

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 Technical and Financial Assistance for Public Involvement

"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

United States Environmental Protection Agency
National Center for Environmental Innovation
Public Involvement Staff
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW 1807T
Washington, DC 20460



EPA 233-F-03-007



Step 3: Consider Providing Technical or Financial Assistance to Support Public Involvement

Goal:

- To help affected groups and individuals who may not have adequate resources to participate effectively

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its revised 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 decisions. The Policy outlines seven steps to effective involvement. This brochure (one in a series) offers suggestions to help you "get started" when considering technical and financial assistance for public involvement.

Why Provide Public Involvement Assistance?

Technical and financial assistance help communities navigate complex scientific issues, data and documents.

Such assistance also helps groups and communities decide if a proposed solution fits their understanding of protective enough. They may not agree with EPA's definition of "acceptable risk."

Many individual stakeholders cannot effectively take part in a dialogue about difficult environmental decisions because they do not have enough suitable and timely technical or financial assistance or personal time to research the issues, understand the effects and results of possible decisions, and feel comfortable expressing their opinions in a public forum.

Although well-established groups may exist in a given community, they often face several obstacles to taking part in environmental decisions:

- Lack of time to review data
- Distrust of public officials
- Lack of access to information
- Lack of knowledge about both scientific methods and Policy choices and processes

Residents often have unique, firsthand knowledge about local resources and environmental threats. By making their involvement easier, the Agency can gather information available only from these sources, and by doing so, improve the quality of the overall decision-making process.

What to Consider about Offering Assistance

It is important for EPA to provide a sound understanding of the issues and choices it is considering. Citizens who want to participate in EPA decision making may need substantial technical and/or financial assistance to do so. Understanding the needs of potential stakeholders is the first step in considering whether to provide assistance.

Researching historic environmental and political decisions in a given community can help lead you to existing groups and individuals. By listening to these parties, you can usually learn about their ability to engage in your particular program's decision and their understanding of the:

- Issues
- Scientific and technical information
- Risks and all costs of any choices
- Legal and procedural constraints
- Overall decision-making process
- Capacity to engage in your program's decision-making process

The next step is to understand what assistance choices are fitting and available. Talk to colleagues within EPA about the many sources of information on technical and financial assistance (See Additional Resources). Involvement and outreach specialists have often worked with affected groups and individuals, and they are a valuable resource.

"Technical aid is not just necessary to help communities understand the risks that a CERCLA site or a polluting facility creates – it's also necessary to help folks translate what they know, because they live near the facility, into technical issues. The type of smells, the timing of odors, the occurrence of disease, or simply nose, throat, or lung irritation—all of that can translate into important technical information about a facility's operations and the risks that it creates for a community."

Alma Lowry, The Public Interest Law Firm at Syracuse University College of Law
Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions



Plan Your Work

If assistance is needed and available, widely announce its availability as early in the process as possible. Clearly describe the process for seeking the support, including timing and the documentation needed to apply.

Consider the following points about funding public involvement:

- Whether the applicable statutory authority allows the proposed activity
- Whether the potentially affected parties are adequately represented
- The current capacity of the potentially affected parties to substantially participate without support
- The applicant's qualifications to do the work that your project may fund
- The direct involvement of affected community members
- The extent to which the funded activity will lead to more effective public involvement and benefit the public

In general, EPA should make special efforts to help groups that traditionally have fewer opportunities or resources to participate. Environmental justice, ethnic minority, and disabled community members may need more extensive support.

Work Your Plan

Technical Assistance Tips

- List and analyze all cost-free ideas first—be creative.
- Promote access to Agency experts or contractors.
- Identify existing models in other communities, partnering with them to help your specific project.
- Find, develop, and provide readily available tools to help adults understand complex environmental issues using:
 - One-on-one training classes
 - Seminars
 - Self-learning modules
 - Specialized contact people on EPA's staff
 - Online materials and courses

- In Superfund communities, consider using Technical Outreach Services to Communities (TOSC) services.
- Offer to brief religious leaders (ordained and lay) so they can share information with their congregations.
- Offer to brief local government officials/staff so you can work together to serve community information needs.
- Offer to provide train-the-trainer help for teachers and librarians who can be excellent community partners for explaining complicated materials.
- Help people translate their common-sense knowledge and observations (timing of events, odors, disease cases) into technical information about the environmental impacts of local facilities and potential associated risks.
- Partner with colleges, universities, schools, local government units, libraries, state and other federal agencies as repositories, meeting hosts, and more.

Financial Assistance Tips

In some limited instances, direct financial aid may be available for EPA partners, outside organizations and stakeholders. EPA managers may consider it suitable and essential to provide aid small local governments, outside groups, and stakeholders to achieve program goals.

In addition, EPA should, in limited situations, consider financial support to stakeholders, such as:

- Travel and per diem for stakeholders to provide information and advice directly to Agency officials
- Compensation for meeting time spent as a member of a Federal Advisory Committee
- Honoraria, stipends, or small grants to organizations and individuals that have a vital contribution to make to the public debate
- Funds so libraries can organize documents for public access
- Training so librarians and other information providers can better serve the public

- Technical aid centers at local colleges and universities so information comes from "local" sources the public is more likely to trust
- Supervised technical aid that graduate science or business students may provide for academic credit
- Contract money to support community groups that need help to participate
- Grants for health advisers to interpret risk data, such as reports from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)

Additional Resources:

Superfund Community Involvement Handbook, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, EPA Publication # 540-K-01-003, March 2001, http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/cag/ci_handbook.pdf

Public Involvement in EPA Decisions, U.S. EPA, Information Renaissance, Hewlett Foundation, Internet Dialogue, July 13, 2001, http://www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip/join/sum_7_13.shtml

Community Assistance Team: Lessons Learned, U.S. EPA Internet site, <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/cahp/catt.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 Do Outreach for Public Involvement
How to Consult with and Involve the Public
How to Review and Use Public Input and Provide Feedback
How to Evaluate Public Involvement
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

