Session Five

Using Public Participation Techniques

1. Objectives drive the selection of techniques.

Public participation is more than public hearings, advisory groups, or open houses. A plethora of techniques is available when involving the public. All of the techniques have strengths and weaknesses; all are good for accomplishing some things but not others. Rather than taking a "cookie-cutter" approach, the people designing the public participation plan should be tailoring the plan, picking techniques suitable for:

- Accomplishing the objectives

- Meeting the publics' needs

- Meeting the decision-maker's needs

- Fitting within time and resource constraints

On my next project, I want to do a bridge. .. Of course, most of my projects are in the Sahara.

Selecting a technique prior to analyzing what is needed – by the public and for the project – wastes resources.

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Setting the Progression of Objectives

↘ **Revisit the project goals, decision statement and decision process.**

Verify that the decision statement reflects a shared vision of the problem or opportunity to be addressed by the project. Projects that proceed, without public acceptance that the problem exists as defined by the sponsor, typically encounter implementation obstacles. Continued dialogue and mutual education of both the public and the project team are recommended to reach a definition of the problem/opportunity that is shared prior to moving forward.

↘ **The Level of Participation selected defines the overall public participation objective to be achieved.**

↘ **However, each step of the decision process requires achievement of specific public participation objectives, as well.**

Objectives for the step to Develop Alternatives are different from those of the step to Evaluate Alternatives.

At the close of one decision step, it is most effective to define objectives for the next step. Setting objectives progressively permits the public involvement to be fresh and responsive to the project environment.

↘ **The involvement techniques selected must correspond to the objectives of each decision step. Additionally, techniques selected are expected to achieve results.**

For example, targeted open houses may be held to meet specific needs such as:
- An opportunity to discuss one or so issues of primary interest early in a project with members of the public most affected to enable mutual understanding; or
- Engagement of nontraditional stakeholders within their familiar environment; or
- Simultaneously holding open houses with different target groups over a large geographical area to gather information (followed by sharing of information between all groups).

General open houses are expected to bring a wide range of stakeholders and issues together to exchange information.

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DOT Project Goals

Improve highway traffic flow through Smallville

Joint DOT & Public Decision Statement

Improve highway traffic flow through Smallville while maintaining and/or enhancing town character, economic viability and safety.

Level of Participation

Collaborate

Decision Step 1
Identify Issues

The scope & issues to be addressed will be defined to accurately blend the community's perspective and the decision makers constraints & mission.

Decision Step 2
Gather information

The public & the project team will provide comprehensive information & data sufficient to identify and mutually understand needs, issues, concerns & desires of the broadest possible range of potentially involved individuals.

Decision Step 3
Establish Decision Criteria

The public will assist in the establishment of decision criteria which reflects the mutual needs & interests of the broadest possible range of potentially involved stakeholders - including the project team and DOT.

Decision Step 4
Develop Alternatives

The public will participate in the identification of potential site alternatives that meet the decision criteria.

Decision Step 5
Evaluate Alternatives

The public will provide input on the various alternatives developed and assist the project team further identify the benefits and challenges of each alternative.

Decision Step 6
Decision is Made

The public will be advised of how & why their input was or was not applied to the decision.

Techniques:
Mailing
Advertisement
Open House

Techniques:
Targeted Open Houses
Surveys
Inerviews
Contact lines

Techniques:
Workshop
Surveys
Ad/web reports
Targeted mailings

Techniques:
Technical Advisory Group
Web
Contact lines
Interviews

Techniques:
Targeted Open Houses
Surveys
Interviews
Contact lines

Techniques:
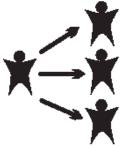Ad/web announcements
Tareted mailings

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2. Selection of Techniques to Meet Objectives

Techniques, like any tools, are effective at achieving some objectives but not others.

Generally, techniques can be divided into three (3) main formats. Within each format are multiple techniques from which to select. The formats are:

A. Share information

Via news releases,
fact sheets,
non-interactive Web site

B. Collect and compile input

Via comment summaries,
survey instruments,
responsiveness reports,
voting

C. Bring people together

Via open house,
Samoan Circle,
Chat room,
Ongoing small groups,
Stakeholder sessions.

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Listening Exercise

Directions

Pair up with someone that you do not know well.
Decide who will be the talker and who will be the listener.
> The Talker will bring up a problem they are having. Something comfortable t discuss such as a home repair issue or trying to select a new car. Your goal is to engage the Listener.
> The Listener will be given a card. DO NOT let your partner see the card! The card indicates the behavior you are to do during the conversation.

Spend 3 minutes.
Share back with the full group what happened.

IAP2 Toolbox

IAP2's Public Participation Toolbox provides an overview of a number of techniques for sharing information, bringing people together, and collecting data and feedback. Additional techniques are rapidly coming into the market of public involvement from research and technological advancements...

Toolbox provided via handout.

Individual Assignment

Directions

1. Look through IAP2's Toolbox.

2. Notice that the toolbox is organized by the three communication formats (upper right hand corner).

3. Notice for each technique, on the left, application considerations are listed.

4. Identify at least one technique you have used. How do the application considerations match-up with your experience?

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Highlight Techniques for Specific Challenges   Take notes!

Common Challenges:
- o **No one comes to meetings**

- o **Only opponents participate**

- o **Opposition gets involved at 11th hour**

- o **Individuals behave badly in meetings**

Additional Challenges Identified by participants:

_____

_____

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3. Effective Application of Two Common Techniques

A. A Sampling of Techniques

Share Information
What are effective alternatives to traditional techniques such as newspapers?

_____

_____

_____

Collect & Compile Input
Low controversy

_____

_____

_____

Higher controversy

_____

_____

_____

Bring People together

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B. Public Meetings

Depending upon a meeting's design, it can function within one or all three communication formats. For example, an expert panel is typically a means to share information. However, the meeting plan below crosses all communication formats and achieves several objectives by applying multiple techniques within one public event.
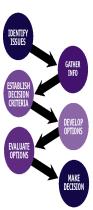
Example

Project Background: DOT believes widening an urban highway to 4-lanes will serve the mobility needs of the region. The local junior high school is adjacent to the existing roadway. One pedestrian crossing has traffic lights. In the past 3 years, multiple pedestrian/vehicle encounters have resulted in "close calls", minor to serious injuries, property damage to vehicles and two student deaths. Public concern is very high and emotionally charged.

Level of Participation Selected: Involve

Over all Participation Goal: The project team will work with the public to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. The project team will strive to build and maintain relationships and trust between all stakeholders.

Current Decision Process Step & Participation Objectives:

Decision Step	Objective for Decision Step	Technique Objectives
Gather Information	The public & the project team will provide comprehensive information & data sufficient to identify and mutually understand needs, issues, concerns & desires of the broadest possible range of	❧ Public emotions is recognized and given a forum. ❧ Public express their issues. ❧ Project team demonstrates understanding of issues. ❧ Project team shares opportunities and constraints within project to address issues. ❧ Role of the public in project is conveyed.

	potentially involved individuals.	❧ Needs for public to participate are identified. ❧ Stakeholder identification continues.
Leading into Develop Decision Criteria	The public will assist in the establishment of decision criteria which reflects the mutual needs & interests of the broadest possible range of potentially involved stakeholders - including the project team and DOT.	Public participates in a draft prioritization of issues. Public is advised the draft prioritization of issues will go through a technical review prior to finalization. Public is advised of how: a)the technical review will be communicated, b) the review will drive the development of decision criteria, and c) the role of the public in developing criteria.

Technique/s Selected: Public event with multiple techniques applied.   Nine (9) participation techniques are incorporated into the following one event.

Pre-event techniques	Event techniques		Post event techniques
	Full Participants	Drop-ins	
Paid news advertisement	Project & meeting handouts	Project & meeting handouts	Exit interviews
Mailings/invitations	Listening session	Comment forms/recordings	Comment forms/recordings
Open House displays for pre & post meeting review	Expert panel & Q/A		Follow-up news announcement
	Prioritizing workshop		Follow-up mailings

Meeting Agenda:
- ❧ Brief welcome and purpose of meeting
- ❧ Introduction of the facilitator
- ❧ Agenda review and ground rules setting
- ❧ Listening session (public talks – project team listens)
- ❧ Expert panel provide information and respond to issues raised in listening session
- ❧ Questions/Answers
- ❧ Prioritization Workshop – everyone present participates

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- ❧ **Next Steps**
- ❧ **Comment Forms and Exit Interviews**

Essential Planning Elements for a Public Meeting

Venue **– The meeting facility must match the needs of participants and meeting activities. Stakeholders need to be able to travel safely and in a timely manner to, as well as feel comfortable about, the location. Flexibility of facility space and amenities is a necessity to ensure that techniques can operate at their full potential.**

Displays **– Beautifully crafted, laminated displays give the impression that decisions have been made and public input is moot. Displays that appear to be works in process encourage dialogue.**

Greeters **– A team of trained individuals that greet and welcome participants and connect them with staff that can discuss issues of interest increase the personal connection of the project to the public attendees.**

Facilitator **– It is very unproductive to have staff with technical and/or project management responsibilities to facilitate public meetings. The roles are competitive. Technical or project management staff that try to also facilitate will be unable to provide 100% performance to both roles. Additionally, facilitation requires advance training to manage group dynamics.   Lastly, the public recognizes the primary role of technical and project management staff and tend to suspect manipulation.**

Technique Experience **– It is recommended, the meting facilitator be experienced in the techniques to be incorporated into the meeting. Learning on the project's time and at the expense of the public is not appropriate.**

Preparation of Roles **– The project team needs to understand and be prepared to staff the meeting. They need to understand their role in meeting the objectives and how to assist participants.**

Preparation of Materials and Equipment **– Prepare ahead. Plan contingencies for equipment problems.**

Signs **– Large signs calling attention to the sign-in table, handouts, comment form collection and information stations is recommended. Ideally, any participant that**

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walks into the room should be able to understand the purpose of the meeting and the location of information.

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C. Advisory Groups

Advisory Groups are commonly used. However, the technique is frequently abused much to the frustration of both sponsors and participants.

Advisory Groups can be used at every level on the Spectrum. For example:
- Inform – Advisory group offers recommendations as to how and whom to inform.

- Consult – Advisory group offers input and reaction to project work.

- Involve – Advisory group and project team participate in exchange of information.

- Collaborate – Advisory group and project staff work together to meet project goals.

- Empower – A group which may include representation from the project team, recommendations the alternative or decision to final decision maker. Group is no longer titled advisory.

Potential functions of advisory groups include the following:

- Advise, recommend or decide on issues and/or decisions

- Serve as a sounding board to the DOT

- Develop a specific product/plan of action

- Implement or supervise the implementation of a plan or action

- Reflect the concerns and issues of various stakeholders groups and the general public

- Promote and sponsor public participation within the community

- Serve as an important communication link to the community

- Provide input into the development, execution and evaluation of the public participation plan

- Comment on reports, products and policies.

Essential Components for Ongoing Advisory Group Effectiveness

Five key components combine to ensure advisory groups operate effectively and delivery their assignment. These components are:

1. Mission & Boundaries
2. Term
3. Membership
4. Roles & responsibilities
5. Operations
6. Documentation
7. Evaluation, Closing and Future Opportunities

1. Mission and Boundaries

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A well defined and clearly articulated statement of purpose is essential. Group members need to have thorough understanding of the expectations assigned. It is equally essential that members maintain awareness
of the limits of their assignment and authority, as well as constraints that affect the group and its work.

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2. **Term**

Setting a specific timeframe or term of operation for the group is useful for all concerned. Group members understand that their commitment and license to serve has a term limit. The sponsoring agency retains the opportunity to re-establish an advisory committee and change membership on a schedule. This flexibility tends to improve efficiency of the advisory group and provide freshness to advisory group mission and membership over time.

3. **Membership**

Members may be recruited from one targeted stakeholder group or represent a broader spectrum of interests, geography, demographics or affiliations.

Instituting a uniform membership process adds credibility and builds trust. It is recommended the process include:

- An application for membership including references
- Selection based upon predetermined criteria to ensure broad representation of interests, demographics, etc.
- Appointment, by the highest ranking agency official possible.
- Obtaining a signed letter of agreement outlining expectations for service.

Prior to the kick-off of the group, procedures for replacing or removing non-active members needs to be defined. A policy regarding substitution attendance is also useful.

4. **Roles & responsibilities**

Clearly articulated roles and responsibilities – provided in a member notebook – assists members understand expectations. Expectations may include:

- Communication with constituents
- Relationship to media
- Homework and effort required outside of meeting times
- Outcomes including products or the scope of recommendations assigned.

Roles within the group require definition, as well. If a chair or co-chairs will be used, how they will be selected and what responsibilities they will have need to be defined. The facilitator's role may be defined, too.

5. **Operations**

Operational information needs to be understood by the group members including the following:

- Size of the group
- Composition of the group
- Leadership
- Facilitation
- Meeting frequency, duration and location

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- ❧ **Attendance and substitution policy**
- ❧ **Decision making process**
- ❧ **Ground rules**

6. **Documentation**
   Groups that participate in the creation and/or definition of the essential components that govern their group tend to become significantly vested in the success of the group. Consequently, developing a group charter that documents the essential components and requires members to sign-off their willingness to participate raises individual member commitment.

   Guidelines for recording, storing and distributing minutes and other documents are required.

   If a report or recommendation is anticipated from the group, it may be useful to provide a template and/or
   outline of the topics to be included.

   Upon conclusion of the groups term, all members should be presented a certificate of participation and a personal thank you from the DOT official that appointed them.

7. **Evaluation, Closing and Future Opportunities**
   Group members should periodically participate in a review of how the group is meting expectations. Additionally, a final written evaluation by participants is useful to gage the effectiveness of the technique.

   An official closing event is recommended. A closing:
   Celebrates accomplishment
   Thanks participants
   Transfer the product or recommendation of the group to the DOT
   Conveys to the general public the value of the members' efforts.

   Frequently, members of highly effective advisory groups become very interested in continuing to serve their community by applying the content and process learned.   Providing outgoing members information on future opportunities to channel their interests is appreciated. DOT can take pride in developing members as community resources and leaving a legacy of active participation.