

An aerial photograph of a public participation meeting. A large, rectangular map display is laid out on a long table in the center of a room. Numerous people, including men and women of various ages, are gathered around the table, looking at the map and talking to each other. Some are pointing at specific areas on the map. The room has a polished floor and a curved wall in the background. The overall atmosphere is one of active engagement and discussion.

# Public Participation Plan

Mid-America Regional Council  
Transportation Department

December 2020

**MARC**  
MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL



# INTRODUCTION

Public participation is based on the belief that people whose lives are affected by planning and investment decisions have a right to be involved in the decision-making process and influence choices that are made. Directly engaging people in this process promotes successful problem solving, yields diverse voices and new ideas, and gives the public a sense of ownership of the developed solutions.

Successful public participation educates the public and facilitates multiple ways of collecting useful feedback. In order to be successful, public participation efforts need to reach and engage diverse audiences. A variety of techniques are necessary to make public participation a success.

## The Role of Mid-America Regional Council

MARC is designated by the federal government as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the bistate Kansas City region. Our MPO boundary includes Cass, Clay, Jackson and Platte counties along with a small portion of Lafayette County in Missouri, and Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Wyandotte counties in Kansas.

As the MPO, we are responsible for coordinating transportation planning activities to keep people and goods moving along our roads and interstates, on buses and the stree-car, and on trails and bikeways within our region. We work with federal and local governments, state departments of transportation, transit agencies, area stakeholders and the public to ensure that the plans and projects developed are aimed at achieving a rising quality of life for everyone.

As an organization, our work reaches beyond transportation so we incorporate

## We are committed to a public participation process that:

- Involves the public in decisions that affect their lives.
- Communicates how the public's contribution will influence decisions.
- Is adaptable and sensitive to diverse audiences.
- Promotes respect.
- Provides equitable access to opportunities, information and education.
- Ensures timely response to participants.
- Is consistent and reliable.
- Promotes continued engagement.
- Allows for flexibility and use of creative and innovative approaches.
- Maintains honesty and integrity throughout the process.
- Continuously strives to educate and inform affected and interested parties to give them a more meaningful participatory experience.
- Encourages early and active participation.

aspects of all that we do — transportation, climate resilience, water and air quality, aging and adult services, workforce development and early learning — into all of our planning work. Continuous collaboration with communities, elected officials, advocates, subject matter experts, local leaders and interested parties is the foundation upon which this comprehensive planning happens.

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# GOALS

It is our goal to have significant and ongoing public participation in the transportation planning process. In addition to providing information, we also seek to empower and improve opportunities for the public to voice their ideas and values regarding transportation.

## Public health and public engagement

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on public engagement, ending most face-to-face meetings and shifting interactions to virtual and digital settings. While it will eventually be safe to go back to traditional, in-person engagement in the future, it is also true that virtual and digital engagement techniques can often solicit feedback from more people because they allow more flexibility.

Going forward, we will resume in-person meetings when safe and appropriate, but will also continue to focus on virtual meetings, online surveys and social media posts with a call-in option for those who aren't comfortable with technology or have limited online access.

### Goal 1 — Inform and Educate the Public

It is our responsibility to make information easily accessible to the public in a timely way. We will provide information that is accurate, understandable and pertinent using a variety of communication tools.

### Goal 2 — Reach Out and Build Connections

We recognize that large segments of the population rarely participate in the transportation planning process, including disabled, minority, non-English speaking and low-income groups. It is a priority to increase the diversity and number of participants in engagement activities through building new relationships with organizations and communities that serve these under-represented populations.

### Goal 3 — Engage the Public and Encourage Continued Participation

We will encourage continued public participation by ensuring a meaningful engagement process. This includes providing various ways to engage and communicate with the public, responding to all comments and questions in a timely manner, presenting a clear process for incorporating public input into our plans, and providing other opportunities for further engagement and education.

### Goal 4 — Use Input to Shape Policies, Plans and Programs

We will document and review all input received from the public. The process of incorporating public input into transportation planning documents will be transparent and open to the public.

### Goal 5 — Evaluate Public Participation Strategies

In order to sustain best practices in public participation, we will continually monitor the public engagement process and seek ways to evaluate and improve how we engage with the public.



## **Reach and Gather Input from Diverse Audiences**

The main way that a public participation process can be successful is to include a diverse segment of the community.

Diversity includes people of varying:

- Ages
- Socioeconomic backgrounds
- Races/ethnicities
- Genders
- Educational attainment
- Disability statuses
- Sexual orientations

In addition, since our work is most often regional in nature, we will strive to inform and include residents from all parts of the region.

## **Build Relationships with Community Organizations**

In order to hear diverse opinions, we will strive to build relationships with organizations that work in a variety

of ways and places across the Kansas City region. We will do this by having one-on-one conversations with staff, representatives or members of these groups ahead of a public engagement process to ask for suggestions on how to engage communities they represent.

## **Inform and Educate**

For any planning process, it is important to educate the public as to the nature of the plan or policy being updated, what the steps will be in the update process, as well as what opportunities will exist to learn about it and offer feedback.

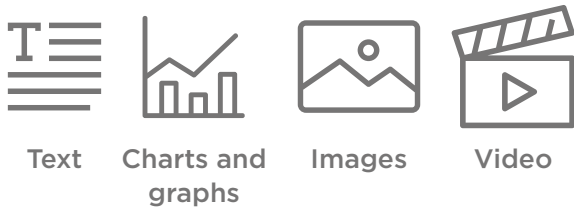
## **Feedback and Input**

In addition to providing information about plan and policy development, we will engage the public at several junctures during the process to gather feedback and input that can inform the content of the plan or policy.

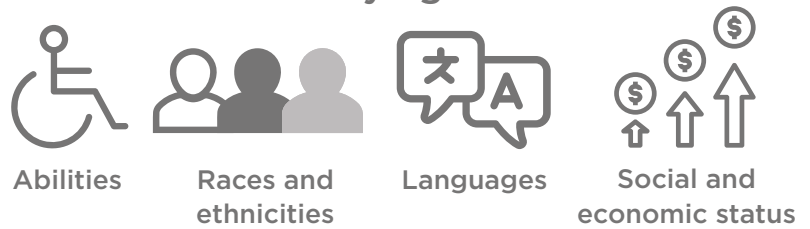
Therefore, when designing activities for in-person meetings, paper and online surveys, or other ways of soliciting input

## We will convey information

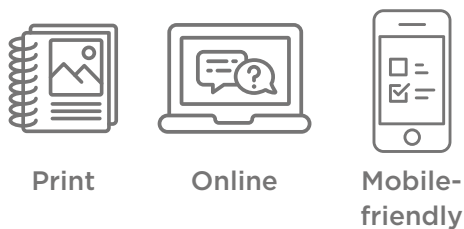
### In a variety of formats



### To audiences of varying



### On a variety of platforms



### Through a variety of channels



from the public, we will drill down to those questions that not only collect information, but also help staff modify the policy/plan development process or even influence the content of the policies.

### Providing Multiple Ways to Learn and Offer Feedback

Providing a variety of avenues to learn about and provide feedback on a MARC plan or policy being developed makes it possible to reach and hear from a larger and more diverse group of people. Some people really appreciate and are able to attend in-person meetings, while it is much easier for others to provide feedback during an online event or survey. Pop-up events at grocery stores, libraries and on transit vehicles are great ways to gather quick input from people who otherwise might not be likely to attend more traditional public meetings. Providing multiple ways for the public to learn and offer their feedback is critical to the success of any engagement process.

### Was a public participation process successful?

There are no specific metrics that can reflect the success of a public participation process. In cases where it is very difficult to get a lot of people to show up to meetings or answer surveys, quality engagement, perhaps via a focus group with a small number of people, can provide meaningful feedback.

Each process will need to be tailored, often as it is going on, to reach and hear from diverse audiences. For most plan or policy development processes, more than one engagement technique will be needed. A successful process results in staff being able to articulate how feedback was integrated to help shape the outcome and the public being able to see the results.

*MARC Transportation committee meetings are always open to the public and their agendas, meeting summaries and other meeting materials are routinely posted on the MARC website.*



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## Involving Participants with Limited English Proficiency

As a recipient of federal funds, we are responsible for involving and providing meaningful access to the benefits, services, information, and other important portions of programs and activities for individuals who are considered limited English proficient (LEP). LEP persons are individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. These individuals may be entitled to language assistance.

In compliance with federal LEP regulations (Title VI of the Civil Right Act of 1964) and to guide MARC staff through assessing whether certain requirements for providing language assistance for any given public participation process is required, we have adopted an LEP plan for our transportation program. This plan describes the analysis we must follow in order to assess what translation and interpreter requirements, if any, must be followed. If it is determined that special services are required, the plan will also guide staff in the process for fulfilling these requirements. The LEP plan can be found on MARC's website at [marc.org/LEPP](http://marc.org/LEPP).

Our transportation-related public participation processes will strive to improve contact and communication with non-native English speakers. We will continue to identify and use channels of communication that are frequented by non-native speakers, including newspapers and radio stations. We will continue to foster relationships with businesses and organizations that serve immigrant populations.

## Title VI of the Civil Right Act of 1964

Our planning activities and programs, including those for the purposes of public engagement, must be sensitive to the region's diverse audience.

We ensure that no person will — on the ground of race, religion, age, gender, disability, national origin, or economic status — be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of our programs or activities. We also promote the full and fair participation of all affected populations in the transportation decision-making process. Any information, education and participation opportunities will be equally accessible.

For additional information regarding the Title VI program and to learn about the process to file a complaint, please visit [marc.org/TitleVI](http://marc.org/TitleVI).

Interpreters and translating services will be identified and readily available to serve the needs of this population. Tools will be used to help identify areas that predominantly speak other languages so they will have an equal chance to participate in planning discussions. These tools include the Modern Language Association Language Map and geographic mapping data available through the U.S. Census.

## Environmental Justice and Community Engagement

Environmental Justice (EJ) is the assertion that no group of people — by race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status — should receive unfair treatment or bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences as a result of decisions made at the federal, state, regional or local levels. With regard to funding for transportation projects and programs, EJ communities should also receive proportionate benefit. In terms of the public participation process, we will make a concerted effort to provide educational and feedback opportunities to EJ communities.

When targeting participation efforts towards communities with concentrations of low-income and minority populations, we will work to gain insight about how best to communicate and engage residents in these areas from community organizations and leaders within these communities. It is important to consider how and where advertisement and notifications of engagement opportunities are carried out. We will identify local publications and media outlets that are important to targeted communities. If applicable, MARC will identify bus routes for the distribution of on-bus flyers.

Public meeting locations should be in neutral locations that are frequented by community members in target areas, such as churches, community centers, or libraries. These locations should be ADA-accessible and within walking distance of bus routes, if available. We will consider providing childcare and nutritious snacks at meetings, when applicable.

Building and maintaining trust among community members in environmental justice areas is essential in order to encourage continued participation in the transportation planning process.



### ***Environmental Justice Principle***

- *To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process;*
- *To avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority or low-income populations.*
- *To prevent the denial of, reduction in or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority or low-income populations.*

Past transportation decisions have had negative impacts on low income and minority neighborhoods. The perception that feedback will not be considered in future decision-making or that decisions have already been made is common. In order to build trust, we must be clear about project objectives, what kind of feedback can influence the project, demonstrate that feedback and concerns are being documented and communicated to decision-makers, and how feedback ultimately shaped final plans and studies.

# OUR PLANS

We rely on a few core plans to guide our work.

## Metropolitan Transportation Plan

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is the centerpiece of our planning process and serves as a blueprint for the long-term management of the region's transportation system. It identifies improvements for the next 20 to 30 years and sets goals, policies and strategies ranging from road and transit improvements to projects that enhance bike, pedestrian and freight movement.

The MTP must be updated every five years while in air quality attainment and every four years when in non-attainment. When an update is being developed, a specific public participation strategy will be developed to outline the public participation process. The final public review and comment period will last at least 30 days, as federally required.

When an update is being developed, a specific public participation strategy will be developed to outline the public participation process. We will share drafts of chapters throughout development, in addition to when it is officially released for public comment as a single document or platform.

When comments are solicited during the public review period, information will be shared through a variety of channels including but not limited to websites, blogs, social media, email lists and digital and print advertisements.

Between major updates, amendments can be made to the plan as new projects, funding, or programs arise. The process for MTP amendments is a 14-day review period to allow for simultaneous public comment periods for amendments impacting both the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

## Amendments versus administrative modifications

Many factors can lead to adjustments to transportation plans and projects, some which may be considered minor and do not require a full review. In such cases, an administrative modification may be made.

An administrative modification is a revision that does not require public review and comment, redemonstration of fiscal constraint, or a conformity determination (in nonattainment and maintenance areas). Administrative modifications can only be made to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Unified Planning Work Program.

Administrative modifications may include minor changes to project costs, funding sources, and project initiation dates.

We will follow established guidelines for each MPO product to determine whether proposed changes will be processed as administrative modifications or amendments and will proceed, with the approval of MARC's director of Transportation and Environment.

We will gather, summarize and analyze public comments on the draft MTP, including on the financial plans, and include them as part of the final document.

## Transportation Improvement Program


The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) contains major surface transportation






### Metropolitan Transportation Plan

Blueprint for long-term management of system. Includes vision, goals and strategies for all modes.

 30 days for adoption, 14 days for amendments

 30-year planning horizon, updated at least every five years

 [ConnectedKC.org](https://connectedkc.org)

## TIP

### Transportation Improvement Program

Short-term list of projects prioritized based on vision and goals of MTP

 14 days for adoption and amendments

 Five-year planning horizon, updated every two years

 [marc.org/transportation/tip](https://marc.org/transportation/tip)

### Unified Planning Work Program

MARC staff's work plan and proposed budget for the year

 14 days for adoption and amendments

 Updated every year in early fall

 [marc.org/transportation/upwp](https://marc.org/transportation/upwp)

### Public Participation Plan

Outlines how MARC staff will inform and gather feedback on all planning processes

 45 days for adoption

 Updated every three years

 [marc.org/transportation/participation](https://marc.org/transportation/participation)

projects planned to receive federal, state and local funding in the next five years. Project examples include new roadways, additional through lanes to existing streets, interchange construction or modification, improvements to intersections, transit amenities and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

We update the TIP every two years and process amendments on a quarterly cycle. Special amendments may also be

processed at other times throughout the year. Early and continuous public participation should be done for the TIP including calling for public review and comments on projects submitted by local governments. TIP full plan updates and amendments require a 14-day public comment period.

In the event of declared state and/or federal emergencies, or at the discretion of MARC's executive director, MARC may

elect to process any emergency-related TIP revisions through an expedited public participation process — a seven-day review instead of 14 days. Emergency-related revisions that would normally require formal approval can be ratified by the MARC Board of Directors at the next scheduled opportunity.

When we receive a comment on the TIP or its amendments, we will provide an individual response, acknowledging the comment and addressing any issues. During an update to the TIP, we will gather, summarize and analyze public comments, including on the financial plans, and include them as part of the final document.

### **Unified Planning Work Program**

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a document that describes all the work we plan to take on in the coming year. The plan describes each major activity, who will perform the work and the schedule for completing it. The UPWP also contains information on the proposed budget for each activity.

MARC develops the UPWP with input from local governments, area transit providers, the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), and the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT).

The UPWP is updated annually in August/September, and released for public review and comment for a minimum of 14 days. Final approval is made in November/December. Amendments are made throughout the year and are released for public comment when projects are either added or deleted, or when significant changes are made to the document.

### **Public Participation Plan**

The Public Participation Plan specifies goals, strategies and techniques to be considered when engaging the public in our planning process.

## **Coordination with partner agencies**

MARC will consult with agencies and officials within the MARC MPO boundary who are responsible for other planning activities that are affected by transportation, including transit agencies, state departments of transportation and federal agencies.

We will coordinate planning processes by ensuring representatives from these organizations are continually involved in and informed about the activities of MARC committees and work groups. We will also work closely with KDOT and MoDOT to coordinate the public involvement and consultation processes for their statewide transportation planning.

The plan requires a 45-day public review and comment period. All comments will be considered in the final review by the TTPC, prior to its adoption. The adopted plan will be posted on the MARC website and be available in both English and Spanish.

### **Special Plans and Studies**

We sometimes develop or facilitate the development of special plans and studies beyond those that are federally required. This additional planning work may include developing a more detailed plan for a particular mode of travel, like a regional bike or freight plan, or assisting local governments in developing a corridor or area plan. The processes to develop these will include a public participation process in most cases. Project managers will develop a public participation strategy with guidance from this Public Participation Plan.



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## TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

We will use a variety of techniques to encourage early and continuous public participation throughout the development of our plans.

The following techniques and strategies will serve as a guide for project managers to consider when developing the public participation component of a project. Finding a balance of various techniques and strategies will be key, resulting in a tailored mix of approaches that ensure early, continuous, and accessible public participation.

We will collaborate with the Public Affairs department and other transportation agencies to help deploy these techniques and strategies.

### Surveys

Surveys are a great way to receive feedback and input on a multitude of issues. They help us develop a valid representation of public opinion. The best method for delivering surveys is online, although some paper surveys may be handed out at in-person functions. Surveys are delivered during or after meetings or open houses, and on social media. A statistically significant survey requires more time and financial investment, usually working with a consultant.

#### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

#### Pros

- Reaches a wide audience
- Can be representative of public opinion
- Questions are consistent
- Easy to share & access

#### Cons

- May not allow people to provide further input or raise other questions
- Can miss important feedback
- May not be statistically valid

#### How to measure

- Analysis of data
- Demographics of survey participants
- Number of participants

### Online public meetings

Online public meetings are a flexible alternative to in-person meetings and are especially important when in-person meetings are not advised due to public health concerns or other reasons. Online engagement allows for a broader engagement with people that may have not attended in person. Meetings may or may not include a formal presentation, breakout-rooms (functions available in video conferencing tools like Zoom), polling, and other interactive media.

#### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

#### Pros

- Can be more accessible for those with home Internet or a smartphone
- Time and cost saving for public & staff

#### Cons

- Some may not have technology or skills to access meetings
- Possible technical issues

#### How to measure

- Number of attendees/participants
- Demographics of attendees
- Online feedback survey from attendees

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## Website

Just as social media and online surveys build upon the inclusion of technology in our everyday lives, other online platforms can maximize engagement by allowing people to access information at their convenience. Ensuring we have information open, available, and up to date is important in keeping the public informed. In addition to providing information, the MARC website may also include interactive tools to provide feedback.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

### Pros

- Can reach a wide audience
- Provides convenient access to information on your own time
- Easy to share with family or friends

### Cons

- Some may not have the technology or skill to access information
- Doesn't allow for interpersonal interaction

### How to measure

- Number of website visits
- Number of website interactions

## Social media

With the use of social media, MARC can actively engage a diverse audience across multiple platforms. A well-marketed social media campaign engages more people and is easy to access. MARC has several social media feeds that provide important information about events, projects and public comment opportunities. While MARC primarily uses these tools for communicating information to the public, the public can communicate back to MARC with comments or questions.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

### Pros

- Requires less resources
- Convenient way to access information
- People can access information on their own time
- Can reach a wide audience
- Gives voice to those who might not be comfortable speaking up in person

### Cons

- Some may not have the technology or skill to access information
- Anonymity can sometimes lead to toxic behavior

### How to measure

- Number of social media followers
- Number of content interactions




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## Focus group

Focus groups are typically smaller groups that zero in on specific topics and issues. They can be used to identify barriers to participation and solutions. A focus group can be particularly useful in gathering feedback from those less likely to participate in other forms of engagement. These groups can be held traditionally in an in-person setting, public health permitting, or online.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time   

Financial 

### Pros

- Helpful to get feedback from people who traditionally would not participate
- Personal, face-to-face interactions with staff and other community members
- Focus on specific issues and gather more in-depth feedback
- Online focus groups can increase attendance and save resources

### Cons

- Might not always accommodate those who want to participate
- Online focus groups may exclude people who do not possess the technology, skill, or knowledge to access it

### How to measure

- Demographics of attendees
- Number of participants
- Survey feedback

## Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews are typically small groups or one-on-one interviews with people such as housing developers or neighborhood association leaders who have a lot of knowledge of particular issues. They're more informal and because they're in a relaxed setting it encourages people to speak up and participate. Interviews are helpful in building trust and alignment on projects.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time   

Financial 

### Pros

- Personal, comfortable groups
- Helps develop trust and transparency
- Helpful in answering specific questions

### Cons

- Lower number of participants
- Doesn't reach a wide audience

### How to measure

- Number of participating stakeholder organizations
- Demographics of attendees
- Feedback from surveys

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## Presentations/speakers bureau

Speakers bureaus are speaking engagements made up of experts on specific topics and issues. They are used to educate and inform the public, so they are more prepared to engage in the process. There may be one speaker or an entire panel. Speakers may use real-time polling and engagement software to gather feedback from the audience. Speakers are available to discuss transportation planning at local meetings and events.

To schedule a speaker or for more information, contact MARC's Transportation Department at 816-474-4240.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time  

Financial 

### Pros

- Attracts a wide audience
- Easy way to share information
- Provides an opportunity to build positive relationships in the community and educate about the breadth of work we do.

### Cons

- May not be a comfortable setting for those afraid to speak in large groups
- Can be difficult to ask questions if there is a large group

### How to measure

- Number of attendees
- Demographics of attendees

## In-person meeting or open house

In-person meetings and open houses are community meetings. Open houses are convenient for people to come and go as their schedule allows. These meetings can be formal or informal. These meetings are a great way to inform the public of the planning process and to solicit ideas, input and feedback. MARC prioritizes open and honest communication and listening to the public.

### Resource usage

Staff   

Time   

Financial   

### Pros

- More convenient personal, face to face contact
- Allows for easy, impromptu conversation between MARC staff and the public.

### Cons

- In-person meetings may not be as flexible due to a set meeting schedule
- Can be resource intensive

### How to measure

- Number of attendees
- Demographics of attendees
- Post-meeting surveys




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## Piggyback meetings

Community members have previously identified they are more likely to attend meetings by well-known and established community organizations (YMCA, neighborhood association, Rotary Clubs, etc.) more than a formal meeting. Piggybacking off already established meetings in the community helps spread awareness, builds legitimacy, and increases participation.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

### Pros

- Reaches a wide audience
- Uses fewer resources
- Informal nature is more comfortable

### Cons

- Might not be at a convenient location or time
- Not everyone at the meeting may be interested

### How to measure

- Demographics of attendees
- Number of attendees

## Pop-up meetings

Pop-up meetings are useful to engage the community and obtain feedback on specific planning projects. Pop-ups are a great option for engaging with people where they are and should be used as a complement to online engagement or public meetings. Meetings generally target areas that will be impacted by specific transit planning projects.

### Resource usage

Staff 

Time 

Financial 

### Pros

- Provides feedback from targeted audiences and those who might not attend a traditional public meeting
- Meets people where they are
- Informal in nature, may be more comfortable for people to share their thoughts

### Cons

- Meetings may not be at a convenient time for participants

### How to measure

- Demographics of attendees
- Number of attendees



600 Broadway, Suite 200 • Kansas City, MO 64105-1659  
Phone: 816-474-4270 • [www.marc.org](http://www.marc.org) • [transportation@marc.org](mailto:transportation@marc.org)