

**Innovations in Public Engagement**  
**Spanish-speaking Focus Group (Perth Amboy, NJ)**  
**February 4, 2016**

**Date:** February 4, 6:00-7:30 PM

**Location:** Jewish Renaissance Foundation, 149 Kearny Ave, Perth Amboy

**Staff Facilitators:** Nieves Pimienta, James Sinclair

**Other staff in attendance:** Aimee Jefferson, Miriam Salerno

**Major Takeaways**

1. **Public meetings:** About half the group had participated in public meetings, often because of the need of a family member or a personal concern, like improving their transportation to work. They felt it was worthwhile if they saw results. Reasons for not participating varied; they included not being confident in English, being a new resident, not having time, or not feeling the need.
2. **Language access** Participants were divided in their preference to have meetings divided by language preference or to have joint meetings with interpreters. While they acknowledged divided meetings are easier and perhaps more comfortable, others believe it's important to be together with other community members and learn from each other.
3. **The topic of discussion** is the most important factor in deciding to attend a meeting, answer a survey, respond to a Textizen ad, or engage with a mobile outreach on the street. The topic of discussion should feature prominently on the flyer to capture interest, without too much clutter. Proximity and time of the meeting are also important considerations. Most will attend if these criteria are met. If participants are unable to attend a meeting, many are happy to engage online.
4. **Concerns about face-to-face engagement:** Some participants are nervous about stopping for mobile kiosks or surveys. Their concerns included: fraud [both online and in-person], being asked legal questions in English that they would answer incorrectly, and being lured into a trap as an undocumented resident. Regarding transit in general, a participant noted that many come from countries where riding transit was not safe, but noted that he/she does feel safe on transit here.
5. **2040 seems close and tangible:** The future seems close and tangible to most participants, for their children if not for themselves. Some participants who felt it was far away could conceptualize the future when relating it to their kids. Participants were also mostly interested in regional planning and think it's important to see New Jersey as one unified state. Several emphasized the importance of thinking on a statewide scale.
6. **Opinions of the transportation system overall are negative.** Some participants expressed special concern for senior and disabled people who cannot drive, as well as laborers who are captive to private bus companies for transportation to worksites. Participants were varied in their daily transportation uses; many own cars but also take the train on occasion, while others use buses. The need for more frequent public transportation was mentioned several times.

7. **Advice to NJTPA:** Participants advised NJTPA to provide more information to the public more frequently. They encouraged NJTPA to have Spanish-only meetings/venues/materials or provide simultaneous translation at English events. NJTPA should also focus on going to meetings that are already happening in the community and should target Latino youth who speak English.
8. **Lessons from recruitment:** Recruitment for Spanish-speaking participants was extremely difficult. After trying several strategies unsuccessfully (flying neighborhoods and shops, online and social media, community groups), the majority of our participants found the focus group through their ESL class because the teacher announced it in class, or through the local senior center where the coordinator personally invited several individuals.

**Participants:**

Name	Race	Gender	Occupation	City of residence
Victor Ortiz	Hispanic	Male	Retired	Perth Amboy
Carmen Calvimontes	Hispanic, mixed race	Female	works at Rutgers	New Brunswick
Antonio Henriquez	Hispanic	Male	Retired	Perth Amboy
Juan Bautista	Hispanic	Male	Retired	Perth Amboy
Minerva Disena	Hispanic	Female		Old Bridge
Oscar	Hispanic	Male		Perth Amboy
Nestor Rivera	Hispanic	Male	Warehouse staff; journalist	Perth Amboy
Tatiana Garay	Hispanic	Female		Perth Amboy
Monica Fernandez	Hispanic	Female	ESL student	Avenal
Leonida Collado	Hispanic	Female	ESL Student	Perth Amboy
Porfino Gir	Hispanic	Male	Retired	Perth Amboy

**Discussion:**

*What type of transportation do you use on a regular basis?*

- I sometimes use my car and sometimes the train or bus
- I have my own car
- I have a car and never use transit
- I use train and bus. I have a car, but I use my bike more.
- I'm transported by my son because I've only been here for one year
- I have a car
- I use the train but have my own car

- I use the train and bus
- I have my own car but sometimes use the train
- I use my car, the train and bus

*Have you been in a public meeting about a community problem?*

[6 have participated]

- They were going to destroy a housing complex and the tenants were talking to authorities about preventing that.
  - I helped.
  - I liked it a lot because people expressed themselves well and were listened to. I'm a volunteer to help translate and interpret
- I have participated in many. I come from Trenton, I moved here in March, and needed transportation to reach my job. And there was a bus route 130 that reached Hightstown but I needed it to go further, to Roxbury. And I was insisting until I was listened to and they changed the route.
  - It was difficult but I got the result I wanted. And previously in Argentina I worked on a plan to get a bicycle lane.
  - For Trenton I was motivated by the personal need for transit but also represented other people who didn't know how to make the approach
- We wanted a library for the community where I lived. I was with a group of parents to help the kids and give them free classes.
  - I was motivated when back then my kids were small and one needed extra help and because the teachers were too busy they did not have time for each of the children. The private class was very important and it would help a lot.
  - My experience was average because that program no longer exists. Some still exist and others don't.
  - We got some results.
- I went to the board of education in Perth Amboy. My cousin had high grades but was excluded from the gifted and talented group, and we went to find out why. This was a forum where people could come and make complaints so we went to appeal the decision. We had heard about other kids being left out too. The board paid attention at first but later they didn't do anything about it
  - I was motivated to participate for my cousin
- I participated in a meeting to see alternatives for security at the school because it had been a disaster. The community came together to talk and they have improved security and it was resolved.
  - I had a good experience because I can see the results.
- I have not participated. I have only been in the country for one year, but I like to participate in the community and want to help. I've been looking at ways to help. The first thing I did was learn English and want to be involved in the future.

- About 3 or 4 years ago I participated because I needed to complain about the increase in property taxes in Perth Amboy. They divided us in different groups and they listened to us. I think it was a good experience because the next year they revalued the property costs and taxes went down.
- Thank God I have never participated. I have never felt the need, I've never been in doubt about anything. I would participate if it were good for me.
- I have never participated. I have been in the country for 60 years and back then there wasn't an opportunity to participate and since then I had 4 kids and didn't have time. The only way I've participated is by going to city council meetings to see what is happening with the town.

*How much do the following factors influence your decision to attend a meeting? (14:54)*

- ***The topic of discussion. If the theme is of personal interest.***
  - [9 said yes]
- ***If they are going to serve food***
  - [all said no]
  - I'll go if I care about the topic, regardless if there is food or not.
- ***If there is child care***
  - [all said no]
  - My kids are old enough
- ***Location and proximity of event***
  - [10 said a strong yes]
  - Location is key
- ***Time and date of event***
  - [9 said yes]
  - If I like the topic and I have the day free, why not go?
  - For example if it's in Brooklyn, that's a hassle.
- ***Being invited by someone who knows you***
  - [4 said yes]
  - It's not so important but it does make a difference
  - Average importance
- ***The event happens somewhere I am going to be anyway***
  - [4 said yes, light agreement]
- ***What else might affect your decision to attend?***
  - Parking is a concern for me because I don't want to circle around looking for a place. For example, today I came early to see if parking was available because I know it's difficult around here. Sometimes there aren't spots, or they're very far away.
  - The theme of the discussion is most important
  - *Is safety of the area an issue?*
    - [mostly women agreed yes]
    - I don't think they would organize a meeting in an area that's not safe.

▪

*Let's talk about the flyers. [note: flyers used for this group were written in Spanish and were different than those used in the English language groups]*

- What word do you use [in Spanish] for flyers?
  - Flyer, volante, Mascota, Folleto.

***Flyer #1:***

- Transportation
- The city
- The economy
- If I see this on the bulletin board at ShopRite I'm not going to stop and read the poster because there's too much information
- It's not clear who they want to participate, there's too much information. The theme that calls your attention should be in a bigger font or different color so you know immediately what it's about
- The design is not effective. I would have to spend more time reading it.
- This was made for a bulletin board at a university. If you put it somewhere else nobody is going to pay attention
- The subject should be at the top and big. If it's about transportation, it should be up here, not down here.
- I do like that they mention which bus routes exist to get to the meeting and that is rarely seen on posters. But there are too many words.

***Flyer #2***

- Looks like it has to do with housing, safety, transportation
- It is not clear what it is about, it has lots of information about the time, the food, but the principal specific message is not there, too general. Saying housing, safety, transportation is too general and not specific
- The text asking what is important to you is lost. It needs to be in another color like red to call attention
- Yes there's lots of things I like such as transportation, art, work, education
- I would like to go, but I like that they give the option that if I couldn't go I could express what is important to me online
- *Do you contact community organizations to express your point of view? (31:20)*
  - Yes, because emails and calls can be very effective
  - If I was interested I would but I would rather go to the meeting, but if I couldn't go I'd communicate online
- *Would you call?*

- [2 say yes]
- I would call if it's very important
- I'd prefer to communicate online if I couldn't go to the meeting.
- I like the brevity
- It's simple and easy to read
- It gives all the information like time and place
- I would just change the color about the main message the rest is simple but looks good
- I don't like the background because it is too generic

*Think about the future. What do people think about planning for 2040? (34:52)*

- The future - how it will be for my kids, maybe me when I'm older
- It's too far away
- It's not. I see electric cars, no dependence on oil, more pedestrian-friendly cities, not so many cars.
- I think it's close
- I think it's close because time goes by quickly and we need to think about the future and how to improve things.
- I think it's far off for me but not for my kids
- I think it's a little too far away but I have to think about my kids
- It's close. We're already in 2016
- I would like to see the future but I know I'm not going to get there.
- The future is now!

*If we're going to plan for 2040, what do we do to get people to be involved in this kind of planning? Think about yourselves - what gets you interested in participating? (38:49)*

- If you give me transportation and food I will go.
- For me, you would have to give me more information about where I have to go and what I have to do. For others, show them how. For example, for people who have never been on a train before, sometimes I show them how to take it.
- When it's about transportation it is important to talk about what is happening to people today because people need access to transportation all the time, and that's why I say it's so far away from my reality because from my point of view the state is very behind in transportation. They should have done the planning many years in the past. They haven't done projections on how many people are coming to NJ, which is very important in each country. The population is growing a lot; this is where people arrive in the country.
  - That's why I'm here because it's something that's always bothered me about this state, the country is so advanced but the motor of this country is people who need public transit. It's not people who can afford a car. People who need to get to a farm on the bus

but you can't get to the farm on the bus so people become captive to private companies that charge whatever they want to take people to the farm. I am passionate about this because I came to this country in 2001 and I heard there was a horrible crash on the Turnpike because someone abandoned their car in the travel lane and a van carrying laborers at 5am didn't see the car and 3 or 4 people died who were working to feed their family and had to use the van because no other transportation is available. So the time to fix it is now.

- In the short time I've been here I've seen people who have a broken car and they don't pull off road.
- If the state can't provide options, then they need to give more licenses for bus companies.
- I want to improve transportation now and in the future and would like to participate in these events
- I agree that the transportation situation is bad
- It's not good but getting better, the bridges and highways and Turnpike have improved. They've added lanes and exits
- I want to add that I think we're forgetting about people who can't drive because they are handicap and the status of transportation for people with handicap is embarrassing and they have to wait 3 or 4 hours to get picked up and 3 to 4 hours to return and for something like a doctor they spend all day. That's not fair. Why is there so little public transit when the resources are there? The highways are there, but only for people with cars.

*Look at the photos of kiosks and information booths. Have you ever seen something like this and interacted with them? (49:40)*

- Yes, I like these because people are there to explain things. I can ask questions.
- Yes, I've gone to these because I'm interested in what is happening what is being planned in his community. I like it because of my background as a photojournalist
- Yes I go up to them if I'm interested in the topic; if not I will walk by. I will ask what the topic is. I'm curious.
- Yes I've approached to find out what it's about.
- Yes, I want to find out if there's a special sale going on.
- Yes, I like kiosks regardless of the subject
- I go up and ask if it's a subject that interests me, and if I see it's something that doesn't interest me, I move on.
- If it's something that interests me, I ask questions. If not, I keep walking.

*Would you stop for someone who comes up to you on the street to ask your opinion about transportation?*

- Yes
- If I have time and it will be brief. I will only answer 5 brief questions, it can't be too much.

- If the subject they're asking about is something I'm familiar with, I'll respond. It depends on if I have knowledge of the subject.
- I will say "I don't know, I don't speak English" [everyone laughs]
- Yes I've answered people who approach me in the street but no one asks me usually
- I haven't been stopped on the street but have been asked on the phone
- I have also been asked on the phone
- I've been stopped at the mall but I don't have time at the mall because I'm busy shopping
- No because I don't have time
- Sometimes they offer stuff like hand cream or something so I might stop.
- If I don't have time that doesn't matter

*What if the signs/display are only in English?*

- I will ask regardless
- I will ask if they speak Spanish and will only respond if they do so I can understand. Sometimes I can be intimidated by language.
- Yes having it be in Spanish is very important. I only want to answer questions in a language I have mastered. What if they're asking legal questions? You can get in trouble.
- I speak both and English is easier for me
- I prefer in Spanish; I can't read the signs in English
- I don't read English
- I'm curious so I will approach and ask but I do speak English so it's ok

*Do you use social media?*

- Instagram, Facebook, Whats app
- Facebook
- Facebook, WhatsApp Twitter
- Whats app
- Whats app and Instagram
- Nothing, I don't like it.

*Has anyone interacted with a public agency using social media?*

- I will receive [marketing] emails but you can't reply to them. I don't interact online with agencies. I haven't tried to, because there's a lot of fraud
- I have with NJ Transit, US Embassy, news agencies, etc.
- [most say no they haven't]

*Have you participated in an online survey? (1:02:50)*

- Yes, if I'm interested in the subject



- I've participated online when the subject is interesting.

*Have you been invited to participate and then didn't click?*

- I have but I don't trust them. There is too much fraud. I don't have much faith in online security.
- I've been called to participate to an event online but said I was too busy because I was a photojournalist at the time.
- I ignore them.
- I have received them and have clicked due to the subject

*How long would you spend on an online survey about public transit?*

- Max 5 minutes, absolute max. If it's a good survey where you only have to select yes no or multiple choice and not write except at the end, even better.
- I would do up to 20 minutes
- 20 minutes is enough to give your opinion
- 10 minutes
- 7-8 minutes
- 8-10 minutes
- 15-20 minutes
- I won't do them online
- 15 minutes

*Please look at example at end of pamphlet where people are giving their opinion via a text message. Would you do it? (1:06:30)*

- I would do it because it's a way to express yourself, mostly to complain. It's always to complain.
- No I wouldn't do this, this isn't a subject that interests me. I might be more interested if it were about education or transportation.
- Yes I would, because now everyone is always doing things on their phones because it's easier.
- Depends on subject
- If it benefits me or the city
- Depends on the subject
- If it's good for the community, yes, but I'd rather call
- If they give me options yes, but if it's open ended no. I like yes or no. I like the example at the bottom which gives a question and a few options.

*Does it make a difference if it's about regional issues vs. local issues? Would you attend a forum about Northern New Jersey? (1:09:50)*

- I always think about the macro already, in all of New Jersey

- Yes especially if it's about transportation. We're not static, we're not just in one part of the state, we want the transportation to work everywhere [many agree]. But, if we're talking about the North and South, the North has a lot more transportation structure than the south.
- Yes I'm interested
- I'm interested

*Preferred Terms for Certain Concepts in Spanish (1:13:10)*

- **Walkable**
  - Peatonal
  - nobody says caminable, we all use peatonal.
- **Liveable**
  - Habitable [preferred]
  - Vivible
- **Complete streets**
  - Transitible [preferred]
  - Multi-transporte
  - Multi-funcional
  - Nobody says *calles completas*
- **Mobility**
  - Accesible
  - *Movilidad* means movement to me. Like it is very busy. Like there's traffic.
  - The ability to move oneself from one side to another
  - In Bolivia, *movilidad* means only for cars
  - accessible is better because it sounds like easy access
- **Regional Planning**
  - Planificación regional:
    - The whole region.
    - Yes regional.
    - Yes well understood.
  - It tells me that we're talking about Northern New Jersey, not specifically about Perth Amboy
- **Sostenible:**
  - For me, It means that it can be maintained
  - That it can be maintained well
- **Sustentable:**
  - It means let's talk about something with a good base, with substance
  - If it's durable
  - Carla: Its different, like if the economy is sustainable vs if a town has all it needs to be self-sustaining
- **Sidewalk**

- Acera [most popular]
- Mexicans [and Bolivians?] say banqueta
- Zona peatonal [two]
- ***Shoulder***
  - *paseo* is more popular
  - *Acotamiento*
- ***Bike lane***
  - Carril de la bicicleta [most agreed]
  - Vía de bicicletas
  - Ciclovía
  - Carril ciclista

***What advice would you give NJTPA to get people involved in planning? (1:23:41)***

- More transportation with greater frequency
- More information to the people
- More outreach and promoting themselves to the public. At least to bring their message to the people. For example, a person can go door-to-door or be on the street giving out information about the project that's going to be carried out.
- Use the resources they already have. Every city has town hall meetings. Marketing companies have everybody's information on every street. If a private company can do that then the government should have better access to call people and invite them to a town hall meeting, just like they call when there's an emergency or something. And set two dates one in English and Spanish. Stop wasting time trying to re-invent the wheel, they have lots of resources, they're simply not using them. And why are they wasting time planning for half the state when the whole state has issues?
- Use the technology. Do meetings like this but with technology. Hispanic people are hard to get to participate. If we don't get anything in return we don't come.
- Also, Hispanics are very busy working a lot
- Lots of people are scared. They are not documented and are scared that it's a trap. But they are interested in transportation, undocumented or not. If you offer them the chance to go participate and they don't have to pay anything, they'll be there, especially if it'll be in their language
- Separate in two groups, English and Spanish, so people have the confidence for those who don't speak English well to be able to participate and indicate their points of view in a clear and transparent way.
- I would rather English and Spanish be involved together. Americans can learn from Hispanics, and Hispanics can go where they want. They shouldn't be separated.
  - The problem is that interpretation uses up time
  - Yes, but If they want people to listen and give their opinions, it will take time.
- Has to be English and Spanish separate because you understand it best in your own language
- Yes, in Spanish is better

- There are people who have been here 15 years and don't speak any English. However, they can be in a mixed meeting and ask their neighbor to translate. It's all a network and people can ask each other.
  - But the translation can be wrong and you can't pay attention when people are translating. It's not using the time efficiently.
- That's why resources need to be used. Simultaneous translation. Instead of waiting for the person to speak and repeat, to put on their headphones and it gets translated simultaneously. That saves time.
  - If they can't improve transit they don't have money to pay for an interpreter
- Involve the kids, like in schools. They're the ones that are going to use what happens in 2040.
  - Yes, and they speak English.

*We had a bilingual meeting in Lakewood and spent a lot of time preparing and translating everything, but nobody came. Why do you think that is?*

- You need to talk to the city
- The public schools have a lot of power. They have the authority to get parents to show up.
  - [in response] No one should be forced to come, it has to be optional and productive. People being forced to go doesn't help. They need to be convicted to go and care about it.
- Many times people don't know there are chances to express themselves; they have to learn about the event.
- In regards to the youth, an easy way to get them, from what I see in HS has to be through the phone. Everyone is on their phone.

*Do you think it's better to do outreach where there's already a meeting or hold a separate meeting?*

- [Most participants thought joining an existing meeting was a good option]
- Churches do a lot of work and are constantly looking to promote their services, like for health or other things

*Anything else to share?*

- Yes I like the train because it is well organized and it is safe, you can ride at 1am and it is safe
- We have a different perception coming from another country where it is not safe, but I've noticed it is safe here.

*How would you describe the regional plan to your friends?*

- What I understand is that it is a plan for public and private transportation to improve what we have for 2040, in many ways. It could be new roads, better accessibility, more transit routes. There are lots of details.
- I don't know what it is.

- I have to explain to people who were interested in coming but couldn't. It's a plan to bring together ideas to improve transportation in a future that's not too far away
- I have no idea
- I would see a transportation plan as something like if I am paying \$30 now to ride the train, how the government can make it less in the future
- It depends on the person but a simple way would be, imagine if you want to go to Poconos and don't want to drive, how you could get there on a train
- A plan for fewer problems in the future and how we can improve transportation so that people are safer and have fewer problems.
- I don't have a clear idea of what that is.
- A way to synchronize trains with buses so they have more buses with more frequent buses and overall more bus routes and the options for private transportation companies maybe subsidized by the government.
- More bikes and trains and fewer cars so we get more exercise and less pollution

Demographic Survey Results – Spanish Speakers





