



Skill Builders: Tips For A Successful First Meeting

- Schedule and publicize the meeting well. Be sure written invitations go out to key interest groups (including those that may have concerns about the byway) and encourage community leaders to announce the meeting as an important community-enhancing project.
- Hold your meeting in a familiar and comfortable public location (for example, a school, library or community center). Make sure the meeting place is not too big or too small. A good meeting space will help to facilitate participation.
- Refreshments are always welcome.
- Introduce all attending and thank them for their participation.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting and what will happen because of the meeting. Set a positive tone that emphasizes the purpose of your meeting: "This byway seems like a good idea, but we are holding this meeting to explore whether it really makes sense for our community and whether we have a set of resources that appeal to travelers. We want this process to be shaped by and driven by citizens." These words should be the true attitude you bring to the project, not empty words spoken to calm the public while you pursue your own agenda.
- Keep meetings to no more than two hours in length, and schedule breaks at reasonable intervals.
- Start promptly and always provide participants with a written agenda. Your agenda will indicate forethought and organization, as well as help keep things on track.
- Keep to the agenda and finish on time. This will bring people back for the next meeting.
- Have flip charts, markers, tape or pushpins available to take notes and display them.
- Use visual aids like photos, maps, handouts and charts to help get your information across.
- Ask open-ended questions and listen carefully to what others have to say. Record their thoughts and concerns throughout the meeting. Verify that you have captured their thoughts as you write them down.
- Seek assistance for meeting facilitation from someone with qualified skills if you need help.
- Before the meeting ends, schedule the next one. If you have assigned any tasks, make sure people know what they are to accomplish prior to the next meeting.
- Remember to have fun! The creation of a byway can be an exciting, public pride-building experience. Try to find common ground where all participants can agree on benefits, initially remove contentious issues from the table, and focus on letting people have fun figuring out how to share their special stories and places with people from around the nation and the world.