

What is Public Participation?

Public Participation

- Individuals potentially affected by a project or decision have a voice in the outcome
- Help communities get involved by providing:
 - Educational materials
 - Outreach activities
 - Site information
 - Training
 - Technical assistance
 - Other support

What Are the Benefits of Public Participation?

Better Outcomes & Governance

- Government will make better and more easily implementable decisions that reflect public interests and values and are better understood by the public
- Communities develop long-term capacity to solve and manage challenging social issues, often overcoming longstanding differences and misunderstandings.

How Does Public Participation Result in Better Decisions?

Better Decisions

- Decision-makers have more complete information, for example additional facts, values, and perspectives
- Decisions are more implementable and sustainable because the decision considers the needs and interests of all stakeholders, and stakeholders better understand and are more invested in the outcomes

Better Decisions (continued)

- Decisions are seen as more legitimate and are less subject to challenge.
- Decision-makers who fully understand stakeholder interests also become better communicators, able to explain decisions and decision rationale in terms stakeholders understand and in ways that relate to stakeholders' values and concerns.

How Does Public Participation Develop Community Capacity?

Improved Relationships

- Improved relationships between decision-makers and the public, and among different stakeholders themselves
- Stakeholders are taught meaningful and collaborative ways to approach each other, manage difficult decisions, and resolve disputes
- Stakeholders learn to appreciate each others' positions by first learning about each others' values and interests.

More Difficult to Say “No”

- As participants, all stakeholders must understand all sides of an issue, weigh the pros and cons, and make more thoughtful decisions
- Stakeholders and communities do not generally achieve this on their own
- Government must recognize their responsibility to help communities build their capacity for collaborative problem solving

**What Are the Necessary
Conditions for Successful Public
Participation?**

Clear Purpose & Goals

- Well-defined purpose for the public's role in the project that is real, practical, and shared among stakeholders
- Determine the appropriate level or degree of public participation for the decision at hand and set the public's expectations accordingly
- Do not promise more in the way of public participation than they are willing to commit to and deliver

Clear Structure & Process

- Well-defined rules about how public participation will be conducted and how the decision will be made

Opportunity & Influence

- A real opportunity for public input to be considered in making the decision
- Be committed to the full range of activities required to make public participation work and be willing to obtain and consider public input in making the decision
- **Inclusive and effective representation**

What Are Some Additional Considerations for Successful Public Participation?

Resources & Capacity

- Provide the funding and staff to support all aspects of the process, including a situation assessment, outreach activities, and obtaining and incorporating public input
- Conduct training in communication, outreach, and collaborative problem solving skills

Integrity & Commitment

- Trust and credibility of government are essential for public participation
- **A belief in the value of public input** – the knowledge that public input will result in better decision-making and that public participation results in better governance
- **Complete transparency** – the timely sharing of easily understandable and accessible information

EPA's Community Involvement Goals

- Keep public informed in the cleanup process
- Provide opportunities for communities to comment and provide input
- Resolve community issues related to the site



Community Involvement Programs

- Community Advisory Groups
- Technical Assistance Funds
- Translation of information into local languages and dialects

Ways The Public Can Get Involved

- Attend public meetings and hearings
- Participate in community information sessions
- Join/Form a Community Advisory Group
- Visit local information repositories

Environmental Justice: Treating Everyone Fairly

- Ensuring "the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes regarding the development of environmental laws, regulations, and policies"



EPA's Environmental Justice Programs

- Encourage public participation by all affected community members by:
 - Translating publications and fact sheets into locally-spoken languages and dialects
 - Providing translators and interpreters at meetings
 - Providing forums for community outreach

