

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

8/04 * ME

Listen-Talk-Hear-Remember:

Essential Skills in Community Effects Analysis

Eileen Hughes, Don Sparklin

Moderator: Listen, Talk, Hear, Remember: Essential Skills in Community Effects Analysis. We have two presenters, today. Don Sparklin and Eileen Hughes.

Don Sparklin is the assistant division chief in the project planning division of the Maryland State Highway Administration. He is responsible for the division's environmental planning section. The environmental planning section is responsible for preparing environmental documentation for state and federally funded projects. Undertaking technical studies, including those for community impact assessment, socio-economic and land use, and coordinating projects with federal, state and local agencies. He has been with the Maryland State Highway Administration for 20 years -- the last 4 of which he served as the assistant division chief. Before that, he was the environmental project manager for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Improvement Study, and the group leader for the environmental planning section's socio-economic and land-use analysis group.

He has a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in community planning -- both from the University of Maryland. In this group, I don't know how that plays, though.

Audience: [humored]

Moderator: And Eileen Hughes. Eileen is a senior environmental planner, and the VP of [Strom] Environmental Services. With over 20 years of experience in the transportation planning industry, she has had the opportunity to support environmental analyses to support every mode of transportation -- including highways, light rail, heavy rail, monorail, shipping, airports and even a brief effort with the early space shuttle program.

She specializes in social and economic studies, but over the years has had the opportunity to gain a dangerous level of knowledge regarding a variety of environmental issues. We all know how that is! She has a bachelor's degree in urban studies and continuing education in negotiation and facilitation, economics and transportation. Eileen lives in Silver Springs, Maryland, with her husband, three children and a dog that specializes in breaking into trash cans and barking at squirrels. We have those, too!

She says her favorite part of community effects analysis is talking with the public, because even though citizens can be angry and upset about a major project, rarely do they exceed the levels of surliness that her teenagers achieve from time-to-time.

Don?

By the way -- I'm Brenda Craig, and I'm the one that sends you all these e-mails!

Don Sparklin: Don't we call Brenda the "Mother of CIA," or something like that? She's our fairy godmother of CIA. Yes. She's the heart. Anyway, thank you all for being here. I wanted to preface my remarks. I was telling John that some of the things we were going to talk about, he's already said. So we pretty much do, in many respects, complement each other on our presentations -- which we've developed certainly independently of each other. That certainly shows how people across the country are thinking.

Anyway, I wanted to welcome you to a Reader's Digest version of the Maryland State Highway Administration's recent community impact, assessment and public-involvement training. As you may see by the end of the session today, we were trying to show how to better integrate community impact assessment, or CIA, and public involvement, and to provide some tips on interacting with the public as part of the CIA process.

As Brenda said, my name is Don Sparklin. I'm with the environmental planning section of the project planning division of the Maryland State Highway Administration. Joining me today for our presentation in an interactive exercise is Eileen Hughes, who helped us to develop this training and the training materials, and who helped in our efforts to improve upon our CIA and public involvement integration efforts.

This is the fourth such national workshop, and there've been a host of other regional efforts devoted to the various aspects of CIA. Many of you have been involved with CIA for a number of years now, and others are relatively new to the subject. Because of the variety of experiences in the group here, it makes it hard to try to tailor this presentation for everybody. So for those of you that are new, this might be a good overview of material -- as was John's in the early part of this workshop.

For some of you, I may be preaching to the choir, as they say. But mainly, we wanted to make sure that we did this training for everybody, so everyone was on the same page -- regardless of their prior experience. We also hope that you will take away some tips and techniques that we'll be talking about, today. These, we tried to convey in our training to Maryland SHA and Federal Highway Administration staff and consultants, and the resource agencies that came to our training.

In turn, we hope you can communicate these things to your staff and your respective agencies that are not here, today -- on the importance of just talking with people. Talking with people was sort of the basis for why we chose today's session title. Listening to what people say, and to be able to be a good listener -- learning from what people have to say, and be able to adjust your project in a reasonable way that could be responsive to community concerns, and remembering what people have to say -- for the analysis and documentation of the project. These are skills that you will need to develop mitigation enhancement and stewardship opportunities, and to write a legally defensible environmental document.

This idea of the need for good communication skills, listening skills and acting on what we hear reminds me of a story that recently Eileen shared with me. She saw a cartoon in which a young child asks his father, "How long does it take for paint to dry on carpeting?" The father proceeded to tell the child, "Well it all depends on whether it's oil or latex paint, the temperature of the room, the humidity, so on and so forth." The child then asked the mother the same question. Needless to say, the mother immediately rushed to the room where the child spilled the paint, and rushed to clean it up before it dried. Different people hear different things when they hear things -- and react differently.

Before we begin, I need to tell you a story. Jerry? Tell that story. You can't whisper to Bob the answer, because I'm going to ask Bob what the answer is. Many years ago in a faraway land in the Middle East, there was a man who gathered together his followers from across the land. He gathered together these people, shared his vision and ideas about life and dealing with people, and encouraged these people -- these followers -- to in turn go out in the world and spread the good news that he himself was trying to spread. Who and what am I talking about? Bob?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: You may think that I'm talking about people and events in the Bible. Right? However, you're wrong. Instead, the time I'm talking about was way back in the mid- to late-1990s. The land was Washington, DC in the middle-eastern part of the US East Coast. The man was [Gene Kleckley], who's now retired from the Federal Highway Administration, but at the time was in charge of the Federal Highway's Office of Environment

and Planning. The followers were folks from across the country who were involved in the socio-economic and land-use impacts of transportation projects, in their respective state highway agencies. The good news these people were trying to or were encouraged to spread was that better transportation decisions can and should be made when there's both a better understanding of the effects of transportation projects on the human environment, and when we better involve people in the decision-making process.

We were encouraged to help increase the awareness and effects of projects on the human environment, and emphasize that community impacts deserve serious attention in project development and implementation. We're also encouraged to apply the benefits of early, continuous and unique public involvement -- especially with people that traditionally are under-served or unrepresented in the decision-making process. Those people that generally come under the umbrella of environmental justice.

These efforts some eight years ago resulted in a little purple book -- the Federal Highway publication that is the primer on CIA that many of you may be familiar with.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: Okay. Well, it's up there. So Eileen and myself are here today to continue to spread this message to make you aware of future opportunities that can help you in this regard, and encourage us to always remember how we should be treating people. Or as the man in the story would say, "To treat others how we ourselves would want to be treated, to do unto others as we would want done to us, to put ourselves in their shoes--" Or, as John said, "To make believe the project's in our backyard."

So why do CIA and public involvement? First off, it's the law. One of the requirements under NEPA is, and I'll quote, "To promote efforts which will eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere, and stimulate the health and welfare of man." NEPA, in turn, is supported by a host of federal regular statutes, policies, and technical advisories, executive orders over the years, that give credence to what we're talking about, today. In fact it goes all the way back to the Title 6 and Civil Rights Act of 1964 as one of the important pieces of legislation requiring us to do what we do, today. Brenda also wants me to promote section 109H of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1970. It's also another important piece of law that leads us to where we are, today. I think Brenda has a copy of that out on the table in the hall.

Second, it's practical. This CIA public involvement process is an efficient way of translating the Maryland State Highway's vision -- and I would think many of your agencies' visions of providing the best highway system for our customers and communities. Historically, community impacts have been given less scrutiny than natural resource impacts. So it [should be] meaningful community early in the process may avoid costly changes later on in project design.

Bob? What's the third reason why we do it?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: It's ethical. Sorry. I'm sorry I put you on the spot, Bob. It's ethical. As stewards of our respective states' resources, our agencies are obligated to consult with our states' residents and business owners about how community resources are affected by transportation improvements. People who live in these apartments are most interested in knowing how their road improvements might affect their life or their rent.

So our citizens are our customers, and they live in communities. The Maryland State Highway Administration developed its training for two reasons. First, we want to build in a nationally-known best practices and context and community-sensitive solutions. Second, we recognized a need. Our public involvement group works hard to make sure that citizens know about and have the chance to participate in our transportation planning process.

The socio-economic group works hard to make sure impacts are carefully documented in credible, legally defensible documents. But between interacting with the public and writing up the impacts, some things got lost. We failed to always take credit for identifying and addressing community issues in the environmental document. Sometimes we failed to fully recognize a quality-of-life issue, such as noise and mobility are part of the whole socio-economic package, and not just displacements. Sometime we failed to realize that some communities have complex human relationships and dependencies that developed over a number of years, and that seemingly minor changes may have tremendous adverse effects to the community members.

Communities are a resource, and as you know, there is no community-protection agency. So during the community impact assessment process, the community becomes a resource that can provide information -- much as wetland or a forest or other environmental might. But the benefits of having a community as a resource as opposed to a wetland or a stand of trees is that the community can talk back to you. [inaudible]

Of course for some of this training, we've had archaeologists in the room, and they've said even the dead people can speak to us. As a matter of fact, they can probably tell us more than the live people can. The public can help you do your CIA to help you develop your community profile, help you articulate your impact assessment, to help you develop alternatives and mitigation enhancements. To help you talk with other people and to help you reach out to other people in the community.

In some respects, just like the father in the TV show in the 1950s with Robert Young -- remember that, Brenda? Sometimes the community knows best. Over the course of the last year and a half or so, the SHA working with the FHA has focused on enhancing this relationship between public involvement and CIA, and identifying new or better techniques that would help us move closer to the realities of our mission statement.

We tried out some of these techniques on several pilot projects, which were early in the project-development process. So we'd consciously think about how we would interact with and involve the public in our project-planning studies, and develop a plan early-on in the process. A plan which always evolves and changes, as we move forward. We also like to think about tools in the toolbox, which Eileen will talk more about later -- whose techniques and methods can help us in achieving our goals of better CIA and public involvement, and the better integration of the two.

This training also builds on some EJ training that we did in the fall of 2002. Training that Eileen and Anne Morris helped us out with. If you do good CIA and public involvement, you should not have any environmental justice issue or Title 6 lawsuits. I forgot to mention, there's a CD that's available. I think a lot of you picked it up. It's on the third table from the rear, near the door. It contains a host of publications and data sources, including Maryland's CIA, PI integration training manual. I think there were some paper copies available, but most of it's on the CD. The little purple book is on there. So in a sense, Brenda, it did come!

Speaker: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: Electronically, though. Not the paper copy. And about a half dozen other publications. And is this on there, too, Eileen? No.

Speaker: No. [That is not]

Don Sparklin: We do have another publication which we didn't bring copies of. But we can see if we might be able to get you a copy. It's a guide for community involvement that we put together. "Enhancing Maryland's Highways With People In Mind." If you give me a card your name, we can maybe ship a copy to you.

I'm not saying that the Maryland SHA has been doing a bad job of community impact assessment or public involvement. In fact, with SHA's context-sensitive solutions philosophy, we're thinking beyond the pavement, as we call it. In our strong environmental ethic, we've already been doing a lot to consider people and our projects, and to build projects that are both sensitive to and involve communities in which they are located. But like there'll always be room for Jell-O even after a large meal, there's always room for improvement in the way we do things. So the assessment of community impacts and involvement of the community helps to ensure that transportation policies and investments embrace the concerns of neighborhoods and communities in which they are located. Active involvement of the effected parties can lead to better decisions and greater acceptance of projects, while creating a sense of community ownership, and enhancing state highway agency credibility. I should point out none of this is new. It's always been part of the way we do business. We're just trying to increase the emphasis on it with our own staff. What we're trying to promote here is a more conscious effort to both consider the effects of our projects on communities and to more heavily involve the public and the communities in our project, planning and development.

Our take on the national CIA efforts is to better incorporate the CIA in public involvement. To have the two disciplines working more closely together with the people, rather than waiting for them to come to us. To take credit for what we already do in the environmental document, and to better understand that what we do is a two-way street. To be reasonably responsive to community concerns, and to follow through on commitments to people and their communities in the design and construction of a project.

Public involvement is a key part of this process. It's not intended to be a separate task, but it's supposed to be fully integrated within project planning. Public involvement is integral to the CIA process, as it provides for an open exchange of ideas and information and opportunities for early and continuous communication. The public can provide information or input on a project's purpose, need or scope, development of the community profile, identification of impacts as well as helping us to identify avoidance, minimization, mitigation, enhancement of stewardship opportunities.

Public involvement results in better CIA, and the results that reflect community values and input. Remember -- the public will have to live with these transportation decisions, as well as the long-term economic and social consequences that our projects or their projects will have on their community. In addition, this integrated approach will help us reach our goals with community support.

Thinking beyond the pavement, our context-sensitive solutions philosophy has enhanced all of our products in Maryland -- big or small. It relies in large part on this increased use of public involvement and public input in the development of a project. We don't always know what's good for a community or what they want their community to look like. So this public participation is a "must" in our process, where we strive to avoid situations where the public is caught off guard or they feel that we've ignored their wishes, or where the public feels anxiety about projects not fitting into their surroundings. So this, too, is part of our thinking beyond the pavement philosophy, where we work with the communities on solutions that reflect community values and needs. The end result of this early, intensive public development is a better project -- one that better reflects the community.

We'd like to think that as taxpayers, the public deserves and will be more pleased with the overall efforts to incorporate community concerns and values and priorities, and to give them an opportunity to have a stake in the process. It's also important to have the buy-in and support as John was pointing out, from the management of your respective state highway agencies, to these ideas of enhanced public involvement and input. I know we have that in Maryland.

The increasing use of CIA techniques should lead us to improve our transportation project decision-making, and better customer service, as that's all-important to the success of the project. Achieving meaningful community input early in the process may also avoid costly changes in project design and construction.

I'm going to turn it over to Eileen, and she'll talk for a little while. Then we have some interactive exercises and we also have some prizes. So you might want to stick around.

Do we want people to move from the back to the front?

Eileen Hughes: Yes.

Don Sparklin: To be closer because of these interactive exercises?

Eileen Hughes: We have some exercises. Brenda and I were saying that really, we want you to do what we ask the public to do. We want you to get out of your seats and come to us. We're asking you to move. So if you could come and fill up the first three rows, that would be great. It'll just make it easier to pass out materials and the like. We won't go through your stuff, if you want to leave it there. Unless there's cash or credit cards.

Everybody gets an index card. This is a little warm-up exercise. We're going to take you through a very quick version of our training. Everybody gets a card. When you get our card, we want you to put a "B" on one side and a "G" on the other side. Everybody's got a pen. "B" and a "G." On the "G" side, think about where you live. When you leave Maine, you're going to go someplace, and it's going to be your home -- your community. On the "G" side, write down one good thing about your community. One thing that you like. On the "B" side, write down the bad thing. Something that you don't like. I'll give you a minute to think, and then we'll share some of our answers and talk about why we do this -- to start our training off.

Everybody go their card?

Don Sparklin: If you look at Maine, I'm sure there are good things about living here, too. We're talking about when you leave Maine. But if you are living in Maine...

Eileen Hughes: Oh, that's true. Shows my bias.

Don Sparklin: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: I love Maine. Everything I've seen so far has been so beautiful and clean. And of course, the weather's been great. If you aren't sure what you're supposed to do with your index card, put a "B" on one side and a "G" on the other side. Write down a good thing about your community on the "G" side and a bad thing on the "B" side. We'll go around and just ask folks to share on the good things, first. Maybe one person from each row. Cheryl?

Cheryl: I said the small town feel.

Eileen Hughes: A small town feel? John?

John: A rural community.

Eileen Hughes: A rural community. You're the lucky one, Leslie!

Leslie: It's the desert.

Eileen Hughes: It's the desert. Where are you from?

Leslie: Phoenix.

Eileen Hughes: Phoenix!

Don Sparklin: [inaudible] Maine. I've [inaudible] from Maine.

Eileen Hughes: Doug?

Doug: Friendly people.

Eileen Hughes: Friendly people. Jeffrey?

Jeffrey: Good mass transit.

Eileen Hughes: Good mass transit.

Speaker: I put water.

Eileen Hughes: Water. Where?

Speaker: I'm from Tampa.

Eileen Hughes: So you're right there on the coast.

Speaker: Yes.

Eileen Hughes: So, the water. And there is a lot of it, there. How'd you do with Charlie?

Speaker: I did all right. We were nervous for a little bit there, but it actually went south of us.

Eileen Hughes: Bad storm. We see those pictures and you wonder how people can survive. Okay. Now let's take the bad.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Long commutes to service centers. Jerry?

Jerry: Becoming unkempt.

Eileen Hughes: It's becoming unkempt.

Speaker: Traffic congestion.

Eileen Hughes: Traffic congestion. Okay. Down here on the end?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: You have to drive everywhere to get anything -- to get to any place.

Speaker: Snow.

Eileen Hughes: The snow. Oh! You're from Maine!

Speaker: Yes.

Speaker: Traffic is noisy.

Eileen Hughes: Traffic is noisy. And we have two that live here. It's funny. On the "good" side, there's a bunch of different answers. When we train people, we talk about we're going to teach you how to be sensitive to community values, and understand what "community characteristics" are. This is the way we warm up. In Maryland, we have a smaller group. One thing that's very interesting is when we talk about the good things, two people might be from the exact same community, but they say two completely different things. It's never what you think.

On the "bad" side, the same thing. Driving everywhere, long commutes -- there are some common themes on the bad things. But for example, the "friendly neighbors." One person says they're friendly neighbors. The other person says, "Well, they're friendly, but they're also quite nosy." So you never know.

We had one woman in a training say, "What I really hate about my neighborhood is the trees." We were like, "Whoa -- trees?" I mean that's our classic mitigation. "We'll give you some trees. We'll landscape." Well, she had just gone through Isabel in the fall. They had a lot of trees in their neighborhood. They were old, and they did thousands and thousands of dollars worth of damage. And they were still cleaning up. They had just paid the bills. She was looking at the remaining trees, knowing the next storm was going to be a repeat. So trees were not on her favorite list. They were on her "bad" list.

The point is, everybody's different. Everybody feels something different about their communities. But you don't know these things until you do what?

Speaker: Ask them.

Eileen Hughes: Ask them.

Don Sparklin: This is all very important, because [inaudible] to understand where people are coming from, and what their likes and dislikes are. Because you want to be able to work with them on some of your projects. [inaudible] unless you know what their values and their concerns and priorities are. You really want to [inaudible] develop the project.

Audience: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: [inaudible] variety of opportunities [inaudible] meaningful knowledge. We were going to play some songs that...

Eileen Hughes: I forgot the CD.

Don Sparklin: We left it in Maryland. Anyway, we all [inaudible] with the refrain of the song by Ricky Nelson, "Garden Party," which was made in 1972. The refrain of the song to, "I went to a garden party." In the refrain, he talked about, "You can't please everybody, so you've got to please yourself." You don't want to do that. [inaudible] you can't please everybody, don't just please yourself. Try to do as much as you can to be responsive to [inaudible] be concerned as much as you can. You're never going to please everybody.

Eileen Hughes: That was our warm-up. I hope that as you go through our mini-training here that you guys will be able to position yourselves to be the leaders in your organization. Maybe one or two of the exercises

that you hear, you can take back to sensitize the people you're working with. If that's one of our outcomes, in addition to maybe you learning something, we would be very happy.

We start out our training with an overview of the process. A lot of times, our planners, engineers and scientists think that there's not really a structure, like there is with wetlands. Where you go delineate and then you get a JD and then you do impact and avoidance. So we did that six-step process. It's the same thing. Getting a study area, planning your public outreach, doing a community profile or baseline assessment, analyzing the effects. thinking of ways to mitigate them. Then although it's not a sixth and last step, it's documented. If I had my way, document would be at each level, as well.

Fifteen minutes left? I thought we had an hour and a half -- 'til 12.30. [inaudible] Oh, gosh! I said it was going to be a really mini-training.

Don Sparklin: I didn't mean [inaudible]

Speaker: Sorry.

Eileen Hughes: Whew! We started our training talking about a study area. In Maryland, in a NEPA documents, your study area is your baseline condition. It's the area where you're looking for impact. It also tends to be the area where we have project mailings and announcements and some of our public outreach. Why is he leaving? He always does this to me.

I have my lovely assistant, here -- Brenda -- to help.

Moderator: Vanna.

Eileen Hughes: I thought you were going to wear the sequined gown.

Moderator: [humored]

Eileen Hughes: The tendency is to pick a corridor. So many feet on either side of the project. Or, "This is the corridor. It's 2,000 feet wide." Whatever. Then to say any census track that touches that corridor is your study area. Those people are going to get the mailings.

We needed to change that mentality a little bit and tweak it so people realized that communities have natural boundaries. Communities cluster themselves. They're not evenly spread out within 500 feet of your project area.

We gave them a map with a real project. It the Maryland 140 Project -- one of our pilot projects. They had, indeed, done a corridor for the initial study area. They did the corridor, and then we said, "Now try a different way." We gave them a list of things to look for, and I'll move ahead a bit. In Toolbox A of the guidance manual that we're providing to you, if you didn't get a paper copy, we were out there giving you a CD. There's a list of considerations in the study area. It's not complete, but... It's got things like neighborhood identity, legislative boundaries. Bridges. Land-use. Economic boundaries. Streets, railroad lines -- there are all sorts of things to consider in "What defines a community?" Social and geographic. We don't want that -- the corridor -- we want a nice squiggle or blob.

I think one thing that was an interesting demonstration to people went through this exercise was that many of them lived in Westminster -- this project area. It's about an hour from Baltimore. There are always 2 or 3 people. We had them in pairs, working -- in a class of 15-30. The people who lived in Westminster invariably had an in-depth knowledge of the community and a very detailed, logical explanation for why they picked the

study area. With everything from, "This church causes a major traffic jam on this road every Sunday," to "This is the high school bus route." Those are things that you could only learn by what?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Visiting with the community. You want to know what the area's traffic influence is. How does transportation affect their lives? You have to go ask them. That's my shameless advertisement for our guidebook.

Now you know where the people are. You have a general idea of who they might be, but you need to know what they're all about. You need to know what their concerns are. You need to go out and do some public outreach. First piece of advice -- plan it early, do it often. Second piece of advice. And recognize that there are two kinds of public outreach -- the "information out..." Those are the newsletters in the announcements -- and maybe the poster in the library. That gets information about your project out. But in the community effects process, you need to create opportunities for people to give information back to you. That's often a challenge. Especially because we like to gather groups of people and get everything synthesized all at once. People are a little messier, sometimes.

We're finding that the classic tools work. Workshops and interviews and all that. But if we could get it smaller -- face-to-face interactions -- we do much better. We get in-depth information. We get a high level of detail. And people open up. They'll tell you what this project means to them. What their community's about. They really are the experts.

For example, we had a home meeting about three weeks ago for a project we're working on, now -- the InterCounty Connector. It's 18 miles of roadway through the densely developed suburban Washington DC area. There were about 10 people that gathered just to talk about the effect of this project on their community, sitting around a kitchen table. We heard a lot more information than we expected. It was really positive just to be there and just to listen and to see me writing notes. They wanted copies of the notes, to make sure we understood.

We found out things like there are elderly people on this road, and although their income isn't low, it's fixed. Moving is going to be a problem. This is one of my favorite things that came out of that meeting. We want the same rights as wildlife! The ability to migrate up and down the street, freely and safely. Those are the kinds of things people tell you. They tell you that they want to be valued as much in the impact analysis as the natural resources. That was something that we needed to overcome with that community -- that, "They only care about wetlands." Well, we were there, and we were talking just about communities. That demonstrated that to them, and we're using that in our impact analysis. In fact, I should be back there writing, right now.

We've done the grocery store outreaches. We spent 50 hours at the county fair last summer for the ICC. We went to the Laurel Street Fair. Street fairs where they serve alcohol -- don't really plan on getting too much information after about 4.00, or so. It tapers off. But we will find that people will -- for a free State Highway map, people will talk to you. They're grateful that you're there, and they always say, "Thank you." You don't get that when you have a public workshop where they're there because they're affected negatively, and they're there to complain. You get a different set of opinions. You get a different flavor of the community, and you get a more diverse set of concerns.

In this guidance, as we developed it, we looked for interview sheets from different agencies. I think Florida had one. [Leroy Niemann] had one. There was one. There was one for Pennsylvania. Anne Morris provided us with copies. We looked at them all, and we developed theories of public outreach planning strategies, and then some interview sheets that you can use to start you off in the basic interview, with directions on how to talk to people.

Part I, Part II and Part III. So it was useful for people to think about, "Okay. What are the things that we're trying to talk about?" It's hard for some people just to go up and strike up a conversation. Those interview sheets helped people, and we started using them in our public meetings.

When you talk to people, you're going to be talking throughout the life of the project. This is a practical tip. I don't know if you do this now, or not. But take these interview sheets and record the information as you go along. Use a separate sheet for every person. Ask the questions. Write the answers. Then you can give it to anybody to help you assemble it.

I'm going to show you one thing that we do. It's kind of quick-and-dirty, but it works. Particularly if every comment sheet or interview sheet has a number. Then we said, "Where did we meet with them?" In Gaithersburg. "What was the master plan area that they were in? Where do you live? Just a little bit about community boundaries. How do you think the ICC will affect your family's ability to leave the neighborhood? Would you use it for work? Would it block your path to a community facility?" Just to trade across. Then when it came time and it's down to the wire now and we're writing the environmental document, we have pages and pages of this. We can sort out all the comments that came from this master plan area, or all the range of issues and concerns associated with neighborhoods. Just using Excel. It's not a fancy Access database program. But it's something that your administrative person -- if you're lucky enough to have one -- can help you with the day after a public meeting. Just do those 15 or 20 at a time, as you go along. I'll tell you -- at the end, it's not any fun and you won't remember it, anyway.

It's pretty clear that after the first two steps, people are beginning to realize they have to talk to people to do a good community effects analysis. So we developed this little game called Jargon Bingo to highlight the fact that when you talk to people, you have to recognize we have our own language, and it doesn't make any sense to people outside of the industry. There's lots of vocabulary that we use that is foreign. Think about your next-door neighbor. My next-door neighbor is a house painter. Who's your next-door neighbor? What does that person do? Do you know your neighbor? Either of you.

He's a geologist. Maybe not a transportation specialist doing [slow boring]s? I don't know. And a teacher. Those people are not transportation professionals. But those are the people that you're designing the road for. So everybody should have a bingo card. How are we doing?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: No. You're going to have to use your pencil. We did this with one group, and there was somebody who actually didn't know how to play Bingo. But this is a variation. Don's going to read a script where we took bits and pieces of things that actually have been said at Maryland meetings. We did not make this up. As bad as it is -- as dismal as some of it sounds -- we heard all of it uttered at meetings. We've changed the project names to protect the innocent. As you hear a jargon word that's on your sheet from his script, cross it off. If you get 5 down or 5 across, you've got Bingo. The one in the middle, labeled SHA, that's your free space. You can get diagonals. I don't know what the other variations are, but...

Don Sparklin: No, we're not doing four corners or upside-down T or taking a stab at anything like that. It's a straight thing -- up and down or diagonal.

Speaker: And they are different, so yours is not the same as anyone else's.

Eileen Hughes: I don't think you could play two cards at once, but if you want to, we have some extra sheets.

Don Sparklin: I think we're going to have a prize for the winner, and then we're going to go on and keep on talking 'til we get a second winner.

Eileen Hughes: Yes. And a third winner, too.

Don Sparklin: A third winner. We do have some prizes. Like John, I like acronyms and jargon. When you spend 20 years with the government, you kind of get caught up in a lot of this jargon and bureaucrat-ease and government words. The public 8-ball. So we've probably been just as guilty as a lot of you all have been in using jargon and bureaucratic words.

We did change some of the words around to protect the innocent, although we did change our Interstate to 52. So there's a difference between [inaudible] here. We're not picking on [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Just made it up.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: That gives you a chance to study. Actually, I'll go ahead and start meeting.

Hello. Welcome to our focus group meeting for the Interstate 52 Hickory Road Transportation Improvement Study. Because this is our first meeting, I want to give you a brief overview of this project planning study, our schedule, and the study area.

The purpose and meat of this study is to accommodate future traffic growth associated with planned development in the Hickory Road area. In order for this development to achieve its full potential, additional access to I52 is required. Federal Highway Administration has already agreed in concept that an additional interchange would not compromise the integrity of I52. Without a roadway improvement, future traffic congestion will increase to unacceptable levels of service, and mobility needs may not be met.

We're early in the project planning process, and open to considering a wide range of alternates that will meet the project's purpose and need. As you can see from this chart, SHA still has a long way to go. We're at the project-planning stage. During this stage, we'll develop preliminary alternates with your input, of course. We plan on holding a public workshop to present them. After that, we will identify the most-reasonable alternates, and retain them for detailed studies. We call the ARDs. During this stage, we will refine the engineering, and develop...

Don Sparklin: You've got to yell out loud.

Eileen Hughes: Okay. Two bingos.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Your prize -- and everybody hold onto your cards! -- because we're going to keep going... ..is a pocket thesaurus. The other one is a dictionary for the NEPA document. Oh -- two bingos! All right. Well, here's your thesaurus. Find the complicated word and substitute and easy word. Now you remember.

During this stage, we will refine the engineering and develop an environmental document. After the drafted environmental document is complete, SHA will hold a public hearing, based on citizen, regulatory agency and engineering review. SHA will identify a preferred alternative. Another bingo! Here we go! Hold on to your cards, though, because we'll have on more!

All right. The second prize is a really cool set of Highway 35 Hotwheels Pencils, with big erasers -- so you can write and rewrite.

...[preferred] location, and obtain location and design approval.

I'm going to give you a little bit of the project background. Along the I52 corridor its extensive, existing and planned future development will lead to future congestion. The project's purpose and need is to develop reasonable alternates that increase roadway capacity. Unless improvements are made... Another bingo! You guys are hot! The final bingo prize is a nice pencil sharpener, so you can sharpen the pencil and go at it again.

Can you understand that some of these words really do have dual meaning? I talked to a woman once about mobility in the project area. She listened patiently and said, "Are there a lot of handicapped people in the neighborhood?" It's just different. People come from different places. You have to recognize that we need to speak their language. It's not dumbing it down -- it's being responsive.

We usually have a break after this point in the session. You take that side, and Brenda, if you could take the other side... When people come back, they have a nice little mint candy treat on their table. I told them that's because you need to realize that talking to the public is work. It takes some energy. You need to be prepped and ready. So the chocolate is for the energy, and it's also to tell you to treat yourself well. It's hard when you go to a public meeting. You've probably worked all day. You've worked hard to get ready for it. Then the meeting starts at 7.00 or whenever. Maybe you've skipped dinner, so you have a hunger headache. It's really hard to be nice and responsive to people when you feel harried and hungry. So treat yourself well. We always use a mint, because usually no matter what, the dinner ends up being some sort of garlicky, greasy pizza. So you need that mint, because remember -- you're working with people, and you don't want to offend. So treat yourself well.

So you're talking with the public, and you're at the beginning of your transportation planning process. You want to know what the community's about. Your baseline tradition or community profile. There are lots of reasons for doing a community profile, but as with every other resource, first you will avoid resources in the community as a resource. You want to minimize any effects on them. You want to mitigate any impacts that you just cannot avoid. You need to know that community. Community profile is the basis for your whole impact analysis, and you need to build this profile as you go along. The interview and the public outreach are good ways to start. There are also traditional sources -- the census data and the master plans and all the printed stuff. You're really putting together a big puzzle of what the community is like. In the end, the picture will start to come into focus.

Also, as you start, in Maryland we have these advisory committees called, "focus groups." We're always looking for people who might want to be on that focus group at the beginning of the study. The community profile and interviewing is a good way to sort of uncover community leaders and representatives.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: We're not stopping them in their cars and arresting them.

Speaker: I think it's a different meaning. [inaudible] A police profile is [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Duly noted. Maybe we should change it to Community Snapshots. But that implies a point in time. We need to come up with a good vocabulary word.

Don Sparklin: [inaudible]

Speaker: [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: Yes. Before "profiling" became national news.

Eileen Hughes: I just wanted to give you an example. Back in the fall, for the InterCounty Connector project, we had done the bookwork. We looked at the census data. I was really involved with the environmental justice analysis. It's a very diverse community, there. You come up here to Maine, and everybody seems so white! It's really funny -- because it's 42 percent minority in our study area, and that minority is not a majority, necessarily, of anything. It's Asians and Hispanics and African Americans. So it's a really diverse community.

So we looked at the census data, trying to find maybe where pockets of people are. It shows pretty uniform, across. Then we'd go to block groups. Also -- also uniform. Then we go down to block level data. In this area, we see that the census block is pretty average -- 40-50 percent minority. But this block and this block are way below average and this block is much higher than average. Okay.

As we went to the public workshops, a gentleman came up to our community concerns table. It was the usual, "Can I help you find where you live? Where's your house?" He told me it was right in this purple area. I said, "Oh, okay. You know, I noticed something really unusual about that community, in that it's got a much higher percentage minority." He said, "Oh, that's because it was part of a "40 acres and a mule," settlement after the Civil War. His family had the property. It had been subdivided over the years, so different family members had it. But on that street, where one of the alternatives went, there was an old set of slave graves marked by boulders that we wouldn't have known about. There was a cemetery for free blacks. It had existed before the Civil War. It just goes to show that community has the depth of knowledge that you're just not going to get from a book.

Remember -- this is in an urbanized area with the historical societies and lots of information. But still, we wouldn't have known until we talked to them.

[tape turn]

...and in mind when you're doing these profiles. This purple book has a list in the back of it, of what you're looking for on these pages, in doing your impact assessment. Did everybody pick up, on their way in, a list of these 27 questions from the purple book?

"Will the project cause redistribution of the population? Will it cause a change in social values?" This is from the FHWA guidance. This is what you're going to need to know. You're going to need the social values, in order to understand if the project's going to change them, or not. Is it consistent with local land-use plan? You're going to need to know that in order to evaluate whether it's consistent. Remember -- if you're doing your profile, you're going to have to analyze a lot of things -- so begin with the end in mind.

As always, start early, continually refine it, use traditional sources and write it as you go. Writing the document at the end is really the weakest way to go. If you write too much, you can cut it out or turn it into a technical report. But develop these characteristics as you go along, and make it easy on yourself.

At this point in our training, the next section we're going to talk about the many, many ways to analyze effects. I'm going to ask Brenda to do this side. We've gone through this extensive exercise on how to do a community profile, and we tell people that it is like putting a puzzle together. We give them these little puzzles to do, while we're going through the next section. A lot of people find sitting in a darkened room with PowerPoint Presentation pretty stupefying, at best. These little puzzles have little [cars], or motorcycles can run over your dinosaurs. Go ahead and play with these. We have extras up front, if you want to take some home for your kids.

For this next section, even in our training which lasted only half a day, we did have to breeze through all these different analytic strategies. We're just going to touch briefly on them and not pretend to offer a mini-course in each of them. But these are the strategies that are frequently mentioned in the literature. There are resources to help you out, if you want to go into any of them in-depth. In a lot of them, you'll see overlap. Use the right tool -- there's no sense in reinventing the wheel. Simple observations and qualitative analysis is often quite appropriate. You may be missing the point if you turn everyone and everything into a number. Particularly when you're talking about quality of life issues -- which is really so, so important.

Don Sparklin: It's not brain surgery -- it's all just common sense.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Yes. They turn into little animals and cars and stuff. The first one is statistics. This is mentioned all the time, and it's the basis for a lot of needs-analysis. Turn something into a number and then count it as noise, air-quality, displacement -- it's all statistics. We have a little quiz here about statistics.

There's a famous saying -- There are three kinds of lies -- lies, damned lies and statistics. We have a prize for whoever can identify the initial speaker.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: If the real one doesn't come forward, you're going to get the prize. Any other guesses?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: No.

Speaker: [inaudible]

[laughter]

Speaker: No, it was Benjamin Disraeli. He was an English diplomat / statesperson / leader. Mark Twain stole it from him, in the American way. You get the prize, which is a set of jumbo dice -- so he can be running the games after this session. It's just to remind you that when you take a class in probability and statistics, they always have those dice questions. You roll the dice 67 times and it's turned up 1. How many -- do you know? On that 68th time, what's the chance that it's going to be 1 again? That's what that's for. To remind you that statistics have a roll, but it's not everything. Numbers. People like numbers because they seem so credible. But we always know, "Garbage In - Garbage Out."

I have also seen statistical analyses regarding disproportionality and where the intensity of effect is given a number. The number of people is given a number. It's a complicated system of adding up things, and it doesn't make sense to the public.

Speaker: I will let you know that there's also a book called [Lying in Statistics].

Eileen Hughes: Really?

Speaker: [inaudible] on sale at [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: There are lots of ways to distort information. Remember, in the end, you're going to have to explain it to Mrs. Smith in person at some point. So it better be something that can be boiled down into something reasonable. Just a little practical tip -- you can't avoid using numbers, but a picture is worth a thousand words. If you can use Excel to turn it into a pie chart, a bar chart, a line chart -- anything where differences among alternatives could be understood easily -- you're doing the public a favor. It's also a lot easier to write those kinds of documents.

Comparisons, case studies -- very often mentioned in the literature. They can be as simple as talking to the person next to you in the cube -- or looking at another project. It can be quite a big ordeal. One example, for the pilot project, we had a road where they were considering putting a roundabout in. That community was very concerned that that roundabout was going to be -- sorry for people from New Jersey -- making their community look like some of those big roads in New Jersey. It's a humongous roundabout.

So we brought in pictures from New Jersey and pictures of a Maryland roundabout, and explained how it was all going to work. That was a comparison, and it was something that drew the response of, "Okay -- we could live with this." It put their minds at ease.

No two projects are exactly alike, but there is a wealth of information in the Internet, amongst your peers. This is a great conference for just exchanging cards. When you get back, if you have something tricky that you need to explain, you now have a friend in another part of the country that you could talk to about it, and hopefully they won't know your public. So it can be almost anonymous.

Speaker: Get on Brenda's e-mail list.

Eileen Hughes: Get on Brenda's e-mail list. Re-NEPA. I look at, from time to time... How many of you know what Re-NEPA is. Good. There are a few people. It's a website that's a federal highway run. There are also some different discussion topics, and you can go back and forth on it. Sam Johnson told me, though -- and I didn't realize this -- but you can post anonymously. So take it for what it's worth. It's opinions, but it's a good way to spur your thinking.

Visual imaging. In Maryland's context-sensitive solutions commitment, right on their website, it says that one of their goals is to increase the use of visual imaging, to help people understand projects. If they understand them, then they can tell us what the effects are. So visual imaging is a great way to facilitate the conversation with the community. It can be expensive, sometimes, but sometimes not -- depending on the resources you have available and what level of design your project is in.

This is something that URS did for up in Maryland. Their Hunt Valley office did this to illustrate what a SPUI looks like to the Westminster community.

Don Sparklin: Just don't call it a SPUI when you have a public meeting. You try to use other terminology to explain what it is.

Eileen Hughes: They can call it a SPUI at that meeting. But when folks saw the picture -- the over-and-under and how it works -- it just clicked in. Then they could comment on it. Before that, it was just a flat plan on the table, and people couldn't understand. Then people were able to say, "Okay. We could cross the street here, then." One person in the training cautioned us though, not to use your renderings in this kind of thing look too good. Then it raises the expectations. Don't make your trees too lush and big, because it won't really be like that, right away. There's just a cautionary, I guess.

GIS is that combination of statistics and a map. You can do a lot of analysis with it. It can be very visual. It can be very data-intensive. Getting GIS set up for a project can be time-consuming. How many of you have

been in that position of relying on your GIS technician to set something up for you, and it's Monday and it'll be just a couple of hours, and then, "Well, it's not in the same coordinates system," and then they have to do this. Then it doesn't line up. You know -- by Thursday, you're still -- it's perfect, but you've waited a while. It's data-hungry, and it can be labor-intensive. Once you've got it set up, it's fantastic. Maybe you don't want to use it for a small project, but for a big project like the ITC, it's been great.

Also, just another sort of an advertisement for the Jargon Bingo. We're doing a project for our State Highway for I81. It touches down in West Virginia. So one of our planners called the West Virginia office of something -- whatever community it was -- and talked to the clerk. She said, "I'm looking for any GIS data that you might have." She said, "GI what?" So you know, it's another piece of jargon. If you're going to use it to analyze impact, you have to explain it to the community what it is and how it works -- a little bit.

We're using it for the InterCounty Connector to do a map analysis. We've identified all of our areas where there are concentrations of minority and low-income people. We've plotted out where some of our historic African-American communities are, and other gathering spots, and public housing. All the different places that could fall under that umbrella of an environmental justice population. As the project develops, we're going to use GIS to lay out where the impacts are, and then do a comparison of if one community is bearing the brunt of all the adverse impacts. I guess the really good thing about this kind of approach is, we're looking at every community. We've highlighted the ones that are of concern in the executive order. But for the ones that don't have a purple splotch or a yellow dot, we're still looking at their community. It's part of the whole balance.

Expert Consultants is another technique that's frequently mentioned in the literature. I'm a consultant, so I think this is your wisest strategy. Just kidding. Some states have a real history of working with consultants. They consider consultants a staff extension, and it's sort of part-and-parcel. Other agencies do most of their work in-house and only bring in a consultant when there's a very unique problem, or something that they don't have the resources to fully address. Consultants could be every day and they can be for special events. I guess the one thing you always have to worry about with consultants is to get the community's buy-in if you can, that that consultant really is an expert. All too often, there's that accusation of, "They're just saying what you pay them to say." That can come back and get you. You have to make sure that whatever you do is reasonable and credible -- whether you're on the consultant's or agency's side.

We're lucky in Maryland. We have several universities that we can draw on -- including the University of Maryland -- for doing some of our studies. They're actually doing an economic study for State Highway on a major project. So, university folks tend to have more neutral advantages or more advantages, that way.

Peer review. Another strategy frequently mentioned in the literature. Peer review is talking to your neighbor or calling to another cube. Calling your associate from Phoenix. It could also be a formal, structured process where an analysis or a set of assumptions or whatever is sent out to 5 or 6 or 7 experts. Then feedback is given to come up with some sort of assurance that that analysis is correct and credible. I've seen peer reviews work in that formal way, but I've also seen it not work when it turns into sort of a shooting match between experts. They'll fold their arms across and say, "Oh, this whole thing's a mess. They should've hired me to do it." You really need a good facilitator to make everybody play nice and be productive. Peer reviews are great, but they have to be managed.

Brainstorming. It's a technique that's mentioned. You may not think of it, necessarily, as an analysis technique, but any time you're standing in front of a map or an easel, or working with a group of people and there are three or four of them talking about their community, and you're listening and writing it down -- they're brainstorming, and you're brainstorming with them. It can be as simple as that. It can also be very structured. "Let's brainstorm possible mitigation strategies." It can be formalized and come up with a product or something finished at the end.

Again, for the formal brainstorming, you need a good facilitator. Someone who's not going to let someone with a negative attitude run rampant over the rest of the group. It's a friendly way of doing business.

Delphi technique is a structured way of getting consensus among experts. It's not a strategy that I'm personally trained in, but I understand that it can be quite effective if you have a very complex problem. State Highway has got an expert land-use panel that they've pulled together. They're going through this Delphi technique to develop a forecast of what the land use could be in 20 years, if this major highway project is built in. They have all these people from real estate and people from the banking industry and people from the local government. All these experts are going through this process to come up with a forecast. Again, it requires a facilitator. I think the facilitator who's leading it -- Sam [Huston] -- is he in the room? He'll be presenting at the end of this session. I'm going to give him free advertisement, because I think that's going to be pretty interesting.

Market research. A lot of what we do really is market research. Who's our public? If we were selling arthritis pills, I guess we'd do the same kinds of things. We'd go into the community and find out the ages. We'd find out what their needs are, and we'd start focusing on selling our products. A lot of what we do is market research. State Highway has been doing quite a few surveys, lately, in their project newsletters. They'll send out a survey on the back of it. You can return it, and it'll help identify key transportation issues. But you have to be very careful about bias. You don't want to build bias into your survey. So we have another quiz, here.

This is an example of a question that has some bias in it. The person that can identify what it is gets the prize. The question is, "How much of a problem is traffic in your community?" A -- Not much of a problem. B -- a problem. C -- A serious problem. D -- I don't know."

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Yes. By the time you've heard "problem, problem, problem," even if you hadn't thought it was a problem, you're beginning to wonder. Are you just out of it? So who gets the prize, Brenda? You can be the... She's already won one. Right? Okay. Well she was gypped out of one. Right?

Audience: [humored]

Eileen Hughes: She can have it!

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Two? Hmm. We have an extra pack of index cards.

Audience: [laughter]

Eileen Hughes: We'll give you extra puzzle pieces.

Don Sparklin: We've got a bowl of candy.

Audience: [laughter]

Eileen Hughes: We talked about that, that people will tell you everything. We just had a table at a public workshop where people could come and tell us what their concerns were. We did some telephone calling, too. We found one woman who said, "No one walks anywhere in Westminster." Okay. Well, that's her opinion. Someone said that the "Homeless people all live behind Carroll Plaza, because that's where the liquor store is." The someone else comes by and says, "Parking is always really tight at Carroll Plaza." So I guess the liquor store much be the focal point of that community.

One woman -- I didn't put this one in, but she's an elderly lady. She said, "Speeding is a real problem in Westminster. People just drive so fast." She said, "I myself -- I drive at a very safe speed; and you know what? People will just pass right by you! Even young girls will give you the finger."

So it does tell you anything. It's great. You get a lot of different perspectives. But validate any information? People do walk in Westminster, I believe.

Meetings, workshops, design [inaudible]. You're going to hear about a lot of that. Many of you are experts in these things. They're opportunities for the people to talk to you and tell us what their concerns are in how the project's going to affect them. Do them early. Do them before your project even starts. That's the best. Tell us what the strategy is. Use it to scope. Don't go in at the last minute. It doesn't make for a very pleasant meeting to find out that you really didn't know best.

Supermarkets are a great place to get some casual outreach. Remember that the point is also not to force people to come to meetings. You can get their input without them being in a meeting. I'm sure that many of you didn't feel so good about moving and getting up here and arranging yourselves conveniently for us. So put yourselves in the shoes of the community -- they don't want to, either.

Another thing we did with this training arose out of some frustration. We do have a lot of formal meetings, and we do have advisory groups. We were working on a project, and traditionally, the person who was writing the document did not always attend all the public meetings. They were the socio-economic analysts -- not the community analysts. So when it came time to write this document, I gave one of our planners a set of meeting notes. I said, "Here are all the meeting notes from the last two years of this advisory group meeting. Just go through them and highlight what the community said." She was like, "There's nothing in here!" I said, "Come on. You're not reading them right." "There's nothing in here!" So we took those notes and used them as part of the training. We gave people two markers -- a pink and a yellow. We said, "Highlight everything that the state said in pink, and everything the community said in yellow."

It was like a detailed explanation of what was presented at that meeting, what the options were, who the consultants were that presented it -- four or five pages of it. At the end, the community issues included safety. Period. Then all of a sudden, it hit home to them. Their notes weren't really doing the job in tracking what the community said. It was a great administrative record of the project-development process, but not a good record of what the community said. If that's a problem in your agency, I don't know, but that was a great exercise to open up the eyes of people who were writing these notes.

Don Sparklin: That's one of the reasons we developed this training for our staff and our consultants. So that we can just have an example of a different way of looking at and doing things. We're trying to wrap up, here. We have a couple more slides, and another exercise. Just remember that we're trying to analyze the benefits and impacts. Actually, it shouldn't be impacts. Maybe it can be, in that context. But we like to use the word, "effects." You can have the positive and negative effects, but in the context of this, I guess we can use the words, "benefits and impacts," in the context of the Civil Rights Act. To make sure that everyone has equal opportunity to all that we're trying to do, and to have equal opportunity for input.

As I was pointing out, remember that sometimes you have positive and negative effects. The community may be bearing the brunt of the adverse effects, while another community only sees benefits. You want to try to balance that out. Also, consider that one person's impact may be another person's benefit. I like to use the example of a project where you have a main street running through town that's congested. Our project is to build a bypass, or relocate the road or the through traffic out of this main downtown area, maybe several blocks away. You might think it's great that you're moving traffic out of town and you're going to reduce congestion, noise and just all the negative impacts associated with a lot of traffic in town. But if you didn't talk to the

community, you may fail to realize that the community is transit-dependent. Thus, because you relocated the traffic to another part of town, you've also probably relocated the buses. If the community was transit-dependent, you've now made them walk 2, 3 or 4 blocks further to catch a bus to get where they have to go. In some respects, a benefit to one may be an impact to another. You may not always know this 'til you talk to people to better understand what the different effects are -- both positive and negative.

Solutions. Next slide. Just real quick -- we all have to do the old AMMR type stuff. Avoid, Minimize, Mitigate -- in that order. Of course, now we also have Enhancements and Stewardship opportunities. But again, it's also good to get the community's input on this, because the community knows best. They can certainly assist in developing these different strategies for our projects.

Lastly is the whole importance of documentation -- whether it's our technical reports or our environmental documents. One of the common things that Eileen and I have been trying to stress today is the importance of writing it down. Just don't wait 'til the end to write it down. Write it down throughout the whole process, in terms of documenting your meetings, your interviews... The whole process that you're going through. It's important to write it down. The people that are doing your effects analysis and your community profiles are the same people that are also writing the environmental documents.

The importance of documentation, of course, is to make sure that we follow through on our commitments that we make to people. We make a lot of commitments when we do our projects. You want to make sure that there's a record of that, so that when we get into design and construction, we make sure that we're following through on those commitments.

Anyway, we have one question before the last exercise. Who can tell us what the main purpose is of a NEPA document? Everybody raise your hands! The man in the yellow?

Speaker: [NEP document] [inaudible]

Don Sparklin: Actually, that's probably closer to what we were looking for. The other answers were good, too. The main purpose of the documents is better decisions -- not better documents.

Eileen Hughes: Better decisions; not better documents. It is a good record, too. You get the dictionary.

Don Sparklin: [inaudible] we were hoping for. The dictionary is to demonstrate. There's always a meaning for these things that we're handing out. The meaning of the dictionary is that we want to try to have our documents be small, concise, and full of lots of information as you have a pocket dictionary.

Eileen Hughes: Right. And here's a set of crayons to help you mark out all the irrelevant stuff.

Don Sparklin: So hopefully, you have kids.

Eileen Hughes: Or like to color!

Don Sparklin: We have one last exercise, here -- on sharpening up your writing skills. Eileen will lead us through that. It's an exercise that if you all have Microsoft Word you can easily use. She'll demonstrate that, now.

Eileen Hughes: I guess I am sort of a nut about eliminating all the wordiness in documents and making it easy to read. Remember, your audience in the community effects analysis, if not the Corps of Engineers. You need to have a document that is understandable to everyone.

A wide variety of people are going to be turning to that community section to see what's going to happen to their home and their daily lives. They don't want to have to read through a bunch of mumbojumbo. Even if Mary Peters was in the highway study area -- she doesn't want to read it all. To develop this training, we actually took parts of some of State Highway's publications. These were the brochures that were being used to explain in a public workshop in a one-page summary of the project. This is some of the language that was used to explain the project. We taught some techniques on how to cut it back. This was it before -- how to comment on the project. Let's just look at the first sentence.

This is really from a brochure. The public is encouraged to participate in the workshop, to ensure citizen input in the planning process. Isn't the message there, "We're putting a check in the box -- that's why we're encouraging you to participate?" It goes on to tell us that studies are preliminary. You'll recognize some of this from the jargon bingo. If you go through and highlight parts of it, you can go into "tools" in Microsoft Word, "spelling and grammar," and "check the selection," and it will come up with readability statistics. It'll tell you -- if you check that in the toolbox -- that the time I highlighted was at the 11th-grade level.

Speaker: Could you do that again? I'm really challenged.

Eileen Hughes: Let me make it a little smaller. First you highlight it. Then you go into "Tools," "Spelling & Grammar." You check your selection. "Do you want to continue with the rest of the document?" No. We just want that one piece. So that one part of the document is at the 10th-grade level. Half the sentences -- about 1/3 of them -- and their reading ease -- I don't know too much about that. But I do know the grade level. And I do know that on the basis of my research into literacy in Maryland, that in some communities, up to 50 percent of the population does not read beyond the 4th or 5th-grade level. So I would think this would be a problem.

Do you know how to change your preferences in Microsoft for...? Let me see. I think you can go into "Tools." Well, never mind.

Speaker: [inaudible] IT person

Eileen Hughes: I almost feel like when Lucy and Ethel were throwing dirt on somebody's rug to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner and found out they didn't have electricity.

Audience: [humored]

Speaker: I feel that way a lot.

Eileen Hughes: It's "Tools, Options, Spelling & Grammar," and you can check all this stuff. "Check grammar as you type, check grammar with spelling. Show readability statistics." It's just a good way to do a little back check on yourself, in the privacy of your own cube or laptop or workstation.

Then we go back and say, "Okay. How can we make that initial sentence more inviting to the public? Same title -- "How to comment." There are many ways to give us your comments. I think you want to go for 7th or 8th-grade.

Don Sparklin: Actually, in State Highway, I think we've always learned even from Federal Highway, that maybe the 6th-grade level should be appropriate to reach everybody. We're not trying to promote, "Dumbing it down." We don't want to use those words. We're just trying to make it acceptable to a lot of people. As Eileen mentioned, in Maryland, we have some counties where the illiteracy rate was quite high.

Eileen Hughes: Very high. Great.

Don Sparklin: So we want to be able to have it understandable by everybody. So we're trying to take our bureaucrat-ese and our government words and our jargon, and just try to put it in plainer English, so everybody can understand.

Eileen Hughes: So we rewrote it a little bit and tried to make it friendlier and more inviting. "We're holding this workshop because we want your comments. This study's at an early stage, and we can make changes based on your input. We appreciate your time and effort, and will carefully review all comments." That comes out at the 6th-grade level -- which is a little easier, I think, to understand. Okay. 7th. It's just a little easier to understand. And the tone is a little better, too. We need to watch ourselves. We have a couple of examples here where -- here -- let's do this one, and this is a contest.

Here's a description of the study area. We'll make this bigger. Okay. We'll see what just this first sentence is. That sentence is at the 12-grade reading level. We have a prize for somebody who can quickly take this sentence and transform it. What's the message or what's the point of this sentence? Jot it down and I'll type it into Word. If we can get it down to 7th or 8th-grade level, we'll give you a prize. It's just this one sentence. "All of the alternates would also have the potential to deliver additional storm water runoff to waterway channels." Take a minute to rewrite that sentence, and then we'll try it again. [This is a sentence of concurrence]

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Already?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: What do you think that's going to be? Any guesses?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: 5.8? That's very good. She gets the way-cool gel pen. We'll try another one, then. We'll go through another exercise. Certainly, there is no lack of material -- not at all! Here's one. This is a beauty. This is at the 12th-grade level, and it has 38 words. Short. 6-10. Keep the syllable number down. Can anybody come up with something better for that one? Right. Let's just take one thought in the 38-word sentence.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Avoid a passive voice. That's another great suggestions. If you have to add, "*By whom*," after any of your sentences, you know you're in passive voice. "Studies were done." *By whom?* You need to put the actor up front.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: But we were looking for someone who's not you! Are you an editor? No? Let's try somebody who's language-challenged. This is a learning. We won't make fun of you at lunch -- really! Well, maybe later in cocktail hour, but... Bob?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: You.

Speakers: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: We'll see.

Speakers: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: That's at the 8th-grade level. But it's 100 percent passive. We'll let you have the pen if you can take it out of passive voice.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: Who's going to use the erosion-control procedures?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: In theory. Put it into active voice.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: *We* will use erosion control procedures. Or, "State Highway," or... When you put it in active voice and you have the person or group that's doing it as the subject of the sentence, it shortens it. That's always a plus. Still 8.3.

Don Sparklin: I think it's an erosion control that [inaudible] got to use another word than "erosion control." We found [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: We will control erosion...

Speakers: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: We will protect streams from eroded -- washout. Okay. Depending on the part of the country you're from. Washout. Is that one word or two?

Speaker: It's one.

Eileen Hughes: It didn't get a little squiggly. First grade! Point 6! Okay. We put him through the wringer. He gets the cool gel pen.

Don Sparklin: Who's that?

Eileen Hughes: Bob.

Don Sparklin: Oh.

Eileen Sparklin: Well there's the 12-pack. You can share with everyone that helped.

Speaker: If that's what you want, we have some of that.

Eileen Hughes: We have some extra candy. Anyway, it was a real eye-opener. When you do it with a small group and your own stuff, it really... I've had people come up and say, "I never realized how bad I was 'til I started using this feature. It helps! It's not the be-all-and-end-all. But it helps. If you can get it down a little..."

Speaker: [inaudible]

Eileen Hughes: No. You highlight the item, go to "spelling and grammar," "check your selection," and it will give the readability statistics. But you have to remember on the "Tools" menu, you go to "Options," and go to the "Spelling & Grammar" option. Then check that you want to show the readability statistics.

Well, you guys did a good job! We're just about done. We'll be out on time for lunch, and Don has a few closing remarks. I guess you have one minute's worth of closing remarks?

Don Sparklin: Well now that our SHA consultant Eileen has pointed out the errors and omissions of the SHA...

Eileen Hughes: I'm just doing what they paid me to say!

Don Sparklin: I'm just kidding. I guess we're pointing out some of the things that we've not been doing right in the past, in terms of trying to just talk to people in plain English. I know I'm just as guilty of some of this bureaucratize. I tried to do this on the stuff that I wrote, and it was very difficult because of the mindset that we're in, working in government -- to talk and write a certain way. It really does result in a bit of a culture change to change the way that we write. Hopefully, you've been able to see that when we do good community-impact assessment and good public involvement that ultimately it's going to lead to good customer service. The environment that we're all in now -- the whole thing is to do what the Simon & Garfunkle song said... I went back to the College of Musical Knowledge. It says on the "Bridge Over Troubled Water," album about "Keeping the Customer Satisfied." So, if we keep the customer satisfied, it'll make our jobs and our lives a lot easier.

But remember, we can't please everybody. Just don't please yourself.

Eileen Hughes: [inaudible] very important. So you do have to...

Don Sparklin: Brenda wanted me to give a shameless advertisement about a paper among other sources that she brought from Washington. It's on the table out there, and it gives a list of all the various online publications and sources of information regarding community impact assessment, public involvement, EJ and so on and so forth.

Moderator: There's a specific one called "Public Involvement Techniques." It's old -- 1996, maybe. But there's a new one that's interactive, that will usually work with your project layout -- like urban and rural, or something like that. It's interactive, and it'll tell you what kinds of tools might be helpful. It's just been beta-tested, so it should be pretty interesting to play with for at least a little bit and see how helpful it is to you. Those are two of the items that are on the...

Don Sparklin: So we're trying to change from our past -- perhaps not mistakes -- but the way we were doing things. Hopefully you all have learned a little bit of something, and can change the way you all do things, as well. Thank you for your attention.

Audience: [inaudible]

[session ends]