

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Assessing EPA's Federal Advisory Committee Act Committees Background Information for EPA Staff

Introduction

Enclosed are five questionnaires for EPA staff to use in generating feedback on the effectiveness of EPA-supported Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) Committees, and the effectiveness of any FACA process. 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 FACA meetings and for EPA staff and contractors who facilitate and/or participate in the FACA process over a period of time. The **first and second questionnaires** (one for FACA participants and one for EPA staff/contractor) focus on the effectiveness of specific FACA meetings. The **third and fourth questionnaires** (one for FACA participants and one for EPA staff/contractor), which should be administered once or twice a year as needed, focus on FACA participant and EPA/contractor perspectives on the FACA's success. The **fifth questionnaire**, which should be administered once or twice a year as needed, focuses on the perspectives of the FACA EPA Designated Federal Official (DFO) regarding the effectiveness of FACA committee outputs for EPA purposes.

What is a FACA Committee?

When EPA seeks advice or recommendations from a group that includes one or more individuals who are not federal government employees, the Agency should determine whether the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. App. 2, applies. EPA staff should consult with the Office of General Counsel or the Office of Regional Counsel to make that determination. FACA requires, among other things, that such groups be chartered, have a balanced membership, hold open meetings and make written materials available to the public. EPA staff should contact the Committee Management Officer in the Office of Cooperative Environmental Management for advice on complying with the FACA requirements. The primary function of a FACA committee is to provide advice and recommendations to federal officials. FACA committees also can provide a forum for addressing issues, promoting constructive dialogue among the various interests represented on the group, and enhancing community understanding of the Agency's action. EPA FACA committees address a wide variety of scientific, technical and policy issues.

How can the FACA 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 should help Agency staff better understand what worked well and what improvements they can make prior to conducting future FACA meetings or staffing another FACA process. Specifically, the questionnaires can help EPA staff understand participant perspectives regarding pre-session preparation, clarity of objectives, facilitator effectiveness, EPA support, and value of participation. Once summarized, Agency staff can use the data to assess if goals were met, make modifications if necessary, and compare progress over time. This feedback should help you to better understand whether a particular FACA committee 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** (one for participants and one for EPA staff/contractor) after every meeting or every couple of meetings. Use the **third and fourth questionnaires** (one for participants and one for the EPA FACA DFO) once or twice a year,

depending on the level of activity of the FACA. Use the ***fifth questionnaire*** to gain perspective on the effectiveness of various FACA committee outputs. The questionnaires may also be helpful in situations where a particular problem hinders the successful working of the group. They may be especially useful when EPA seeks advice from a FACA that needs particularly effective support to get quickly and develop findings. 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 FACA committee processes in the future.

Are the questionnaires in compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act?

Yes. The ***questionnaires one through four*** 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. The ***fifth questionnaire*** does not need OMB approval (since it is designed for federal entities), and is ready for use.

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 FACA committees.

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. Aggregated data should help

you better understand what worked well and what improvements can be made prior to conducting future FACA meetings or staffing another FACA 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, your 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 FACA members about the effectiveness of FACA meetings and FACAs overall and where changes may be necessary. Communicate overall results to FACA participants in the FACA performance report or other follow-up materials distributed to FACA participants. A few brief sentences describing overall what participants thought of the FACA, their suggestions for improvement, and what might be considered to improve the FACA 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>.