



# Public Engagement: State of the Practice

TRB Annual Meeting, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Washington, DC



| Matrix of Domination Levels | Performative Equity                                                                                   | Authentic equity                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Individual to Interpersonal | From: Defensiveness<br>Guilt<br>Comfort<br>Emotional isolation                                        | To: Collective Support<br>Honesty<br>Discomfort<br>Collective support                                  |
| Interpersonal to Cultural   | From: Tokenism<br>Hiring<br>Voice disregarded<br>Identity as reductionistic<br>Position with no power | To: Dignity<br>Retention<br>Voice amplified<br>Identity as interventional<br>Dignity infused workplace |
| Cultural to Institutional   | From: Checklist Approach<br>Retrofitting or downscaling equity<br>Under-investment<br>White-led       | To: Long Term Engagement<br>Equity led agendas<br>Fully resourced<br>Community-led                     |

# Genesis, Purpose and Need

- TRB January 2023 AJE40 Committee
- So much change – sense of vertigo
- No comprehensive State of the Practice



**Amy Luft**  
**COMPASS**



**Dave Biggs**  
**Social Pinpoint**



**Lloyd Brown**  
**HDR, Inc.**



**Susan Howard**  
**TxDOT**

# Today's Agenda

1. Overview of process & key findings
2. Panel reflections/discussion
3. Q&A
4. Open discussion on research needs

# State of the Practice Partners



# State of the Practice Team

**Amy Luft**, Communication Coordinator,  
Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho

**Lloyd D. Brown**, Strategic Communications Business  
Class Leader, HDR

**Susan Howard**, Director of Public Involvement,  
Texas Department of Transportation

**Dave Biggs**, Strategic Engagement Advisor  
Social Pinpoint

**Jeff Moore**, AICP, Chairman,  
TRB AJE40 Committee

**Tina Geiselbrecht**, CP3, Senior Research Scientist,  
Planning and Engagement Program,  
Texas A&M Transportation Institute

**Jamille A. Robbins**, Public Involvement,  
Community Studies & Visualization Group Leader,  
North Carolina Department of Transportation

**Claudia Bilotto**, AICP, Senior Vice President,  
Southern States District Leader, WSP  
Formerly Chair, TRB AJE40 Committee

**Eileen Barron**, Communications Manager,  
Utah Department of Transportation



# The Survey

- About your agency?
- How do you engage the public?
- What's working? What's not?
- What's next?

# Responses

## Agency type

| Type                                     | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) | 248   | 58%        |
| State Department of Transportation (DOT) | 101   | 23%        |
| Local Government                         | 26    | 6%         |
| Transit Organizations                    | 22    | 5%         |
| Other Regional Agencies                  | 20    | 5%         |
| Other Organizations and Consultants      | 8     | 2%         |
| Rural Agencies                           | 6     | 1%         |

## Primary

| Role                                            | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Planning                                        | 200   | 46%        |
| Executive/Leadership                            | 96    | 22%        |
| Public Engagement                               | 56    | 13%        |
| Communications                                  | 40    | 9%         |
| Engineering                                     | 13    | 3%         |
| Other responses:                                |       |            |
| Environmental Services and/or NEPA Practitioner | 12    | 3%         |
| Other or a combination of roles                 | 14    | 3%         |

431 responses  
43 DOTs  
211 MPOs

# Key Goals and Objectives

1

- Gathering feedback to inform plans
- Less so: building awareness/trust & meeting requirements



# Barriers to Progress

2

- Limited staff & resources
- Lack of training
- Not for lack of buy-in

**What factors/barriers limit your agency's progress on public engagement?**

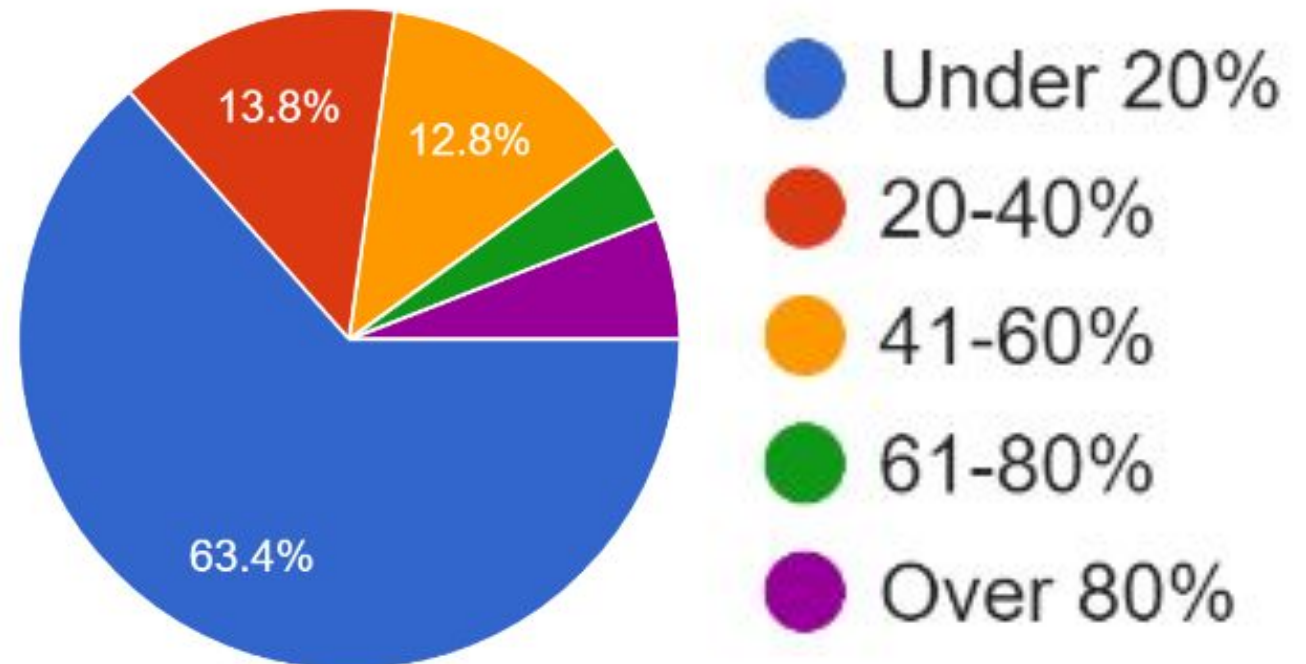
|                                | A great deal | Considerably | Moderately | Slightly | Not at all |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|----------|------------|
| Lack of buy-in from leadership | 5%           | 7%           | 20%        | 19%      | 49%        |
| Lack of staff training         | 6%           | 13%          | 32%        | 31%      | 18%        |
| Limited staffing               | 30%          | 28%          | 20%        | 15%      | 7%         |
| Limited resources/budget       | 26%          | 29%          | 21%        | 15%      | 9%         |
| Organization/agency culture    | 7%           | 10%          | 17%        | 23%      | 42%        |

# Roles and Responsibilities

3

- Mostly staff, not consultants (+70%)
- More on small projects (+80%)

**What percent of public engagement is performed by consultants?**



# Staffing

4

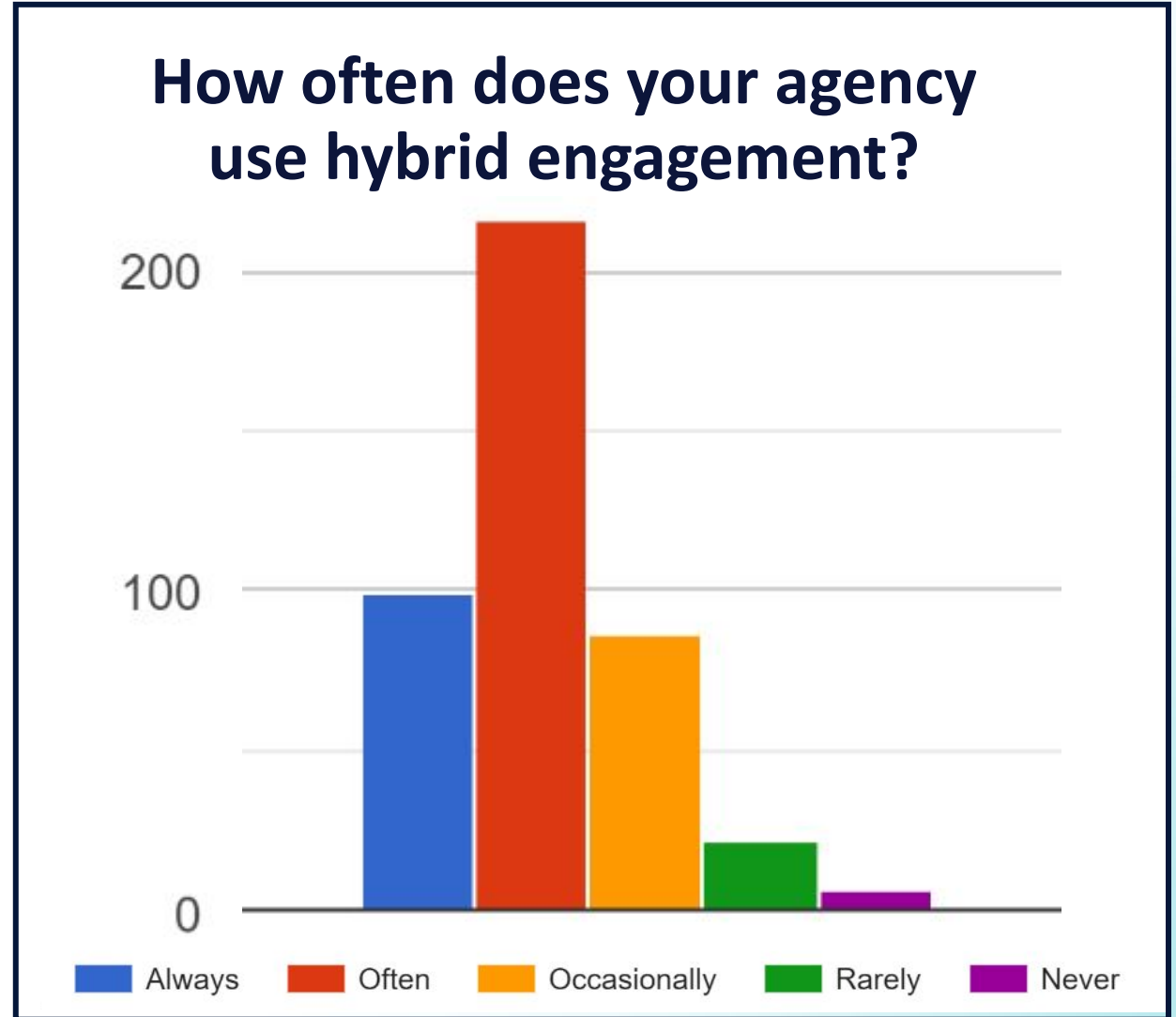
- Many have no PE staff (or very limited)
- PE performed by others



# Engagement Tools

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- Hybrid is key (public meetings + online surveys)
- Social media & websites in supporting roles



# Satisfaction with Results

6

- Input is mostly useful/constructive
- Less happy with participation
- Unhappy with diversity (especially MPOs)

## Level of satisfaction with your public engagement results?

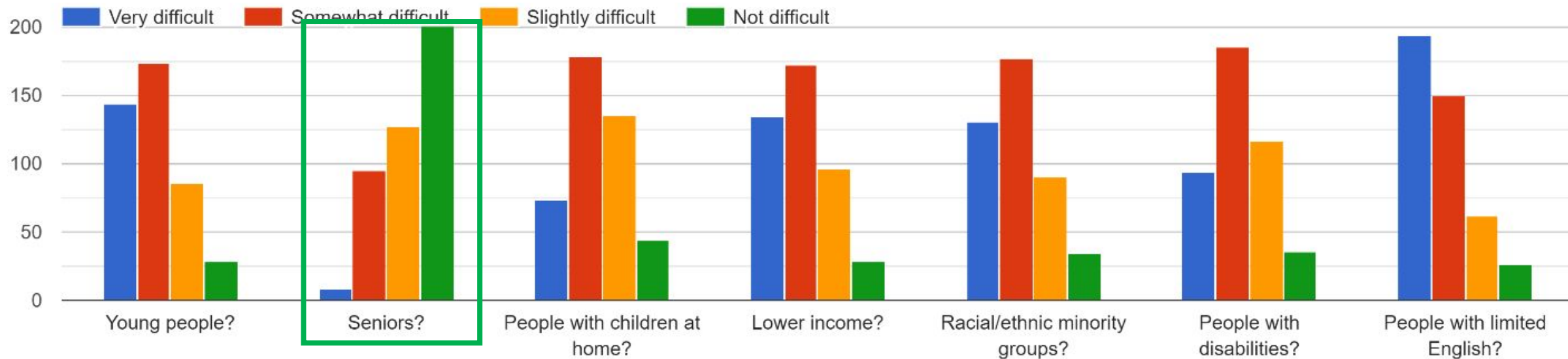
|                                  | Very satisfied | Moderately satisfied | Neutral      | Moderately unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Useful/constructive public input | 72<br>16.71%   | 214<br>49.65%        | 87<br>20.19% | 53<br>12.30%           | 5<br>1.16%       |
| Number of participants           | 37<br>8.58%    | 182<br>42.23%        | 82<br>19.03% | 110<br>25.52%          | 20<br>4.64%      |
| Diversity of participants        | 33<br>7.66%    | 101<br>23.43%        | 95<br>22.04% | 148<br>34.34%          | 54<br>12.53%     |

# Difficult to Reach Audiences

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- Limited English, young people, racial/ethnic minorities, lower income
- Positive or neutral people

## Which community members do you find most difficult to reach?



# Motivations for Improvement

8

- Broader reach/more representative
- Better understanding of priorities



# Key Engagement Obstacles

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- Harder to gain interest
- Apathy, distrust, lack of time, short term focus
- NIMBY still skews feedback
- What is an MPO?



# Looking to the Future

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- Hybrid is norm
- Increasingly online
- Role of social media
- 3D, VR, enhanced GIS
- AI as predictive tool and more



# Key Takeaways

**Key challenge:**  
diversity, equity  
& inclusion

**Key goal:**  
representative  
& useful input

**Key barrier:**  
limited staff &  
resources

**Key tools:**  
hybrid, online  
and more

**Key need:**  
targeted  
engagement

# Thank you!

## **Dave Biggs**

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