Engaging Citizens in Decision Making Processes

Pat Bonner/Leanne Nurse

SIG Workshop 2007

May 2007

bonner.patricia@epa.gov   202-566-2204

nurse.leanne@epa.gov   202-566-2207

Benefits of Public/Community Involvement

- Can produce more creative, technically superior options/ outcomes

- Transparent decision-making processes viewed as more fair

- Improves the amount and quality of information

- Fosters better relationships (trust) among parties

- Provides chance to address misunderstandings and "vent"

- Parties more committed to decisions in which they participate

- Encourages mutual learning

- Can reduce litigation and adversarial behavior

- Provides "practicality check" to agency and other parties

EPA's Seven Basic Steps for Effective Public Involvement

- Plan and budget for public involvement activities
- Identify the interested and affected public
- Consider providing technical/ financial assistance to facilitate involvement
- Provide information and outreach
- Conduct public consultation and involvement activities
- Review and use input and provide feedback to the public
- Evaluate public involvement activities

Key Best Practices:

- Treat community/public involvement as a process, not an event!

- Start EARLY! Help people plan -- they have lives too!

- Conduct an Assessment

- "Fit the Forum to the Fuss" – Design EACH process

- Go beyond "the usual suspects"

- Make your purpose CLEAR

- Obtain the right type of skilled help

- Follow through on commitments

Community/Public Involvement Assessment

Internal Screening (inside agency)

External Assessment (with community people)

Work with the agency team to identify the goals, outcomes, issues, resources, timelines and commitment to various types of processes

Talk with people in the community to determine their willingness, issues, schedules, resources, relationships and preferences as to types of processes

Situation Assessment Questions

Four basic types of questions you should ask internally and externally:

- What's Up?
- So What?
- Who Cares?
- What's Next?

The short list of questions following in each category will help you think through what you may need to do a good job of involving stakeholders.

Situation Assessment Questions

What's Up?

- What are the issues; how do the potential participants see them?
- What are their underlying needs, interests and values?
- What's the past history on the issue?
- How well informed are potential participants on the issue?
- What are the relationships among the potential participants

Situation Assessment Questions

So What?

- What are the likely outcomes if the issue is not resolved?
- What are the potential environmental, economic, social and political outcomes desired?

Situation Assessment Questions

Who Cares?

- Who are the recognized potential participants?
- Who's missing from the list who might/should be involved?
- Whose support or opposition is crucial to any process to resolve the issue?

Situation Assessment Questions

What's Next?

- What decision and process options exist?
- Is additional information on the issue needed?
- What can be done to interest those impacted but not yet involved?
- What are realistic objectives for a resolution or decision process?
- What processes can enable potential participants to develop and discuss additional creative options?
- Is outside help needed to implement the process?

What You Risk Without Doing an Assessment

- Leaving out key participants
- Not addressing the appropriate issues
- Framing the issues in ways that will keep community people from coming to the table
- Proceeding without sufficient internal and external commitment to implementation
- Not having enough time or resources to complete the process
- Proceeding with an inappropriate involvement process design – losing community support for process

What if there is a Disagreement?

- Sometimes a Situation Assessment identifies disagreements or differences of opinions about:
  - Data
  - Policy issues
  - Plans
  - Schedules
  - Underlying assumptions
  - Goals and outcomes

  What are some options for proceeding?

Advantages of Facilitation

- One way of handling disagreements and differences may be to invite a facilitator to assist the process. Professional skills to the process to overcome impasses, handle differences
  - Organize and manage the process
  - Allow parties to advocate for their own interests
  - Focus on agreement and closure
- Facilitators can be internal or from outside as long as they have the time to prepare with you and can be neutral during discussions.

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (CPRC) Services (202-564-2922)

- Stakeholder Assessments & Process Design
- Facilitation of Stakeholder Processes
- Obtaining Outside Facilitators
- Policy/Guidance/Information
- Evaluation of Stakeholder Processes
- Training in Stakeholder Involvement
- Access to EPA Contract

CPRC Contract Services

- Can be accessed by HQ and Regions
- Offers full range of facilitation, mediation and training services
- Provides contractors nationwide (roster of providers @ US IECR (www.ecr.gov)
- Task orders funded by requestor of services

Spectrum of Decision-Making and Public Participation Processes

| Decision by Vested Authority Alone | Decision with Minimal Input for Informed Consent | Decision with Repeated Opportunities to Provide Substantive Input | Decision Based on Recommended Policy from Stakeholder Negotiations | Stakeholder Decision Making |

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Less Public Involvement → More Public Involvement

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION METHODS

| No Public Input | Public Hearing(s) for Comment on Proposed Action or Policy | Series of Public Involvement Events with Targeted Groups and/or General Public | Direct Negotiations among Key Stakeholder Groups | Stakeholder Negotiations Leading to Implement-table Decision |

Consultative Processes EPA Uses

Information Exchange	Recommendations	Agreements
Provide and exchange data, opinions & options	Provide non-binding, but influential advice or recommendations	Reach implementab agreement or settlement
• Meetings with individual interested parties • Public hearings • Public meetings • Focus groups • Citizen Advisory Groups • Workshops and Roundtable discussions • Listening sessions • Facility tours, web-based dialogues and tele or video conferences	• Advisory Committees • Scoping sessions • Policy Dialogues • Technical workshops • Joint fact-finding processes on scientific, technical, or other data • Task Forces • Blue Ribbon Committees • Citizen Advisory Boards	• Negotiated Rulemaking • Consensus permits • Settlement - litigation or enforcement actions • Memorandum of Understanding • Statement of Principles (SOP) • Allocations of Liabilit or Costs

EPA's Tools for Public/ Community Involvement

- Internet site http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement
- Public Involvement Policy Guidelines http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/guidance.pdf
- Public Involvement Resources and Training (PIRT) database http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/pirtdatabase
- OMB-Approved Feedback Questionnaires http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/feedback
- Evaluation Tool Box http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/toolbox/index.htm
- Internet-based dialogues http://www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip/
- How To Brochures http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/brochures
- Collaboration Tools and Services Fact Sheet http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/involvework.htm#othertools
- Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center http://www.epa.gov/adr
- Superfund Community Involvement Toolkit http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/index.htm