

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/framework.pdf>

The Web site for the "Internet Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions" is <http://www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip>

EPA's Response to Comments on the Draft 2000 Public Involvement Policy is available at <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/response.pdf>

How to Evaluate Public Involvement

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



Involvement brings the pieces together

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Step 7: Evaluate Public Involvement Activities

Goal:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the Policy and of public involvement processes

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its new 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 decisions. The Policy outlines seven steps to effective involvement. This brochure (one in a series) offers suggestions to help EPA staff members to "get started" evaluating public involvement activities and processes.

Why Evaluate Public Involvement?

Evaluations of public involvement help to define, measure, and improve public involvement effectiveness. Getting feedback from the public on how well a specific involvement activity or overall involvement process (e.g., meetings, notice of action, rule-making) worked, can help you change those processes and activities to make them more effective for EPA and participants.

Evaluation should lead naturally to action. If you evaluate formally and informally throughout your process, you can improve as you go along.

"...the key goal of evaluation should be to improve a program. Also, unless it can be demonstrated with some sort of evaluation that public involvement "works," agencies won't fund it and managers won't do it."

Caron Chess, Rutgers University
2001 Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA's Decisions

"EPA should not view evaluation as something that is done at the end of a cycle, but rather as something that should be strategically planned at the start of a cycle as participatory objectives and benchmarks are being mutually developed in consultation with stakeholder populations."

John Stone, Institute for Food and Agricultural Standards, University of Michigan
2001 Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA's Decisions

What to Consider in Public Involvement Evaluations

When you think about evaluating public involvement efforts, start by analyzing the process and its component parts.

Thinking Through the Big Picture

- Outcomes
- Lessons learned
- Institutional support
- Staff/budget
- Tools
- Measures

What outcomes should your involvement process or activity produce? How will you know if you succeed in meeting your goals?

For example, if one goal is to achieve broad, inclusive involvement, how will you measure how well you consulted with the targeted and affected groups? When building awareness is part of your public involvement process, how will you know if people are better informed about the issues?

Evaluation tools such as surveys are used to set a performance baseline for measuring current and future improvements. Build your survey instruments and informal feedback opportunities so you will learn what works, what does not, and what to do to improve. Gather both qualitative and quantitative information.

Counting outputs such as how many brochures people take away from a meeting, how many people attended, or how many flyers you mailed is easy. Measuring outcomes is harder, but you will gather useful information that moves you to more effective processes and activities.

Plan Your Work Defining the Evaluation

- Set clear, measurable outcomes for the overall evaluation process and activities, share them with the participants, and use their ideas.
- Review past processes, activities, and evaluations to see what actions the Agency took as a result, noting lessons learned.
- Work to gain everyone's support for evaluating your process as it happens and once it is completed.
 - Recognize whose support you must have to make changes, and get their commitments to act on results.
 - Plan evaluations to match available staff time and budget.
 - Review EPA's public involvement feedback templates series, and if they meet your needs, use them and the related database to simplify your work.
 - Understand what activities you want to measure, when and how often (e.g., the effectiveness of a series of public meetings at three stages of the process).
 - Decide how you will gauge success throughout the process and for activities [e.g., 75% of respondents rated (a meeting) at 4.52 or higher on a six-point scale].
 - Decide how to share your findings and take action on them along the way and following the process.

Deciding What to Measure Will you/did you?

- Provide enough preliminary information.
- Engage traditionally under-served communities.
- Reach all the potentially affected people to give them an opportunity to participate.
- Learn why people participated or decided not to.
- Understand participants' satisfaction with aspects of the activity and process.
- Provide for equitable stakeholder participation.

"A well-supported evaluation plan will make it possible to (1) better understand if EPA is taking the necessary steps to work with the public; (2) better understand the quality of EPA's involvement processes; (3) allow for EPA to systematically and consistently learn and make improvement; and (4) be more accountable to the public."

Eric Marsh, EPA
2001 Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA's Decisions

- Identify and simplify public involvement techniques that produce more cost-effective decisions.
- Provide effective overall outreach efforts.
- Enable EPA to incorporate public values in its decision.
- Provide enough opportunity for participants to identify their issues and concerns.
- Build increased public capacity to take part in future environmental decision making.
- Create or increase trust in the Agency.
- Preclude misinformation and obstacles to EPA's decision making.
- Provide suitable time frames for participation.
- Help build new relationships and collaborative alliances between stakeholders.
- Reduce legal actions taken against a final proposal.
- Develop a decision more acceptable to all stakeholders.

Which Measurement Tools Will You Use?

- Telephone interviews
- Face-to-face interviews with opinion leaders or randomly chosen people
- Focus groups
- Mail surveys
- Comment cards
- E-mail or Internet-based surveys
- On-site surveys at events
- Informal discussion at the end of an activity
- Something unique to your process

Work Your Plan Implementing the Evaluation

- Develop any unique survey instruments to measure how well you are meeting stated goals.
- Clear your surveys through the Office of Management and Budget if necessary (if you expect that nine or more nonfederal people will respond).
- Ask participants to tell you what they think the goals/objectives of the public involvement activity are.
- Respondents may surprise you with ideas unrelated to the program's intent, with expressions of confusion or with other information that shows your outreach missed the group targeted, or just missed.
- Informally ask participants in involvement activities what went well and how to improve what did not, then fix things immediately (don't wait!), and ask again.
- Use the formal survey instruments—do the fieldwork.
- Compile and analyze responses after each evaluation.
- Improve survey questions and measures.
- Tell staff and managers what you learned.
- Tell respondents what you changed to show them how you used their ideas.
- Improve activities or process.
- Keep asking for opinions and continue using the information to improve.

Additional Resources:

Stakeholder Involvement & Public Participation at the U.S. EPA: Lessons Learned, Barriers, and Innovative Approaches, EPA Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation, January 2001. <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/pd./sipp.pdf>

Beierle, Thomas C. and Jerry Cayford. "Democracy in Practice: Public Participation in Environmental Decisions" Resources for the Future, Washington, DC, 2002. <http://www.rff.org/books/descriptions/democracyinpractice.htm>

"Program Evaluation System at the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution" U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, Tucson, AZ, January 2002. <http://www.ecr.gov/pdf/progeval.pdf>

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 Consult with and Involve the Public
How to Review and Use Public Input and Provide Feedback
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

