

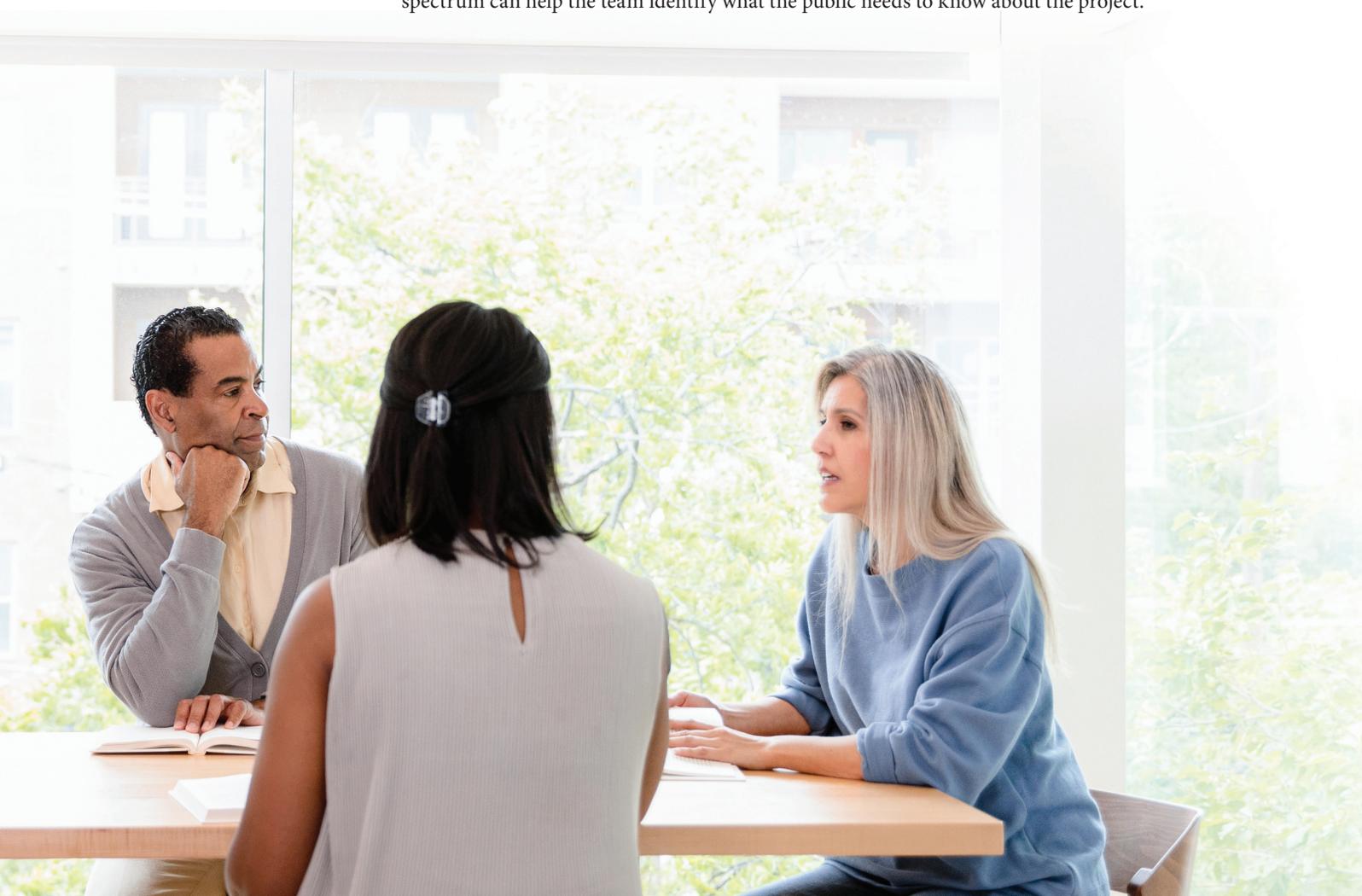
Benefits of a **High-Functioning** Public Involvement Team

How public involvement creates efficiencies and positive sentiment for utility projects

BY ROB SCIMEME

Utility projects and programs demand varying degrees of engagement and communication with key participants including residential, agricultural, commercial, industrial, institutional, municipal, state or federal agencies. Strategic, upfront analysis of specific project impacts and affected areas is critical in developing an effective engagement plan and streamlined project processes.

The International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation is a valuable model used for developing an appropriate strategy. The spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world. While communication campaigns and notifications provide necessary messaging, direct communication with customers and landowners throughout the acquisition and construction process drive success. The public participant's knowledge of how to receive and understand the intricate details of the proposed activities truly make a difference, and the spectrum can help the team identify what the public needs to know about the project.



IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

© IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1

Source: International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

However, it is crucial to fully understand the client's existing communication style. A tailored approach is necessary to adjust to every client's unique challenges. The goal of public involvement and engagement with utility projects and programs should be to create an understanding of the technical process to accurately inform impacted parties. Collaboration with all functional areas, such as engineering, project management, construction and land acquisition, must include direct and constant communication.

What happens when public involvement strategies are employed and in sync with land and construction?

- The public participants and landowners are well-informed about the benefits, challenges and duration of the work to be completed and have realistic expectations regarding community impacts.
- The participants and landowners are educated on relevant industry topics such as road rights of way, types of property interests and easement conveyance document requirements. This mitigates common concerns and creates

an open and transparent view of the necessary processes allowing for timely acquisition.

- The project owner's expectations of public engagement are met through proactive and purposeful communication, engaging all levels of the community where appropriate. External and internal communications are done in real time and drive project awareness via thoughtful strategies for every type of scenario.
- Acquisition is complete prior to construction and supports the established project schedule. A critical path is maintained and minimizes potentially massive cost impacts to the client.
- Issues arising from construction activities are quickly addressed via open and continuous communication between landowners and the public involvement team. Examples include extended construction schedules (and reasons why), facility placement concerns, traffic impacts, aesthetic upgrades and restoration matters.



What happens when public involvement strategies are not employed and in sync with land and construction?

- Public participants and landowners are not informed about the benefits, challenges or duration of the work to be performed. This could lead to a negative sentiment that will cause delays during the acquisition and construction stages of the project.
- The participants and landowners lack the appropriate education on topics about road rights of way, types of property interests and easement conveyance document requirements. This can lead to concerns and distrust of the project owner and associated contractors. This scenario will cause delays in acquisition and construction.
- Failure to engage all levels of the community when necessary won't meet project owner expectations. Lack of external and internal communications can result in a poor reflection of the project work and may impact long-standing and sensitive relationships on a public and private level. For instance, failure to engage a city with an easement request leaves it blind to necessary legislative action required of it, in addition to simply being unaware of project work leading to community impacts to constituents.
- Acquisition is delayed, leading to schedule and cost overruns, which impact multiple functional areas and can cause a disservice to the client and community. This puts undue duress on negotiation guidelines and set strategies.

- Issues arising from construction activities are not adequately addressed between landowners and the public involvement team. Examples include extended construction schedules, facility placement concerns, traffic impacts, aesthetic upgrades and restoration matters.

Developing an effective engagement plan that outlines comprehensive project scope, specifically potentially impacted areas and parties, is crucial. Utilizing a public involvement team to educate public participants and landowners on utility projects and programs establish trust and drive alignment with the community at large, project owner, and project and program teams. The efforts made throughout a project's duration by a public involvement team create efficiencies that ultimately serve the projects, the public participants and landowners.

Whether upgrading an electrical distribution circuit, constructing a new transmission line or planning to acquire and construct a new greenfield substation, a high-functioning public involvement team provides quantifiable efficiencies — and comprehensive understanding — for projects and programs. 🌟



Rob Scimeme, project and real estate program manager at Burns & McDonnell. He has extensive experience examining real property and land title for utility industries, as well as federal, state and public utility rights of way and property acquisition and negotiation experience.