605 Conducting the In-Person Meeting

Setting Up

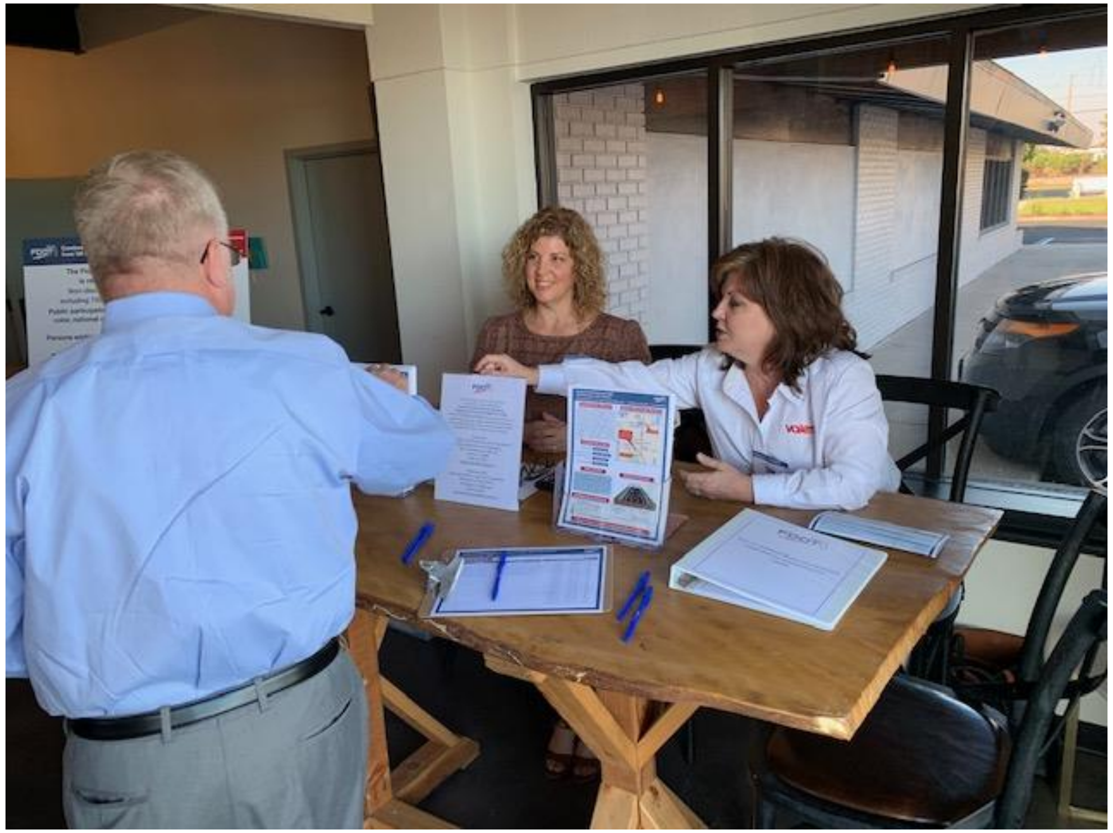
Arrive at least two hours in advance of the published start time to setup. More time may be needed depending on the number and size of display materials. Aim to complete the setup at least 30 minutes prior to the start time to welcome those who arrive early.

Staff Briefings

Prior to the start of the public meeting, a thorough briefing with staff will help eliminate the possibility of someone providing incorrect information. It is a best practice to gather the team and discuss roles, responsibilities, and anticipated questions from the public. Emphasize to staff that it's ok to say "I don't know" and to find a team member who can answer the question. It's better to find someone to help rather than provide the wrong answer.

Welcome and Sign-in

As people walk into the meeting room, their first impression is the sign-in table and those who greet them. Welcome people as they enter and ask them to sign in. Having people sign in creates a record of who attended and provides a contact list in case additional follow-up is needed. If handouts are available, provide them at the sign-in table.



Display Area

The display area is where the boards, videos, and/or presentation are provided for public review and input. This area is generally staffed by the FDOT PM, Consultant PM, facilitators (if applicable), subject matter experts, and public involvement support team.

Arrange the display boards in a logical order best suited to the project. Not every board needs a staff member assigned to it. However, assign multiple team members to high traffic areas (i.e., concept boards). As people enter, allow them to review the materials at their own pace. Identify several team members who can float and provide staff support where it's needed most. The FDOT PM and Consultant PM should be free to roam the meeting room and dedicate their time to one-on-one conversations.

If a presentation or video is provided, assign a staff member to assist with operating the audio-visual equipment and with addressing technical problems.

Challenging Conversations

How staff handles conflict and objections from participants influences people's perception of both the project and the Department. People are more willing to collaborate and stay engaged if they are properly informed, kept in the loop, and treated fairly. Some conversations turn difficult. The following suggestions can help defuse tense situations:

- Be respectful
- Actively listen
- Rephrase their concern to show you are listening
- Don't respond to what's unproductive
- Ask another team member for help
- Find the underlying interest or need
- End the conversation by directing the person to the comment form

Collecting Comments

Most public meetings follow an informal format where attendees are provided the opportunity to review display materials and ask questions. Team members are not expected to remember or record verbal comments provided during the meeting, nor can verbal comments be effectively captured for the meeting record. For this reason, after discussing the project with each person, direct them to fill out a comment form (written or electronically) or send an email to ensure that their comment is documented.