

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

EPA'S COLLABORATION NETWORK NEWS



"Public Involvement brings the pieces together"

This is the sixteenth issue of *Network News* and it is packed with information I hope you can use and share widely. There is no theme; the issue came together as news releases, new reports and so much more from so many sources arrived in my e-mails [bonner.patricia@epa.gov]. There should be something of interest for everyone – from new practitioner to expert -- in this the longest issue ever.

As always, please send me bulletins, releases, report summaries, photos and stories of what you and your organization are doing. If you've found a unique way to work through an issue using public involvement/collaboration techniques and processes, let *Network News* help you share your success – send an article. It is always a treat to hear from readers. *Pat*

In This Issue:

- Read "An Open Letter to Environmental Justice Stakeholders," a message from Mathy Stanislaus, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER)
- Review the article "New Report Encourages Equitable Development for Gary, IN" and see how the American Planning Association's Planning and the Black Community Division has worked with the City to bring about positive change
- The lack of civility during the Health Care Town Meetings inspired "Upgrading the Way We Do Politics," a discussion of why this occurred and what can be done to improve deliberations
- See how EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior plan to work together in "Reducing Environmental Impacts of Mountaintop Coal Mining"
- Learn about the on line dialogue exploring best practices in Internet-based dialogue held among 20 practitioners in July and see what their hopes are for the future in "Web-Based Dialogue: What is The Next Frontier?"
- In "Making a Difference in the Community: The Superfund Job Training Initiative at Savannah River Superfund Site" you'll learn about a great project recognized at the August 2009 Community Involvement Conference.

Events



Stakeholder Engagement 2010 - an On Line Conference presented by PublicDecisions <http://www.publicdecisions.com> and Learning Times <http://www.learningtimes.com/> , March 2 – 4, 2010. The theme is Including the Excluded: Social/Environmental Justice, Accessibility, and Social Inclusion in Engagement. The event will be three days of presentations, networking, virtual tours, and more.

Effectively engaging diverse people or groups can be challenging. What works for the majority of stakeholders may not work well for some individuals or groups. This is especially true for those who have historically been excluded (e.g., groups subject to racial or ethnic discrimination), individuals with physical or mental disabilities, and persons who are socially excluded for a variety of reasons (such as illegal aliens or the homeless). Because of history, social norms, or other factors, we may need different or distinct ways of approaching and practicing engagement with such individuals or groups.

Conference sessions will feature "lessons learned" from around the globe about the engagement of:

- Historically excluded or underserved groups (Social or Environmental Justice)
- Individuals with physical or mental disabilities (accessibility)
- Persons who are socially excluded by geography, personal habits and appearance, class structure, income, education or religion (Social Inclusion)

All conference sessions, field trips, and networking events will take place via webcast/webinar, Skype, or in virtual worlds. Conference tracks include:

- Community Engagement for community planning, transportation, and the "built" environment.
- Health Engagement for health prevention, promotion, assessment, and community health partnerships.
- Environmental Engagement for preservation and protection of the natural environment.
- Civic Engagement for building the skills and abilities of individuals, groups, and communities to take action on problems, needs, or concerns.



Registration for this conference will open in late 2009.

2009 Parliament of the World's Religions Coming up in Australia

First held in Chicago in 1893, the Parliament of the World's Religions brings together the world's religious and spiritual communities, their leaders and their followers to a gathering where peace, diversity and sustainability are discussed and explored in the context of interreligious understanding and cooperation.

As the world's largest interreligious gathering, the Parliament will

- Convene religious and civil leaders and people of faith, spirit and goodwill from at least or more than 80 countries
- Foster interreligious, civil and cross-cultural dialogue on important local, national, and global issues
- Invite over 10,000 participants to work together for a just, peaceful, and harmonious society
- Have global appeal, covering social concerns including understanding and respecting diversity, peace and Indigenous reconciliation
- Engage worldwide religious, spiritual, secular, environmental, business and educational leaders to seek commitment and practical solutions through dialogue.
- Promote and encourage social cohesion within societies locally and across the world.

Since 1993, a Parliament of the World's Religions has convened every five years in a major international city (Chicago 1993, Cape Town 1999, Barcelona 2004). The 2009 gathering will be held December 3-9, 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. There will be over 500 events including keynote addresses, seminars, conferences, dialogues, performances, concerts and exhibitions. The 2009 Parliament will bring together more than 8,000 people from across the world, including renowned spiritual, religious and political leaders

Parliament participants will work with others and within their own traditions to respond to:

- indigenous reconciliation
- global poverty and global warming
- environmental care and degradation
- education of the young and the challenges of social disengagement
- voluntary and forced migration
- artistic expression and spirituality and
- the value of sports

For more information, visit: <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=8>

Upcoming U.S. Institute Training Sessions ~ Fall 2009/Winter 2010

Interest-Based Negotiation of Environmental Issues, Washington, D.C., November 4-5, 2009

Interest-based negotiation provides the foundation for all training at the U.S. Institute. This highly interactive workshop helps new and experienced resource managers engaged in environmental decision making become more effective in environmental conflict negotiation, prevention, and management. Lessons learned in this training also transfer to many facets of life.

Advanced Multi-Party Negotiation of Environmental Disputes, Washington, D.C., January 20-22, 2010

This highly interactive workshop develops confidence and skill in negotiating in the complex context of multiple parties by building a practical set of skills and tools that agency staff can use to work more effectively in interagency settings, with stakeholders, and the public at large. Environmental, public lands and natural resources issues involve multiple interests and parties, as well as complex issues. This workshop helps new and experienced resource managers engaged in environmental decision making become more effective in environmental conflict negotiation, prevention, and management.

For additional information and to register for these or other U.S. Institute courses, see the Training tab at www.ecr.gov.

EPA's Environmental Information Symposium

The 2010 event will be held May 10-14, at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown Hotel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It will showcase the latest tools and trends in information technology, information management, data, and information security, which are critical in ensuring that we meet the challenges of the new Administration's Open Government initiative. Participants will have the opportunity to network and learn more about EPA's information management and technology strategic direction and the challenges we face in meeting today's information needs.

The Office of Environmental Information will be holding the annual **IT Operations and Security Conference** as well as the annual **EPA Quality Management Conference** in conjunction with the Symposium. In addition to meeting the challenge of helping to reduce our carbon footprint by consolidating meetings, this also provides an exciting opportunity to have greater collaboration across a wider spectrum of our partners who may not normally attend the Symposium.

Please mark your calendar and look for more information on logistics and registration in the coming weeks. If you have any questions or would like to learn more in the interim, please contact Janice Jablonski at 202-564-9922 (jablonski.janice@epa.gov). For more information about key Office of Environmental Information services, please visit www.epa.gov/oei.

2010 Conference on Environmental Justice, Air and Green Jobs: Evolution and Innovation

The Office of Air Quality Planning & Standards (OAQPS), the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Worker Education and Training Program

(WETP), and Dillard University's Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ) are hosting the 2010 Conference, January 25-27, 2010 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Abstracts will be accepted October 14, 2009 through November 13, 2009. Only poster presentations will be accepted. Abstracts should address to the 4 conference tracks of: Goods Movement, Ambient Air/Climate Change, Hazardous Waste Cleanup Job Training, and Sustainability/Green Jobs. More information on the descriptions of the conference tracks can be found on the [conference website](http://www.cleanairinfo.com/ejconference/). [<http://www.cleanairinfo.com/ejconference/>]



What's New?

Executive Order on Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President-Obama-signs-an-Executive-Order-Focused-on-Federal-Leadership-in-Environmental-Energy-and-Economic-Performance

On October 5, 2009, President Obama issued the new Executive Order "Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance", which sets sustainability goals for Federal agencies and focuses on making improvements in their environmental, energy and economic performance. The Executive Order requires Federal agencies to set a 2020 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target within 90 days; increase energy efficiency; reduce fleet petroleum consumption; conserve water; reduce waste; support sustainable communities; and leverage Federal purchasing power to promote environmentally-responsible products and technologies.

Comment on How to Improve Implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act

OMB is seeking public comments on possible initiatives to improve the implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA)--and in particular, to reduce the paperwork burden on the public, especially on small entities; to maximize the utility of the information collected; to ensure accurate burden estimates; to improve the process of OMB review; and to prevent unintended adverse consequences. OMB plans to use the comments it receives in response to this notice to inform its preparation of the 2010 Information Collection Budget (ICB), which is a report that will be provided to Congress on the Federal Government's effectiveness in implementing the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. OMB

will also use these comments to inform its practices for evaluating information collections submitted to OMB by agencies.

Find the October 27, 2009 Federal Register Notice @ <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-25757.htm> . Responses must be written and received by December 28, 2009. Submit comments by one of the following methods:

Web site: www.regulations.gov.

E-mail: oir_submission@omb.eop.gov.

Fax: (202) 395-7245.

Environmental Justice Small Grants Solicitation

On October 28, 2009 [the Request For Applications \(RFA\)](#) was released announcing the availability of funds and solicitation of applications from eligible entities interested in participating in the Environmental Justice Small Grants Program. The Environmental Justice Small Grants Program (EJSG), supports and empowers communities working on solutions to local environmental and public health issues.

This year the program is emphasizing the need to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change in communities with environmental justice concerns. There is a well-established scientific consensus that climate change will cause disproportionate impacts upon vulnerable populations. As stated in the Technical Support Document for the Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act (April 2009), "Within settlements experiencing climate change, certain parts of the population may be especially vulnerable; these include the poor, the elderly, those already in poor health, the disabled, those living alone, those with limited rights and power (such as recent immigrants with limited English skills), and/or indigenous populations dependent on one or a few resources. Thus, the potential impacts of climate change raise environmental justice issues." The goals of this focus on climate change are to recognize the critical role of grassroots efforts in helping shape strategies to avoid, lessen, or delay the risks and impacts associated with climate change; to decrease the number of under represented communities; and, to ensure equitable green economic development in ways that build healthy sustainable communities.

The EJSG continues to assist recipients in building collaborative partnerships to help them understand and address environmental and public health issues in their communities. Successful collaborative partnerships involve not only well-designed strategic plans to build, maintain and sustain the partnerships, but also to work towards addressing the local environmental and public health issues.

For the guidance document go to <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/publications/ej/grants/rfa-state-grant-2-12-09.pdf>

For questions, contact Sheila Lewis: lewis.sheila@epa.gov

Pesticides Public Participation Processes

As part of EPA's ongoing commitment to transparency in its pesticide regulatory decisions, the Agency has developed and begun implementing a new [process for public participation for potential new pesticide active ingredients and certain new pesticide uses](#). Beginning October 1, 2009, the public can review and comment on the risk assessments and proposed registration decisions for certain pesticide registration actions. This public process, which expands the transparency of the Agency's pesticide registration decisions, applies to new pesticide active ingredients, and the first food use, first outdoor use, and first residential use for currently registered active ingredients.

The process works like this: Upon receiving a complete application for registration for a new pesticide active ingredient or a new use of an already registered active ingredient, EPA publishes a Federal Register Notice of Receipt, establishes a case docket in [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov), and opens an initial 30-day public comment. Once the Agency's risk assessments and proposed decision for the registration application are added to the docket, EPA opens another 30-day public comment period. After the final comment period closes, EPA publishes its decision and response-to-comment document.

When new active ingredients or first new use registration applications that meet the criteria for the new public process become available, they will be posted on the Pesticides Web site. Once available, EPA will post links to the risk assessments, proposed registration decisions, and the Dockets where the public can submit comments.

Another way the public can engage in pesticide decisions is through the [process for public involvement in the review of already registered pesticides](#). Differences between it and the new process reflect the particular regulatory requirements of initial [registration](#) as compared to [registration review](#).

Intergovernmental Solutions Newsletter

The U.S. General Services Administration's (GSA's) Office of Citizen Services & Communications just released its Intergovernmental Solutions Newsletter, which is organized around the theme of "Engaging Citizens in Government." The 43-page PDF document includes articles written by public and private sector leaders in the field.



Here is the table of contents:

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- Putting Your Audience to Work: EPA's Radon Video Contest
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- Emerging Themes for Effective Online Citizen Engagement
- The Importance of Open Web Standards in the Move to Open and Transparent Government

Download the newsletter at www.usaservices.gov/pdf_docs/EngagingCitizensII.pdf

National Center of Citizenship Releases Civic Health Index Reports in Six States

Following the media flurry surrounding the release of the 2009 *America's Civic Health Index*, NCoC in October announced the release of six state-specific reports measuring the civic health of communities across the country.

These reports expand the reach and impact of *America's Civic Health Index* by helping communities better understand how to harness the power of their citizens. The localized data tells a compelling story in light of the economic downturn that has forced Americans to focus their engagement inward to more personal forms of giving and service.

In coordination with local partners, NCOC is releasing the state Civic Health Index reports according to the following schedule:

- **Florida:** October 14 and 15 in Miami in partnership with the Florida Joint Center for Citizenship with support from the Knight Foundation
- **California:** October 26 in Los Angeles in partnership with California Forward and Common Sense California
- **Minnesota:** November 2 in Minneapolis in partnership with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship with support from Target
- **New Hampshire:** Early November in Durham in partnership with the Carsey Institute at UNH
- **Ohio:** November 10 in Columbus in partnership with Miami University-Hamilton

- **Illinois:** November 18 in Chicago in partnership with the McCormick Freedom Project with support from the McCormick Foundation

NCoC will feature each report on its website as reports are released. You can read the Florida report @ <http://www.ncoc.net>. The 2009 America's Civic Health Index and media coverage of it @ http://ncoc.net/index.php?tray=content_blog&tid=top5&cid=2gp115

Saving Our Nation's Democracy Conference Report

On August 2 – 4, 2009, Everyday Democracy, AmericaSpeaks, Demos and Harvard University's Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation brought together more than 100 individuals for the second Strengthening our Nation's Democracy conference. Participants came from various parts of the democracy reform and civic engagement' community: deliberative democracy practitioners, community problem solvers and organizers, election reformers, transparency advocates, e-democracy practitioners, national service advocates, media reformers, educators, federal public engagement practitioners/managers and others.

The "Working Together to Build a Stronger Democracy" <http://forums.e-democracy.org/r/file/1107-2009-10-05T195159Z> full conference report provides detailed recommendations for both the Administration and the democracy reform movement itself. The priorities are as follows:

1. Involve the American public in meaningful deliberations about important policy questions
2. Support and promote an electoral reform agenda
3. Improve federal public participation and collaboration
4. Explore lessons from the Open Government Dialogue
5. Recognize and support engagement carried out by traditionally disenfranchised communities
6. Create a report on the health of our democracy
7. Build skills and capacity for public engagement
8. Increase the availability of federal funding for democratic participation
9. Convene an international democracy conference
10. Create an ongoing mechanism for sustaining leadership

Deliberative Techniques for Engagement – Mini-Poll Report

In August, PublicDecisions [<http://www.PublicDecisions.com>] issued a Mini-Poll on the subject of deliberative techniques for engagement. The purpose of the poll was to discern how broadly understood deliberation is as an engagement technique; to identify the degree to which it is used formally, informally or both; and to learn why (or why not) it is employed.

The data in this 14-page report led to four key findings:

1. A large majority of respondents are familiar with deliberation as an engagement technique. There is also interest in learning more about the technique, among those familiar with it and those to whom it is new.
2. The most common reason for using deliberation is to create a safe place to express varying opinions. This reason is cited equally by those who formally convene deliberative events and those who use deliberation informally.
3. The convening of formal deliberations by organizations is about as common as the use of informal deliberation. Moreover, an equal number of respondents report employing *both* formal and informal deliberation in their engagement work.
4. Deliberation is understood and used as a practical technique in support of engagement goals.

Download your copy today at [this link](#)

Solar Powering Your Community: A Guide for Local Governments

The U.S. Department of Energy developed this comprehensive resource to assist local governments and stakeholders in building sustainable local solar markets. The guide introduces a range of policy and program options that have been successfully field tested in localities around the country. It describes each policy or program, explains the benefits, provides implementation tips and options, and includes short examples from local governments across the United States.

“Why we need to ‘sell ‘ environmentalism,” EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson’s complete August 28 article in the Huffington Post can be found @, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-p-jackson/why-we-need-to-sell-the-e b 271650.html>

Here are excerpts from the last paragraphs:

“We have a chance to expand the conversation on environmentalism, and welcome new voices and new ideas to the environmental movement. ...People are seeing more and more that environmentalism doesn’t come in one shape, size, color, or income bracket. “

“Those of us who identify as environmentalists today must make room in this movement for the environmentalists of tomorrow..... To confront the urgent environmental challenges of the 21st century, we need to make sure that every community sees their stake in this movement.”

EPA just launched Data Finder (www.epa.gov/datafinder), a single place to find EPA's data sources so people can access and understand environmental information. We encourage people to suggest new content and comment on its functionality. Comments will be displayed in a forum so people can build on each others' ideas and EPA can describe future directions for Data Finder.

EPA also will use Data Finder to discover raw data that can be accessed via Data.gov, a federal site that helps people find, download, and use datasets that are generated and held by the Federal Government.

Feel free to get the word out about Data Finder so others can use it.

You can also use **MyEnvironment** to find data online. Search for maps, alerts, and environmental data and information based on ZIP code or place name. Check it out at: www.epa.gov/myenvironment/

Comment on regulation development: <http://www.regulations.gov>

New Interactive Map from UK's Meteorological Office

The new map shows the impacts of a 4 degree temperature rise world wide. Have a look @ <http://www.actoncopenhagen.decc.gov.uk/en/ambition/evidence/4-degrees-map/>.

NCDD's Engagement Streams Framework

<http://www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/ddStreams1-08.pdf>

The framework is depicted on two charts and is designed to help people decide which dialogue and deliberation [D&D] methods are the best fit for their circumstances. No method works in all situations, yet too often people become overly attached to the first D&D process they learn about -and end up with less-than-satisfying results.

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) developed this framework in 2004 to introduce people to the range of possibilities available to them and to send them in a better direction than they may have otherwise gone. The first chart of the Engagement Streams Framework categorizes the D&D field into four streams based on the organizer's primary intention or purpose - Exploration, Conflict Transformation, Decision Making and Collaborative Action. It shows which of the most well-known and well-tested methods have proven themselves effective in each stream. The second chart outlines 19 of the most well-known and well-tested dialogue and deliberation methods and, first, identifies which of the 4 streams the method focuses significantly on (some models can be used in more than one stream with little adaptation). It also provides additional details such as size of group and how participants are selected. The Framework is and always will be a work in progress, and NCDD welcomes suggestions for changes and additions! As the field continues learning and growing, so will this framework. Please email your feedback to Sandy Hierbacher at sandy@thataway.org. Check www.thataway.org/streams anytime to see the latest iterations of the charts.

The framework is most similar to and borrows most heavily from the four "social technologies for civic engagement" identified by Patricia Wilson in the article "Deep Democracy: The Inner Practice of Civic Engagement" (Fieldnotes: A Newsletter of the Shambhala Institute, Issue No. 2, February 2004). Download Wilson's article here. http://www.thataway.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/wilson-deep_democracy.pdf

National Issues Forums Launches Coping with the Cost of Health Care Dialogue

Considering the shouting matches that have erupted at many town hall meetings, and the necessarily adversarial nature of debates, many people who are interested in the future of health care are left wondering: How can I join a constructive conversation about this issue?

In response to this need, the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forum Institute (NIFI) just launched a new online choicebook, modeled after the highly successful Coping with the Cost of Health Care issue book. This is an online opportunity for citizens to wrestle with the tensions underlying the health care debate and to share their experiences and opinions. Instead of having to travel to a town hall meeting and deal with angry crowds, interested citizens can log on and complete an online workbook that helps them weigh the advantages, disadvantages, and tradeoffs of several approaches to solving the health care problem, and add their stories to a broad spectrum of other voices.

Web site: <http://nifi-healthcare.dialoguecircles.com/Default.aspx?DN=719,745,Documents>

U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution's Survey of Citizen Groups

Federal agencies often turn to the U.S. Institute for advice on how to engage the public for input on federal environmental programs and how to collaborate with citizens groups to manage or resolve conflict over environmental issues. Prompted by a request for suggestions from a stakeholder group considering how to engage citizens, the U.S. Institute reviewed a variety of citizens groups to learn more about how they function, what conditions favor their success, and any major insights or lessons learned from their experiences. This information may be helpful to agencies and environmental conflict resolution practitioners interested in convening similar citizens groups.

To read a description of the groups reviewed, the review process, findings, lessons learned and conclusions, go to: <http://www.ecr.gov/AnnouncementsEvents/Announcements/USIECRCitizensGroupsSurvey.aspx> The table below outlines the types of groups involved in the survey process.

FACA-chartered	Federally Convened (non-FACA)	Federal-State Convened	State Convened	Other
1. Glen Canyon Adaptive Management Work Group 2. Pinedale Anticline Working Group 3. Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Advisory Committee 4. Steens Mountain Advisory Council 5. Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee	1. Grizzly Bear Introduction Citizen Management Committee	1. Chesapeake Bay Program Citizens Advisory Committee 2. Susquehanna River Basin Compact Water Quality Advisory Group	1. Utah Wildlife Management Plans Advisory Committees 2. Colorado Wolf Management Working Group 3. Puget Sound Partnership	1. Madison Valley Ranchlands Group 2. Malpai Borderlands Group 3. Blackfoot Challenge 4. Quincy Library Group 5. Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan 6. Klamath Settlement Group (not the actual title of the group because they do not have one)

"FACA-chartered" refers to advisory groups convened by a federal agency under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, having a formal charter and membership approved by the convening agency.

New Pew Report finds the well-off and well-educated are more likely to engage

The Pew Internet and American Life Project conducted a study in August 2008 and published its findings in September 2009. Pew's report, [The Internet and Civic Engagement](http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement.aspx) [http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement.aspx] concluded:

- Whether it takes place on the internet or off, traditional political activities remain the domain of those with high levels of income and education.
- There are hints that forms of civic engagement anchored in blogs and social networking sites could alter long-standing patterns that are based on socioeconomic status.
- Those who use blogs and social networking sites as an outlet for civic engagement are far more active in traditional realms of political and nonpolitical participation than are other internet users. In addition, they are even more active than those who do not use the internet at all.
- The internet is now part of the fabric of everyday civic life. Half of those who are involved in a political or community group communicate with other group members using digital tools such as email or group websites.

Respondents report that public officials are no less responsive to email than to snail mail. Online communications to government officials are just as likely to draw a response as contacts in person, over the phone, or by letter.

Report on Online Town Hall Meetings



Online Town Hall Meetings: Exploring Democracy in the 21st Century (2009, Congressional Management Foundation) tackles the lack of information about how the internet might facilitate and enable conversations between citizens and Members of Congress. The report is based on 20 online town hall meetings facilitated in 2006 with U.S. Representatives and one event in 2008 with a U.S. Senator, with a total number of participants in excess of 600.

The "online town halls" used a simple process. The Member of Congress and moderator spoke over VOIP (internet phone) and constituents typed in questions and comments online. Researchers found that:

The online town halls increased constituents' approval of and trust in the Member of Congress.

The online town halls increased constituents' approval of the Member's position on the issue discussed (in this case, immigration was the most popular issue discussed).

- The town halls attracted a diverse array of constituents—including those not traditionally engaged in politics and people frustrated with the political system.
- The town halls increased engagement in politics (voting, following elections, persuading others to vote).
- The town halls increased the probability of voting for the Member.
- The discussions in the town halls were of high quality (quality of information, use of accurate facts, respect for different points of view, etc.).
- The sessions were highly rated by constituents; participants wanted to see more of these types of sessions.

Shanxi Province [North Central China] Gives Public Access To Environmental Data on Businesses

Citizens in Shanxi Province can better participate in environmental legislation, supervision, and management. A new law, issued September 9, requires businesses to report “all information that is relevant to the environment” to the public, other than information that falls under state or business secret stipulations. The law also gives the public access to hearings regarding environmental impact assessments and will allow public comments on already completed projects. Citizens can request seven types of pollution information:

- 1) businesses' environmental impact assessments
- 2) annual environmental protection targets and total discharge amounts broken down by pollutant
- 3) information about whether the businesses have included equipment to enhance environmental protection (and if so, its current operating condition)
- 4) the environmental impact from their discharges
- 5) their pollution treatment plans (and annual report on these plans),
- 6) what responses the businesses have made to prevent pollution or clean up pollution that has already occurred.

Excerpted from a story by Michael Standaert, a free lance journalist in Beijing, China.

How Some Communities Make Public Engagement Stick



When sufficiently agitated, Americans can, and often do, mobilize—at least on a one-time basis—to find solutions for critical community problems. A new research report, issued October 20, 2009, by Everyday Democracy and the Kettering Foundation, provides insights into how public engagement initiatives can grow into a regular practice, used to address a variety of community issues.

The report, entitled [Sustaining Public Engagement: Embedded Deliberation in Local Communities](http://www.everyday-democracy.org/en/Article.1060.aspx) [http://www.everyday-democracy.org/en/Article.1060.aspx] was written by Harvard University researchers Archon Fung and Elena Fagotto. In the report, they argue that the most successful civic engagement efforts not only address particular public issues such as school redistricting, domestic violence, or racism, but also improve the quality of local democratic governance. "Those who build institutions and practices of public engagement often work at two levels," according to the authors. "Not only do they address urgently felt needs in their communities, but, although they may not have intended it, they also improve the machinery of democratic self-government."

Introducing the GreenGov Challenge – A Bottom-Up Approach to Greening Government

On October 19, 2009, the White House launched today a new online participatory program that challenges federal and military personnel to take part in implementing the requirements of the new Executive Order 13514 "Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance" issued October 5, 2009. Within the GreenGov Challenge initiative, federal and military personnel will have an opportunity to submit their own clean energy ideas and suggestions while voting on others. The participatory program will run from October 19 - October 31, 2009. Read more from CEQ Chair Nancy Sutley's White House blog at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Introducing-the-GreenGov-Challenge-A-Bottom-Up-Approach-to-Greening-Government/>.

If Citizens Have a Voice, Who's Listening? Lessons from Recent Citizen Consultation Experiments for the European Union – new paper by Stephen Boucher

Are European Union institutions, as they claim, really listening to citizens thanks to more 'deliberative' consultation tools? The European Commission and the European Parliament in particular have committed themselves to engaging in a dialogue with citizens in recent years. But to what effect? This paper notes how official policies have adopted language borrowed from the deliberative democracy school of thinking, but denounces the lack of clarity in the role assigned to deliberation with citizens in EU policy-making processes. It also invites EU policy-makers to think more critically about recent and future experiments that present themselves as 'deliberative'. It does so by highlighting areas for improvement in recent initiatives. Finally, it makes a number of recommendations for the future of dialogue with citizens, suggesting in particular the creation of a European Observatory for Democracy and Opinion, as well as a list of criteria to assess the design and role of such activities, and the concentration of efforts on one high-quality, high-impact initiative per year. [Stephen Boucher is the Program Director at the European Climate Foundation.]

["The Corps Environment" Newsletter - October 2009 \(10/23/2009\)](#)

Quarterly publication of "The Corps Environment" newsletter by the USACE Environmental Community of Practice, covering recent environmental activities conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and their partners. Three articles cover: [Project works to save migrating salmon](#), [EnviroPoints: New chief shares thoughts](#), and [District project protects against stream bank erosion](#) .

Kodak American Greenways Program

Kodak's program is the nation's longest running community-based grants program preserving open space, trails and greenways. The program marked its 20th anniversary by honoring three individuals and funding 28 local nonprofits and public agencies that are making great strides with greenways on October 19, 2009..

Since the program's inception in 1989, more than \$800,000 has been granted to nearly 700 organizations in all 50 states. The program is a partnership between Eastman Kodak Company, National Geographic Society and The Conservation Fund.

This year's individual award recipients are:



Alexie Torres-Fleming, who led the removal of tons of trash from the Bronx River in New York City, including 40 cars and 10,000 tires, creating a healthy waterway and river corridor that inspired youth in the community to connect with nature and take pride in their South Bronx neighborhood.



Rosie Zamora, the driving force behind Houston Wilderness and its effort to bridge the vibrant, lively city with the wetlands, forests and rivers and educate Houston residents on the spectacular environment in their backyards.



Rick Wagner, a 26-year veteran of the National Park Service with 43 years of federal conservation work who preserved key pieces of the American cultural and natural heritage by spearheading the creation of the State of Idaho Castle Rock State Park and the expansion of the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail, the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and the California Trail in the City of Rocks National Reserve.

This year, 28 nonprofits and public agencies received grants.



Featured Articles

An Open Letter to Environmental Justice Stakeholders

Greetings!

I am Mathy Stanislaus, and President Obama recently appointed me to serve as the Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER). I'm writing today to introduce myself and ask for your help, advice, and cooperation in the months ahead. As you know, OSWER has primary responsibility for leading or supporting federal action related to a host of issues crucially important to public health, environmental quality, and future economic growth in the United States. These issues include cleaning up contaminated land, responding to human health and environmental emergencies, and supporting the more efficient use of, recovery, reuse, and/or proper disposal of virtually all materials used in our economy. This is a daunting task, and I am keenly aware of the challenges that it poses to EPA, OSWER, and myself.

In light of the broad scope of my responsibilities, I am inviting you to lend your support as OSWER begins this new era under President Obama. I believe that government works best when it listens carefully to the opinions and criticisms of interested stakeholders, ensures ongoing public participation in government decisions, and learns from successful models. Your organization includes people with a broad range of insights and experience in many of the issues facing us, and I encourage you to use those assets in cooperation with OSWER as we work toward our shared goals. As a first step, I'm inviting you to send me any comments or suggestions you may have for restructuring OSWER programs to provide greater transparency in our decision making and more accessibility to information, especially for vulnerable communities.

How should EPA's process for developing and issuing policy, rules, or guidance be opened so that we can gain from your experience and insights? How can we develop better strategies for handling waste or cleaning up contaminated sites? How should we enhance or redesign the public processes used at individual cleanup sites so that local communities are more fully informed and consulted?

Furthermore, I intend to use the Internet to expand my interactions with the public. I can be reached by e-mail at aastanislaus@epa.gov. Feel free to use that address to send me your thoughts on OSWER issues. We will also be hosting video town hall meetings so that interested groups across the country can speak directly with me and OSWER experts. In the coming months we will be launching the OSWER discussion forum, an online conversation where EPA officials and the public will be able to post and respond to comments on specific topics. Please participate, because your views will inform my management of OSWER at every step.

I personally intend to meet with as many of you as possible both here at EPA headquarters in Washington, DC, and as I visit EPA's regional offices around the country.

Thank you in advance for any assistance you may give me in the future. I look forward to meeting you, listening to your views, and ? when the occasion requires ? working cooperatively with your organization to improve the lives of all Americans.

Sincerely,
Mathy Stanislaus, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and
Emergency Response

New Report Encourages Equitable Development for Gary, IN

By Carlton Eley [EPA/OPEI/Smart Growth staff]

Modified from a June 2009 news release from PBCD of APA

On June 29, 2009, The Planning and the Black Community Division (PBCD) of American Planning Association www.planningandtheblackcommunity.org released its technical assistance report. "Vision for Broadway".

<http://www.planning.org/divisions/blackcommunity/pdf/garyindiana.pdf>



American Planning Association
**Planning and the
Black Community Division**

Making Great Communities Happen

Throughout the 20th Century, the City of Gary became known as the "City of the Century" due to its advanced design, forward-thinking development plan, ethnic diversity, and miraculous growth. However, forty years of urban disinvestment and flight left hundreds of abandoned buildings and devastated the city's downtown.

Despite the economic and social challenges, Gary is mounting a comeback, and the city is receiving support from the PBCD. In 2007, PBCD held its biennial conference in Gary, and conducted a technical assistance workshop as a service to the community. PBCD then assembled a technical assistance team that worked with stakeholders in the City of Gary and offered options for arterial enhancements along a one-mile span of the city's Broadway corridor. The project identified strategies -- including equitable development, smart growth, context sensitive design, and heritage preservation -- that local officials could consider to facilitate development along the urban corridor while protecting the cultural heritage and cherished institutions that could be leveraged to create a "place-making dividend" for the city.

The assistance educated participants about sustainable practices, presented development scenarios for the corridor, and shared techniques for equitable development that can be applied to ensure Gary's citizens have access to safe and healthy environments in which to live, work, and play. Since the conclusion of the technical assistance workshop, PBCD has focused on completing a technical assistance report, and the product was submitted to local officials on June 30, 2009.

Since the conclusion of the technical assistance workshop, PBCD has focused on completing a technical assistance report for the City of Gary; the Gary/East Chicago/Hammond (GECH) Empowerment Zone; and the Indiana University Northwest, Historic Midtown Project of the Department of Minority Studies (IUN). The report was submitted to local officials on June 30, 2009.

PBCD was asked to produce a visioning report for enhancing a one-mile span of the Broadway corridor and addressing future growth along the arterial. Citizens in Gary welcome the opportunities that growth will offer, and they have the foresight to know that changes to the landscape from development do not occur in swift, sweeping movements.

Local stakeholders have awaited the release of the report because they entered the process seeking to explore alternative models for economic and community development. Concerned that prolonged disinvestment and neglect may prompt hasty decision making, the community aspired to demonstrate the merits of urban redevelopment while meeting the needs of underserved communities and vulnerable populations through policies, programs, and projects. In response to local leaders, PBCD structured the technical assistance workshop and the recommendations of the report on using equitable development and smart growth strategies for enhancing the Broadway corridor.

Ben Clement, Economic Development and Marketing Administrator of the GECH Empowerment Zone, is a Gary native. He states “the downward spiral of Gary, Indiana, like many other urban centers around the country, did not start overnight, so neither should an economic resurgence be expected immediately. The revitalization of Gary will be a steady, deliberate, persistent process and that effort begins with intelligent strategic planning. The work done by PBCD to formulate a plan to resurrect downtown and the historic midtown districts is a crucial building block for long-term redevelopment.”

To be clear, Gary’s citizens want future development to accomplish multiple sustainability goals. In addition to urban management, economic prosperity, environmental protection, and resource efficiency, citizens want to protect cultural heritage and cherished institutions; encourage meaningful participation of all citizens; and foster community parity. Despite the signs of physical entropy and deterioration, locals realize Broadway has many distinct cultural treasures that can be leveraged as the city rebounds.

Earl R. Jones, Associate Professor of African American Studies at Indiana University Northwest (IUN) is encouraged by the visioning report. He shared “one of the important aspects of the PBCB technical assistance report is the focus on youth, and their involvement in the planning process. Youth are applying their knowledge, in math, science, and business, towards improving the community. This is clearly seen in the establishment of Gary’s Youth Empowerment Zone.” Dr. Jones believes this focus on the contributions of youth is significant, and it will help to encourage the “inclusive growth” that represents a guiding principle of President Obama’s Urban Policy program.

PBCD assembled a broad team of practitioners for the City of Gary, GECH Empowerment Zone, and IUN’s Historic Midtown Project of the Department of Minority Studies. The team had expertise in equitable development, smart growth, context sensitive design, place making, urban design/architecture, and vacant property reclamation. According to Carlton Eley, of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, who assisted PBCD by coordinating the technical assistance effort, “completion of the technical assistance report is a landmark event because it represents the first time a majority African-American consulting team, consisting of planners; architects; community developers; and environmentalists, has assisted a major U.S. city to frame a vision for its future.”

Recent Happenings: The first authentic signs of hope are starting to emerge in Gary. GECH created a Youth Empowerment Zone in 2008. The city of Gary has recognized the heritage assets of Midtown as integral to the place-making dividend of the community, as acknowledged in the City's Comprehensive Plan which was approved in February 2009. Also, the city has been visited by two senior officials in the Obama Administration, Deputy Secretary Ron Sims of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Administrator Lisa P. Jackson of the U.S. EPA.

Since 1980, PBCD has pursued its mission of providing a forum for discussion, research, and action by African-American planners, citizens, and students. For additional information on this project or to obtain a printed copy of the technical assistance report, please contact Carlton Eley at 202-566-2841 or eley.carlton@epa.gov.

Upgrading the Way We Do Politics

by Sandy Hierbacher, Co-Founder and Director of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation

Town hall meetings being held on healthcare legislation across the country are exploding with emotion, frustration, and conflict. Citizens are showing up in throngs to speak out about health care as well as dozens of other topics, but it seems the louder voices get, the less people are actually heard. The meetings have become a vivid demonstration of what's missing in American Democracy.

Why is this happening? Members of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation—a network of people who bring together Americans of all stripes to discuss, decide and act together on today's toughest issues—have outlined some ideas to help us understand what has evolved.

There is a lack of trust between government and citizens

While Americans' distrust of government is playing out in obvious ways at town hall meetings across the country, another level of distrust is less frequently acknowledged: government officials' lack of trust in citizens' ability to grapple with complicated issues and trade-offs. Government officials often don't see citizens as peers who, when given the opportunity, can talk reasonably together across partisan and other divides and come to agreement even on elements of highly divisive issues like healthcare, gay marriage, and abortion.

The typical "town hall meeting" format isn't working

Today's typical "town hall meetings" don't live up to the traditional New England Town Meetings they're named after. They don't allow citizens to feel they've been truly heard, or to discuss issues in any depth. The current town hall design sets the stage for activist groups and special interest groups to try to 'game' the system and sideline other concerned citizens in the process. As one NCDD member said, "the loudest voices are the ones that get heard."

The issue is in crisis mode

Another NCDD member observed that when people are only invited in when there is a final battle between proposals, "this fact alone invites polarization." When an issue is in crisis mode, it is easier to manipulate people; there is less time to get information and

issues clarified; there is less patience on all sides to delve into the actual complexities; and nonpartisans get the sense they are being sold false alternatives.

What to do?

So how can officials hold more effective open-to-the-public meetings with their constituents? Dozens of effective public engagement techniques have been developed to enable citizens to have authentic, civil, productive discussions at public meetings—even on highly contentious issues. These techniques have names like National Issues Forums, Study Circles, 21st Century Town Meetings, Open Space Technology, and World Cafe, to name just a few.

When done well, these techniques create the space for real dialogue, so everyone who shows up can tell their story and share their perspective on the topic at hand. Dialogue builds trust and enables people to be open to listening to perspectives that are very different from their own. Deliberation is often key to public engagement work as well, enabling people to discuss the consequences, costs, and trade-offs of various policy options, and to work through the emotions and values inherent in tough public decisions.

Though it may not seem like it when we watch clips from recent healthcare town halls, the truth is that people can come together to have a positive impact on national policy—not only in spite of our differences, but because working through those differences allows us to make better decisions. Citizens have higher expectations than ever for a government that is of, by and for the people, and it's high time for an upgrade in the way we do politics.



Sandy Heierbacher wrote the original and longer article <http://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/upgrading-the-way-we-do-politics/#> for Yes! Magazine in August 2009. Sandy is the co-founder and director of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD), a network of 1200 groups and professionals who bring together Americans of all stripes to discuss, decide and act together on today's toughest issues.

Reducing Environmental Impacts of Mountaintop Coal Mining

On June 11, 2009, Obama Administration officials announced that they are taking unprecedented steps to reduce the environmental impacts of mountaintop coal mining in the six Appalachian states of Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia through a coordinated approach between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of the Interior (DOI) and Army Corps of Engineers.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency; Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior; and Terrence "Rock" Salt, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, the Administration will implement an Interagency Action Plan on mountaintop coal mining that will:

- Minimize the adverse environmental consequences of mountaintop coal mining through short-term actions to be completed in 2009;
- Undertake longer-term actions to tighten the regulation of mountaintop coal mining;
- Ensure coordinated and stringent environmental reviews of permit applications under the Clean Water Act (CWA) and Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1997 (SMCRA);
- Engage the public through outreach events in the Appalachian region to help inform the development of Federal policy; and
- Federal Agencies will work in coordination with appropriate regional, state, and local entities to help diversify and strengthen the Appalachian regional economy and promote the health and welfare of Appalachian communities.

"Mountaintop coal mining cannot be predicated on the assumption of minimal oversight of its environmental impacts, and its permanent degradation of water quality. Stronger reviews and protections will safeguard the health of local waters, and thousands of acres of watersheds in Appalachia," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "Our announcement today reaffirms EPA's fundamental responsibility for protecting the water quality and environmental integrity of streams, rivers, and wetlands under the Clean Water Act. Getting this right is important to coalfield communities that count on a livable environment, both during mining and after coal companies move to other sites."

In close coordination, EPA, DOI, and the Corps will take several short-term actions to reform the regulation of mountaintop coal mining under the two primary environmental laws governing this mining practice.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency will take immediate steps under the CWA to minimize environmental harm by taking the following actions in 2009:

- Requiring more stringent environmental reviews for future permit applications for mountaintop coal mining;
- Within 30 days of the date of the MOU, the Corps will issue a public notice (pursuant to 33 C.F.R. § 330.5) proposing to modify Nationwide Permit (NWP) 21 to preclude its use to authorize the discharge of fill material into streams for surface coal mining activities in the Appalachian region, and will seek public comment on the proposed action;
- Strengthening permit reviews under CWA regulations (Section 404(b)(1)) to reduce the harmful direct and cumulative environmental impacts of mountaintop coal mining on streams and watersheds;
- Strengthening EPA coordination with states on water pollution permits for discharges from valley fills and state water quality certifications for mountaintop coal mining operations; and
- Improving stream mitigation projects to increase ecological performance and compensate for losses of these important waters of the United States.

The Department of Interior will also take the following steps:

- Reevaluate and determine how the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) will more effectively conduct oversight of state permitting, state enforcement, and regulatory activities under SMCRA;
- Ensure the protection of wildlife resources and endangered species by coordinating the development of CWA guidance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS); and
- If the U.S. District Court vacates the 2008 Stream Buffer Zone Rule, as requested by the Secretary of the Interior on April 27, 2009, Interior will issue guidance clarifying the application of stream buffer zone provisions in a preexisting 1983 SMCRA regulation to ensure mining activities will occur in a more environmentally protective way in or near Appalachian streams

Concurrent with these short-term actions, the three agencies will embark on a comprehensive, coordinated review of their existing respective regulations and procedures governing mountaintop coal mining under existing law. The agencies will also create an interagency working group to promote ongoing Federal collaboration and ensure the Action Plan achieves results. As these reforms are implemented, the agencies will seek to involve the public and guide Federal actions through robust public comment and outreach.

EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers are today taking steps to enhance coordination in the environmental review of pending Clean Water Act permits for surface coal mining activities in Appalachian States. Administrator Jackson and Acting Assistant Secretary Salt have directed EPA and Corps field offices to coordinate under new procedures to ensure Clean Water Act permit decisions are fully consistent with sound science and the law, reduce adverse environmental impacts, provide greater public participation and transparency, and address pending permits in a more timely manner.

The Federal agencies will also work in coordination with appropriate regional, state, and local entities to help diversify and strengthen the Appalachian regional economy and promote the health and welfare of Appalachian communities. This interagency effort will have a special focus on stimulating clean enterprise and green jobs development, encouraging better coordination among existing federal efforts, and supporting innovative new ideas and initiatives.

- [EPA-Corps Enhanced MTM Coordination Procedure](#)
- [Letter from EPA to Department of the Army](#)
- [MOU Among U.S. Department of the Army, U.S. Department of the Interior, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[Based on news releases]

Web-Based Dialogue: What is The Next Frontier?

<http://www.webdialogues.net/pubengage/nextfrontier>

By Authors: Tom Beierle, Ross & Associates Environmental Consulting and Sally Hedman, WestEd

Contributors: Laurie Maak - WestEd, Don Greenstein - DLG Conflict Management Systems, Nicholas Dewar – CirclePoint, and Patricia Bonner - USEPA

President Obama has directed heads of executive departments and agencies to “... work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration.” Key to accomplishing this goal is using the Internet to broaden informed public engagement. Some challenges to achieving this “Next Frontier” include helping citizens inform themselves about the issue under discussion; tapping diverse perspectives; managing the volume of ideas and information; recognizing and responding to input; and maintaining communication to continue to inform and evolve the web-based public engagement process.

To meet the challenges of the Next Frontier, we envision bringing together a broad spectrum of stakeholders—informed by experts and practitioners—to identify successful practices and define realistic and ideal functions and expectations designed to achieve host agency goals. Through this discovery process, a foundation for developing the Next Frontier—based on stakeholder needs—will emerge. The process will generate the next steps to create an engagement platform and strategy that will be useful to both participants and conveners.

The Next Frontier WebDialogue was an initial step to begin this important process. We used WestEd’s WebDialogues platform, which, for over six years, has been used to successfully convene stakeholders, members of the public, and policy makers. In each case, participants learned about, discussed, and provided input regarding key policy issues in state, national, and international dialogues.

In July 2009, twenty individuals with experience hosting, developing, facilitating, and/or researching web-based public engagement participated in a week-long WebDialogue entitled, “Web-based Dialogue: What is the Next Frontier?” The discussion focused on “Aspects of GREAT web-based engagement” to guide the group’s reflections on what works, unanswered questions, and promising new strategies. The goal was to identify the diverse needs of national and state agencies and organizations as we evolve web-based engagements.

This paper captures the essence of the ideas exchanged in six discussions:

- **Blue sky description:** What does virtual communication, which effectively supports public engagement, look like? What are examples of important aspects?
- **Usefulness for policy makers:** What are the needs of policy makers? How can we structure and produce information that is useful to policy makers (mining info/polls, etc.)?
- **Appropriate contexts and topics:** What are the most appropriate topics and contexts for web-based engagement?
- **Types of web-based engagement:** What are the types of web-based engagements (e.g., public comment, foster dialogue, build consensus, and cultivate deliberation)? What do we know about effective facilitation of each? How can these and other goals be achieved?

- **Dialogue with very large numbers of participants:** What are the challenges and possible strategies that can support dialogues with very large numbers of participants?
- **Where do we go from here?** How can we capture the ideas shared, advance the practice, and find opportunities to implement more dialogues?

We hope the ideas in this summary paper provide useful guidance for our collective work toward realizing this very important Next Frontier! We welcome additional input on the ideas and concepts presented in this report. *Laurie Maak, WebDialogues Developer & Producer, WestEd, lmaak@wested.org*

Introduction

This document describes online dialogues from the perspective of practitioners (organizers, facilitators, and hosts) and identifies best practices developed from their experience with online dialogues over several years. It is motivated by a sense that this approach to public involvement is promising, in need of concise description, and ripe for an articulation of what works and what still needs to be better understood. The initial content for this document was developed through a WebDialogue among practitioners and refined through collaborative authorship using a wiki.

Online dialogues are a structured approach for engaging participants in topical written discussions. They typically involve more people in more places and from more walks of life than could be practically brought together for face-to-face interactions. Conversations are generally through written messages, linked together through threads of related content to which participants contribute over a series of days or weeks.

Online dialogues provide a number of potential advantages compared to in-person processes, including:

- The opportunity to tap the ideas and experiences of a large, and potentially diverse, group in the process of crafting rules, legislation, or programs.
- Access for people who would not be able to attend collaborative forums in person (e.g., those far from Washington, D.C. or a state capital).
- Access to a broader variety of disciplines and people with busy schedules—including parents, business people, faculty, students, nurses, and others—rather than paid lobbyists.
- A range of voices and points of view to add perspectives beyond the “extremes” that often characterize in-person processes (e.g., public hearings) and that can help mitigate the fault lines that often develop during in-person meetings.
- More intensive involvement, supported by background material and iterative engagement, over a period of time with other participants.
- The ability for policymakers to ask questions and discuss topics directly with participants—and the opportunity for citizens to engage directly with government and high-level government officials.

"Web dialogues offer a tremendous opportunity to open up the process and to allow people with jobs or babies or aging parents or an appointment with their dentist to 'show up' and take part."

- The opportunity to delve deep into a subject and share details and specific research supporting one's thinking on a topic.

Online Dialogue Process



What Are Best Practices for Online Dialogues?

There is enough experience with online dialogues that a body of “best practices” is beginning to emerge. This section describes key lessons identified by practitioners—starting with up-front planning, moving into dialogue facilitation, and finally describing how dialogue content affects policy.

Establish a clear purpose—and design the dialogue to accomplish it

The more clearly the purpose of the dialogue is articulated by sponsors and understood by participants, the more successful it will be. Some practitioners feel that establishing a clear purpose is the most important—and most challenging—aspect of dialogue planning. Key questions are:

- What is the issue we are seeking to resolve?
- What information do hosts/organizers want to address or receive input on from participants?
- What should participants get out of the dialogue?
- How will information contributed to the dialogue be used and how will participants be informed?
- How can participants most effectively use the dialogue to affect policy outcomes?
- Who needs to be involved in the engagement and how can they be effectively reached?

Hosts—the agencies or other organizations that initiate and sponsor a dialogue—play a critical role in establishing and communicating its purpose. They should begin with an authentic desire to hear from the public and develop a clear statement regarding what difference the input will make. They should plan to report back to participants on what they learned and keep participants in the loop as decisions, policy, or programs evolve. Establishing a compelling purpose may require a “pre-process” with hosts before the dialogue begins.

"Participants are hungry for access to information and interaction with [agency] staff. I doubt the agencies realize how powerful their openness and involvement can be."

Some practitioners feel that dialogues are most appropriate for getting a better understanding of people's knowledge about an issue and a sense of what they care about rather than measuring "public opinion." Dialogues can then surface policy alternatives, trade-offs, innovative solutions, and implementation challenges. By promoting and co-building common knowledge, a higher quality public

opinion may emerge.

Just like in-person processes, online dialogues can be designed to accomplish different purposes—from educating and informing participants, to drawing out public knowledge, to influencing decisions. The International Association for Public Participation defines this spectrum as ranging across the following activities: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower.

Although online participation is distinctly different from in-person engagement, a typology of in-person processes can be useful for understanding what online dialogues can be used for, such as:

- *Focus Groups.* Essentially small-group research interviews that provide a reading of individual and a group's state of mind but do not, by themselves, help them develop their thinking very much.
- *Stakeholder Dialogues.* Participants are peers and citizens who voluntarily contribute their time and ideas; these sessions can be homogeneous groups, or they can be more eclectic, with diverse stakeholders. The idea is to engage people in productive dialogue about a problem or initiative and to elicit ideas about how to address the subject. The dialogue may include opportunities for participants to learn about the problem and develop a better understanding of the perspectives of other stakeholders. The dialogue may also produce changes in the participants' perspectives that reflect increased knowledge of the subject and better understanding of other stakeholders' perspectives.
- *Community Conversations:* Opportunities to engage a broad cross-section of a community in a dialogue, including specific stakeholders and average citizens. These are large-scale civic events. "Community" can be defined very narrowly or broadly based on the topic(s) involved.

An articulation of purpose helps inform key design choices, such as who should participate. For example, a dialogue focusing on exploring divergent views on a given topic would ideally involve a large number of people with significant differences in level of subject expertise and experience, while a deliberative dialogue that seeks serious insight and input may focus on involving a select number of people with varied but substantial expertise and experience.

Actively market the dialogue and recruit people to participate

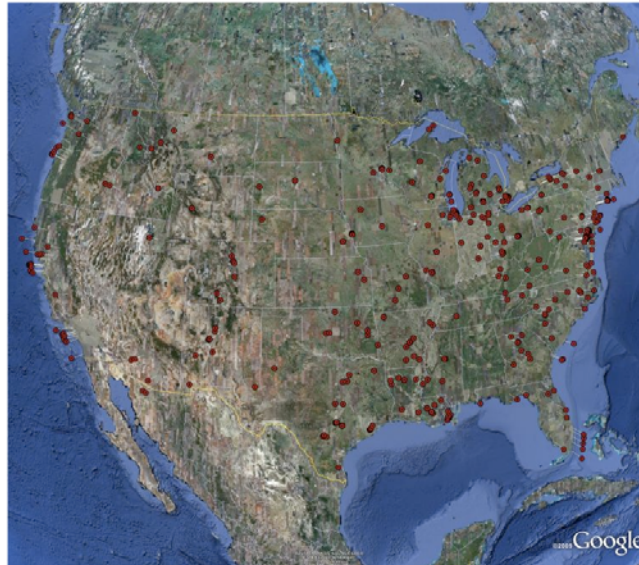
Recruiting for dialogues is most successful when hosts and others involved in the dialogue actively tap multiple local, regional, national, and international communications networks to provide information about the dialogue and recruit participants. This active

"Because we were national in scope, we learned about project operations and perspectives we would have had a difficult time identifying otherwise."

recruitment helps inform those with the most potential interest about the topic/dialogue and helps bring in participants who are knowledgeable and interested in the topic.

Participant Location Map

[View Participant List](#)



[WebDialogues](#) are produced by [WestEd](#) Interactive.

Develop a compelling and constructive agenda

A well-framed agenda clearly maps out topics and key discussion points and guides participants' involvement throughout the process. To make the agenda responsive to the interests of those participating, dialogue participants must be involved in framing it from the beginning—or they may determine the agenda for the last few days of a dialogue based on discussion earlier in the dialogue. This helps build trust for all who are engaged in the process.

For public dialogues, agendas should begin with broad and easily understood concepts that can then be deconstructed as the dialogue proceeds. Baseline polls at the commencement of a dialogue are useful for helping the organizers evaluate basic knowledge and—when combined with a poll at the end—assess how much people learned or revised their thinking as a result of the dialogue.

Early in a dialogue, the agenda should encourage participants to provide specific examples, experiences, and insights that may serve as a basis of exploration and analysis. Supporting statements with research and experience should be encouraged in online engagements as ways to better understand and experience a process by participants new to the ideas being presented. “Hooks” in the beginning can get people excited about sharing their experiences and can help make them aware that what they say and do in the dialogue will influence and impact others involved. As the dialogue comes to a close, techniques such as summaries, polling, and user-defined discussion topics can be used to construct a new commonly-built and synthesized outcome.

Use effective facilitation techniques to help people participate and keep the dialogue focused

Active facilitation is an important element of online dialogues. Facilitation online, however, differs significantly from facilitation of face-to-face meetings. Some basic values apply to both online and in-person facilitation (e.g., clarity, neutrality), and facilitation has the same fundamental objective (i.e., help participants be effective, make it safe for all involved). There are, however, some unique challenges to online facilitation. These include:

- Many conversations occurring at the same time with large numbers of people.
- Long time periods (dialogues can run from a few days to a few weeks) and participation from early morning until late at night, especially when multiple time zones are involved.
- A more challenging environment to encourage group norms around ground rules, cultural differences, and behaviors.
- A limited ability to “balance” participation by encouraging more quiet participants and asking those with more active voices to give others a chance to be heard.
- The potential to attract dominating numbers of activists or people with a need to be heard regularly and who take the dialogue off topic to cover their own agendas.

Experience with facilitating online dialogues has led to some useful techniques, such as:

- Doing as much as possible to support effective self-regulation by participants. The impact of a facilitator is more limited online. Hence, more effort needs to go into designing the process to ensure that participants can play a significant role in regulating themselves and other participants.
- Having multiple facilitators or empowering other dialogue partners (e.g., subject matter experts, summarizers, monitors) to “facilitate” through their roles and activities in the dialogue. These roles need to be explicit, well understood, and built into the structure of the process.
- Actively encouraging basic norms, such as respect, that are often taken for granted during in-person forums.
- If needed, contacting participants by email and telephone to keep the conversation on-track and to discuss ground rules with “difficult” participants. These interactions can “humanize” the interaction between the facilitator and participants.
- Creating norms for the process agreed to at the outset by all participants with known consequences for behaviors that are deviant from the norm.
- When a person or a group of people lead the discussion off the main topic, bringing the group or individuals back on topic expeditiously. Once others follow the conversation off topic, it is very difficult to redirect.

- Maintaining the option to warn participants and potentially delete their comments if they are inappropriate in nature or language. Some dialogues allow comments to be posted only after a review by a moderator or facilitator.¹
- Getting a commitment to the rules of engagement when participants register. This helps participants self-regulate and also empowers a facilitator to cut off inappropriate comments or redirect the discussion.

Make it easy for people to get started and stay focused on the topic

In many dialogues, a few people post many comments and many people post only a few (or no) comments. A persistent challenge is encouraging the silent participants to contribute to the dialogue and not allowing the extremely active participants to control the content. A number of techniques can help, including:

- “Seed” the conversation to make people more comfortable about contributing and to provide an example of how to participate for those that are new to online dialogues. Conversations can be seeded through questions or opening remarks that participants are asked to make during registration or by having a core team, hosts, or even local celebrities, topical experts, or leaders start a couple of discussion threads.
- Express a clear policy question to which the sponsor or host really is interested in the answers that might emerge.
- Begin with “safe” questions that people can answer based on their own experiences or feelings and that address the policy question at hand. These kinds of questions make people feel they possess valuable information based on their own experience. Subsequent follow-up questions—presented by the facilitator, hosts, or others—can probe for more detail and hone in on specifics related to the overall topic and purpose of the dialogue.
- Provide a “backgrounder” that explains key issues and educates people about the dialogue topic. A backgrounder can be in the form of a short summary document, a library of background materials, an introductory video, or other format (questionnaire, multiple choice baseline exam, etc.).
- Deliver short daily summaries of each day’s discussions that allow people to stay up-to-date and feel that the dialogue has not “passed them by” if they start late, miss a few days, or simply don’t have time to read all the posts.
- Establish short- and long-range goals for the dialogue that can be updated and revised as needed and as the dialogue progresses.
- Communicate at a level that allows all participants to easily understand the online content and reinforce this from the beginning to the end of the dialogue. Government officials, scientists, and technical experts often communicate in a way much different from community participants. Leaders of the dialogue as well as facilitators may need to translate and/or monitor messages to make certain

“In our dialogue evaluations people tell us that the dialogues included different points of view, with comments noting how much they appreciate learning about views different from their own.”

¹ It is important to recognize that the First Amendment limits the ability of Federal organizations to censor messages.

that all involved can understand the ideas being communicated. For example, all acronyms need to be defined.

Ensure worthy content with lasting value

A key challenge for online dialogues—and many in-person processes for that matter—is capturing contributions from hundreds of contributions in a concise way that has lasting value. Some best practices include:

- Articulate a clear intent and purpose for the dialogue that helps focus contributions. One practitioner warns that “a vague and nebulous idea can lead to a profound realization but hundreds and thousands of vague and nebulous ideas tossed together ... will likely just produce a large database of vague and nebulous ideas.” When host agencies have a clearly defined goal for their dialogues, they are more likely to receive focused messages that relate to the goal.
- Work toward a defined deliverable such as a white paper or plan of action to crystallize a “product” for the benefit of the group and to carry the knowledge to others interested in or working on the topic.
- Prepare summaries that highlight key points that reflect the perspectives of the participants.

Ensure an active and constructive role for dialogue “hosts”

Dialogue hosts play a key role in identifying the purpose of the dialogue and focusing it on a clear topic. When hosts are elected representatives or agency personnel, their active participation in the dialogue provides a unique opportunity for direct interactions between citizens and their government. Hosts should also strive (or be encouraged) to play a number of other roles, including:

- Contributing to the development of the agenda and providing documents to a dialogue library or other repository for background materials.
- Actively marketing the dialogue and recruiting participation through mailing lists, listservs, and other networks of communities of interest.
- Providing a high-level welcome and encouragement at the beginning of the dialogue that describes what the host hopes to gain from the dialogue and what the host hopes participants will gain.
- Recruiting staff from host agencies and content experts to participate as hosts and expert panelists and to answer questions as they come up.
- Reading messages as the online dialogue evolves and coding or categorizing them for later reference.
- Summarizing what the host has “heard” from participants in the dialogue and communicating back to them how their information will be used.

“The leadership of a hosting organization can have a stimulating effect on participation by simply dipping into the conversation to welcome participants and say how important this process is to them--it dignifies the process and adds significance to the participation of everyone.”

- Correcting misinformation as soon as it is posted so it does not become accepted or even assumed to be endorsed.

Make sure participants are being heard—and that they know it

Most people take the time to participate in online dialogues and other participatory forums because they care about the world they live in and the topic at issue—they also want to make a difference. Dialogue planners and hosts need to make sure that people are rewarded for their participation by letting them know they are being heard and legitimately considering their input as part of decision-making. Best practices include:

- Active participation by hosts—especially when it is a government body that will be developing policy related to the dialogue topic.
- Follow the dialogue with a message from the hosts describing what they heard and how they plan to use the information. Ideally, hosts should explain how they plan to use information at the outset of the dialogue before the conversation begins.
- Continue communicating with participants after the dialogue (e.g., by sending out information about programs, rules, guidance or other policy, and documents informed by the dialogue), and sharing outcomes and final materials as they are revised and finalized. Personal emails and print letters from the highest-level officials involved are meaningful to participants.

What Are Key Remaining Challenges and Questions About Online Dialogues?

Although much has been learned about how to make online dialogues effective, there are still remaining challenges to be addressed through refinements to dialogue design, facilitation, and other techniques. Key challenges include:

- Different levels of engagement—while some people are reluctant to post, some are “chomping at the bit” to get discussions going and can deluge other participants with overwhelming numbers of messages.
- Promoting effective interactions when dealing with participant populations having significantly different levels of expertise, experience, and expectation. When dialogues are open and inclusive, diversity can result in a much more interesting dialogue that produces a rich and varied knowledge product. However, in other instances, a great disparity in threshold knowledge, experience, and expectation can result in a dialogue that is less effective and also more frustrating to participants. Those with a greater threshold knowledge who hope to focus on tangible outcomes may become frustrated with those having a more casual interest (and the casual participants may feel intimidated by those with more knowledge and experience).
- Un-facilitated conversations that potentially devolve into “chat room” banter, flame wars, and tit for tat over semantics.
- Involving people with limited Internet access or other cultural, social, or psychological constraints on participating. (In one dialogue the hosts heard that someone had no access to a computer, and they arranged to receive his faxes, post them, and get the related responses to him for several days.)

- Sorting and organizing the wealth of contributions in an efficient way so that participants and sponsors can find and participate in the parts of the dialogue that are most relevant to them. In some cases, the "noise" of irrelevant postings can eclipse the "signal" of on-topic content.
- Balancing the need to keep conversations focused while also not limiting insightful conversations or unique ideas that are "outside of the box."
- Helping participants stay current with the evolving dialogue conversations that can run over hundreds of messages posted each day.
- Overcoming some well-intentioned, but limiting government rules, such as the Paperwork Reduction Act's limits on asking questions² of participants or asking them to take surveys as part of the dialogue process.

"I believe that well-moderated web dialogues that deal with the most critical and controversial issues would allow political leaders to hear from a greater number of their constituents and might prove more effective than a single or series of physical-based hearings in promoting constructive dialogue among citizens and between citizens and their leaders."

Where Do We Go From Here?

The evolution of online dialogues has largely been driven by a process of experimentation, evaluation, and "learning by doing." Practitioners have identified a number of new ideas to try and refine in future dialogues. These include:

- Holding a "proxy dialogue" where a random sample of a much larger group of individuals is selected to actively write messages to a dialogue while the remaining group of "observers" could follow the discussion and submit "fresh perspectives" to the facilitators for review and inclusion in the discussion. Alternatively, the observers could participate in polls (via the web or cell phones) the results of which are discussed in the dialogue.
- Allowing people to contribute in ways other than posting messages. Ideas include adding an "I agree" feature or other ways of tagging others' messages to show agreement, disagreement, interest, support, etc. These tags could also help participants find certain types of content or conversations in the dialogue (e.g., highlighting threads that are particularly active or interesting).
- Using a dialogue as one step in writing a publication (or "launching" a new publication). The dialogue could bring together researchers, authors, subject matter experts, and an array of experiences to inform and test ideas.
- Combining dialogues with other online processes, such as a three-step process of using a dialogue to brainstorm ideas, using online polling (or some similar tool) to focus the conversation, and then using a wiki for the group to collaboratively develop a written product.³

² Federal organizations cannot ask questions unless they have been cleared through the Office of Management and Budget under the Paperwork Reduction Act. Participants can instead be invited to respond to statements.

- Dividing a large dialogue up into “subject tribes,” in which people are invited or assigned to one or two specific subjects to explore and then bring insights back to the larger group.
- Trying an online dialogue with a video component so people communicating in real time can be in many different locations.
- Utilizing dialogues at various stages of the legislative or policymaking process. For example, using online dialogues to focus on critical issues that might be introduced in committees or as bills prior to actual legislative sessions.

Conclusion

It is clear that online dialogues offer a significantly different approach to public and stakeholder engagement from tried and true in-person approaches. Features such as the potential to involve a very large number of people, the ability to engage people from anywhere in the world, and the seamless incorporation of other electronic techniques, such as instant polling, can make online dialogues exciting for hosts, facilitators, and participants. These same features also create new challenges for making online dialogues effective and rewarding for those involved. This document has outlined an emerging set of best practices, some remaining challenges, and an agenda for further inquiry. The time is ripe for further implementation of online dialogues and a continuing commitment by practitioners to hone skills, experiment with new techniques, and offer participants a valuable experience that contributes to the responsiveness and transparency of public policy.

Making a Difference in the Community: The Superfund Job Training Initiative at Savannah River Superfund Site

By Karen Martin, Superfund

The Savannah River Site Superfund Job Training Initiative (SRS SuperJTI) is a job training program that provided career development opportunities for residents living near the Savannah River site in south-central South Carolina and eastern Georgia. Through a unique partnership with the Department of Energy, the community-based Imani Group, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, Aiken Technical College, Parsons, and Friendship Baptist Church, nineteen graduates of this SuperJTI project received the training and learned the skills that helped them land jobs with the site cleanup contractor. EPA's goal is to help the community create job opportunities and partnerships that remain long after the site's cleanup has been completed.

Through SuperJTI, EPA sponsors and supports job training programs in communities affected by nearby Superfund sites. SuperJTI provides local residents with extensive classroom instruction and hands-on work experience. This approach provides trainees basic technical skills to work at Superfund sites, construction projects, or hazardous waste processing companies. Trainees also learn the basic life skills needed to remain employable.



One of the keys to a successful SuperJTI project is to recruit candidates for the training who will have a high likelihood of successfully completing the training, and subsequently have a high likelihood of being hired by a site cleanup contractor. Because there was a high unemployment rate in the area, the Savannah River SuperJTI team developed an intensive recruitment process. Over 450 people applied for 21 student positions. The trainees chosen represented the diverse demographics of the area. Seven women and 14 men were selected ranging in age from 20 to 56. Some of the trainees did not have a high school diploma, while others had college degrees. Two thirds of the students came from homes with annual incomes under \$25,000.

From May 26, 2009 through June 22, 2009, the students received Hazardous Waste Operations Management and Emergency Response training, as well as computer skills, CPR and life skills training. Twenty of the 21 students graduated from the program. Sixteen graduates were hired by the Savannah River Site contractor, and started in operators and material handler positions on August 16, 2009. Three graduates are expected to be hired by the site contractor upon successful completion of their GED exam. This job training experience was life changing for many of the graduates, including Kera Woods who said, "We struggled, we had to make sacrifices, now we can open up opportunities for our families and other people in our communities."



SuperJTI Graduates and Rev. Brendolyn Jenkins of the Imani Group.

The Superfund Program sees the Savannah River Site SuperJTI as the model for conducting future SuperJTIs around the country. The Savannah River Site SuperJTI is the first job training initiative conducted at a federal facility. As a result of the success of the SRS

SuperJTI, the community, DOE, and EPA are excited and engaged in developing another round of the initiative for FY2010. The Savannah River Site SuperJTI project was made possible by the dedicated work of the following individuals: Kyle Bryant (Region 4/Superfund), Carolyn Haugabook (Region 4/Superfund), Karen L. Martin (Headquarters/OSWER/OSRTI) and Robert H. Pope (Region 4/Superfund, Site Manager).

The Savannah River Site SuperJTI was selected as the People's Choice Award poster presentation winner at EPA's 11th Community Involvement Training Conference held August 18-20, 2009, in Seattle, Washington. This dynamic conference brought together more than 400 people from EPA and its federal, state, tribal, and local agency partners who plan and implement environmental community involvement, partnership, stewardship, outreach and education programs. Poster presentations on specific projects and activities were displayed and highlighted during the conference. Poster authors interacted with participants to answer questions and provide additional information about the project or activity they presented.



Jeff Phillip, Region 10 Community Involvement Manager, presenting the People's Choice Award to Karen L. Martin, of the Superfund Program.



The People's Choice Award winner, the Savannah River Site Superfund Job Training Initiative exhibit

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Public Involvement brings the pieces together