



Telephone Town Halls

 low-cost

OVERVIEW:

Telephone town halls are large-scale, live discussions, similar in format to a call-in radio show. They allow large numbers of people to listen in and interact with agency staff during the development of a planning product or project, and to participate in real-time polling. Telephone town halls can reach thousands of people through automated outgoing calls. Those contacted are invited to stay on the line, ask questions of staff, and provide input. Others may call directly through a publicized call-in number. Specialized vendors are available to handle the logistics of the process, including placing calls to phone numbers in a defined geographic area and managing a queue of callers who wish to speak.

BEST SUITED FOR:

Planning Products

CASE STUDIES:

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, NextGen Bus Study

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro) used telephone town halls on two consecutive days to gather feedback for their NextGen Bus Study, which was a reimagining of bus service across Los Angeles County. Over 7,000 people stayed on the line or called in during the two meetings for an average listening duration of 5-7 minutes. Over 300 listeners used a Spanish simulcast option. Each town hall began with brief remarks about the planning process and the importance of public input to the plan and budget decisions. A panel of agency representatives was on hand to answer questions and provide support during the event. Live polls asked listeners about their bus service priorities. LA Metro factored these results and listener comments into the bus service concepts for the plan.



LA Metro used Telephone Town Halls as part of a comprehensive engagement strategy for its NextGen Bus Study. Image courtesy of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Colorado Department of Transportation, Statewide Transportation Plan

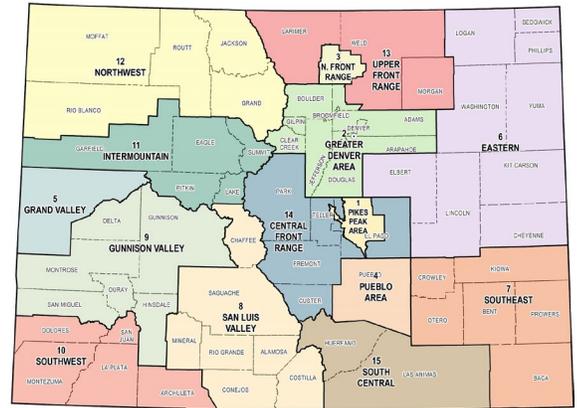
The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) hosted telephone town halls around the state to gather input for their statewide long-range transportation plan update. They held 15 town halls—ten in rural transportation planning areas and five in metropolitan areas—to hear about each area's needs and priorities. Live polling through touch-tone phones included questions on how CDOT should invest limited transportation dollars. Nearly 58,000 people participated in these sessions for some length of time, including over 17,000 in the rural regions.



CASE STUDIES cont...

The results informed priorities for the Plan and provided feedback for other CDOT planning documents, including transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and safety plans. CDOT has continued to use this method to report on progress in implementing the plan.

Colorado DOT held telephone town halls in each of the state's 15 transportation planning regions to inform the development of the statewide long-range transportation plan. Image courtesy of Colorado Department of Transportation.



Snapshot



Advantages

- Allows people to participate in a live meeting from the comfort of their homes
- Provides authenticity and accountability through direct interaction with agency staff
- Accommodates rural residents with limited broadband service and persons spread across large regions
- Reaches beyond the typical audience for a transportation plan or project
- Low cost per participant



Disadvantages

- Participating staff must be comfortable responding to live questions in a public setting
- Potential for dropped calls
- Possible background noise during calls



Resources Required

- Lead time and staff resources to plan and publicize town halls
- Cost of a town hall vendor service, if used



Outcomes

- Increased public awareness of the agency's role and the plan or project underway
- Feedback from large numbers of residents, including new participants



Tips for Success

- Select 3-7 agency staff for the panel who can best address anticipated questions and comments and support staff to assist them with responses
- Provide talking points or briefing materials on key topics to help the panel respond
- Allow callers to leave comments and questions by voicemail
- Publicize the town halls through news releases, social media, and on the website

