

About Community Advisory Groups Toolkit: A Summary of the Tools, U. S. EPA Office of Solid Waste & Emergency Response, 1998

<http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/cag/resource/aboutcag.pdf>

More Information about the Policy

Copies of the Policy and the Framework for implementing it are available at

<http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/policy2003.pdf>

and

<http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/frzframework.pdf>

The Website for the "Internet Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions" is

<http://www.network-democracy.org/epa/epa-plp>

EPA's Response to Comments on the Draft 2000 Public Involvement Policy is available at

<http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/response.pdf>

"Involvement brings the pieces together" artwork is the creation of Erica Ann Turner, who contributed the work to EPA through an agreement between the Art Institute of Washington and the Agency.

Step 5: How to Consult with and Involve the Public



Involvement brings
the pieces together

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Step 5: How to Consult with and Involve the Public

Goal:

- To understand the interests and needs of the affected public
- To provide for the exchange of information and views
- Open exploration of issues, alternatives and consequences between interested and affected members of the public and EPA officials responsible for the forthcoming action or decision

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its revised Public Involvement Policy in June 2003. The Policy's overall goal is for excellent public involvement to become an integral part of EPA's culture, thus supporting more effective Agency actions.

The Policy provides guidance to EPA managers and staff on how you can better involve the public in the Agency's decision making processes. The Policy outlines seven steps to effective involvement. This brochure, focusing on step 5, offers suggestions to help you "get started," with emphasis on public consultation and collaboration. It serves as an outline for how to conduct consultation and involvement activities.

Why Public Consultation and Involvement?

Public consultation and involvement helps EPA to understand the interests and needs of the affected public. Giving the public an opportunity to communicate their concerns, problems, and alternatives improves the Agency's decisions and environmental outcomes. You should seek every opportunity to expand and diversify public consultation and involvement processes.

What to Consider in Public Consultation and Involvement

The public includes everyone. However, because no two people or groups are exactly alike, no single approach will be of interest to or appropriate for everyone. When you think about public consultation and involvement, consider the scope of your project or issue and the audience which it affects.

When you consider how to conduct public involvement, be aware of and comply with any statutory or regulatory public involvement requirements that apply to your project or issue.

Plan Your Work How to Organize for Public Consultation and Involvement

Research Public Consultation and Involvement

Be creative. Dig in and learn all you can from existing sources and the community. Learn from other EPA program or regional staff how similar public audiences and communities have responded to comparable or related involvement processes and the issues.

Understand Needs

- Review projects
- Consult colleagues
- Research materials
& organizations

- Ask your colleagues, your Office of General Counsel advisor or Regional Counsel staff about pertinent requirements that may apply to your involvement process or issues
- Gather information from organizations which represent the affected public such as the city council, civic associations, churches or other neighborhood groups
- Review census materials, newspapers, election issues and results, and related issues
- Hold individual or small meetings to help identify the interests and needs of your targeted public audiences, as well as to sharpen the focus of the goals and objectives for your consultation

Your involvement, and the issue or project driving it, may be national in scope. If so, conduct research and consider designing your activities and overall process to accommodate both a larger number of people and a greater diversity of interests.

Define Your Consultation/Involvement Process

- Set the public involvement goals you wish to accomplish
- Determine which members of the affected public need to be involved in the process
- Decide if the involvement process will be open to the general public, only for a representative segment of stakeholder and interest groups, or a combination of both
- Define your processes and activities by determining which involvement practices best fit the stakeholders' or groups' needs as well as foster EPA's goals
- Encourage participation, especially from under-represented segments of the public, and seek advice and help from those groups you wish to consult

- Ensure feedback from a diverse pool of people, groups, communities and interests by using a mixture of the following consultation/involvement techniques to suit different situations:

- Outreach (see brochure #4, "How to Provide Information and Conduct Outreach for Public Involvement")
- Information Exchange - Listen to, be available for or attend community sessions such as:
 - Public, "town-hall" meetings and open forums
 - Workshops co-sponsored with local organizations and government agencies
 - Focus groups, interviews, telephone hotlines and Internet-based discussions
- Recommendation - Receive advice for EPA on particularly complex or controversial issues from:
 - Technical committees
 - Technical advisory groups
 - Citizen advisory groups whose members represent stakeholders

Be aware of, and comply with, the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act when seeking advice or recommendations from groups

- Agreements (legally non-binding): mutually developed and accepted decisions between EPA and affected, concerned or interested persons
- Estimate budget and resource needs of the consultation/involvement based on the frequency and location of:
 - Meetings, consultations, and other involvement activities
 - Supplies and materials
 - Facilitation or alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques needed
 - Necessary technical or financial support to ensure involvement
- Decide how you will evaluate and improve activities and the process throughout your project
- Decide how you will share findings and take action on them along the way and after completing the decision-making process (comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act when applicable)

Work Your Plan How to Implement the Consultation/Involvement Process

Obtain Pre-Activity Consultation/Involvement Support

Consulting with the Public

- Make allies
- Publicize activities
- Prepare support
- Meet & focus
- Be fair & credible

- Consult with local and statewide environmental groups (use EPA regional staff to help build participant relationships and understanding)
- Involve educators from the community for suggestions/perspective about the community and to engage students
- Encourage affected community representation and collaboration through advisory committees, elected officials and staff of local, state and federal agencies

Prepare Materials for Your Consultation/Involvement Activity

- Identify and prepare material(s) that will be distributed at the activity
- Make relevant information easy to understand and accessible to the public before any events
- Line up guidance, resources, training and professional assistance to support participants and/or build capacity to participate in activities
- Facilitate early communications between technical staff and informed participants so EPA and other "experts" can more easily understand, relate and communicate with the general public

Publicize Each of Your Consultation/Involvement Activities and the Overall Process

- Determine in advance the timing of any notices of consultation/ involvement activities, usually 30 days for regular meetings, 60 days for complex issues
- Notify participants via e-mail, telephone, posters, and any other innovative, creative and appropriate mechanisms
- Clearly state the purpose of the activity and process, and the role of EPA and participants in all written materials

- Schedule activities at convenient times, close to mass transit (consider activities after work and/or weekends)
- Encourage individuals from under-represented communities - minorities, tribes - and the general public to participate in the process

Establish Clearly Focused Consultation/Involvement Activity for Participants at Any Event

- State the purpose of the activity and the goals of the overall process
- Clarify the roles of EPA and participants, the chief role and priority of EPA staff being to listen to feedback and concerns
- Establish basic ground rules for all meetings and events, especially regularly scheduled activities
- Decide if and how decisions will be made and who will make them. If majority rules, what percent will carry the vote? If decisions will require consensus, agree on how the group will define consensus
- At meetings, have someone write a summary of the results and actions to keep track for future reference

Ensure Fairness

- Employ facilitators and/or mediators who are fair and accessible to everyone involved, and ensure their role as facilitator/mediator is clear to all participants
- Use collaborations that "level the playing field," enabling anyone to take an active role in public involvement, ensuring individual citizens have the same respect as corporations, organizations, associations, or government agencies

Ideas from Participants in EPA's Public Involvement Policy Review Processes

"Good intentions must be inextricably linked with good process. Otherwise we will continue to alienate key stakeholders, the implications of which are evident."

Greg Bourne, Center for Civic Participation and Renewal Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions

"Any stakeholder should be suspicious of engaging in any open-ended process that does not have any ground rules or structure."

Alan Strasser
Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions

"Citizens should be directly involved in evaluating the problems as well as formulating creative solutions. This should reach beyond traditional hearings and meetings, providing competing interests...the opportunity to deepen their mutual understanding. Often collaborative methods result in win-win solutions where the interests of each party are substantively addressed."

Michigan Environmental Council -
Public Comments on Draft Policy

"...if you really want to be successful at public involvement, learn to LISTEN, not just speak. This will help the EPA to become aware of the difference between what the EPA intends the public to hear and what the public actually hears."

Eileen Omeohundro, Washington State University - Public Comments on Draft Policy

Other EPA Public Involvement Brochures

Introducing EPA's Public Involvement Policy
How to Plan and Budget for Public Involvement
How to Identify People to Involve
How to Provide Technical and Financial Assistance for Public Involvement
How to Do Outreach for Public Involvement
How to Review and Use Public Input and Provide Feedback
How to Evaluate Public Involvement
How to Improve Public Meetings and Hearings
How to Improve Working with Tribes
How to Involve Environmental Justice Communities
How to Overcome Barriers to Public Involvement

Additional Resources:

Philip Harter, The Mediation Consortium & Deborah Dalton, U.S. EPA, Office of General Counsel, Destinations: Better Decisions Through Consultation and Collaboration, A Stakeholder Involvement Manual for EPA Policy and Program Managers. (to be published in 2003)

Resource Conservation & Recovery Act (RCRA) Public Participation Manual, U.S. EPA Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, RCRA Program, 1996
<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/permit/pubpart/manual.htm>

