

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

A publication of the United States Environmental Protection Agency
EPA'S PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT NETWORK NEWS



"Public Involvement brings the pieces together"

Fall 2005

Welcome! We are pleased to present the second issue of "Public Involvement Network News" – an electronic publication of EPA's National Center for Environmental Innovation, designed for public involvement practitioners within and outside EPA.

We want Network News to help you carry out your vital work as effectively as possible, so please tell us what kinds of articles and information would make Network News valuable for you. We also want this to be a forum where practitioners can share their experience and knowledge with each other. Please send us your ideas on what you can share, or what you would like to learn from others – or better yet, just send a draft article to bonner.patricia@epa.gov.

In This Issue:

- ▶ **Community Involvement Conference** – See what happens when almost 300 enthusiastic public and community involvement leaders have time to really get down to business and learn from each other?
- ▶ **White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation** – Requested by President Bush and jointly sponsored and organized by the Departments of Defense, Commerce, Agriculture, Interior, the CEQ, and EPA. The White House Conference's purpose was to strengthen conservation partnerships between the federal government and states, tribes, and local communities and to promote citizen stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- ▶ **Public Involvement Activities in Virginia** – In 2004, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) launched an ambitious initiative: to improve how the agency communicates with the public and to strengthen how the public participates in the agency's significant environmental actions.
- ▶ **National Conference on Citizenship** - For the first time in its 52-year history, the National Conference on Citizenship took a leap into the future of public involvement technology and used its unique 21st Century Town Meeting process to help more than 300 attendees look at ways to strengthen the Public Involvement process in their communities.

In addition, we preview four upcoming events: the Community Based Collaborative Research Consortium (US) National Conference, the First Canadian Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation, the 2005 International Association for Public Participation Conference, and the Third Annual National Partnership Summit.

What's New

Want to liven up your public involvement activities? Check out the extensive Tools and Techniques Links on EPA's Public Involvement web page at <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement>

Featured Upcoming Events

Community Based Collaborative Research Consortium National Conference

[<http://www.cbrc.org/2005%20National%20Workshop.htm>]

Researchers, community collaborative groups, agencies, facilitators and environmental groups will gather Nov. 17-19, 2005 in Sedona, Arizona for the Consortium's National Conference. The conference will showcase and evaluate current research funded and conducted by Consortium partners on the environmental outcomes and effectiveness of community-based collaborative processes. The conference will have a major focus on applying knowledge from both research and field-based experience about collaboration for environmental protection. This is the only conference where researchers, community groups, agencies and process coordinators and facilitators can meet each other and share new research along with practical knowledge. Find the conference brochure @ http://www.cbrc.org/2005%20Conference%20Links/2005CBCRC_4fold_Brochure.pdf

Canadian Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation

[<https://www.confmanager.com/main.cfm?cid=187&nid=2369>]

The first Canadian Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (C2D2) will be held at the Congress Center in Ottawa, October 27 – 30, 2005. Thursday, October 27 is a dedicated pre-conference training day. Half day and full day workshops will offer a broad spectrum of high quality, intensive skills building sessions for both in-person and on-line dialogue and deliberation. (Fees, not including tax, are \$150 for half and \$250 for full day trainings.)

The conference programs features a rich variety of 50 learning opportunities for participants - four community plenaries, six community conversations, plus breakout sessions, poster sessions, and 'tool jams.' Plenaries will model large scale dialogue and deliberation practices. "Dialogue and Deli", on the evening of October 27, will feature the World Café technique. Plenaries on the following three days will employ other approaches such as "Circle of Inquiry", "Open Space Technology" and "Playback Theatre" and will address such themes as: "The Hope and Promise of Dialogue and Deliberation", "Insights from the Front lines", and "Sustaining and Institutionalizing Dialogue and Deliberation in Public Spaces and Political Institutions." In addition, six "community conversations" will focus on a variety of issues including dialogue in a changing world, dialogue in the city, renewing democracy, equipping citizens for the 21st century, power and exclusion, and technology as an enabler of dialogue.

2005 International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Conference

[<http://www.iap2.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=49&convnabr=2129>]

IAP2 is going on this week in Portland, Oregon (October 14 - 19). The conference, "Motivate! Participate!," will highlight the following areas:

- Shaping the Future - energizing public participation in community decisions

- Calm Through the Storm - engaging communities in emergency communications plans and ongoing community solutions
- Diversity and Empowerment - reaching out and connecting underrepresented community members
- Bringing the Big Picture Home - overcoming local challenges to projects that benefit a larger group (regional, national, and international)
- Have You Tried This? - wild and successful methods of involving people in constructive dialogue
- New Ideas in Research - In response to members' interest in more enhanced learning opportunities, this year's conference includes presentations and dialogues with researchers and academics in the field of public participation. These sessions should bring new ideas in research to practitioners, and share information about practitioners' experiences in applying new theories and techniques in the field. By bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners, IAP2 hopes to enhance attendees' learning experience at the conference and to provide researchers with relevant and timely questions for further study.

National Environmental Partnership Summit 2006

[\[http://www.environmentalsummit.org\]](http://www.environmentalsummit.org)

The 2006 Summit, to be held May 8 -11 in Atlanta, will explore the theme of environmental stewardship. Together Summit attendees will share their questions, answers and experiences with stewardship. The continuous threads that will unite all discussions will be the practice of collaboration and partnership and the values of leadership, innovation, responsibility, measurability, continuous improvement, and sustainability.

The Summit is a merger of the National Pollution Prevention Roundtable Spring Conference, the National Compliance Assistance Providers Forum, and the Performance Track Participants Association annual meeting. This meeting is for all who want to become better stewards of the environment while also helping our homes, workplaces and clients become better stewards: individuals or representatives of small, medium or large businesses or industries, local, state or federal government agencies, federal facilities, non-profits or community based organizations, and educational institutions.

Sponsors invite individuals, companies, geographic communities and communities of interest, governmental and non-governmental organizations with experience and expertise in pollution prevention, compliance assistance, superior environmental performance and sustainability to propose workshops, breakout panels, work sessions and dialogues to get involved. Submit a proposal to host a mini-workshop or educational game, facilitate a needed dialogue, present a paper or organize a work meeting. Proposals are due by November 18, 2005. See the Call for Content Proposals @ [\[http://www.environmentalsummit.org/CallBackground.cfm\]](http://www.environmentalsummit.org/CallBackground.cfm)

Let's Talk....Questions, Tips and Stories

This is your section of the newsletter. Do you need public involvement advice? Do you have questions about process design, evaluation or techniques? Do you have a great tip on process or technique you'd like to share with the PI Network? Do you have a success story or a lesson learned to share?

Send your contributions to GroupStakeholders@EPA with the Subject line: For Network News. To be dropped from the mailing list, write to bonner.patricia@epa.gov

Featured Articles

Community Involvement Conference

Leanne Nurse, NCEI

Collaborative Governance: Can You Hear Me Now?

Feedback from the Closing Plenary of the 2005 Community Involvement Training and Conference

What happens when almost 300 enthusiastic public and community involvement leaders have time to really get down to business and learn from each other? They affirm both their own community involvement experiences and the principles of effective involvement. They also give EPA a chance to consider suggestions about how to do things better.

Attendees at the June 15 closing plenary of EPA's 2005 Community Involvement Training and Conference in Buffalo, NY found common ground, frequently citing similar elements of best practice. They took part in three guided conversations about what makes community involvement work best.

Their responses followed a slide show on collaborative governance by Langdon Marsh (Portland State University), an update on EPA's collaborative problem-solving initiative by Betsy Shaw (EPA National Center for Environmental Innovation) and a videotaped greeting from EPA Administrator, Steve Johnson.

After closely reviewing the detailed replies, EPA is posting them on the conference web site. Senior managers who make up EPA's Human Resources Council and the Collaborative Problem Solving steering committee will also review the feedback from these unique conversations.

Conversation #1

- **Is this new to you?**
- **Is this relevant/helpful to you?**
- **Is this realistic for you?**

Volunteer respondents agreed that much of the collaborative governance material was not new, but may have been presented with different framing or syntax. Others said that considering broader elements of collaborative governance was helpful. Several questioned how realistic it would be to use some of this material in their real life projects.

Conversations #2 and #3 took place in small groups at ballroom tables, usually 4-6 people per table. Groups self-selected their recorders and reporters.

Conversation #2

Please list up to ten factors which, in your collective experience, most contribute to successful collaboration. Responses to this question converged in several areas:

- Clear communication, especially intent and expectations
- Finding common ground and providing clear processes for this to emerge
- Engaging the “right” people; community, staff, consultants
- Respecting differences, being transparent, building trust
- Adaptive management; use methods that work, even if they’re different
- Use existing community resources, increase community capacity
- Walk the talk; use what you know in and outside your organization
- Get tangible results; evaluate your work, use the lessons learned

Conversation #3

Please briefly describe up to six of the most interesting/useful ideas you discussed for promoting collaboration and practicing it in innovative ways. These answers were similarly related:

- Increase team capacity, train teams together; use interns academics
- Make a clear commitment to action
- Combine government resources/services to save time, money
- Use third-party (faith-based, civic) groups to support decision processes
- Increase the budgets of popular grant programs (Technical Assistance Grant [TAG], Technical Outreach Service to Communities [TOSC]) for sustained success
- Fit the forum to the fuss; bring meetings, staff to the local community
- Celebrate success; find incentives to encourage participation; pay people

White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation

Bruce Engelbert, OSWER

The White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation was held in St. Louis, the last week in August. President Bush had asked the Departments of Defense, Commerce, Agriculture and Interior and CEQ and EPA to jointly sponsor and organize this event. Its purpose was to strengthen conservation partnerships between the federal government and states, tribes, and local communities and to promote citizen stewardship of natural and cultural resources. Over one thousand people participated. The first day was devoted to presentations from a wide variety of projects that showcased multi-party partnership and collaboration. The second day consisted of a number of facilitated dialogue sessions to generate ideas for encouraging more and stronger cooperation.

A speech by the Secretary of Defense (he said all the right things about the importance of military bases being good environmental citizens) was followed later in the afternoon by a speech from Chuck Leavell, who has played keyboard for the last 20 years with the Rolling Stones. Leavell, jetting in from the previous evening's Stones concert in Ottawa, gave an entertaining and inspiring address on his experiences with forest management (when not on tour with the Stones, he manages his timber farm in Georgia). The most passionate speech was from Ward Burton, the winner of the 2004 Daytona 500. He talked about his life growing up in the Virginia woods and how, what he calls, nature deficit disorder is insidiously undermining not only conservation efforts, but the long term health of this country and its people.

EPA Administrator Steve Johnson participated in the conference all three days as did Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. She announced that the administration would soon be requesting legislation to support cooperative conservation projects. However, she provided no details about what might be included in such a proposal. Every speechmaker at the conference professed an allegiance to the importance of greater coordination and collaboration. Yet it was clear from the summary of the dialogue sessions, provided on the final day, that complete agreement on what cooperative conservation really means or how to nurture it remains somewhat elusive. Some of the key themes presented during the wrap-up session:

- Collaborative work will not reduce resource needs -- it will probably increase them.
- Must support evaluation of whether cooperative efforts really result in better environmental outcomes.
- Must transform federal organizational culture.
- Better resolve the tension between the desirability of predictability/uniformity in dealing with environmental problems and the flexibility needed for innovative cooperation.

This conference was an interesting and rich consideration of what goes into cooperative conservation. It was also a recognition of the considerable achievements of various successful partnerships. However, whether it will usher in a renewed national commitment to resource stewardship and environmental protection, as Larry Schweiger, President of the National Wildlife Federation suggested, remains to be seen.

The conference organizers intend to put proceedings from the conference on the web site: <http://www.conservation.ceq.gov>

Building Community Involvement in Virginia

Bill Hayden, Public Affairs Director, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

In 2004, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) launched an ambitious initiative: to improve how the agency communicates with the public and to strengthen how the public participates in the agency's significant environmental actions.

This "community involvement initiative" began in response to DEQ's recognition that communication with many of the main conservation organizations in Virginia was no longer effective. In some cases, there was no communication at all. This resulted from many years of DEQ's following basic procedural requirements on such issues as environmental permits and regulations. Several organizations believed that such procedures did not provide adequate opportunity to gather and address public input.

DEQ had long believed that by following the rules and adhering to public participation requirements, public concerns were receiving appropriate attention. As communication deteriorated to a rocky low, however, DEQ determined that something needed to change.

The first step was to put together a task force of individuals representing conservation organizations and key DEQ staff members. Initially, the task force was intended to improve communication between the groups and DEQ, but it was quickly evident that

DEQ could do much more. Under the leadership of DEQ Director Robert G. Burnley, the Community Involvement Task Force listed several dozen actions DEQ could take – many immediately – to help reach the goal of involving the public more meaningfully in important environmental decisions. These steps ranged from improving the way information is presented and retrieved on the agency web site, to simplifying the language used with lay audiences, to making a few extra calls to determine who is interested in a particular decision.

The first task force meetings focused necessarily on building trust. Through a series of candid discussions, led by a neutral facilitator, members of the task force found that strengthening their trust of each other could become a foundation for making significant improvements. The DEQ and conservation members of the task force also recognized that what was really at stake went far beyond basic communication between two sides on important issues. Burnley set building community involvement as a top priority goal for DEQ and the public to achieve as partners.

The task force met at least once a month for six months in 2004, and then agreed to meet about twice a year. In addition to the list of communication improvements that DEQ implemented, the task force suggested a series of community meetings sponsored by the DEQ staffs in each of the agency's seven Virginia regions. These "open house" meetings, held in the fall of 2004, were designed to give individuals and organizations that had not developed a relationship with DEQ an opportunity to learn more about the agency and how the public can become involved in environmental decision making.

DEQ sent hundreds of invitations to dozens of community, environmental, civic, religious, academic and government organizations from across Virginia. More than 350 people attended the meetings. For most of the DEQ staff, this was a first: The agency opened its doors to anyone who wanted to stop by, discuss their environmental concerns and learn what roles they can play in protecting the environment.

During the year that followed these meetings, DEQ maintained its contact with Virginia's communities. Smaller follow-up meetings were held to address locality-specific environmental issues, and new stakeholders were identified to participate in ongoing discussions with DEQ. In 2005, DEQ held similar community meetings to expand on many of the ideas raised at the previous meetings. In addition, each regional staff put together its own community involvement plan to outline the steps it will take each year to foster community awareness and participation.

Another product of the Community Involvement Task Force's work was the development of a community involvement policy for DEQ. Burnley had asked the group to propose a policy to him, and he accepted that proposal in December 2004.

The DEQ community involvement policy now provides the philosophical framework for the agency's efforts to communicate more effectively and to bring concerned citizens into the decision-making process. DEQ's policy highlights these four actions:

- Involve the public early in significant environmental actions, such as major permits.
- Establish a strong relationship with environmental and community organizations.
- Develop active participation in consensus building on significant environmental issues.
- Communicate clearly with the public.

Perhaps the key to this policy is DEQ's dedication to bringing people into the process much earlier than in the past. Armed with more diverse points of view, DEQ is certain that its environmental decisions will be stronger and will protect the environment better.

Results came quickly, in 2005 DEQ has held several neighborhood meetings in advance of required regulatory hearings. This has enabled community members to learn about a project or permit early, have their questions answered and their concerns addressed. By the time the hearings took place, the community had few questions and expressed satisfaction with the actions DEQ was taking – actions in which the community participated.

DEQ also expects notable improvement in areas such as sustaining the confidence of the community; a reduction in tensions when disagreements arise; and more productive two-way communication.

To date, DEQ has not incurred significant costs with this initiative. The agency is focusing on doing its job differently, rather than on doing more things on top of its regular job. This means, for example, identifying who in the community might be interested in a permit application and giving those people an opportunity to review and discuss it before the permit is drafted. This generally takes less time than cataloguing the complaints of angry citizens after a permit is proposed and determining how to address those complaints. Other examples, or "best practices," are being developed for the staff to use, depending on individual job responsibilities.

People expect government to work for them. DEQ takes this expectation seriously and has identified concrete, effective ways to meet it. With an enthusiastic response from the public, DEQ is making community involvement practices a normal part of everyday business.

DEQ has placed much of the information about the community involvement initiative in documents and photographs on its web site. For more information visit www.deq.virginia.gov/community.

Conferees Speak Up to Foster Better Civic Engagement

Leanne Nurse, NCEI

21st Century Town Meeting Culls Future Strategies at National Conference on Citizenship

For the first time in its 52-year history, the National Conference on Citizenship took a leap into the future of public involvement technology. On September 19 in Washington, DC, America Speaks used its unique 21st Century Town Meeting process to help more than 300 attendees at NCoC's 2005 meeting consider the following questions:

- What are the ways in which we can best strengthen citizenship?
- How can the new National Center on Citizenship help strengthen citizenship?
- How will we know when we are succeeding and by what measures of progress?

For three hours, trained facilitators supported conversations with approximately ten people at each table discussing the questions above. Conferees used hand held electronic voting devices to specify their preferences. These responses were, in turn, compiled by tech-savvy staff who projected the summaries onto large screens so that all participants could see each other's ideas.

Based on the dynamic dialogue and voting, some of the highest priority strategies are:

- make Election Day a national holiday
- expand experiential civic education
- establish a clearing house of civic opportunities
- require flexible work schedules that allow for civic engagement
- establish mandatory service learning requirements
- increase media coverage of citizenship as a value

America Speaks is an organization that develops innovative deliberative tools for citizens and decision makers. They specialize in large-scale citizen assemblies using integrated technology, such as the "Listening to the City" sessions in New York after 9/11.

The nonprofit NCoC was chartered by the US Congress to: hold an annual conference on or around September 17, Citizenship Day; develop strategies to encourage, promote and facilitate citizen participation in communities, states and the nation; and to help organizations contribute more concretely to the development of "a more active, alert, enlightened, conscientious and progressive citizenry in the country."

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