

## 5. Lessons Learned

To date, the public engagement process CMAP mounted between June and September is the largest public engagement effort CMAP has undertaken. There are many challenges and opportunities that come with any public engagement effort. To provide some background to our effort, according to statistics published by Volunteering in America ([http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/about/definition\\_table.cfm](http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/about/definition_table.cfm)), neighborhood engagement rates -- defined as the proportion of adults who attended at least one public meeting last year, for the nation -- averaged just under 9% from 2006 to 2008. The average neighborhood engagement rate for the Midwest is 10.1%, while the average rate for the state of Illinois is 7.9%. In other words, in Illinois, less than 8% of residents participated in a public meeting of any type over the past year.

Figure 50 Public participation levels in Illinois, the Midwest, and the Nation

| Neighborhood Engagement Rate (percent) |      |      |      |         |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|------|---------|
|                                        | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | Average |
| <b>IL</b>                              | 8.4  | 6.9  | 8.3  | 7.9     |
| <b>Midwest</b>                         | 10.5 | 9.1  | 10.7 | 10.1    |
| <b>Nation</b>                          | 9.0  | 8.3  | 9.6  | 9.0     |

In an effort to continuously improve our public engagement efforts CMAP staff sat down and reflected on what we could learn from this effort. To strategically look at these issues we conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. This allowed us to look at what we were good at and use that to think of creative solutions to address our shortfalls moving forward.

Strengths of the *Invent the Future* phase were the tools we had. MetroQuest allowed CMAP to visually depict different policy decisions we could potentially take as a region. The workshop format was also a strength of this process, it was flexible enough to give in various lengths to accommodate different stakeholder groups and meeting lengths.

Some of the weaknesses the team identified were that while we had a great tool to support us in explaining different ideas it was still very complex. For other participants the tool was not complex enough. Finding common ground among participants really happened in the conversations that occurred after everyone had been given a baseline of information. Another weakness was that this phase of the plan happened across the summer. Summer is inevitably a difficult time to reach people because of vacations and other competing activities. Lastly, with over 280 municipalities and 77 Chicago community areas scheduling meetings that don't conflict with other activities is a challenge.

One of the great opportunities of this public engagement process was the fact that 2009 is the centennial of Daniel Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago. By working with the Burnham Centennial civic organization there were many new opportunities for us to reach out to new groups. Social networking afforded CMAP previously untapped networks of bloggers, "Tweeters," and Facebook friends to help spread the word about *Invent the Future* events.

There are always threats facing public engagement but for CMAP the one we deal with on a daily basis is there are so many immediate problems facing communities that long range planning is a difficult concept to convey.

Overall there were three main areas that we should focus on to best improve our future public engagement efforts. First, you can never start planning too early; second workshops that had strong partners with well a well connected membership base had better attendance; and lastly increased coordination between technical and outreach staff would have helped in being more strategic in our approach.