

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

More Information about the Policy

Copies of the Policy and the Framework for implementing it are available at <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/policy2003.pdf> and <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/framework.pdf>

The Website for the "Internet Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions" is <http://www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip>

EPA's Response to Comments on the Draft 2000 Public Involvement Policy is available at <http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/policy2003/response.pdf>

How to Provide Information and Conduct Outreach

"Involvement brings the pieces together" artwork is the creation of Erica Ann Turner, who contributed the work through an agreement between the Art Institute of Washington and EPA.



Involvement brings the pieces together

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Step 4: Provide Information and Conduct Outreach

Goal:

- Provide the public with access to accurate, understandable, pertinent, and timely information to facilitate effective involvement in Agency decision-making processes

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its new Public Involvement Policy in June 2003. The Policy's overall goal is for excellent public involvement to become an integral part of EPA's culture, thus supporting more effective Agency decisions and actions.

The Policy provides guidance to EPA managers and staff on how you can better involve the public in the Agency's decision making. The Policy outlines seven steps to effective involvement. This brochure (one in a series) offers suggestions to help you "get started" providing information and conducting outreach for your public involvement activities and processes.

Why Provide Information and Conduct Outreach?

EPA seeks to give communities accurate information early, often, and in accessible places so that they can contribute effectively to EPA decision-making processes. Without clearly understanding the scientific and legal basis for EPA's decisions, most people will have difficulty fully engaging.

"Helping the community understand the EPA process is as important as helping them understand the specific project features. It is important to educate the community about the expected process and what type of information is needed from them and how/when they can/should participate."

Eileen Ringnalda
Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions

What to Consider When You Provide Public Involvement Information and Conduct Outreach

To adequately inform the public, you should be sensitive to the community and affected groups' needs and learn the answers to these questions:

- How do they prefer to receive information?
- Which are their trusted sources?
- What is the history of this issue in the community?
- What do they already believe or know about the issue? Why?
- How widespread are community interest and knowledge of the issue?
- How long should you take to inform before you involve your stakeholders?
- What information sources does the community trust? Can you enlist their help?

Information for the Public

- Understand the audience
- Outline the process
- Communicate strategically
- Find community contacts

Since not everyone can easily find or understand Federal Register Notices, you'll need to use the answers to the previous questions to develop and distribute information and make it available through trusted sources.

To build trust, always seek transparency – be clear, direct, and open in your communications and processes.

"Go into the community and talk to people. We cannot expect to know why people seem disinterested unless we talk with them. Do they have such a low level of trust because they feel participation will be a waste of time? Are there other social and/or economic issues for this community which are simply a higher priority, such as employment? Do they feel so bombarded with information that they have simply disengaged? We don't know unless we ask."

Bruce Smith
Facilitator - Nova Scotia, Canada
Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions



"Layman terms should not be viewed as derogatory or insulting to one's intelligence. As a society, we are not all rocket scientists, but we are intelligent in our own ways... Real life terminology is crucial in getting information out to the public."

Jan Boyle - Training Coordinator
Montana Environmental Training Center
Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions

Plan Your Work

How to Organize Your Information and Outreach

Educate yourself about the issues and become familiar with the community, its groups, history, and issues related to your involvement activities.

- Communicate with other agencies and EPA staff who may have worked on similar public involvement activities or with similar audiences to get key contact and audience information.
- Gain an idea of the community interest and the best way to communicate information to the affected public.
- Outline, or develop, a "process map" of your information and outreach activities, events, and dates which you can give to anyone interested in the process.
- Develop a strategic communication plan with clearly defined goals and objectives so you can track progress.
- Look at the community as a whole system, enlisting help from community groups and leaders, individual stakeholders, experts, local officials, environmental organizations, and tribes so you can leverage your information and outreach involvement activities.

- Plan to communicate with the widest range of community members with help from or through:

- Local churches, clinics, restaurants, beauty and barber shops, and social outlets such as senior and youth centers, malls, banks, gyms, and neighborhood and block associations
- Government agencies, officials, post offices, libraries
- Private not-for-profit and environmental groups
- Educators, community specialists, scientists
- Older residents and other community leaders

- Consider using a neutral party to find and communicate with those who may be interested in an issue, especially when the issue is controversial.

Work Your Plan

- Develop messages for the community or affected public and use the best methods available to communicate them (e.g., articles, ads, talk shows, videos electronically, mailings, meetings, door-to-door contact, flyers, billboards, etc.).
- Develop and use attention-grabbing materials and visuals such as maps, graphs, photos, and diagrams to show your points and the issues.
- Provide service and access for all audiences, including foreign and sign languages and Braille or large print or other considerations for users with physical challenges.
- Write for the public using plain English (provide alternative languages for non-English speakers), and include a contact name and, when possible, a toll-free number.

"Partnership with local government could make EPA more approachable; also, local government is certainly familiar with what outreach method works most effectively with its particular constituents."

Nancy Howard
City of Newport News, Virginia

- Improve the understanding of long, complicated documents by producing summaries. Also provide full text access and straightforward guides on regulatory and science fundamentals.

- Work with the credible media outlets of the community and affected public to disseminate information (e.g., TV, newspapers, radio, Internet, social or religious settings).

- Keep careful records.

- Make sure your entire team understands the communications goals.

- Enlist help to share information in local, social, business, and religious organizations such as city hall, community centers, stores, libraries, and churches.

- Treat all organizations and individuals equally, fairly, and respectfully.

Additional Resources:

The Federal Communicators' Network, Communicators' Guide, 2000, <http://www.publicforuminstitute.org/activities/2002/fcn/commguid.pdf>

U.S. EPA Office of Emergency and Remedial Response, Superfund Community Involvement Handbook, EPA doc#540-K-01003, 2001, http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tool/cag/ci_handbook.pdf

U.S. EPA Education and Outreach Group, "Outreach Program," <http://www.epa.gov/oar/oaqps/eog/sbop.html>

Other EPA Public Involvement Brochures

Introducing EPA's Public Involvement Policy
How to Plan and Budget for Public Involvement
How to Identify People to Involve
How to Provide Technical and Financial Assistance for Public Involvement
How to Consult with and Involve the Public
How to Review and Use Public Input and Provide Feedback
How to Improve Public Meetings and Hearings
How to Improve Working with Tribes
How to Involve Environmental Justice Communities
How to Overcome Barriers to Public Involvement
More Information about the Policy

