

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Assessing EPA's Community Advisory Groups Background Information for EPA Staff

Introduction

Enclosed are four questionnaires for EPA staff to use in generating feedback on the effectiveness of EPA-supported (and other) community advisory groups (CAGs). The questionnaires are a component of the evaluation section in the *Framework for Implementing EPA's Public Involvement Policy*. The questionnaires are for people who regularly attend CAG meetings and for EPA staff responsible for coordinating the work of a CAG. The **first and second questionnaires** (one for CAG participants and one for EPA/contractor staff) focus on the effectiveness of specific CAG meetings. The **third questionnaire**, which should be administered once or twice a year as needed, deals with CAG participant perspectives on the CAG's success. The **fourth questionnaire**, which should be administered once or twice a year as needed, deals with Agency/contractor perspectives on the CAG's success.

What is a community advisory group?

A CAG is made up of diverse representatives from a community. Its purpose is to provide a public forum for discussing the interests and concerns the community has about some project or set of actions. CAG members meet on a regular basis to learn about project plans and activities and to offer ideas and suggestions to the project sponsor. A CAG may be self-facilitated or use an outside professional. It is not EPA sponsored and it is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act procedures.

How can the CAG questionnaires be useful to you?

Use of the questionnaires should make the process of gathering feedback for your public involvement activity easier for you to implement directly, without spending contract dollars. These questionnaires provide an easy way to get useful feedback from participants about their CAG experience. This feedback should help you to better understand whether a particular CAG is working out well, whether you are missing opportunities for improvement, or whether you need to address certain problems. Once you have summarized the data, Agency staff can assess whether they met goals, make modifications, and compare progress over time.

When should I use the questionnaires?

You can use the **first and second questionnaires** after every meeting or every couple of meetings. Use the **third and fourth questionnaires** once or twice a year, depending on the level of activity of the CAG. The questionnaires may also be helpful in situations where a particular problem hinders the successful working of the group. It is ultimately up to you, however, to decide when to use them. The key is to use the questionnaires to the extent that they provide you with valuable information and improve your ability to design and implement more effective listening sessions in the future.

Are the questionnaires in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act?

Yes.. The *questionnaires* were cleared with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under ICR #2151.01, OMB Control No: 2010-0039. This clearance will allow EPA to collect information (via the questionnaires) from more than nine non-federal entities.

Who designed these questionnaires?

The Evaluation Task Group of EPA's Public Involvement Workgroup designed these questionnaires after consulting with EPA staff who are regularly involved in working with Community Advisory Groups.

What should I do when preparing to administer a questionnaire?

See "Checklist for Administering the Questionnaire."

What do I do with the questionnaire data once the forms are returned?

As soon as you can, record and tabulate the responses you receive to each question on each survey in a format that works for you. Include the date, location, total number of respondents and which survey you used on the form. After each use of the same survey, check the past results so you can track improvement in the respondents' ratings.

On an annual basis, EPA must report use of the surveys to the Office of Management and Budget. Just before Thanksgiving, send a summary of your use of all the surveys to: bonner.patricia@epa.gov. Please note all the surveys used, the number of times you administered each, and the total number of respondents to each survey. If you have seen improved ratings, add a note about what you changed and what difference it made in not only the rating, but the activity itself. That way we will be able to track the use of the questionnaires, and learn from you what is and is not working well, and gauge whether and how the questionnaires are useful to your efforts to improve public involvement activities. If you have suggestions for additional surveys or changes to existing surveys, send those along too.

When it becomes available, you may collect, collate and analyze the data from the respondent forms using a pre-formatted Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet program. In addition, the spreadsheet program will allow you to summarize data over a period of time, making it easy to generate annual summary reports for your management. More information on how to use the program is available in the "Checklist for Administering the Questionnaire and Using Results" and within the Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet program.

How can I use the results?

The completed questionnaires should provide you with information that can help you design improvements to activities and to your overall involvement process. You can learn what worked well, what participants feel is important and what should change to better accommodate their needs. It will be up to you to decide how much data you need to prompt changes. While it is prudent to be cautious about making changes based upon a small amount of feedback data, you may find a number of the respondents' ideas useful. If you can act on their suggestions, even in a small way, participants will appreciate that you listened.

How should I communicate the results?

Use the performance and summary reports from the Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet program to talk with managers, staff, and CAG members about the effectiveness of CAG meetings and CAGs overall and where changes may be necessary. Communicate overall results to CAG participants in the CAG performance report or other follow-up materials distributed to CAG participants. A few brief sentences describing overall what participants thought of the CAG, their suggestions for improvement, and what might be considered to improve the CAG process would let participants know that you valued their input.

What is EPA's Public Involvement Policy and where can I get more information?

EPA's 2003 Public Involvement Policy underscores EPA's commitment to improving its practices and is based on seven steps for effective public involvement:

1. Plan and budget for public involvement activities
2. Identify the interested and affected public
3. Consider providing technical or financial assistance to the public to facilitate involvement
4. Provide information and outreach to the public

5. Conduct public consultation and involvement activities
6. Review and use input, and provide feedback to the public
7. Evaluate public involvement activities

The *Framework for Implementing EPA's Public Involvement Policy* urges development of tools to improve public involvement information sharing, training and evaluation at EPA. This questionnaire and the database program are examples of such tools. Cross-agency work groups developed the Policy and Framework using public comments and ideas gathered through a two-week, Internet-based Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions. Copies of the Policy and *Framework* are available @ <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/public/index.htm>.