<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Measuring Public Involvement Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Group</td>
<td>PRR, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Washington -- testing took place at 11 in-person open houses and 3 online open houses throughout the Puget Sound region.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Question/Problem</td>
<td>How can we create an easy to use, valid measure of the effectiveness of public involvement from both the public’s and the public involvement agency’s perspectives?</td>
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<td>Sample Methods</td>
<td>The study was conducted in six phases, including: (1) a systematic literature review of over 1,000 documents, (2) development of indicators for measuring the effectiveness of public involvement, (3) developing items for measuring each indicator, (4) pretesting through in-depth cognitive interviews, (5) testing the surveys on three major transportation projects, (6) use of focus groups, factor analysis, principal components analysis, tests of validity/reliability, and usability testing to refine the surveys, scoring tool, and user guidelines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>The final toolkit includes paper and online versions of the survey for use with the public, an online version of the survey for use by the public involvement agency, an Excel scoring tool, and guidelines for administering and scoring the surveys. Although the toolkit was tested on three transportation projects, it can be used on all projects that include public involvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact Level</td>
<td>Final summary reports for the three test projects resulted in identifying key areas for improvement in their public involvement activities, some of which have already been implemented.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Frame</td>
<td>June 6, 2016 to November 20, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>People Engaged</td>
<td>140 public involvement participants completed the survey, 3 public involvement participants participated in in-depth cognitive interviews, and 6 participated in two mini-focus groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web Link</td>
<td><a href="http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/179069.aspx">http://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/179069.aspx</a></td>
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The Problem and Challenge

While there are widespread resources for how to best conduct public involvement, there are few practical or validated methods to gauge the effectiveness of public involvement. This research addressed this gap by developing rigorously tested surveys and scoring tools that agencies can use to measure the effectiveness of their public involvement from both the public’s and the agency’s perspectives. Our goal was to create the best possible tool that validly measures the effectiveness of public involvement, while also being user-friendly and “doable” given the typical constraints faced by agencies.

A team of research and public involvement experts developed a toolkit for evaluating the effectiveness of public involvement and tested it on three major transportation projects. The Public Involvement Effectiveness Measurement toolkit enables agency professionals to: track performance throughout the project lifecycle, identify strengths and weaknesses of public involvement activities, and inform decisions about the best way to allocate resources.

Methodology & Theoretical Frameworks

The findings from our systematic literature review of over 1,000 documents were used to inform the creation of specific questions (items), which were then categorized based on themes (indicators). These questions became the first draft of the survey. The survey was tested initially by conducting in-depth cognitive interviews with three participants who had attended a recent project open house. The survey was further tested on three major transportation projects – one involving extending two state highways, one extending express toll lanes on an interstate highway, and one for a long range plan for a state ferry system.

This testing highlighted the need to further reduce the number of items in the survey to decrease the burden on the public when completing the survey, but also to enhance the validity and reliability of the survey. The reduction was informed by several quantitative processes (factor analysis, principal components analysis, test of convergent validity, and reliability analysis), and qualitative processes (two focus groups with persons who participated in public involvement activities, an analysis of skipped survey items, and discussions among public involvement professionals). The length of the survey was thus reduced from 47 questions to 38 questions. Two versions of the survey were created – one to be completed by the public and one to be completed by the agency. The public version and the agency version were designed to be compared to each other. In addition to the surveys, an Excel scoring tool was developed and tested. This tool allows agencies to input the survey results and automatically calculate scores to understand how effective their public involvement is (and to compare the public results to the agency results).
Research Results

The toolkit includes a paper version of the survey for use with the public, an online version of the survey for use with the public, an online version of the survey for the agency to score itself (and provide documentation/evidence to objectively substantiate their ratings), the Excel scoring tool, and guidelines for using and scoring the surveys.

The survey for use with the public is composed of 38 questions divided across several areas, including six indicators of effective public involvement. Most of the questions are rated on a five-point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, with “don’t know” and “not applicable” response categories also available. The areas of the survey include:

- Respondent demographics measured in ways that allow for comparison to Census demographics (questions 1-9).
- Influence and Impact – The goal of this indicator is to measure the extent to which public feedback has an impact on project decisions, and that agencies are not just eliciting feedback from the public as part of a “checklist” (questions 10a-10g).
- Transparency and Clarity – The goal of this indicator is to measure whether trust of project agencies has increased or improved because of the public involvement processes, and whether agencies were appropriately transparent about the project (questions 11a-11f).
- Timing – The goal of this indicator is to evaluate whether public involvement started early enough and was of sufficient length and frequency to be valuable (questions 12a-12c).
- Inclusion – The goal of this indicator is to measure the extent to which the public involvement was inclusive and representative of all targeted and affected populations (questions 13a-13c).
- Targeted Engagement – The goal of this indicator is to measure the extent to which the public involvement included locations relevant to the targeted and affected populations (questions 14a-14c).
- Accessibility – The goal of this indicator is to measure the extent to which the public involvement activities used multiple methods for participation (questions 15a-15d).
- Overall satisfaction with the public involvement (question 16).
- An open-ended question asking for the top three ways the public involvement could have been improved (question 17).
- Types of public involvement activities the respondent had been involved in for the project (question 18).

The online survey for use by the agency is composed of 39 questions divided across several areas, including six indicators of effective public involvement. Most of the questions are rated on a five-point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, with “don’t know” and “not applicable” response categories also available. The agency version of the survey also includes space for the respondent to indicate the type of documentation or evidence they have to substantiate their ratings (see example to the right). Since the indicator items on the agency version are identical to those on the public version, it is possible to compare the ratings on these items from both the public and agency perspectives.

The scoring tool is in an Excel workbook and automatically calculates the geometric mean for each survey item and indicator. It also calculates the overall index score and a measure of discrepancy between public and agency scores. The higher the geometric means, the more effective the public involvement. This scoring tool also has the further benefit of easy comparison of public involvement effectiveness at different times during the development and delivery of a project or plan.

The results of the scoring are then presented in concise summary reports for use by the agency. In general, project managers from all three of the test projects found the summary reports easy to read and very useful. In particular, they mentioned the demographic comparison section and the table showing the public and agency ratings on each of the survey questions to be useful in evaluating how they are doing and for informing adjustments to the public involvement process. Project managers also mentioned the organization of the report and the brief length (four pages of results, two-page appendix with the survey questions) worked well for their and their staffs’ busy schedules. One project manager shared the report with their staff, who also had positive feedback. Another mentioned that the items on which they scored the lowest and the highest mirrored their sense of how the public involvement had been
going. They found the key findings from the survey useful in providing them with data-driven information beyond their own impressions.

The *guidelines document* provides detailed instructions in text, diagrams, and visual examples for the following aspects of using and scoring the surveys:

- Definitions of important terms.
- Overview of the survey contents.
- How to prepare and use the paper version of the survey with the public.
- How to prepare and use the online version of the survey with the public.
- Best practices for increasing the response rate.
- How to prepare and use the agency version of the survey.
- How to enter data into the scoring tool.
- How to use the scoring tool to measure public involvement effectiveness.

**Contribution to the Body of Knowledge**

This project developed a field-tested method to measure the effectiveness of public involvement using a toolkit that includes user-friendly surveys, indexes, scoring tools, and a user guide tailored for agencies conducting public involvement. The tools provide a way to target areas for improvement and to track such improvement over time, as well as to check on the performance of public involvement consultants. In addition, the use of the surveys can serve to improve relationships with affected communities since they now have a means for providing feedback not only on projects, but also on the public involvement processes. Finally, the use of the toolkit allows agencies to demonstrate the seriousness with which they take their responsibilities to conduct effective public involvement.

Although the paper version of the survey will always be needed, the online version will be widely used due to the increased use of online public involvement processes, ever-increasing internet access (especially via smart phones), and because an online version simplifies the availability of the survey in languages other than English. Many readily available and affordable online survey platforms allow the respondent to simply click on their language of choice once the survey has been translated.

Widespread adoption of this method for evaluating the effectiveness of public involvement will face many challenges. While there may be initial interest in using the surveys, it could fall to the bottom of agency priorities, given other priorities and concerns some agencies may have about the potential effects of criticism from the public on the agency’s credibility. In addition, there is the challenge of integrating the public involvement effectiveness survey alongside other planned surveys that are focused on feedback regarding the specific project itself. Finally, the costs in terms of time and resources of using the surveys and scoring tool need to be considered.

Agencies can overcome these challenges by considering the benefits of using the toolkit. For example, the survey questions in and of themselves provide a clear and concise blueprint for conducting effective public involvement. This can be especially helpful for
those agencies who are new to the world of conducting public involvement. Also, agencies can improve their public involvement practices through use of the survey scoring results to maximize public involvement that is inclusive, transparent, and impactful. In addition, funding agencies and elected officials may be more likely to fund specific projects because they see the value of the evaluation of public involvement done by agencies. Finally, the use of the survey results by agencies to improve the public involvement may increase trust by the public and may also lead to a deeper understanding by the public of the reasons behind decisions made by agencies.

Alignment with Core Values

The Public Involvement Effectiveness Measurement Toolkit is perfectly aligned with the IAP2 core values. Each of the following core values are reflected in the six indicators of effective public involvement in the Public Involvement Effectiveness (PIE) Index (see diagram below).

- Those who are affected by the decision were involved in the decision-making process.
- The public's contribution influenced the decision.
- The decision was sustainable, and recognized and communicated the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- The involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in the decision was sought out and facilitated.
- Participants provided input into designing how they participated in the decision.
- Information provided to participants supported meaningful participation.
- Participants were informed about how their input affected the decision.