them identify where they needed to increase grassroots efforts to more fully engage groups that they did not see participating online.

An increase in social media activity can be sparked by a media story or other outreach happening as part of the project. If the public involvement team cannot identify what has caused a spike in participation, it may be a sign of outreach from unofficial sources. Changes in social media trends signal a change in something happening within the project or community of which the public involvement team should be aware.

One of the advantages of social media is that it has built-in analytics that make measurement easier. The challenge is to decide what measures have value. Online tools are about engaging people, and social media measurements should reflect that goal. In addition to tracking the number of people who "like" a Facebook page, qualitative evaluation can look at who is sharing your information on their page and how many comments are posted in response. Monitoring what gets shared serves as a good indicator of the type of information the site's users prefer.

Finally, it is valuable to document instances of social media contributing to the NEPA decision-making process. Whether it is documenting an increase in public meeting attendance or obtaining higher quality content in public comments, anecdotal stories help build understanding of how social media outreach contributes to the public involvement process.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Social media has tremendous potential to supplement public involvement during the NEPA process. This report and the suggested practices guidance resource in Chapter 5 has been designed to help project teams understand social media and use it as applicable to foster interactive dialogue and reach stakeholders who might not otherwise participate. Although each project context has a unique set of conditions and communications needs, social media presents the opportunity for a significant interface with the public that should be considered in public involvement planning.

In addition to providing descriptions of the range of tools and potential uses for social media, this research study seeks to provide practical recommendations for implementation. The checklist of social media purpose, tools selection, policy, protocol and communications strategy can form the basis of a sound approach to social media that can effectively support the NEPA decision-making process.

Social media has proven worthy as a public communication tool where meaningful outreach can occur. However, questions remain about how to document and respond to social media inputs in the NEPA process. Project teams should consult with their own legal counsel and regional federal agency representatives to address the protocol for social media documentation.

Social media tools used in combination with other forms of public outreach can enhance NEPA public involvement in providing timely notification, sharing complete information and a mechanism for a broad range of stakeholders to provide input to the NEPA study. Embracing the interactive potential for social media to build a community of interested participants can benefit the public involvement process by broadening outreach, creating a more informed public and hearing issues and concerns earlier in the NEPA process while topics can be more readily addressed.

Meeting the Intent of NEPA and Public Communication Preferences

Social media is a communication tool that is becoming commonplace in today's culture. Social media is an ever-growing communication tool that fulfills the intent of NEPA public involvement for early and ongoing outreach, timely notification, access to information for a range of stakeholders and opportunity to comment. Like any public involvement tool, a project cannot rely on social media alone to reach all relevant stakeholders, but the project team might engage some groups more effectively using this tool. As demonstrated in the case study examples, even if social media sites are not being used to receive formal comments maintained in the project file, it can be used to link to locations where comments are received and/or publicize where comments can be made, such as a public hearing.

Social media is most effective when used in conjunction with a comprehensive public involvement plan involving other forms of outreach. Social media can be used to repurpose and link to project information, which helps reach a broader group of stakeholders who already have interest in the project

and want to see updates in their social media feed. Social media provides the opportunity for repeated exposure to subscribers and participation in the public process over time, thus gaining feedback from well-informed stakeholders on an ongoing and regular basis. Social media may be used to publicize opportunities to participate and comment; likewise, other forms of outreach, such as meetings and newsletters, can be used to publicize social media presence as a place for ongoing interaction and project updates.

Transparency and Accessibility

Social media also demonstrates the ability to engage stakeholders in the NEPA decision-making process by making information available to the public for review and comment. As public expectations to engage with government online continue to grow, interacting with stakeholders on social media demonstrates accessibility and responsiveness of the agency. Social media sites provide a constant feed of information to keep the NEPA study in front of stakeholders, which can highlight facts and findings that would otherwise go unnoticed in a large document, building a more informed public. Social media can also be used to provide interaction during periods when it would otherwise be difficult to maintain communication with the public.

In addition, social media can provide a valuable method for public input to the NEPA process. Social media as a public involvement tool facilitates real-time, ongoing input throughout the NEPA study. Early and real-time questions and comments can be better addressed and incorporated during the study rather than at the end of the study. Similar to any method of receiving comments from the public, comments on technical work and ideas for solutions should be vetted, researched and verified. It should be noted, however, that NCHRP 25-25 Task 80 interviewees noted the difficulty of trying to categorize social media comments as well as the limits of social media comments due to space. Current practice tends to look at social media input in summary form by outlining themes and concerns to check for consistency with formal comments; social media can thus be used as a validation of public comments and a method of evaluating whether the project team has addressed all stakeholder issues and concerns.

Evaluating Effectiveness Using Quantitative and Qualitative Assessments

The question of effectiveness as the use of social media evolves is important to the industry. In the online survey, effectiveness was named as a top motivator to implement social media during the NEPA process. The question of effectiveness essentially comes down to evaluating what unique contributions social media can make to the NEPA process. As demonstrated in the case study interviews, NEPA project teams have not fully evaluated the effectiveness of social media as a public involvement tool, but they are realizing benefits that motivate them to continue using social media as an outreach tool. Specific benefits discussed during this research included:

- Reaching commuters and overall broadening outreach to people who might not otherwise participate;
- Evaluating gaps in public participation by taking note of geographic locations where online participation was lacking;
- Evaluating effectiveness of tools, techniques and messages based on online real-time feedback and discussion;

- Evaluating public reactions to project information and decisions as reflected in online discussion in real-time;
- Creating a more informed public that yielded more substantive comments; and
- Validating key topics of concern by cross-referencing online discussion topics with formal comment analysis.

The case study project teams all described tracking data to monitor social media activities and interpret trends to refine the outreach, but specific quantitative or qualitative analyses were not performed. Some preliminary suggestions for measurement criteria include:

- Specific numbers or percentage of participants gained through social media that would not have been engaged otherwise;
- Specific stakeholder groups that participated online, contributing early and often, allowing the project team to make adjustments in methods or designs before publishing a draft document;
- Cost savings and time efficiencies of building ties with key opinion leaders for specific stakeholder groups who have broad social media reach through sharing, liking or retweeting project information; and
- Specific issues or ideas posted on social media that the project team followed-up on that shaped the alternatives design or analysis.

Because social media works in combination with many other tools, it may be difficult to pin down exact contributions; but using qualitative and quantitative assessments will help build a case for its effective use and demonstrate how social media effectively engages the public during the NEPA process.

Additional Research Needs

As the number of case study examples continues to grow, it will be valuable to continue to track the contributions of social media to the NEPA public involvement process. Outcomes of specific project use and the formation of legal precedence will shape this shifting and evolving practice. *Another survey and case study evaluation* in 2-3 years is recommended to stay abreast of the state of practices and continue to follow this emerging outreach tool.

Criteria for measuring effectiveness is an area that requires further investigation and training. Project teams are tracking data trends, but standards of practice for evaluating public involvement in general and social media in particular are not well established. Some thoughtful research on methods and analytics could improve professional standards of practice and meet the overall trend toward demonstrating measurable results as part of government agencies' accountability to the public.

Additional demographic analysis and documentation of *outreach to specific groups* using social media would also be of benefit to NEPA public involvement practitioners. Such research could build a stronger correlation between social media users and specific online platforms that apply to environmental justice analysis and outreach. Further exploration of how mobile communications technology might be used to engage minority, low-income or limited English proficiency populations could provide valuable insight to the industry.

Finally, additional research and guidance about *tone and topics best suited to social media* might benefit advancing the practice and realizing the potential for social media as a NEPA public involvement tool. This study took a high level look at policies and procedures for social media implementation more than the content of specific posts. As implementation practices are put into place, the industry might benefit from a more detailed look at what type of content is most effective on social media and how project teams can develop that content in a compelling way while maintaining credibility and legal defensibility during the NEPA process. Use of photo and video sharing sites were of interest to the case study projects that participated in this study, but questions remained on what content to provide.

Social media tools used in combination with other forms of public outreach can enhance the intent of NEPA public involvement programs in providing timely notification, sharing complete information and providing a mechanism for a broad range of stakeholders to provide input to NEPA studies. Embracing the interactive potential for social media to build a community of interested participants can benefit the public involvement process by broadening outreach, creating a more informed public and hearing issues and concerns earlier in the NEPA process when topics can be more readily addressed.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESULTS
COMPLETE

1. 1. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools to support a NEPA process?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		73.5%	36
No		22.4%	11
Not Sure		4.1%	2
answered question			49
skipped question			2

2. 1.a. If yes, please identify the top three purposes or contexts in which your organization uses social media to support the NEPA process.

		Response Percent	Response Count
To encourage public discussion of the agency or project		58.3%	21
To monitor public discussion of the agency or project		16.7%	6
To target certain audiences (such as by younger persons, minority populations, specific communities, etc.)		19.4%	7
To broaden awareness of and participation in the project		83.3%	30
To inform the public about an event, the availability of information, a public comment period, etc.		77.8%	28
To host online events (e.g. Twitter Parties, Virtual Public Meetings, Facebook Events, etc.)		13.9%	5
To gather public comments on specific aspects of the project such as proposed alternatives, environmental resources, the environmental analysis or other aspects of the study		41.7%	15
To identify data and resources for the project (such as environmental or community resources)		5.6%	2
To identify potential project stakeholders		5.6%	2
To engage stakeholders, such as having dialogue on a topic not necessarily directly related to the project		11.1%	4
To identify general public values,			

issues or concerns that might have implications for the project		11.1%	4
To engage consulting agencies, cooperating agencies, or other agency stakeholders		8.3%	3
To share data and files with project team members		5.6%	2
Other (please specify)		2.8%	1
answered question			36
skipped question			15

3. 1.b. If no, please identify the top three reasons your agency does not use social media to support the NEPA process.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Personal lack of experience or knowledge in using the tools		14.3%	2
Concerns about legal issues relative to the NEPA process (such as the Administrative Record)		7.1%	1
Concerns about privacy		0.0%	0
Inexperience with / lack of skill in using social media		21.4%	3
Does not seem useful for supporting a project in NEPA		0.0%	0
Not sure how to use it to support a project in NEPA		35.7%	5
Management / organizational culture not supportive		14.3%	2
Cost		0.0%	0
IT upgrades required		14.3%	2
Staff skills required		21.4%	3
Concern about staff misusing social media for personal use		7.1%	1
Concern regarding potential for negative comments		0.0%	0
Concern regarding distribution of misinformation		0.0%	0
Concern regarding providing a platform for opponents		0.0%	0
Concern about limited access to persons with disabilities		0.0%	0
Concern about limited access to minorities		7.1%	1

Concern about limited access to low income persons		7.1%	1
Concern about limited access by low-English proficiency populations (such as those for whom English is not their principle language or who cannot read or write English)		0.0%	0
Concern about collecting and managing comments		7.1%	1
Lack of understanding of legal status of comments and information shared over social media		7.1%	1
Frivolous; not a good use of public involvement resources		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		42.9%	6
answered question			14
skipped question			37

4. 1.c. If no to question 1, what would be the most important deciding factor in implementing social media as a public involvement tool during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		0.0%	0
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		7.7%	1
Ability to staff appropriately		7.7%	1
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		7.7%	1
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		38.5%	5
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		0.0%	0
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		0.0%	0
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		0.0%	0
Ability to control use by staff members		15.4%	2
Other (please specify)		23.1%	3
answered question			13
skipped question			38

5. 2. Has your agency used social media or other web based tools to monitor public discussion (external discussion) of a project during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		34.1%	14
No		51.2%	21
Not sure		14.6%	6
answered question			41
skipped question			10

6. 2.a If yes, what type of social media sites did you monitor? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		86.7%	13
Twitter		93.3%	14
YouTube		26.7%	4
Flickr		20.0%	3
LinkedIn		0.0%	0
Pinterest		0.0%	0
Storify		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		40.0%	6
answered question			15
skipped question			36

7. 2.b. How well did it work?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Great! We are actively trying to extend the use of social media		66.7%	10
Moderately well; not sure if it's worth it		26.7%	4
Not so well		6.7%	1
	Comments		6
	answered question		15
	skipped question		36

8. 2.c If no, would your agency consider using social media to monitor public discussion of a project during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		45.8%	11
No		0.0%	0
Not Sure		54.2%	13
	answered question		24
	skipped question		27

9. 2.d. If no, what would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to monitor public discussion of a project during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		23.5%	4
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		41.2%	7
Ability to staff appropriately		41.2%	7
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		17.6%	3
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		52.9%	9
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		29.4%	5
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		11.8%	2
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		17.6%	3
Ability to control use by staff members		35.3%	6
Other (please specify)		11.8%	2
answered question			17
skipped question			34

10. 3. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools to broadcast information about a NEPA study, such as announcing the availability of information for public comment or the time and date of a public meeting?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		75.0%	30
No		17.5%	7
Not Sure		7.5%	3
answered question			40
skipped question			11

11. 3.a. If yes, what types of social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		70.0%	21
Twitter		76.7%	23
YouTube		20.0%	6
Flickr		10.0%	3
LinkedIn		0.0%	0
Pinterest		0.0%	0
Storify		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		46.7%	14
answered question			30
skipped question			21

12. 3.b. How well did it work?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Great! We are actively trying to extend the use of social media		50.0%	14
Moderately well; not sure if it's worth it		42.9%	12
Not so well		7.1%	2
	Comments		4
	answered question		28
	skipped question		23

13. 3.c. If no, would your agency consider using social media tools to broadcast information during the NEPA process, such as announcing a public meeting?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		66.7%	8
No		0.0%	0
Not Sure		33.3%	4
	answered question		12
	skipped question		39

14. 3.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to broadcast information during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		22.6%	7
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		48.4%	15
Ability to staff appropriately		51.6%	16
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		9.7%	3
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		45.2%	14
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		41.9%	13
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		6.5%	2
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		25.8%	8
Ability to control use by staff members		19.4%	6
Other (please specify)		16.1%	5
		answered question	31
		skipped question	20

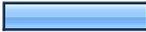
15. 4. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools to gather information, such as collecting relevant data or researching stakeholders, during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		34.1%	14
No		53.7%	22
Not Sure		12.2%	5
answered question			41
skipped question			10

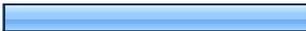
16. 4.a. If yes, what social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		64.3%	9
Twitter		64.3%	9
YouTube		0.0%	0
Flickr		7.1%	1
LinkedIn		0.0%	0
Pinterest		0.0%	0
Storify		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		50.0%	7
answered question			14
skipped question			37

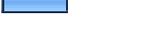
17. 4.b. How well did it work?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Great! We are actively trying to extend the use of social media		64.3%	9
Moderately well; not sure if it's worth it		21.4%	3
Not so well		14.3%	2
	Comments		3
	answered question		14
	skipped question		37

18. 4.c. If no, would your agency consider using social media tools to gather information during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		54.2%	13
No		0.0%	0
Not Sure		45.8%	11
	answered question		24
	skipped question		27

19. 4.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to gather information during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		21.2%	7
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		48.5%	16
Ability to staff appropriately		51.5%	17
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		12.1%	4
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		48.5%	16
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		30.3%	10
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		9.1%	3
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		21.2%	7
Ability to control use by staff members		15.2%	5
Other (please specify)		18.2%	6
answered question			33
skipped question			18

20. 5. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools to engage stakeholders, such as having dialogue on a topic related to your project, during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		41.5%	17
No		46.3%	19
Not Sure		12.2%	5
answered question			41
skipped question			10

21. 5.a. If yes, what social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		64.7%	11
Twitter		64.7%	11
YouTube		17.6%	3
Flickr		11.8%	2
LinkedIn		0.0%	0
Pinterest		0.0%	0
Storify		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		52.9%	9
answered question			17
skipped question			34

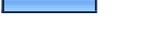
22. 5.b. How well did it work?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Great! We are actively trying to extend the use of social media		64.7%	11
Moderately well; not sure if it's worth it		17.6%	3
Not so well		17.6%	3
	Comments		5
	answered question		17
	skipped question		34

23. 5.c. If no, would your agency consider using social media tools to engage stakeholder dialogue during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		45.5%	10
No		4.5%	1
Not Sure		50.0%	11
	answered question		22
	skipped question		29

24. 5.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to engage stakeholders during NEPA?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		24.1%	7
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		48.3%	14
Ability to staff appropriately		58.6%	17
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		6.9%	2
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		48.3%	14
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		31.0%	9
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		13.8%	4
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		20.7%	6
Ability to control use by staff members		20.7%	6
Other (please specify)		6.9%	2
		answered question	29
		skipped question	22

25. 6. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools as a method to receive public comments?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		52.5%	21
No		47.5%	19
Not Sure		0.0%	0
answered question			40
skipped question			11

26. 6.a. If yes, what types of social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		40.0%	8
Twitter		35.0%	7
YouTube		15.0%	3
Flickr		5.0%	1
LinkedIn		0.0%	0
Pinterest		0.0%	0
Storify		0.0%	0
Other (please specify)		65.0%	13
answered question			20
skipped question			31

27. 6.b. How well did it work?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Great! We are actively trying to extend the use of social media		61.9%	13
Moderately well; not sure if it's worth it		33.3%	7
Not so well		4.8%	1
	Comments		4
	answered question		21
	skipped question		30

28. 7. Were comments received via social media or web-based tools considered official comments as part of the NEPA process?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		39.4%	13
No		30.3%	10
Not Sure		30.3%	10
	answered question		33
	skipped question		18

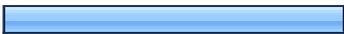
29. 7.a. What were the top three most important determining factors in deciding whether social media or web-based comments would be considered official or unofficial?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Affordability		15.6%	5
Perceived utility of input to NEPA process		37.5%	12
Ability to staff appropriately		31.3%	10
Technical improvements would need to be made at my agency		9.4%	3
Proof of the effectiveness of the tool to meet my project's needs		43.8%	14
Ability to reach new or hard to contact populations		34.4%	11
Precedence from other projects and state DOTs		18.8%	6
Federal guidance from EPA, FHWA or FTA		37.5%	12
Ability to control use by staff members		15.6%	5
Other (please specify)		21.9%	7
answered question			32
skipped question			19

30. 8. Has your agency used social media or other web-based tools on more than one project in the NEPA process?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		58.5%	24
No		26.8%	11
Not Sure		14.6%	6
answered question			41
skipped question			10

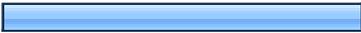
31. 9. Does your agency have a social media policy or set of protocols for using social media and/or web-based tools?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		51.2%	21
No		29.3%	12
Not Sure		19.5%	8
answered question			41
skipped question			10

32. 9.a. If yes, what is the primary purpose of the policy?

		Response Percent	Response Count
To achieve consistency in social media use throughout the agency		26.1%	6
To protect the agency's brand identity		0.0%	0
To outline expectations for appropriate conduct while representing the agency on social media		39.1%	9
To provide leadership a level of comfort that social media is used appropriately		13.0%	3
To provide a protocol for developing social media content, including approvals and responses		21.7%	5
Other (please specify)		0.0%	0
answered question			23
skipped question			28

33. 9.b. If no, why hasn't the agency developed a social media policy?

		Response Percent	Response Count
We do not have staff or expertise to develop a policy		0.0%	0
Agency does not use social media, so a policy is not needed		15.4%	2
A formal policy might constrain current use of social media		0.0%	0
Social media is the responsibility of the communications/community relations department and doesn't pertain to the rest of the agency		15.4%	2
Social media falls under other existing policies regarding use of information technology at our agency		15.4%	2
Other (please specify)		53.8%	7
		answered question	13
		skipped question	38

34. 10. Which of the following groups do you think would be likely to engage in NEPA processes using social media and other web-based tools? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Students and younger people		89.6%	43
Professionals		75.0%	36
Minorities		29.2%	14
Persons with limited English language proficiency		16.7%	8
Persons with disabilities		35.4%	17
“General” population / average citizen or resident		56.3%	27
Project supporters		68.8%	33
Project opponents		75.0%	36
Agency stakeholders such as local governments, funding partners, consulting agencies and cooperating agencies		43.8%	21
I do not believe social media would improve access to specific groups.		0.0%	0
I don't know / unsure		10.4%	5
Other (please specify)		6.3%	3
answered question			48
skipped question			3

35. 11. What potential benefits do you believe social media and web-based communication might provide NEPA projects? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Ease of file and data sharing among cooperating agencies or project team members		48.9%	23
Better sense of project stakeholders' needs and values		42.6%	20
Better relationship with the project stakeholders		42.6%	20
Improved community support for the project		53.2%	25
Better agency image with members of the public		59.6%	28
Better quality public involvement for the project		66.0%	31
Access to a broad audience for public participation		91.5%	43
I do not believe there are benefits to using social media and web-based tools to support NEPA projects.		2.1%	1
Other (please specify)		6.4%	3
answered question			47
skipped question			4

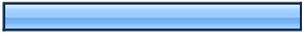
36. 12. What type of agency do you work for?

		Response Percent	Response Count
State Department of Transportation		87.2%	41
Transit Agency		12.8%	6
answered question			47
skipped question			4

37. 13. Which of the following best describes your role within that organization?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Executive		0.0%	0
Division or Department Director		8.3%	4
Manager		12.5%	6
Project Manager		6.3%	3
NEPA Process Manager		25.0%	12
Communication or Public Involvement Manager		31.3%	15
Professional Support		6.3%	3
Other (please specify)		10.4%	5
answered question			48
skipped question			3

38. 14. What is your general area of technical responsibility?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Overall agency management		0.0%	0
Environmental		44.7%	21
Planning		4.3%	2
Engineering/ Design		2.1%	1
Communications or Public Relations		34.0%	16
Public Involvement		12.8%	6
Other (please specify)		2.1%	1
		answered question	47
		skipped question	4

39. What is the name of your organization?

	Response Count
	43
answered question	43
skipped question	8

40. The study team is seeking volunteers for follow up interviews from this survey database to develop more insight on the uses of social media to support NEPA. Please submit your contact information if you are willing to participate in a follow up telephone interview.

**Response
Count**

14

answered question

14

skipped question

37

Page 2, Q2. 1.a. If yes, please identify the top three purposes or contexts in which your organization uses social media to support the NEPA process.

1	Only to promote public meetings	Nov 19, 2012 7:56 PM
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Page 2, Q3. 1.b. If no, please identify the top three reasons your agency does not use social media to support the NEPA process.

1	Not considered	Nov 21, 2012 9:12 AM
2	We have suggested using Social Media in the past and the idea was not widely accepted.	Nov 19, 2012 1:42 PM
3	It's just never come up	Nov 19, 2012 9:43 AM
4	Staffing and resource shortages	Nov 19, 2012 9:23 AM
5	we will likely start using social media in upcoming projects	Nov 2, 2012 4:47 PM
6	IT unit discourages use of social media or any other model that does not follow Department information to public directional approach.	Nov 2, 2012 1:23 PM

Page 2, Q4. 1.c. If no to question 1, what would be the most important deciding factor in implementing social media as a public involvement tool during NEPA?

1	Direction from the appropriate office	Nov 19, 2012 9:43 AM
2	Not sure what it has to do with our agency?	Nov 5, 2012 8:49 AM
3	change in perspective from IT unit - see above	Nov 2, 2012 1:23 PM

Page 2, Q6. 2.a If yes, what type of social media sites did you monitor? (check all that apply)

1	blogs, podcasts	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	blogs	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
3	MindMixer	Nov 13, 2012 8:02 AM
4	Forums and blogs	Nov 12, 2012 1:32 PM
5	Agency websites.	Nov 5, 2012 2:35 PM
6	blogs	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM

Page 2, Q7. 2.b. How well did it work?

1	We are using SoMe to get the word out about projects and status and we are currently working with the FHWA-Texas Division folks to see how we can extend the use of social media in an official context.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Caltrans is using twitter to connect to the public. it effectively sends 3-8 tweets weekly that include announcements about closures, community meetings, traffic alerts, events, links to media stories, project updates, and more.	Nov 21, 2012 1:20 PM
3	It's a very real time commitment in order to actually extend the use of social media for the benefit of the project.	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
4	Some followers shared our links and made positive comments of the rail project associated with NEPA. However, we did not see an increase in chatter about the project itself.	Nov 2, 2012 8:39 AM
5	People are becoming accustomed to receiving information through social media, and it's use will only grow.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
6	Social Media is helping reach more people. We are continuing to develop this resource.	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM

Page 2, Q9. 2.d. If no, what would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to monitor public discussion of a project during NEPA?

1	Approval by State HQ to use social media, which is not currently allowed.	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
2	There are no inhibitions to ur using social media. We are still at the beginning stage of implementing social media.	Nov 13, 2012 6:37 AM

Page 2, Q11. 3.a. If yes, what types of social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

1	blogs, podcasts	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	DOT website	Nov 20, 2012 2:45 PM
3	DOT&PF website	Nov 19, 2012 6:07 PM
4	only through the AHTD Website (www.ArkansasHighways.com)	Nov 19, 2012 1:54 PM
5	project blog	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
6	MindMixer	Nov 13, 2012 8:02 AM
7	project specific web pages	Nov 7, 2012 3:13 PM
8	Government website to post information about NEPA study	Nov 5, 2012 8:38 AM
9	blog	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
10	Project website	Nov 2, 2012 1:49 PM
11	website	Nov 2, 2012 7:49 AM
12	Agency general web page and project specific web page	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
13	Typically online website for project	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM
14	our website	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q12. 3.b. How well did it work?

1	This is something we've been doing more frequently here at TxDOT and are looking into ways that the comments we receive can be entered into the "official" registrar. Right now, we use the social sites to share info and direct people to project websites or meetings for official comments.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	It is unknown at this time whether use of social media has an impact on increasing public awareness of a project or attendance at a public event	Nov 21, 2012 11:18 AM
3	Hard to build a blog site around just one project without someone dedicated to regular, short, meaningful posts.	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
4	Some followers shared our links and made positive comments of the rail project associated with NEPA. However, we did not see an increase in chatter about the project itself.	Nov 2, 2012 8:39 AM

Page 2, Q14. 3.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to broadcast information during NEPA?

1	Approval by State HQ to use social media, which is not currently allowed.	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
2	Same as above	Nov 13, 2012 6:37 AM
3	If it's the appropriate tool to help reach our objective.	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
4	Accessibility for a broader range of people who receive news online.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
5	public acceptability	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q16. 4.a. If yes, what social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

1	Project Specific Websites	Nov 26, 2012 1:20 PM
2	Webex	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
3	blogs	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
4	Web-based tools on project website	Nov 2, 2012 1:49 PM
5	project website	Nov 2, 2012 7:49 AM
6	Agency webpage specific to the project for comment gathering.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
7	Online project website	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM

Page 2, Q17. 4.b. How well did it work?

1	I have not done this, however, I'm not sure if others in communication or public involvement have. We are currently studying how to do this effectively and have a team working on formulating guidelines and best practices on how to accomplish this objective.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	When provided a choice, more people opted to submit comments online or verbally to a person, rather than to write them by hand.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
3	our citizens might not like this -- & why are you asking this question again?	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q19. 4.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to gather information during NEPA?

1	same as above	Nov 13, 2012 6:37 AM
2	veracity of input provided as well as the commenter	Nov 5, 2012 5:33 PM
3	We have been using social media more in the last six months. We will probably use it more for future projects.	Nov 5, 2012 2:35 PM
4	Is it the appropriate tool to help meet our objectives.	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
5	To provide greater access to people.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
6	again - will our citizens feel that this is intrusive?	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q21. 5.a. If yes, what social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

1	Webex	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
2	project website	Nov 14, 2012 2:04 PM
3	project blog	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
4	MindMixer	Nov 13, 2012 8:02 AM
5	Online public meeting	Nov 5, 2012 5:11 PM
6	blog	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
7	A SharePoint or ftp site has been used to engage stakeholders, agencies, and tribes.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
8	Project website	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM
9	- website	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q22. 5.b. How well did it work?

1	We talk about projects and meetings on SoMe and encourage people to participate in the discussion. However, so far, we've not been able to use the comments in any formal documentation, which is why we're working with FHWA and studying how to do that. (Currently, we talk with folks and answer their questions but tell them they have to send an e-mail or fill out an official comment form from the website to have their comments registered.)	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Especially early in planning/scoping, it takes time to build a following and can be hard to engage in meaningful dialog.	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
3	We had a project blog and used it gather input and engage in conversation. We used Twitter and Facebook to alert people about the public comment period and direct them to where they could send their comments.	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
4	While computer skills and equipment vary, it was a useful tool for transferring large amounts of data.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
5	didn't I already answer this question - twice?	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q24. 5.d. What would be the top three determining factors in deciding whether to use social media to engage stakeholders during NEPA?

1	same as above	Nov 13, 2012 6:37 AM
2	note - if not sure there are no follow up questions...	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q26. 6.a. If yes, what types of social media tools did you use? (check all that apply)

1	comment features on project specific websites	Nov 26, 2012 1:20 PM
2	email / DOT website	Nov 20, 2012 2:45 PM
3	Commissioner's blog - "Word Press"	Nov 19, 2012 9:23 AM
4	project web site	Nov 14, 2012 2:04 PM
5	On-line comment forms	Nov 13, 2012 4:47 PM
6	project web page linked user to project staff email for submitting comments	Nov 7, 2012 3:13 PM
7	Agency webpages.	Nov 5, 2012 2:35 PM
8	DOT website has fillable comment form	Nov 5, 2012 8:38 AM
9	Project-based website	Nov 2, 2012 1:49 PM
10	MindMixer - web-based tool, our own websites	Nov 2, 2012 7:49 AM
11	Agency web page	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
12	project website	Nov 1, 2012 3:45 PM
13	Project WEbsite	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM

Page 2, Q27. 6.b. How well did it work?

1	See the comment for question 5. (We do this, just not in an official capacity.)	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Just getting into it - positive results so far.	Nov 19, 2012 9:23 AM
3	Email submittals of official public comments on NEPA document works well. People also often submit their comments via snail mail.	Nov 7, 2012 3:13 PM
4	The majority of comments were received online.	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM

Page 2, Q29. 7.a. What were the top three most important determining factors in deciding whether social media or web-based comments would be considered official or unofficial?

1	Want to make sure the comments met FHWA standards and they were on-board with receiving comments in this format.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Approval by State HQ to use social media, which is not currently allowed.	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
3	We do not receive comments through social media.	Nov 19, 2012 1:42 PM
4	The ease with which on-line comment forms are managed as part of an official comment period.	Nov 13, 2012 4:47 PM
5	Had to give contact information.	Nov 5, 2012 2:35 PM
6	Comments made on DOT website or emailed in were considered official. No social media was used.	Nov 5, 2012 8:38 AM
7	I think even though we received comments that could be added to the record, we just didn't use them. We encouraged commentors to utilize the official online tool or email to directly document comments.	Oct 24, 2012 10:58 AM

Page 2, Q33. 9.b. If no, why hasn't the agency developed a social media policy?

1	We have an Internet access policy, not a social media policy. Employees are prohibited from using Social Media websites.	Nov 19, 2012 1:42 PM
2	In the plans to add it to public involvement policy.	Nov 14, 2012 2:04 PM
3	Efforts to use social media for NEPA are relatively new. The Idaho Transportation Department is using Twitter, Facebook, on-line videos and is developing mobile websites. These efforts have coincided with construction projects, and not as much with projects in the environmental review and design phase.	Nov 13, 2012 4:47 PM
4	In process of development	Nov 5, 2012 5:33 PM
5	Social media has not been used officially on a project, so a policy hasn't been applicable. DOT website has been used and that is regulated under another policy.	Nov 5, 2012 8:38 AM
6	In transition now	Nov 2, 2012 7:24 AM
7	ugh - get rid of #4	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q34. 10. Which of the following groups do you think would be likely to engage in NEPA processes using social media and other web-based tools? (check all that apply)

1	The great thing about SoMe is that it's so easy to access and convenient to use. It's not just a tool for the younger generation, but older individuals are using it, too. In fact, the fastest growing demographic on FB today is women age 55-64. This proves that SoMe can serve as an effective way to reach the population, as a whole.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	some evidence that some minorities may participate via mobile devices but language assistance issues may have to be addressed to make this work and it wouldn't work for all/most minority populations	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
3	The Media has been a an interesting audience that has voluntarily engaged via social media, and allowed for increased exposure through traditional media.	Oct 24, 2012 10:58 AM

Page 2, Q35. 11. What potential benefits do you believe social media and web-based communication might provide NEPA projects? (check all that apply)

1	This is also a very honest and transparent way to engage the community. By being where the people are, it shows your agency's commitment to hearing the public's views and listening to their input. It also provides the agency a way to share factual information in real-time.	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Can appeal to people who are unable to attend a traditional public meeting, or who feel intimidated in that venue	Nov 13, 2012 8:02 AM
3	how about "dis benefits"?	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM

Page 2, Q37. 13. Which of the following best describes your role within that organization?

1	Social Media Coordinator	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
2	Public Involvement coordination	Nov 19, 2012 1:42 PM
3	Section 106 process manager	Nov 2, 2012 1:23 PM
4	critic	Oct 24, 2012 10:02 PM
5	Communications Sub for Primary holding NEPA contract with state agency	Oct 24, 2012 10:58 AM

Page 2, Q38. 14. What is your general area of technical responsibility?

1	Mainten & Operatios	Nov 19, 2012 6:07 PM
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Page 2, Q39. What is the name of your organization?

1	Texas Department of Transportation	Dec 10, 2012 2:29 PM
2	Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)	Nov 27, 2012 11:06 AM
3	Texas Department of Transportation	Nov 26, 2012 1:20 PM
4	Alaska DOT&PF	Nov 26, 2012 11:52 AM
5	California Department of Transportation (Caltrans District 12)	Nov 21, 2012 1:20 PM
6	California Department of Transportation	Nov 21, 2012 11:18 AM
7	WYDOT	Nov 21, 2012 9:12 AM
8	WYDOT	Nov 20, 2012 2:52 PM
9	California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	Nov 20, 2012 10:33 AM
10	Colroado DOT	Nov 19, 2012 7:56 PM
11	ADOT&PF	Nov 19, 2012 7:02 PM
12	Alaska Dept of Transportation & Public Facilities	Nov 19, 2012 6:07 PM
13	Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department	Nov 19, 2012 1:54 PM
14	The Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department	Nov 19, 2012 1:42 PM
15	Michigan Department of Transportation	Nov 19, 2012 9:29 AM
16	New Hampshire Department of Transportation	Nov 19, 2012 9:23 AM
17	Iowa Department of Transportation	Nov 16, 2012 10:33 AM
18	WSDOT	Nov 15, 2012 4:04 PM
19	NH Department of Transportation	Nov 15, 2012 10:07 AM
20	MoDOT	Nov 14, 2012 2:04 PM
21	Metro	Nov 13, 2012 7:43 PM
22	The Idaho Transportation Department	Nov 13, 2012 4:47 PM
23	Maryland State Highway Administration	Nov 13, 2012 9:17 AM
24	Missouri Department of Transportation	Nov 13, 2012 8:02 AM
25	Maryland State Highway Administration	Nov 13, 2012 6:37 AM
26	Chicago Transit Authority	Nov 12, 2012 1:32 PM
27	WSDOT	Nov 7, 2012 3:13 PM

Page 2, Q39. What is the name of your organization?

28	Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development	Nov 7, 2012 10:15 AM
29	Nevada DOT	Nov 5, 2012 5:33 PM
30	Utah Department of Transportation	Nov 5, 2012 5:11 PM
31	Utah Transit Authority	Nov 5, 2012 2:35 PM
32	South Carolina Department of Transportation	Nov 5, 2012 8:38 AM
33	Utah Tarnsit Authority	Nov 2, 2012 4:47 PM
34	Oregon Department of Transportation	Nov 2, 2012 2:49 PM
35	Port Authority of Allegheny County	Nov 2, 2012 1:49 PM
36	Pennsylvania Department of Transportation	Nov 2, 2012 1:23 PM
37	Michigan Department of Transportation	Nov 2, 2012 8:39 AM
38	Missouri Department of Transportation	Nov 2, 2012 7:49 AM
39	Iowa DOT	Nov 2, 2012 7:24 AM
40	Washington State Department of Transportation	Nov 1, 2012 7:25 PM
41	TriMet, Portland, Oregon transit agency	Nov 1, 2012 4:51 PM
42	TriMet	Nov 1, 2012 3:45 PM
43	Kansas DOT	Oct 25, 2012 10:21 AM

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS - INFOGRAPHIC

Current Use of Social Media During NEPA by Transportation Agencies

Online Survey Key Findings

- Half the survey respondents said they used social media to support a NEPA process.

Of these, nearly **75%** used social media to broadcast information in support of a NEPA process, such as announcing the availability of information for public comment or the time and date of a public meeting.



60% used social media to encourage public discussion of a NEPA project.



40% used social media to gather public comments and/or engage stakeholders in dialogue on a topic related to the project.



- Agencies agree that social media has potential for public outreach during NEPA, but are waiting for proof of effectiveness and demonstration of utility to the NEPA process.

55% would consider using social media in future NEPA projects. **44%** were not sure.



44% said proof of effectiveness is a determining factor in deciding to use social media during NEPA.



- Survey results demonstrate the need for guidance on best practices and training on how to use social media effectively for NEPA if the potential offered by these techniques is to be advanced.

Highest-ranked determining factors to use social media during NEPA:



Top reasons for not using social media during NEPA:



APPENDIX C: SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



TRANSPORTATION ADMINISTRATIVE MANUAL

Directive: TAM 301

Subject: Social Media

Issued: 06/20/12

Supersedes: 04/11/11

Agency/Originator: Office of Public Affairs

Purpose

Social media sites are used to build online communities of people who share interests or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Social media sites provide a variety of ways for users to interact electronically with e-mail or instant messaging services. Social media sites vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging and photo/video-sharing.

Social media gives the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) another tool in its communication toolbox. As with any form of communication, social media delivery mechanisms must be analyzed and carefully considered before deciding to use them. WisDOT believes that before social media are used to communicate, there must be a good reason to do so. In deciding whether or not to request the use of social media tools, a business area must account for any or all of these factors:

- Customer needs and demands, including for specialized or unique services
- Desire to reach a targeted or niche audience
- Business or project needs
- Availability of department resources
- Expertise of department staff
- Technical capabilities of available department tools and of the social media site(s)
- Records management concerns
- Security, privacy and risk management concerns

WisDOT business areas considering the use of social media sites must be able to identify how the usage supports the department's overall communications strategy. Business areas should examine these concepts to identify the purpose and goal for the site(s):

- Does the social media site provide a new or better method to provide information to stakeholders?
- Does the social media site provide a new or better method to obtain input from stakeholders?
- Will use of the social media site support and work in concert with existing department outreach efforts, including the department's Web site?

General Operations and Administration

The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) is responsible for overseeing the use of social media sites. There is a process for divisions to request authorization to establish a department-sponsored social media site.

It is the responsibility of WisDOT managers to identify and assess business needs regarding the use of social media. Managers must obtain approval from the DBM Bureau of Human Resource Services (BHRS) to allow division staff to access to social media sites, including those staff who will administer a WisDOT-sponsored social media site.

The process outlined in this TAM deals only with access and administration of WisDOT-sponsored social media sites. Other policies regarding employee use of Internet and e-communications, including external social media sites, are outlined in TAM 112. In general, WisDOT employees and contractors shall not communicate on behalf of the department in any electronic or online public venue unless specifically authorized by management.

All authorized social media sites must be identified as official department sites through the use of the department name or acronym or approved department, campaign or project logos. Social media sites should be consistent with other WisDOT branding efforts.

Authorized WisDOT social media sites will be established, monitored and maintained as outlined in this TAM. Content posted shall not violate privacy, confidentiality and legal policies. A notice of the department's overall social comment policy is posted under the Legal Notices section of the WisDOT Internet site <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/util/legal.htm>

Content of social media sites are subject to the Wisconsin Open Records laws. Content must be maintained according to established laws, policies and records disposition authorizations (RDAs).

General Process to Set Up Social Media Accounts

1. Division users identify and analyze a business need for a WisDOT social media site.
2. Users submit Request for a WisDOT-sponsored Social Media Site form together with the Request for Restricted Internet Site Access form (identifies staff needing access to the site).
3. The Office of Public Affairs approves the Request for a WisDOT-sponsored Social Media Site and forwards copies of both the forms to the DBM Bureau of Human Resource Services (BHRS).
4. BHRS authorizes BITS to unblock sites to allow division user access to social media sites.
5. BHRS returns copies of the approval forms to the BITS Web Content Group which then provides assistance to division users to establish social media accounts (accounts may be established by a contracted vendor operating under the direction of WisDOT staff).
6. Ongoing monitoring, maintenance and administration of social media sites are handled according to the roles and responsibilities described in detail below.

Responsibilities and Roles

Division of Business Management Bureau of Human Resource Services (BHRS)

- Review and approve requests for authorized users to connect with social media sites in an effort to fulfill WisDOT business needs and customer demand.

Division of Business Management (DBM) Bureau of Information Technology Services (BITS)

- Work in coordination with BHRS to implement approved requests for authorized users to connect to social media Web sites.

- Unblock sites to allow user access to social media sites.
- Provide technical assistance and training to division users/contracted vendors as they work to establish new social media sites or disable existing social media accounts.
- Provide back-up assistance to add/delete content.
- Provide links to WisDOT-sponsored social media sites from WisDOT Web pages.

DBM Office of Research and Program Operations Creative Communication Services

- Manage the department's YouTube site.
- Post new videos to YouTube and ensure the technical quality of materials posted to the department's YouTube site.
- Provide technical assistance to staff wanting to develop videos for use on YouTube.
- Identify, crop and prepare photo images for use on social media sites.

Office of Public Affairs (OPA)

- Evaluate requests to use social media and grant permission as appropriate.
- Establish and modify department policies regarding the use of social media.
- Work with users to recommend privacy settings and naming conventions for sites.
- Assist users in choosing the most appropriate social media platform/s.
- Monitor WisDOT social media sites and advise users regarding content issues, including guidance on the removal of objectionable comments posted on sites.
- Approve video content for department's YouTube site.
- Manage department's Facebook site. Post new content and work with program staff to respond to inquiries as needed.
- Maintain master list of social media accounts. Notify Twitter of existing, new and deleted WisDOT Twitter accounts per State of Wisconsin agreement.
- Provide periodic reports tracking the number of users or other data as a performance measure.

Division/Office Users

- Analyze business need for social media site and forward the Request for a WisDOT-sponsored Social Media Site form together with the Request for Restricted Internet Site Access form to OPA.
- Work with the BITS Web Content Unit to establish the site as authorized. Division users are responsible for establishing accounts, passwords and paying any necessary fees.
- Provide ongoing administrative duties per the site's standards.
- Post content on the social media site.
- Monitor information on the site to ensure it is accurate, concise and appropriate. Practice good customer service and quickly reply to questions/input.
- Act in accordance with all current WisDOT external communications policies and conduct communications on social media sites in a professional manner at all times.
- Collaborate with BITS Web Content Unit to manage any technical concerns related to social media accounts. Periodically review account settings to confirm that chosen settings continue to serve the needs of the department.
- Notify OPA if authorized staff or a contracted vendor helping to administer the site change. It may be appropriate to change passwords (even without staffing changes it is recommended that passwords on social media accounts be changed periodically).

- Notify OPA if a social media account is no longer needed and will be disabled.
- Takes steps to archive content for historical and public record purposes. Content must be maintained according to established laws, policies and record disposition authorizations.
- Ensure that no proprietary, confidential, sensitive, personally identifiable information or other state government intellectual property is posted on social media sites.

The guidelines included in this TAM regarding social media do not replace, but rather work in coordination with other State of Wisconsin and WisDOT policies. Adhere to all other policies accordingly, including those listed in the cross references below.

Cross References

WisDOT Work Rules, Ch IX, Employee Responsibilities and Personal Conduct
DOA Internet Services Standards
Wis Stat 943.70 Computer Crime
Wisconsin Open Records Law
TAM 58, Public Records
TAM 91, World Wide Web
TAM 111, Electronic Records Management Policy
TAM 112, DOT Internet and E-Communications Use, Access and Security Policy

END OF DOCUMENT

APPENDIX D: TOOLS MATRIX

A social media tools matrix is available online for project teams to become more familiar with leading social media platforms and analysis tools that may benefit NEPA public involvement processes:

www.NEPAandSocialMedia.com

Disclaimer

Social media tools descriptions and functionality presented in the online tools matrix were valid as of July 2013. Note that social media is an ever-changing endeavor with new tools and functionalities; this online tools matrix should be considered a starting point and venue for learning, not a comprehensive social media list.

APPENDIX E: SUGGESTED PRACTICES GUIDANCE RESOURCE

See separate document for stand-alone Suggested Practices Guidance Resource.