

AASHTO Innovation Initiative

[Proposed] Nomination of Innovation Ready for Implementation

Sponsor

Nominations must be submitted by an AASHTO member DOT willing to help promote the innovation. If selected, the sponsoring DOT will be asked to promote the innovation to other states by participating on a Lead States Team supported by the AASHTO Innovation Initiative.

1. **Sponsoring DOT (State):** Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)
2. **Name and Title:** Rusty Ennemoser, PhD, State Public Involvement Coordinator

Organization: Florida Department of Transportation

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City: Tallahassee

State: Florida

Zip Code: 32399

Email: rusty.ennemoser@dot.state.fl.us

Phone: 850-414-5337

Fax: n/a

Innovation Description (10 points)

The term “innovation” may include processes, products, techniques, procedures, and practices.

3. **Name of the innovation:**

Hybrid Public Meetings – The New Normal

4. **Please describe the innovation.**

FDOT created a process of virtual and then hybrid public meetings that allowed the Department to maintain its production schedules during the pandemic while considering the safety of project staff and

the public. Hybrid public meetings provide the public with multiple ways to participate by offering an in-person and virtual experience. Often conducted at the same time, it allows the public to participate in a way that they feel most comfortable with or that is convenient to them.

5. What is the existing baseline practice that the innovation intends to replace/improve?

Prior to the hybrid format, meetings were held as in-person only. If the time and/or place was not convenient, then members of the public would be limited to information posted on the website.

6. What problems associated with the baseline practice does the innovation propose to solve?

The baseline practice (in-person meetings) only offered one way for the public to participate. If the time or location were not convenient for a member of the public, their ability to engage with the project was limited. Particularly during the pandemic, the safety of the public could be at risk, potentially reducing the number of participants. In addition, state executive orders and local mandates restricted the ability to have in-person meetings. For several months, local venues were closed due to the pandemic.

7. Briefly describe the history of its development.

The hybrid public format was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person meetings were limited. At first, the Department designed and provided guidance for virtual-only meetings. As social distancing rules were relaxed, the hybrid format was developed combining in-person and virtual meetings. FDOT now requires the hybrid format for all public meetings.

8. What resources—such as technical specifications, training materials, and user guides—have you developed to assist with the deployment effort? If appropriate, please attach or provide weblinks to reports, videos, photographs, diagrams, or other images illustrating the appearance or functionality of the innovation (if electronic, please provide a separate file). Please list your attachments or weblinks here.

Multiple resources were developed to assist staff with conducting hybrid and virtual meetings. All materials are posted on FDOT's public involvement page located here:

<https://www.fdot.gov/planning/policy/publicinvolvement/index>

Attach photographs, diagrams, or other images here. If images are of larger resolution size, please provide as separate files.



Behind Scenes at TPK



Event Center

Quick Start Resources for Public Involvement



ADDRESSING ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES

for reaching people virtually

While virtual meetings offer convenience by accommodating public participation wherever people are, we must be mindful of potential barriers to participation faced by some.

Understanding the special needs of people who live, work, shop, study, or travel in our plan or project area helps us respond to communication challenges that could negatively impact our engagement goals.

Florida (2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates)



1 in 7 households have no Internet access



1 in 3 households with income below \$20,000 do not have Internet access

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Access to virtual public meetings may be harder for some and impossible for others based on one or more of the characteristics below:

- Internet availability
- Internet quality
- Interest in the internet
- Technical proficiency
- Income (e.g., internet affordability)
- Culture (e.g., technology restrictions)
- Physical abilities
- English proficiency
- Literacy level

DATA ABOUT HOUSEHOLD INTERNET ACCESS

U.S. Census Bureau Data

The U.S. Census Bureau's [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#) reports household Internet access by the following categories:

- Households with broadband
- Households with dial-up
- Households with cellular data
- Households with satellite data
- Households with no internet access

Beyond the Data

Remember that demographic data provides a snapshot but not the complete picture. Be sure to talk to those who regularly engage the community (e.g., local government staff and social service organizations) to learn more about the population groups in your study area.



ACS demographic data is searchable down to the block group level at data.census.gov. In the website's search bar, type "Internet" and select [Table S2801: Types of computers and internet subscriptions](#). Then select [View All Tables](#), [Customize Table](#), [2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables](#), and the desired [Geographies](#).

Making Your Virtual Public Meeting More Accessible

Always provide a call-in number. This gives people without a computer the ability to call in and listen.

Provide a contact person and telephone number in the meeting notification inviting those needing assistance a way to request it.

Offer to mail hard copies of the presentation materials. If someone does not have computer or Internet access, they can follow along by phone. Make sure to number the pages and announce the page when shown during the meeting.

Post the recording of the virtual public meeting online. Those who could not join the live meeting because of an access issue may find a way to view the recording.

Have a longer public comment period after the meeting. Consider at least 20 days to allow time for the public to view the meeting recording and submit comments.

Office of Policy Planning | May 2020

Quick Start Resources for Public Involvement



'CAMERA-READY' TIPS

for virtual public meetings

Choosing the right environment, positioning the camera, and optimizing lighting conditions will help you look polished and professional when "meeting" the public virtually.



PICK YOUR SPOT

Choose a setting with low potential for distractions to either you or your audience. Avoid locations with background noise and where moving objects could be in the camera's view or your view such as windows, hallways, and ceiling fans. While on-camera, stand or sit without moving around too much.

Turn off or remove anything in the room that might be distracting. For example, artwork might draw the audience's attention away from your presentation, while an email chime could cause you to lose your focus.

Using a [virtual backdrop](#) is a way of making your space instantly presentable for a virtual meeting. Be sure to select one that looks professional. Another tip is to notify others around you when the broadcast will begin. Hanging a sign as a reminder would also help avoid interruptions.

CHECK THE LIGHTING

Proper lighting makes a big difference. Position the camera to achieve soft, front-facing light to brighten and enhance your image. Natural light is usually best but other lighting can substitute if you have too much or not enough natural light. Make sure the light source is outside the camera frame, and avoid a light source positioned behind you. Correct for harshness, glare, wash-out (overexposure), or dramatic shadows. You may be able to adjust the camera settings to improve brightness and contrast.



POSITION THE CAMERA

Adjust the camera to be at eye level to create a more natural and conversational feel between you and the audience. Placing a stack of books under your laptop is a quick and easy way to raise the camera to eye level.

CHOOSE YOUR ATTIRE

Avoid wearing clothes with intricate patterns. Stripes, checks, dots, and noticeable textures can distract by appearing to strobe or shimmer on video. Bright white or black shirts can cause the camera to auto-adjust brightness, making your face appear less clear on the screen. You can moderate this effect by wearing a jacket in a contrasting color. Neutral tones work well on video provided there is enough contrast between your clothing and your face and background.

MAKE FINAL ADJUSTMENTS

Adjust the camera position before the meeting to capture the desired view of yourself and the room.

Look in the direction of the camera as much as possible. Set up your computer desk-top so the items you will be looking at most during the meeting are situated closest to the camera. This will help

keep your eyes aimed toward the camera, giving the appearance of eye-contact with the audience. Eye contact helps engage the audience.

If using dual monitors, position them close together in front of you. That way, when you look back and forth it will be less obvious to the audience.

Quick Start Resources and other guidance are available on the Department's [Public Involvement webpage](#).

Office of Policy Planning | June 2020



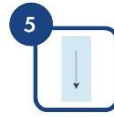
Social Distancing
Public Meeting Room Layout for 50 people



70
2 ft. X 2 ft.
chairs



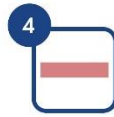
8
4 ft. X 2 ft.
boards



5
6 ft.
aisles



4
8 ft. X 2 ft.
boards



4
4 ft. X 2 ft.
comment direction
boards



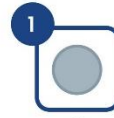
2
6 ft. X 2 ft.
registration tables



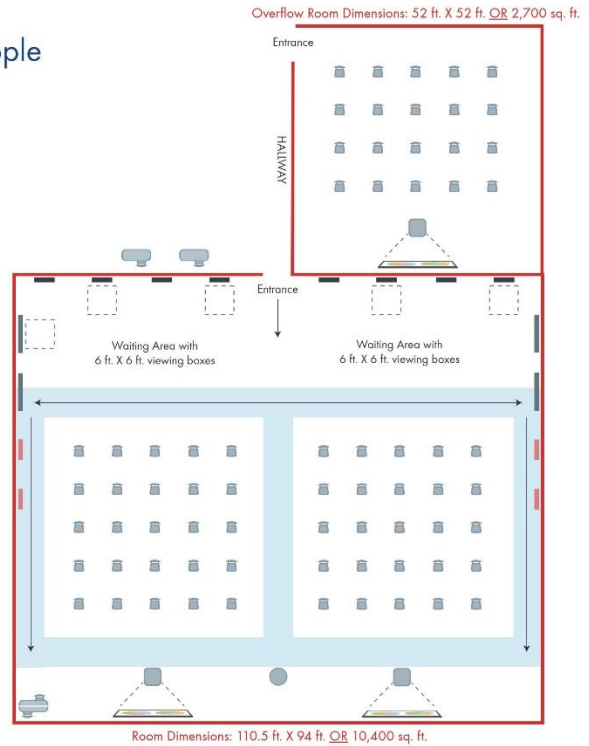
3
projector with
screen



1
6 ft. X 2 ft.
court reporter table
with plexiglass divider



1
4 ft.
moderator





A Guide to Hybrid Public Meetings and Hearings

OFFICE OF POLICY PLANNING | OCTOBER 2020



State of Development (40 points)

Innovations must be successfully deployed in at least one State DOT. The All selection process will favor innovations that have advanced beyond the research stage, at least to the pilot deployment stage, and preferably into routine use.

9. How ready is this innovation for implementation in an operational environment? Please select from the following options. Please describe.

- Prototype is fully functional and yet to be piloted
- Prototype has been piloted successfully in an operational environment
- Technology has been deployed multiple times in an operational environment
- Technology is ready for full-scale implementation

FDOT now requires the hybrid format for all public meetings.

10. What additional development is necessary to enable implementation of the innovation for routine use?

No additional development is necessary.

11. Are other organizations using, currently developing, or have they shown interest in this innovation or of similar technology?? Yes No

If so, please list organization names and contacts. Please identify the source of this information.

Organization	Name	Phone	Email
State Water Resources Control Board, California Environmental Protection Agency	Brita Romans	916-445-5603	Brita.romans@waterboards.ca.gov
North Carolina Turnpike Authority	Kimberlee Poulton	562-329-4808	k.poulton@hntb.com
Urban and Regional Planning Department at Georgia Tech	Colin Delargy	Not available	Cdelargy3@gatech.edu

Metro Regional Government, Portland, Oregon	Victor Sin	503-517-6911	Victor.sin@oregonmetro.gov
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Potential Payoff (30 points)

Payoff is defined as the combination of broad applicability and significant benefit or advantage over baseline practice .

12. How does the innovation meet customer or stakeholder needs in your State DOT or other organizations that have used it?

Hybrid meetings provide the public with more options for participation that are convenient for them. If a member of the public cannot attend the in-person meeting, then they can participate virtually from anywhere with a phone or internet connection.

13. Identify the top three benefit types your DOT has realized from using this innovation. Describe the type and scale of benefits of using this innovation over baseline practice. Provide additional information, if available, using quantitative metrics, to describe the benefits.

Benefit Types	Please describe:
Improved Customer Service	Provides choices and multiple ways to participate
Shorter Schedule	With Florida’s high number of seasonal residents, in-person meetings were typically held in the winter/spring. The hybrid format provides more flexibility and opportunity to avoid schedule delays.
Improved Safety	The virtual component of the hybrid format provides a private and safe way to participate.

Provide any additional description, if necessary:

An additional benefit is that with the virtual component, we are seeing more people participate. For instance, for a statewide task force meeting and prior to COVID, the average number of public attendees at the face-to-face meeting was 87. During COVID and with the Hybrid format, the average number of attendees was 228. For the Pioneer Trail PD&E public hearing, 110 attended virtually and 54 in-person. For Kissimmee Park Road PD&E, 74 attended virtually and 32 attended in person.

14 How broadly might this innovation be deployed for other applications. in the transportation industry (including other disciplines of a DOT, other transportation modes, and private industry)?

Any face-to-face meetings can be converted to a hybrid meeting. It can be applied broadly across all FDOT functions including training and consultant marketing meetings.

Market Readiness (20 points)

The All selection process will favor innovations that can be adopted with a reasonable amount of effort and cost, commensurate with the payoff potential.

15. What specific actions would another organization need to take along each of the following dimensions to adopt this innovation?

Check boxes that apply	Dimensions	Please describe:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gaining executive leadership support	Organization staff should obtain buy-in from senior management.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Communicating benefits	Organization staff should identify benefits to support the implementation of the hybrid format.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Overcoming funding constraints	Organization would need to fund the purchase of GoToMeeting, Zoom, or TEAMS license.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Acquiring in-house capabilities	Organization would need to develop procedures and training.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Addressing legal issues (if applicable) (e.g., liability and intellectual property)	N/A
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Resolving conflicts with existing national/state regulations and standards	Other State DOTs should work with their Federal Highway Division Office to ensure compliance with federal requirements.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other challenges	Organization should assure that their hybrid public meetings are compliant with non-discrimination regulations.

16. Please provide details of cost, effort, and length of time expended to deploy the innovation in your organization.

Cost: Cost was minimal. FDOT already obtained licenses for GoToMeeting. Additional time was spent preparing guidance and training for staff.

Level of Effort: High to address changing COVID guidance as the State closed and then re-opened.

Time: 6 months

17. To what extent might implementation of this innovation require the involvement of third parties, including vendors, contractors, and consultants? If so, please describe. List the type of expertise required for implementation.

It requires vendors for the virtual platform (i.e., GoToMeeting, Zoom, WebEx, or TEAMS). It also requires expertise in training and support from IT for using the software. Under the hybrid format, the in-person and virtual component may occur at the same time. Additional staff support may be needed to support the simultaneous activities.