

Is It CSS Yet?

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provides the following definition for Context Sensitive Solutions:

“Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) is a *collaborative, interdisciplinary* approach that involves all *stakeholders* to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSS is an approach that considers the total *context* within which a transportation improvement project will exist. CSS principles include the employment of early, continuous, and meaningful *involvement* of the public and all stakeholders throughout the project development process.”

It is important that each aspect of this definition be embraced and achieved on a project; simply addressing one or two does not really make it a CSS process. The following provides guidance on each aspect of CSS, with questions to consider for your project in order to answer “Is it CSS yet?”

Collaborative

The I-70 Mountain Corridor CSS 6-Step Process is designed to facilitate a collaborative approach to project decision making. The process is clearly articulated to provide early, continuous, and meaningful involvement of the public and all the stakeholders.

Questions to ask about your project:

- Have you developed your work plan, approach, and schedule based on the 6-Step Process?
- Have you included community leaders on the Project Leadership Team (PLT)?
- Have you incorporated a philosophy of working cooperatively to address all of the issues of all of the stakeholders?
- Have you made your work plan available to the stakeholders?

Interdisciplinary

The importance of working with an interdisciplinary approach is the opportunity to identify and address the full range of potential issues, solutions, and alternatives to ensure that the project “considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist.”

Questions to ask about your project:

- Is your PLT a multidisciplinary team that includes community representatives and experts in planning, design, operations, environment, public process, and communication? (The appropriate experts vary by

project. For example, for a traffic incident management plan, include fire/rescue, law enforcement, towing and recovery, and emergency management. For an environmental study, include community activists, local agency representatives, biologists, wildlife experts, geologists, hydrologists, and others.)

- Is your Project Staff a multidisciplinary team that includes community experts, as well as experts in planning, design, public process, and communication? (Consider other disciplines as outlined above for the PLT.)
- If you are using a Technical Team, is it also multidisciplinary and does it include all technical perspectives?
- Have you included a wide range of disciplines and interest groups in your stakeholder involvement process?
- Do you consider issues, challenges, and opportunities from all disciplines in your Decision-Making Process?

Stakeholders

Stakeholders include anyone with an interest in the project or anyone who could potentially be affected by decisions made on the project. CSS promotes a climate of inclusiveness and involvement of stakeholders and the public. Effective solutions come from exploring all of the stakeholders' interests and issues.

Questions to ask about your project:

- Have you identified the full range of stakeholders and potential stakeholders?
- Have you asked those stakeholders if there are any other stakeholders or potential stakeholders?
- Have you included public agencies (federal, state, and local), special interest groups, property owners, residents, businesses, service providers, elected officials, users, the general public, and any other groups or individuals who may have an interest in your project?
- Have you included appropriate stakeholders on the PLT and other project teams?
- Have you engaged the stakeholders in exploring their interests and issues?
- Have you engaged the stakeholders in developing the evaluation process and criteria?
- Have you engaged the stakeholders in identifying potential solutions and alternatives?

Context

On the I-70 Mountain Corridor, the Context Statement and the Core Values help define the context and guide how a project “fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility.”

Questions to ask about your project:

- How have you incorporated the Context Statement and the Core Values in the definition of the project vision, work plan, and alternative evaluation?
- How are you addressing each of the Core Values? Are you using Issue Task Forces to address issues in each of the Core Values?
- How have you applied the guidance in the I-70 Mountain Corridor CSS Web site (e.g., sustainability principles, Aesthetic Plan, SWEEP Implementation Matrix)?
- How are the corridor's unique character and the values of the stakeholders, as reflected in the Context Statement and Core Values, addressed in your project?

Involvement

As stated in the FHWA definition, "CSS principles include the employment of early, continuous, and meaningful involvement of the public and all stakeholders throughout the project development process."

Questions to ask about your project:

- Have you identified the full range of stakeholders? (A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest in the outcome or decision.)
- Have you developed a Stakeholder Involvement Plan to ensure early, continuous, and meaningful involvement?
- Have you identified the appropriate forums and techniques for stakeholder involvement?
- What teams would support your project's stakeholder involvement objectives (e.g., Technical Team or Issue Task Force)?
- Is your decision-making process clear, transparent, and accessible to the public and stakeholders?
- Have you discussed concerns and issues with all stakeholders before you have presented solutions?
- Can stakeholders track how you have used their input?