



# Closing the Participation Gap: Real-Time, Place-Based PIP Strategies

May 14, 2026



# Presenters



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- Reframe engagement beyond traditional public involvement.
- Understand how data and local context can drive engagement.
- Apply practical strategies to improve participation and trust.



## **Raise Your Hand if...**

- You've struggled with low public participation.
- You've had difficulty reaching diverse audiences.
- You see the same people at each meeting or comment opportunity.





# The Engagement Problem

# The Traditional Model – Checklist Approach

Addressing NEPA – “is this required?”



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## Notifications

Mailed letter for property owners, print newspaper



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## Limited personal interactions

Large public meetings or online only interactions, comment portals



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## Technical, straightforward information

Exhibit boards with technical jargon, minimal graphics

# Historical Context

## Evolution of Communities in NEPA

- The gap in engagement practices
- Evolution of public involvement expectations
  - Early NEPA public notice era
  - Demographic considerations rollercoaster



*Community engagement has evolved but often remains static.*

# Limitations of the Checklist Approach

- Same methods for every community
- Participation skewed toward a few groups or community organizations
- Limited insight into who isn't participating and why



*How do  
we know who  
isn't  
participating?*

# Engagement Gaps

## Common Challenges:



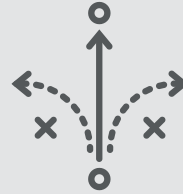
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Communities are not all the same, even throughout a small corridor



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One-size outreach strategies



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Limited ability to adapt mid-process



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Data collected but rarely analyzed



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Increasing emphasis on meaningful engagement

# Defining Meaningful Engagement

- **Practitioner:** Designing engagement with the public in mind, not ourselves.
- **Public:** *Trinity of Voice\**: Access, Standing, Influence



*To address this, some practitioners are moving toward a more adaptive engagement model.*



*What if we treated public involvement more like a data-informed engagement strategy?*



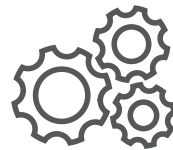
# Micro-Targeted Engagement

# What is Micro-Targeted Engagement?

Identifying communities by smaller engagement zones based on:

- Neighborhoods
- Cultural communities
- School districts
- Civic groups
- Environmental or geographic context

*Tailor outreach strategies to how communities receive and respond to information.*



# When Micro-Targeted Engagement is Limited



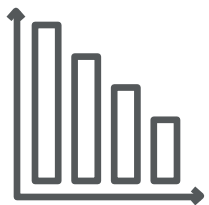
**Overreliance on broad outreach strategies:** Traditional outreach that relies on generalized tactics can miss the mark with diverse or niche audiences.



**Weakened engagement outcomes:** Lack of targeted strategies reduces the ability to build trust and drive meaningful participation.



**Limited audience targeting or interaction:** When geographic, behavioral, or audience data is unavailable, engagement gaps occur.



**Lower community relevancy:** Without tailoring to specific communities' values and concerns, engagement remains low and less meaningful.

# Engagement Framework



## 1. Collect

- Gather data across channels (digital engagement, surveys, community events, comments, social channels)
- Document community feedback, concerns, and barriers to participation
- Identify who we're reaching and who we're not



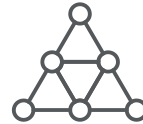
## 2. Analyze

- Identify engagement gaps in geography, demographics, stakeholder groups
- Pinpoint barriers (access, awareness, timing, format, language, etc.)



## 3. Adjust

- Refine outreach strategies to better reach underrepresented groups
- Shift tactics and tailor content (location, timing, format, partnerships)
- Collaborate with trusted community organizations to reduce barriers



## 4. Re-engage

- Conduct targeted outreach using updated strategies
- Meet communities where they are, both physically and culturally
- Continue gathering feedback and monitoring participation

# Inputs that Inform Micro-Engagement Opportunities

## Data sources may include:

- Demographic and cultural data
- Environmental context
- Comment trends
- Digital engagement analytics
- Local grassroots organizations, NGOs, trusted community partners
- Neighborhoods
- Elected official representation



**Effective outreach isn't louder —  
it's more intentional.**



# Turning Data into Action

Start with the tools you have access to.

- Desktop research
- Public GIS information
- Local knowledge
- Stakeholder engagement & community partnerships
- Existing conditions reports

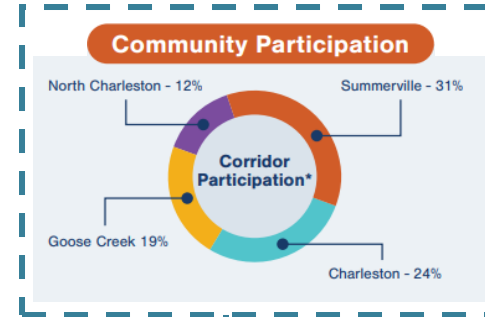
Scale tactics when possible.

- Detailed community analytics reports
- Comment mapping
- Stakeholder analysis
- Media monitoring and sentiment tracking
- CRM systems



## Topics Important to the Community:

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Roadway Design       | Bicycle & Pedestrian Features            |
| Airport Connectivity | Enhanced CARTA Routes                    |
| Service Frequency    | Park & Ride Locations                    |
| Flooding & Parking   | Connections in Goose Creek & West Ashley |



# How We're Reaching These Audiences

## Outreach and Canvas Strategy

- Stakeholder working groups
- Trusted community partners
- HOA meetings
- Neighborhood events
- Pop ups and community meetings
- Dual-language translations
- Direct mail with return postage



# How We're Reaching These Audiences

## Digitally

- Geo-targeted advertising
- Social media strategy including Next Door
- Virtual Town Halls
- Online Meetings
- Interactive websites
- GIS mapping tools
- Visualizations and renderings



Subject to Change

# Participation Tracking

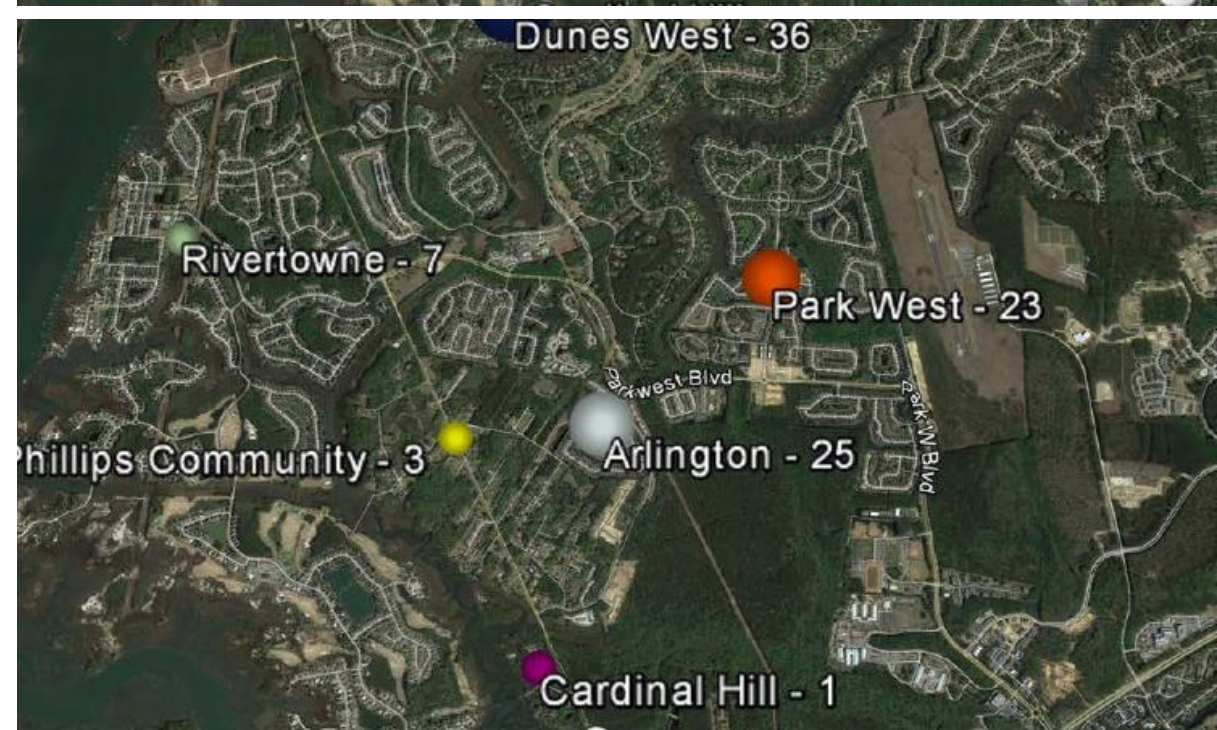
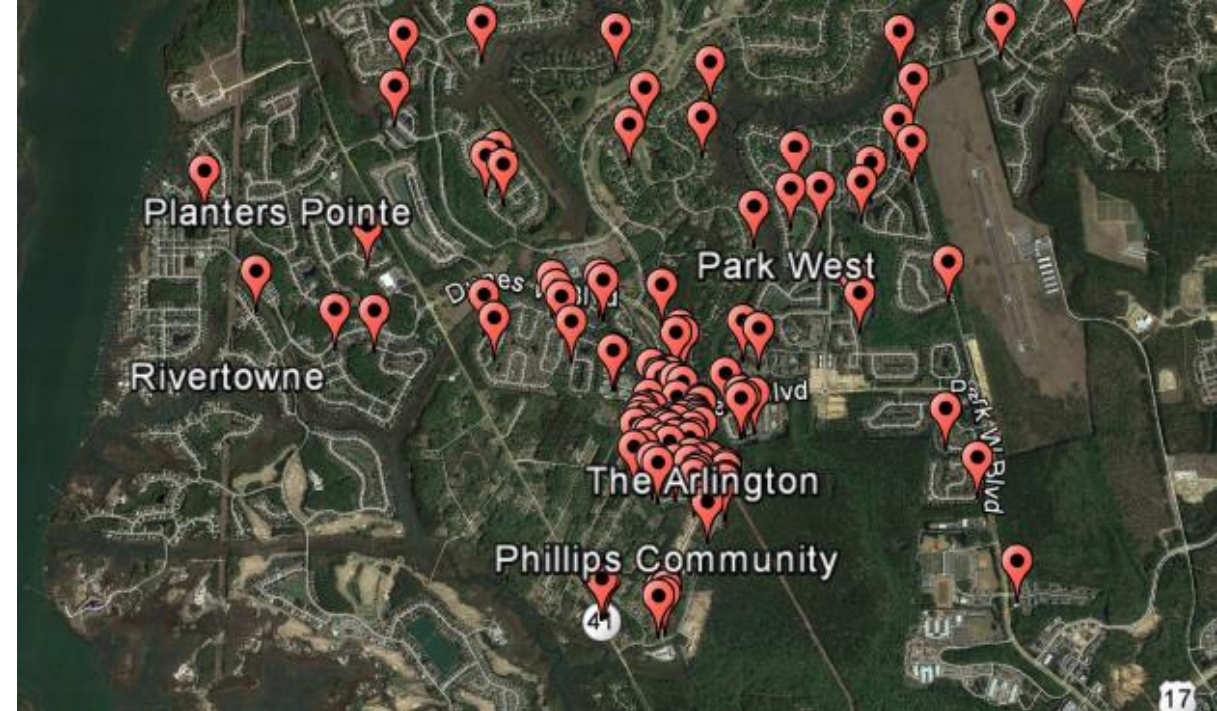
By continuously reviewing data received, we can improve engagement in real-time.

## What it can reveal:

- Specific audiences or demographics
- Outreach channels
- Emerging comment topics

## Purpose:

- Identify who we've heard from
- Where the gaps are
- Adjust outreach strategies



# Understanding gaps in engagement and sentiment allows us to be more intentional in outreach.



## 1. Collect

Gather data

Who are we reaching?

Who are we missing?



## 2. Analyze

Identify Gaps

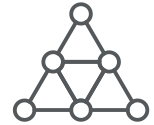
Pinpoint Barriers



## 3. Adjust

Refine tactics

Pivot if needed



## 4. Re-engage

Target your outreach strategies

Gather more feedback



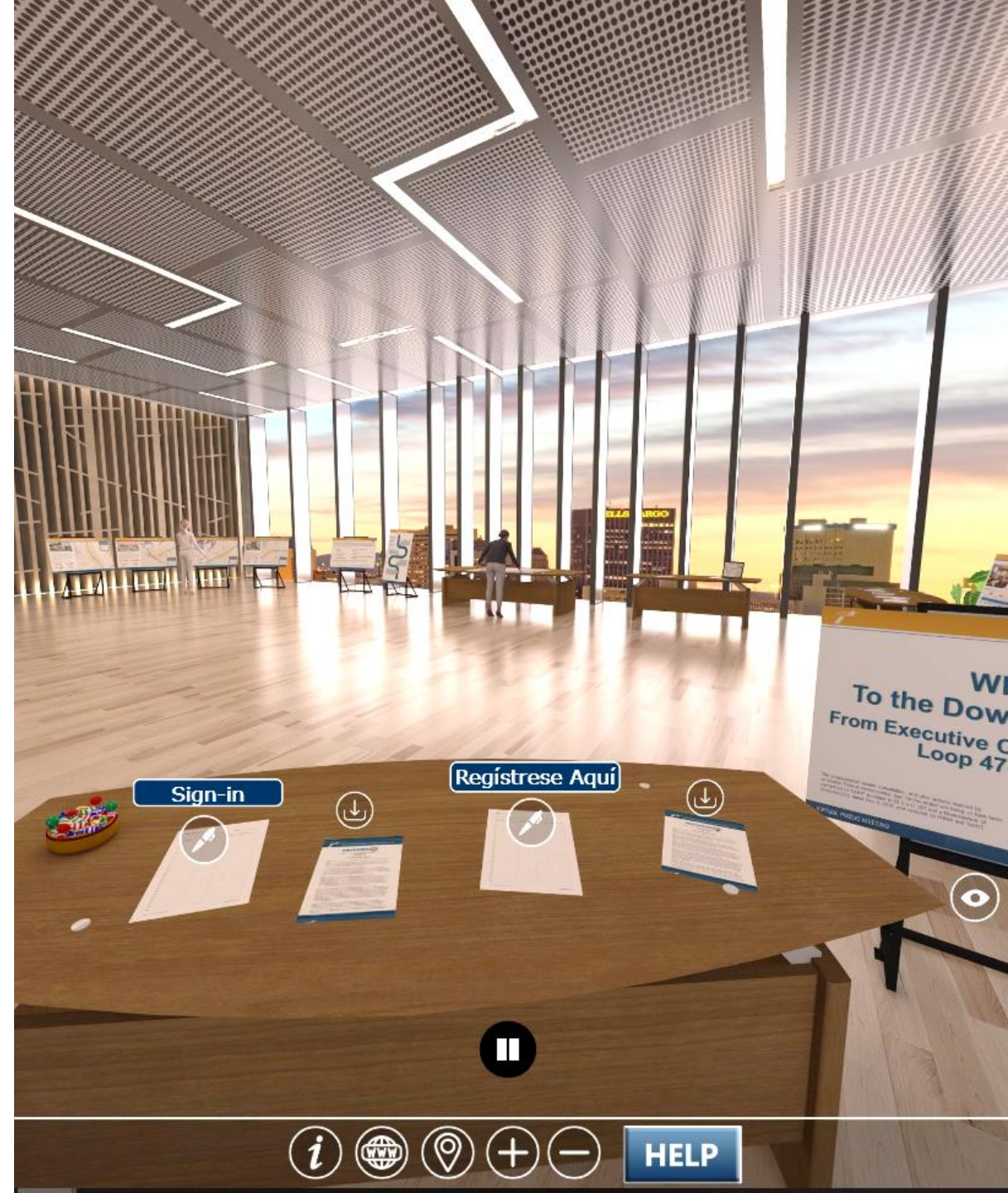
# Practical Application

# Downtown 10 – TxDOT EI Paso District

## From Corridor Study to EIS

### Challenges

- Binational project area
- Diverse stakeholders
- Bilingual audience
- Limited to virtual outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Evolution from EA to EIS
- Confusion with city-led projects such as Deck Plaza

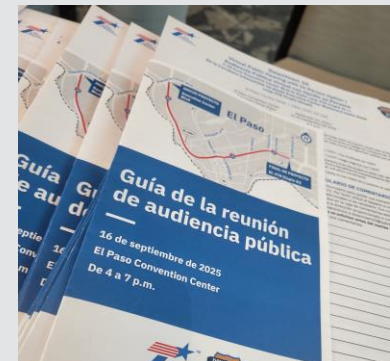
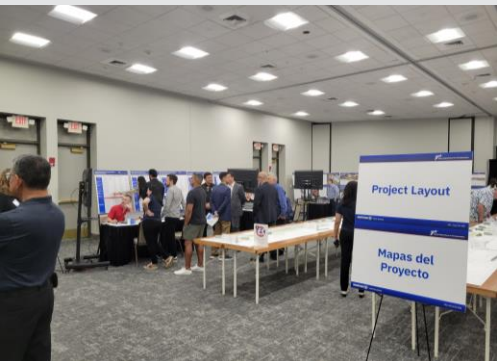


# Downtown 10 – TxDOT El Paso District

## From Corridor Study to EIS

### Analyze & Adjust

- Interest-specific meetings – Bike/Ped Committee
- Community Workshop for adjacent property owners
- Bilingual materials
- Non-traditional notice materials
- 3-D visualizations for public hearing
- Showing how feedback was incorporated





**Why this Matters**



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Real-time data drives  
better engagement.



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Tailored, community-level  
strategies are essential.



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Intentional strategies  
outperform one-size-fits-  
all approaches.

# Thank You

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