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Iraq Governance Strengthening Project

Exploring Opportunities for Public Officials to
Work With Citizens, Non-Profits and
Community-Based Organizations

April 2012

IRAQ GOVERNANCE STRENGTHENING PROJECT

**Exploring Opportunities for Public Officials to
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FUNDED BY USAID

April 2012
Contract No. AID-267-C-11-00006
Deliverable No. D-2014-233

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Exploring Opportunities for Public Officials to Work With Citizens, Non-Profits and Community-Based Organizations

Contract No.:	AID-267-C-11-00006
Contractor Name:	Chemonics International, Inc.
USAID Cognizant Technical Office:	Capacity Building Office USAID Iraq
Date of Report:	April 2012

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION AND REMARKS

This manual is intended to be a practical guide for public officials. It is written from a public official's perspective. The subject of the manual is public participation. It provides a rationale for involving the public and outside organizations in government's decision-making and policymaking processes. It offers guidelines and principles that every public official or government agency should be aware of and follow as it involves the public and outside organizations in its business (see pages 5-7).

The manual lists fifty-six (56) different public participation strategies and techniques can be used when doing public participation (page 4) and offers summaries of each one of them (pages 26-40). Four of the most commonly used techniques (public hearings, citizen committees, focus groups, and nominal group workshops) are described in detail, in a way that provides specific instructions about how to organize them, manage them and what kinds of outcomes to expect (pages 41-46).

The manual highlights situational factors that public officials always consider when they're deciding how to handle a problem. It indicates which public participation strategies and techniques work best in those situations (pages 8-12). The manual also provides indexes, reasonably expected outcomes and other matters that public officials consider as they do their jobs. It links them to public participation strategies that help (pages 13-25). These two sections are designed to channel a public official's focus and attention to a specific strategy or techniques that address their special needs, particular situation, or unique circumstance – factors they know best.

Finally, this manual includes an agenda for a day-long workshop at which all of the manual's contents can be reviewed and explained in detail (page 3)

WORKSHOP AGENDA: (sample)

Local Government: Exploring Opportunities to Work with Citizens, Non-Profits and Community-Based Organizations

09:30 – 09:45 Welcome and Introductions, Workshop Overview

09:45 – 10:30 Public Participation

1. WHAT IS IT?
2. WHY DO IT?
3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES
4. DISCUSSION

10:30 – 10:45 Tea Break

10:45 – 12:45 Tools and Strategies

A Model for Figuring Which Strategies and Techniques Work Best in Your Situation
Key Factors and Questions for Designing a Public Participation Programme

12:45 – 01:30 Lunch

01:30 – 02:45 Case Studies

1. Explain cases
2. Break into groups
3. Design a public participation programme

02:45 – 03:15 Report back from small groups, share and tell

03:15 – 03:30 Afternoon Tea Break

03:30 – 04:45 Working with Non-Profits and Community-Based Organizations

1. Why work with non-profits?
2. What relationships are possible?
3. How can urban councils build-in accountability?
4. Working more effectively with cbo's and non-profits
5. Discussion

04:45 – 05:15 Wrap-Up and Evaluation (What did you learn? What else do you want to learn? What are some of your current public participation needs? What are your relationships with CBOs?)

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

“Face-to-Face, People-to-People” Events and Processes

Committees

Blue Ribbon Panel	Eager Beaver Committee
Bridge Committee	Feedback Panel
Commission	Oversight Committee
Depolarizing Committee	Task Force
	Working Group

Events and Site-Specific Activities

Brainstorm Session	Open Meeting
Conference/Retreat	Participation Style Radio Show
Drop-In Center	Public Hearing
Field Demonstration	Public Meeting
Games and Contests	Samoan Circle
Nominal Group Workshop	Site Visit
	Town Meeting

In-Depth

Citizens Panel	Seminar/Workshop
Consensus Process	Study Circles
Deliberative Poll	

Processes

Facilitation	Negotiation
Mediation	

“Proactive Strategies – Laying the Foundation” Approaches

Communication

Advertisement	Media
Briefings with Key Individuals	Models
Fliers/Brochures	Newsletter
Initiating Communication with Stakeholders	Poster Campaign
Mailing List	Working with Civic Groups and Institutions

Procedural, Management and Staffing Adjustments

Community Information Representative	Ombudsman
Improving Office Procedures	Presenting the Full Range of Alternatives
Internal Communication	Volunteerism
Logging Citizen Contacts	

Research and Data Collection

Analyze Potential Opposition	Key Contacts
Background	Questionnaire
Delphi Techniques	Survey

Focus Groups

WHY DO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

THE CIVIC PERSPECTIVE

1. Our political system is a democracy – a form of government where citizens have opportunities to participate in making public decisions that impact their lives and their community.
2. Citizens have a civic responsibility to actively participate in government; public officials have an obligation to provide to provide them with ways to do that.
3. Effective democratic self-governance requires citizens to be informed about public issues that affect them

THE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE (from a public official's point-of-view)

1. A public participation event can tell you how you are doing and if the direction you are thinking about going is where the public wants to go (and what the other side's arguments are if it isn't).
2. Public participation events are opportunities to meet constituents face-to-face. They provide you with opportunities to show that you are open to hearing and considering their ideas, and that you know what you are doing. You become more than a name in the newspaper or a voice on the radio.
3. People like to be asked their opinion about important issues, especially issues that directly affect them. Even if they choose not to offer an opinion, they like to be asked. People want to know what's going on. People like to know they matter.
4. Most public participation events and strategies are arranged by public officials. You create the forum and you make the agenda. Successful public participation strategies widen your support base when decisions are taken and policies are implemented.

'GOOD MANAGEMENT' ARGUMENTS

1. Citizens bring new energy and new resources to the table. They are sources of special insight, information and experience. They contribute to developing practical solutions that often work to solve community problems.
2. Public participation done honestly enhances a sense of community and trust in government.
3. Public participation creates better plans, better projects and better programs. In the long run, it saves usually time and money (particularly handling controversial issues).

THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public participation is two-way communication.
2. Public participation will seldom produce consensus. But it important that you strive for consensus – and do it in a very transparent way.
3. Citizens can best effectively participate in the decision-making and the policymaking processes if they are well-informed about the reasons decisions and policies have to be made, the constraints you face when you try to solve public problems, the range of alternatives available and their consequences.
4. Even if people are not entirely satisfied with the outcome, most of them will consider the decision made was fairly derived -- if they have had an honest and fair opportunity to influence:
 - how the issue is framed,
 - which alternatives are considered,
 - how alternatives are evaluated, and
 - adjustments made along the way.
5. Public participation and public relations are two different things.
6. Doing public participation without full integrity (doing it honestly and openly) is worse than not doing it at all.
7. It is more important that a public participation event be widely promoted than that it be well attended.
8. Public participation is done best when it is done throughout the decision-making and policymaking process, or the project or program's development.

GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Things to remember when you are involved in any public participation event (especially consider these things when you do public hearings):

1. Be up-front and honest about your intentions and how you plan to use in the input the event generates.
2. Make time at the end of the event to review with citizens what has happened at the event. Tell them what you have heard and how you will process it (next steps).
3. Whenever possible, make the event venue 'citizen friendly' and 'citizen attentive':
 - Facilitators should be at the same eye-level level as the public
 - Make the procedure to offer public comment as un-bureaucratic as possible – in tone, content and procedure
 - Keep your presentation time to a minimum; maximize time for public comment
 - If you ask people to identify themselves before they speak, be sure to explain why
 - Set up a system that makes it easy for anyone speaking to be heard by everyone in the hall
4. When the same comments seem to be made by several speakers, mention it. Then ask for a show of hands about who agrees with the point, who disagrees. This allows for everyone to register an opinion, without everyone present having to hear the same points made over and over again.
5. Be cognizant of your 'stage presence':
 - Give the people who speak your full attention
 - Do not badger speakers
 - When you respond (answer a question posed by a speaker or ask the speaker for clarification), address the speaker by name
 - At the end of the event, be sure to thank people for attending
6. Understand why people come to a public participation event. Role perceptions in the public participation process change when people get the perception that they are empowered.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU DECIDE WHICH PARTICULAR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY OR TECHNIQUE YOU WILL USE:

Situation Factor: OVERALL PROJECT COST

The higher the cost of the project you're considering (money, time and commitment):

- The more you can justifiably spend in money and time on your public participation program
- The more important it is to ensure a diversity of input
- The more important it is to have agreement that decisions are being made with appropriate citizen input
- The more important it is to consult a large number of people (a full range of obvious and possible stakeholders) -- to ensure that different perspectives are being considered
- The more important it is to gather citizen input up front (at the beginning of the process), before a lot of money is spent heading off in a specific direction
- The more willing citizens will be to commit a significant amount of time and effort
- The more necessary it may be to go in-depth -- so that the public understands the rationale and justification for the expense and the effort
- The more flexibility you have about hiring outside experts to help design and facilitate your public participation program
- It is often advisable to move slowly -- so that people don't feel 'steam-rolled' (if you can afford a longer planning time)

Situation Factor: COMPLEXITY OF ISSUE

As complexity of the issue increases, consider this:

1. You may want to have fewer people involved, but involved in an in-depth manner. It is very difficult to involve a large number of people in an in-depth manner, and it is especially difficult to do it when you are dealing with a complex issue.
2. The selection process for participation needs to be clear and trusted so that the people involved in it are 'honest brokers.' (Be sure not to 'stack the deck' or give the perception that participants in the process are all your friends or people who usually agree with you.) The selection process should be trusted and respected – by everyone directly involved and everyone watching the process from the outside.
3. It becomes less likely that you will be able to or that you should involve a large number of ordinary citizens – the more complex the issue. You may want to have fewer people involved in a more intense manner. These people can then act as liaisons to the broader public.
4. You should be willing to invest enough resources on your public participation program to ensure that the people involved and affected have a good, accurate understanding of your project.
5. It is more important to involve people early in the process and all along the way. If people can gather the information they need over time enough to comfortably absorb it,

it is more likely they will understand it and be able to thoughtfully contribute to the resulting decisions.

6. Interested and involved citizens and community organizations will need to devote more time to learning and understanding the issues and the project, the more complex the problem is. Public participation programs should be designed to reflect this.
7. It is important that people trust you and your organization to do the right thing. That way, even if they don't completely understand the issue, as long as they trust you, your organization, and your decision-making process, they will be less likely to object to the decision or policy you make. If, however, they do not trust you, it may be important to acknowledge that and bring in a neutral third-party to facilitate the decision-making process.

Situation Factor: EMOTIONAL COMPONENT

If there are emotional components involved:

1. You must listen to the concerns and feelings of the public. If you have to make a difficult decision that adversely affects someone, the public will be more likely to go along or get along with what you decide to do, because they feel they have been listened to.
2. It is unlikely you will reach consensus. So don't make that your goal. Instead, strive for group 'consent.'
3. You need to either intensively involve a small number of people, or involve a large number of people in a purposely and obviously less intense forum or environment.
4. It is very important that the public trust you and your organization to do the right thing. If they don't trust you, acknowledge the fact and involve an outside organization or facilitator to manage the process who they do trust.
5. In order to achieve a level of group consent to the outcome of your process in these circumstances, you must move slowly, which may lead to increased cost (money, time, effort) for your public participation program. It may also involve some outside help to plan and organize the process.
6. It may be necessary to design a rather in-depth public participation program, so the public is aware of the competing interests and trade-offs that you have to deal with. This will also let the public know that you are aware of the competing interests and have considered all the options.
7. It is important to move slowly so that the public feels that you are carefully considering all the options and weighing the implications of the decisions you have to make.

Situation Factor: HISTORY OF THE ISSUE

If there is significant history with the issue (it has been around and talked about for some time):

1. It is very important to involve stakeholders and people who have been interested in the issue in the past. Bring them into the process and include them. Work together; it reduces chances that they might turn into adversarial opponents. Let them see the information you have and be part of the decision-making process.
2. Certain individuals may need to be invited to participate in order to help repair any negative associations with the issue in the past. Conversely, depending on the

circumstance, it might be deemed more useful and productive to randomly select participants -- so that you don't run the risk of 'stacking the deck' either for you or against you. Random selection will more likely get a broad sampling of opinions.

3. It may be necessary to design a rather in-depth process so that all the information and details of your plan or policy can be understood on their own merits. The full reasoning and trade-offs that are behind decisions must also be understood. The consequences of alternatives must be detailed and openly discussed.
4. If the history of the issue directly involves (on a personal basis) either the decision-maker or the organization that will make the decision, it may be necessary to involve an outside unbiased third party to develop and facilitate your public participation program. If you don't, then the public may view the entire process, the input it generates, and the outcome it produces to be 'tainted' and not trustworthy. It may also be necessary and advisable to do some 'rebuilding' of trust and respect relating to the organization as a whole or the decision-makers -- before attempting to tackle the issue at hand.
5. It may be necessary to move rather slowly so that the public doesn't feel like it is being run over by the process.
6. If the history around the issue is positive (if any initiative concerning it will likely enjoy wide-spread support), acknowledge that and build on it. Use the positive history as a bridge to get current and future projects off to a good start.

Situation Factor: NUMBER, VARIETY AND COMPOSITION OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

1. You may find that involving ordinary citizens who are stakeholders will be more productive and useful than involving citizen activists and interest groups. However, it is politically important and essential to the perception of inclusiveness that you involve the activists and interest groups. You need to develop a multi-faceted public participation program in order to be truly effective.
2. Be aware that it is important to keep key elected officials aware and informed about your public participation project. But realize that involving them directly in it may not be very productive, because they might not be able to freely express themselves in the process, or they might have well-known opinions or positions they've already taken regarding the issue.
3. If there are a small number of stakeholders and interests, and their cooperation and agreement is essential to success, then it may be necessary to design a program that involves a relatively small number of people in an in-depth manner. Create space and time enough for them to understand all of the issues and the trade-offs involved. You should also develop some way to reach out from the small group to the community at large.
4. If the stakeholders are a large or diverse group, then it will be necessary to have the public participation process opened to anyone who wants to participate. You should make a concerted effort to make sure that many different perspectives are included.
5. If there are a large number of diametrically opposed stakeholders, it may be impossible to reach a consensus. Strive to identify common ground. If there are a small number of

stakeholders, or if their differences are minimal, then maybe it is possible to reach consensus, or some level of group agreement.

6. If there are a large number of stakeholders, you may want to develop at least a two-prong approach for your public participation program. On one level, you will want to provide a forum for input from a large, diverse group of stakeholders. On another level, you will want an opportunity for more in-depth discussion and debate with representatives of stakeholder groups and 'wise' individuals who are respected by the stakeholders.

Situation Factor: ORGANIZED OPPOSITION

If there is organized opposition to your proposed program, project or policy:

1. They must be involved in some way in your public participation program, preferably early on in the process, before they dig in their heels and stop listening to you. You need to develop the ability and the opportunity to have a two-way dialogue with your opposition, with both of you listening. You cannot simply try to defend your ideas and convince them. You must listen to their concerns and address them.
2. You should either explicitly invite the opposition to participate or randomly select participants. If you choose to design a public participation program with randomly selected participants, you can plug in the opposition as members of an advisory committee that oversees the public participation process – as sources of information sources for the randomly selected participants. Be creative.
3. Make sure you set up a constructive forum for the opposition to convey their concerns to you. And make sure that you truly listen and honestly consider their concerns.
4. It still may be possible to reach a consensus. But do not make that your goal. Rather, strive for consent. Make sure that the opposition knows that you closely listened to their concerns, yet had to make a tough decision -- particularly, if you can't accommodate their perspective in some way.
5. It may be necessary to hire an outside organization or consultant to help organize and facilitate your public participation program. This is especially true if the opposition is opposed to you or your organization, just as much as the problem you are attempting to solve.
6. It may be necessary to have a more involved, longer public participation program, which may lead to increased costs.
7. Citizens will be more willing to be involved in a significant manner. Organized opposition indicates that there is a strong feeling about the issue, so they will likely be willing to be more involved in trying to come up with a way for addressing it.
8. It may be necessary to meet many times over an extended period, so that the opposition knows that you listened to and carefully considered their concerns. The extended time period allows everyone to make 'baby steps' towards each other, rather than have to take one giant leap, which can be tough to swallow. Even if you choose an 'event' technique as the centerpiece of your public participation program, make sure to also include another tool that meets over an extended period.

Situation Factor: ORGANIZED SUPPORT

If there is organized support:

1. ... and there is organized opposition, you should invite members of each group to participate in the planning of your public participation program as well as involvement in the actual program as it rolls out.
2. ... and there appears to be no organized opposition, you should still design your public participation program to allow an opportunity for people who are opposed to be able to express their concerns to you -- in a mutually constructive way.
3. No organized opposition means it is possible to have a less in-depth, a briefer and less expensive public participation process. And it is possible to reach consensus about how you should address the issue at hand. But be sure to seek out a diversity of perspectives, not just ones that support you.
4. If the public generally supports you and your organization, but you are unclear whether they support your proposal or plan to address a problem or issue, then start your public participation program focused on the organization and work down to the specifics. Build on the institutional support that already exists.

Situation Factor: PROJECT TIMELINE

As your timeline increases:

1. You have greater flexibility and choice about the planning time for your public participation program (more opportunity to meet over an extended period rather than just one or two times).
2. You are more able to effectively involve a greater number of people. However, a short timeframe does not necessarily mean that you are unable to involve a large number of people. It means their involvement will likely be significantly less in-depth and substantive.
3. The ability to create an in-depth public participation program increases as well. But you must look at other factors, too, to best determine whether an in-depth or abbreviated, more superficial program best suits your project.
4. The ability to bring in outside help to assist you in developing or implementing your public participation program increases, because you will have more time to fully inform your outside assistants about the nuances of your project. But if your timeframe is short and the personnel demands of your project do not allow your staff to commit the necessary time to develop and implement a good public participation program, then it might be necessary to hire an outside consultant or specialist to help design and run it.

AGREEMENT INDEX

(What kind of agreement or level of agreement can you reasonably expect to get or achieve among participants at the end of the process?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	consensus	group	common ground	individual
Blue Ribbon Panel	X	x		
brainstorm session				X
Bridge Committee			X	
briefings with key individuals				X
Citizens Panel	x	X	X	
Commission	x	X	X	
Community Information Representative				X
conference/retreat	x	X		
consensus process	x	X		
deliberative poll		X		
Delphi technique			X	
depolarizing committee		X		
eager beaver committee	x	x	X	
Facilitation	x	x	X	
Feedback Panel	x	x	X	X
focus group		x	X	X
games and contests		x	X	X
Mediation			X	
Models				X
Negotiation	X			
Nominal Group Workshop		x	X	X
open meeting				X
Oversight Committee	x	X	X	X
participation style radio show			X	X
public hearing				X
public meeting			X	X
Questionnaire		x		X
Samoan Circle			X	X
seminar/workshop		x	X	
site visit			X	
Survey				X
task force	x	x	X	
town meeting			x	X
Volunteerism				x
Website				X
working group	x	X		
working with civic groups and institutions		X	X	

CITIZEN INFLUENCE INDEX

(How important is it that citizens and community organizations influence during the process and in outcomes affected by this issue?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	citizen influence low	citizen influence medium	citizen influence high
Blue Ribbon Panel		X	
brainstorm session	X		
Bridge Committee		X	
briefings with key individuals	x	X	
Citizens Panel			X
Commission			X
Community Information Representative		X	
conference/retreat		x	X
Consensus Process		X	
deliberative poll	x	X	
Delphi technique		X	
depolarizing committee		X	
Eager Beaver Committee		x	X
Facilitation		x	X
Feedback Panel		x	X
fliers/brochures	X		
focus group		X	
games and contests	X		
Mediation	x		
Negotiation			X
mailing list	X		
nominal group workshop		X	
open meeting	X		
Oversight Committee		X	
participation type radio show	X	X	
public hearing		X	
public meeting	X		
Questionnaire	X	X	
Samoan Circle		X	
seminar/workshop	X		
site visit	X		
Survey	X		
task force		X	
town meeting		X	
Volunteerism		x	
Website	X		
working group		x	X
Working with civic groups and institutions		X	

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT INDEX

(At what level are citizens and community organizations involved in each individual process?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	Citizen Involvement Low	Citizen involvement medium	Citizen involvement high
Blue Ribbon Panel		X	
brainstorm session	X		
Bridge Committee		X	
briefings with key individuals	X		
Citizens Panel			X
Commission			X
Community Information Rep	X		
conference/retreat		x	X
Consensus process		X	
deliberative poll		X	
Delphi technique		X	
Depolarizing Committee		X	
Eager Beaver Committee			X
Facilitation		X	
Feedback Panel		X	
focus group		X	
games and contests	X		
Mediation		X	
Models	X		
Negotiation	X		
Nominal Group Workshop		X	
open meeting		X	
Oversight Committee		X	
participation radio show	X		
public hearing		X	
public meeting	X		
Questionnaire	X		
Samoan Circle		X	
seminar/workshop		X	
site visit	X		
Survey	X		
task force		X	
town meeting		X	
Volunteerism			X
Website	X		
working group			X
working with CBOs and institutions	X		

COST INDEX

(Estimated cost to do each strategy or technique)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	\$0-\$1000	\$1-5000	\$5-10,000	\$10-50,000
Blue Ribbon Panel	X			
brainstorm session	X			
Bridge Committee	X			
briefings with key individuals	X			
Citizens Panel			x	X
Commission	X	X	X	
Community Information Representative		X	X	
conference/retreat	X	X	X	X
consensus process				x
deliberative poll				X
Delphi technique	X	X		
Depolarizing committee	X	X	X	
eager beaver committee	X			
Facilitation		X	x	X
Feedback Panel		X	x	X
focus group		X	x	X
games and contests	X	X		
Mediation			x	X
Models	X	X		
Negotiation		X	x	X
Nominal Group Workshop			x	x
open meeting	X			
Oversight Committee	X	X		
participation style radio show	X	X	x	X
public hearing	X			
public meeting	X			
Questionnaire	X	X		
Samoan Circle	X			
seminar/workshop	X	X	X	
site visit	X			
Survey	X	X	X	
task force	X	X		
town meeting	X	X	X	
Volunteerism	X			
Website		x	x	X
working group	X	X		
Working with civic groups and institutions	X			

DEPTH INDEX

(How much do citizens need to know about the issue in order to be sufficiently well-versed to contribute in a useful, positive way?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	superficial	moderate	In-depth
Blue Ribbon Panel		X	
brainstorm session		X	
Bridge Committee		X	
briefings with key individuals	X	X	
Citizens Panel			X
Commission			X
Community Information Representative		X	
conference/retreat		x	X
Consensus process		X	
deliberative poll		X	
Delphi technique		X	
depolarizing committee		x	X
eager beaver committee		X	
Facilitation		x	X
Feedback Panel			X
focus group	X		
games and contests	X		
Mediation			X
Models		x	X
Negotiation	X	X	
Nominal Group Workshop		X	
open meeting	X		
Oversight Committee		X	
participation style radio show		X	
public hearing	X		
public meeting	X		
Questionnaire	X		
Samoan Circle		X	
seminar/workshop		X	
site visit		X	
Survey	X		
task force	X	x	X
town meeting		X	
Volunteerism		X	
Website		X	
working group			X
Working with civic groups and institutions	X		

DURATION INDEX

(What kind of time commitment is required of public officials and citizens engaged in each process or technique)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	Meets once	Meets more than once	Meet longer, More often
Blue Ribbon Panel	x	X	
brainstorm session	X		
Bridge Committee		X	
briefings with key individuals	x	X	X
Citizens Panel		X	
Commission			X
Community Information Representative	X		
conference/retreat	X		
Consensus process	X		
deliberative poll	X		
Delphi technique	x	X	
depolarizing committee			X
eager beaver committee			X
Facilitation	x	X	X
Feedback Panel	X		
focus groups	X		
games and contests	x	X	
Mediation		X	
Models	x	X	
Negotiation	x	X	X
Nominal Group Workshop	X		
open meeting	X		
Oversight Committee		X	
participation style radio show	x	X	
public hearing	x	X	
public meeting	x	X	
Questionnaire	X		
Samoan Circle	X		
seminar/workshop	X		
site visit	x	X	
Survey	X		
task force	x	X	X
town meeting	X		
Volunteerism			X
Website			X
working group			X
Working with civic groups and institutions		X	

ISSUE STAGE INDEX

(At what stage do public officials want to first engage public participation in the policymaking or decision-making process?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	Explore problem	Plan develops	Respond to a plan
Blue Ribbon Panel	x		X
brainstorm session	x	X	
Bridge Committee	x	X	X
briefings with key individuals	x	X	X
Citizens Panel		X	
Commission	X		
Community Information Representative	x	X	
conference/retreat	x	X	
Consensus process	x	X	
deliberative poll	x	X	
Delphi technique	x	X	X
depolarizing committee	x	X	X
eager beaver committee	x	X	
Facilitation		X	X
Feedback Panel	x	X	X
focus group	x	X	X
games and contests	x	X	X
Mediation	x		X
Models	x	X	X
Negotiation	x	X	X
Nominal Group Workshop	X		
open meeting	x	X	
Oversight Committee		X	X
participation style radio show	x	X	X
public hearing	x	X	X
public meeting	x	X	X
Questionnaire	x	X	X
Samoan Circle	x	X	
seminar/workshop	x	X	
site visit	x	X	X
Survey	X		
task force	X	X	X
town meeting	X	X	
Volunteerism	X	X	X
Website	X	X	X
working group	X	X	X
Working with civic groups and institutions	X	X	X

PARTICIPANTS INDEX

(How many citizens are directly involved or can be directly involved?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	1-10	10-25	25-50	50-100	100+
Blue Ribbon Panel	X	X			
brainstorm session	X	X			
Bridge Committee	X	X			
briefings with key individuals		X	X		
Citizen Panel		X			
Commission	X	X			
Community Information Representative	X	X			
conference/retreat		X	X		
Consensus Process		X	X		
deliberative poll				x	X
Delphi technique	X	X			
depolarizing committee		X			
eager beaver committee		X	X		
Facilitation		X	X		
Feedback Panel		X			
focus group		X			
games and contests					X
Mediation	X	X			
Models					X
Negotiation	X	X			
Nominal Group Workshop			X	X	
open meeting		X	X	x	X
Oversight Committee	X	X			
participation style radio show				x	X
public hearing		X	X	x	X
Public meeting		X	X	x	X
Questionnaire					X
Samoan Circle		X	X		
seminar/workshop		X	X	X	
site visit	X	X	X		
Survey				x	X
task force	X	X			
town meeting			X	x	X
Volunteerism		X	X		
Website			X	x	X
working group	X	X			
Working with civic groups and institutions			X	x	X

PARTICIPANTS INDEX

(What kinds and types of people are involved in each process or technique?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	Ordinary random citizens	Interested individuals	Interest groups	stakeholders	Experts
Blue Ribbon Panel					X
brainstorm session		X	x	X	X
Bridge Committee			x	X	
briefings with key individuals		X	x	X	X
Citizens Panel	X				
Commission				X	X
Community Information Representative		X	x	X	
conference/retreat	x	X	x	X	X
Consensus process	x	X			
deliberative poll	X				
Delphi technique					X
depolarizing committee		X	X		
eager beaver committee		X	x	X	
Facilitation	x	x	x	X	X
Feedback Panel	x	x		X	
focus group	X				
games and contests	x	x	x	X	
Mediation		x	x	X	
Models	x	x	x	X	X
Negotiation	x	x	x	X	
Nominal Group Workshop	x	x	x	X	X
open meeting		X			
Oversight Committee		x	x	X	X
participation style radio show	x	x	x	X	X
public hearing		x	x	X	
public meeting		x	x	X	
Questionnaire	x	x	x	X	X
Samoan Circle	x	x		X	
seminar/workshop		X	x	X	X
site visit	x	X	x	X	X
Survey	x	X	x	X	X
task force	x	X	x	X	X
town meeting	x	X	x	X	X
Volunteerism		X			
Website	x	X	x	X	X
working group		X	x	X	X
working with civic groups and institutions	x	X	x	X	

PLANNING TIME INDEX

(How much lead time is likely required to set up the process or and implement the strategy?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	0-1 week	1-4 weeks	1-2 months	3-6 months	6+ months
Blue Ribbon Panel			X		
brainstorm session		x	X		
Bridge Committee		x	X		
briefings with key individuals	X	x	X		
Citizen Panel			X	X	
Commission			X	X	
Community Information Rep		x	X		
conference/retreat			X	x	X
Consensus process			X	X	
deliberative poll				x	X
Delphi technique		x	X		
depolarizing committee			X		
eager beaver committee			X		
Facilitation		x	X		
Feedback Panel			X		
focus group			X		
games and contests		x	X	X	
Mediation		x	X	x	X
Models		x	X	X	
Negotiation		x	X	x	X
Nominal Group Workshop		x	X	X	
open meeting	X	x	X		
Oversight Committee			X		
participation style radio show		x	X		
Public hearing	X	X			
Public meeting	X	X			
Questionnaire		x	X		
Samoan Circle		x	X		
seminar/workshop		x	X	X	
site visit		x	X		
Survey		x	X		
task force			X		
town meeting	X	x	X		
Volunteerism		x	X		
Website			X		
working group			X		
Working with CBOs and institutions		x	X		

RESULTS INDEX

(What is the type of result or outcome that can reasonably be expected?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	reaction	Actionable outcome	Significant Input and Specific Recommendations
Blue Ribbon Panel	X		
brainstorm session	x	x	X
Bridge Committee	x	x	X
briefings with key individuals	x	x	X
Citizens Panel			X
Commission			X
Community Information Representative	x	X	X
conference/retreat	x	x	X
consensus process	x	x	X
deliberative poll	x		X
Delphi technique		X	
depolarizing committee	x	x	X
eager beaver committee			X
Facilitation		x	X
Feedback Panel	x	x	X
focus groups	X		
games and contests	X		
Mediation			X
Models	X		
Negotiation		x	X
Nominal Group Workshop		X	
open meeting	x		X
Oversight Committee		X	
participation style radio show	x	x	X
public hearing	x		X
public meeting	x	x	X
Questionnaire	X		
Samoan Circle			X
seminar/workshop		x	X
site visit	x	x	X
Survey	X		
task force	x	x	X
town meeting	x	x	X
Volunteerism			X
Website	X		
working group			X
working with civic groups and institutions	x	x	X

SELECTION INDEX

(How are participants in each process chosen? From where do they come?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	Randomly identified or selected through a formal process	volunteer	nominated	appointed, invited
Blue Ribbon Panel			x	X
brainstorm session		x	x	X
Bridge Committee			x	X
briefings with key individuals			X	X
Citizens Panel	X			
Commission			x	X
Community Information Representative		X		
conference/retreat		x	x	X
Consensus process		X		
deliberative poll	X			
Delphi technique				X
depolarizing committee			x	X
eager beaver committee		X		
Facilitation		x	x	X
Feedback Panel	x		x	X
focus groups	x	X		
games and contests	x	x	x	X
Mediation				X
Models	x	X		
Negotiation			X	
Nominal Group Workshop				X
open meeting		X		
Oversight Committee		x	x	X
participation style radio show	x	X		
public hearing		X		
public meeting		X		
Questionnaire	x	X		
Samoan Circle		X		
seminar/workshop		x		X
site visit		X		
Survey	X			
task force			x	X
town meeting	x	x	X	
Volunteerism		X		
Website		X		
working group		x	x	X
working with civic groups and institutions		X		

WHO PLANS AND CONDUCTS INDEX

(Who organizes and facilitates the strategy or technique?)

PROCESS/TECHNIQUE	staff (internal)	Combination	outside expert (external)
Blue Ribbon Panel	X	X	X
brainstorm session	X	X	
Bridge Committee		X	X
briefings with key individuals	X		
Citizens Panel			X
Commission	X	X	X
Community Information Representative	X		
conference/retreat	X	X	X
Consensus process			X
deliberative poll			X
Delphi technique	X	X	X
Depolarizing Committee	X	X	X
eager beaver committee	X	X	
Facilitation	X	X	X
Feedback Panel		X	X
focus group	X	X	X
games and contests	X	X	
Mediation			X
Models	X	X	X
Negotiation		X	
Nominal Group Workshop	X	X	X
open meeting	X		
Oversight Committee	X	X	
participation style radio show	X		X
public hearing	X	X	
public meeting	X		
Questionnaire	X		
Samoan Circle	X		
seminar/workshop	X	x	X
site visit	X	X	
Survey	X	X	
task force	X	x	X
town meeting	X		
Volunteerism	X	X	
Website	X		X
working group	X	x	X
working with civic groups and institutions	X		

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

“Face-to-Face, People-to-People”

Committees

01. Blue Ribbon Panel

The defining characteristic of the group is its members: well-known experts on the issue; prominent people whose advice and recommendations tend to carry a lot of weight in the community. Members examine a specific issue and develop broad recommendations, without inference from the agency that appointed them. A Blue Ribbon Panel may also be assembled to examine a specific plan or policy direction and deliver a ‘verdict’ stating whether they (in their expert or prominent opinion) support the plan or policy. Whatever a Blue Ribbon Panel concludes has the potential to significantly boost the support among ordinary citizens, as long as the panel and the process are perceived as being allowed to come to their own judgment and they were not just ‘talking puppets.’

02. Bridge Committee

This type of committee is used to form a ‘bridge’ between your agency and stakeholders or other outside interests who might have an effect on the success or approval of a policy or plan. The members of the committee are ‘go-betweens’ that connect your agency with interested parties. They are able to effectively and accurately relay your potential plan or policy or program to interested parties, as well as relay the concerns and reactions of interested parties to you. The members of this committee will also listen and learn about the concerns and reactions of other stakeholders who are members of the committee. Members need to be trusted by all parties involved, and not have selfish or personal reasons for serving on the committee. They are links between you and the people interested in the policy or plan being considered, as well as links between the various groups that are interested.

03. Commission

The commission is similar to the Blue Ribbon Panel, the task force and the working group, yet slightly different. A commission is usually made up of experts or prominent individuals who study and examine a specific area for an extended period of time. They can develop either broad recommendations or specific recommendations, but tend to come to their conclusions after significant study and deliberation. Whereas a blue ribbon committee may only convene a few times, a commission meets over an extended time period. A commission is useful where careful and thorough examination is required before developing and delivering recommendations. A commission may also be organized and convened to look at the entire agency rather than just one specific policy or issue area.

04. Depolarizing Committee

This type of advisory committee is used when interests are so polarized and opposed to each other that it may be impossible for them to examine a plan or an issue on its own merits. So it is necessary and useful to get the opposing and polarized parties together at the same table, as members of the same committee. In such a case, the ground-rules and procedures the committee adopts are very important, so that opposing

perspectives can begin to empathize and understand each other. It is important that the committee focuses and builds on areas of agreement and is able to discuss areas of disagreement in a respectful manner. There are risks to using this type of committee, but if it is successful. There is potential for improving the entire decision-making environment as well as raising the level of communication and respect of all parties involved. The relationships that are built through this type of committee can have long-lasting effects and create the potential of trade-offs and compromises on a long-term basis.

05. Eager Beaver Committee

The members of this type of committee as 'eager beavers' – people who are so motivated that they are willing to not only come up with ideas and recommendation, but are willing to take responsibility for implementing and following-through on their recommendations. This type of committee is useful when 'volunteer power' is essential to achieve the goals of the program. People are often more willing to take initiative and execute a plan if they part of developing the plan, rather than just being asked to do the work. This type of committee not only takes advantage of citizens who are active, energetic and motivated, but also sends the message that you value your citizens and their contributions.

06. Feedback Panel

The feedback panel brings together a group of relevant people to examine and discuss an organization, a policy, a program, plan or problem and provide feedback to decision-makers. Designed to be flexible to meet your needs, a feedback panel can meet for a day or two. It is made up of ordinary citizens, stakeholders, and your 'customers'. Participants can provide initial feedback and advice based on their own experiences, or can be asked to think about and respond to specific information and requests. With a feedback panel, you can gather information about specific ways you can modify a service, improve performance, or deal with a challenging problem. More in-depth and informed than a Focus Group (57), a feedback panel is designed to allow you to hear from a small group of relevant participants.

07. Oversight Committee

This type of committee is used when either there is a level of mistrust of your organization or project, or when it is critically important that the public perceive that your decision-making or planning process is honest and fair. This type of committee serves as a 'watchdog' over your project or process to make sure that things are being done in a proper manner, that you are fair and impartial, that all perspectives and alternatives are being given consideration. The members of this committee can range from interested individuals, to 'wise' and thoughtful experts, but they must be trusted and respected by the varying perspectives and interests in the project or policy. Their main purpose is check-up on you and your progress, and they have the ability to call you and the public's attention to actions and decisions they feel are improper, given the circumstances of the project. The existence of the over-sight committee should be well-publicized and well-known, since they are contributing to the perception of your level of integrity.

08. Task Force

A task force is a committee that is assigned a specific task to accomplish. That task can range from broad recommendations to very specific details, on anything from a very specific issue to analysis of your whole organization. The members of a task force can be experts, well-respected people, members of special interest groups, ordinary citizens. But they are assigned a specific task or mission to accomplish.

09. Working Group

A working group is a committee that works together to develop a specific plan or recommendation. Their work is usually focused and can be very detailed, as opposed to making broad ranging recommendations. A working group is often composed of interested citizens and stakeholders, but can include experts and prominent people as well. Working groups consider the basic details and all the ramifications of an issue, proposal or a program and develop very detailed plans and recommendations, which are generally followed by the appointing agency. Their recommendations are more than just advice or food-for-thought. The recommendations of a working group are action plans that are typically implemented without much change.

Events and Site-Specific Activities

10. Brainstorm Session

A brainstorm session is an opportunity to generate ideas. To be effective, brainstorm sessions should include a relatively small number of people. However, if you wanted to get a large group involved, you can always break them into small groups and then combine all the ideas from each small group. A key to brainstorming is that any and every thought expressed gets written down, even if it is only a partially formed idea. Ideas are not criticized or critiqued. Participants are encouraged to expand on other's ideas, but these get recorded as separate ideas. It is useful to appoint one person in the group as a recorder. They may choose to contribute ideas as well. It is helpful to do the recording in a format that allows all the participants to see the entire list of ideas (like a flip chart or whiteboard), so that they can get inspired seeing other's ideas. Depending on the issue or the circumstance, a wide variety of people can participate in your brainstorming session: interested citizens, experts, stakeholders, ordinary citizens. You may even choose to have several brainstorming sessions with different types of participants in order to general a wide range of ideas. Brainstorm sessions typically last just thirty to sixty minutes after you actually start brainstorming.

11. Conference/Retreat

A conference or retreat is a way to get in-depth education and dialogue about a specific issue or set of issues. It is an extended workshop or seminar where interested citizens, stakeholders, experts, elected officials and staff can assemble together to learn about the issues relating to your project or plan or agency and dialogue, brainstorm, discuss and deliberate about ideas, alternatives, priorities and solutions. A retreat is a tool that spends significant energy (and time and money) to focus on an issue or set of issues. In planning a retreat, you must make sure that all the appropriate interests are invited and involved. You must make sure that, if there are presentations scheduled, a wide range of perspectives and ideas are presented. And you need to provide professional facilitators to guide the discussions and deliberation sessions to help develop agreement and give direction to the conference.

12. Drop-In Center

A drop-in center is a place for exchange of information. Most often located in the neighborhood or area that the project will impact or where it will occur, a drop-in center is a site where citizens can 'drop-in' and express their concerns. Generally, the drop-in center maintains regular, scheduled hours. It is manned by staff who are familiar with the project. It enables staff to get to hear first-hand some of the concerns and questions, in an informal, non-confrontational setting. A drop-in center is an excellent tool for two-way communication to occur. And creating a drop-in center establishes a visible commitment to communication, which can be very important in maintaining openness and trust between your agency and the community.

13. Field Demonstration

A field demonstration is an opportunity to show ideas to stakeholders and other interested people. This technique does not work well if a project or plan is not one that can easily be demonstrated. You have to consider the cost and effects of the demonstration and weigh that against the outcomes. Often models, computer generations and other techniques can be utilized to give the same outcome as a field demonstration, but at much less cost. This is especially true for building and construction projects. In instances where a field demonstration would be helpful, it is important to invite the appropriate people, with sufficient advance notice. Also, make sure you allow an opportunity for those present to provide their input and reaction. A field demonstration is not simply a chance to 'show off'. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to demonstrate ideas and gather reactions and ideas from the people witnessing the demonstration. You don't just want to convince the public that an idea is a good idea. You also want the public to know you are listening to their concerns. Citizens who witness a field demonstration will probably come up with good ideas for improvements.

14. Games and Contests

Games and contests are special ways to attract attention and engage people who may not otherwise pay attention to your agency or project. Games can help people think about different alternatives and options. Games can be designed to help people think through trade-offs and priorities, in a different and inviting manner. Games can range from very 'low tech' such as card games or board games, to specially designed 'high tech' computer simulations. Contests can generate publicity and interest, as well as generate ideas and input. Examples of contests include essay contests, poster contests and raffles. A contest can generate interest and focus attention on your project and provide you with an opportunity to discuss it with a different group of individuals.

15. Nominal Group Workshop

The objective of this technique is to identify and prioritize issues and concerns that impact a situation or a project. First, a relatively representative group is assembled. This group should include all of the different interests and perspectives and can be of any size, although a group larger than 25 is strongly encouraged (to ensure that many different perspectives are present). The workshop coordinator starts with a presentation to provide the participants with solid background information about the issue or project. This presentation should present as many different perspectives and ideas as possible, yet not be too technical. Ideally, the presentation should not be longer than half an hour. Once the participants have a good understanding of the project, they

break into 'nominally small' groups (usually 3-5 people). Once divided into groups, each participant takes time to write down issues that impact the subject of the presentation that he/she feels are of major importance, as well as reasons why each is a significant issue. Then, taking turns within their small group, each individual offers up one of his/her issues and reasons why it is important. A group recorder writes down everyone's issues on a flip-chart sized paper until everyone's list is exhausted. (Sometimes ideas offered are similar. If everyone within the small group agrees, they can be combined or re-worded.) Each group posts their list of issues and quickly reviews them with large group when it re-convenes. (Again, if similar issues come from more than one small group, and the large group agrees, they can be combined.) Next, ballots are handed out and each participant is asked to vote for the most important issues. When the ballots are counted, the issues are listed in priority order. A discussion led by the event's moderator follows, which participants lobbying for the issues that they feel are most important. After the discussion, a second vote is taken and a new priority list is developed. Discussions and voting may continue until the group feels that the list of issues accurately reflects their priorities. This technique may be altered in many ways to fit your needs.

16. Open Meeting

This is a general term that describes a meeting open to the public. Most government-sponsored meetings are required by law to be open meetings. They should be well-advertised and held at venues convenient and comfortable for the public who decide to attend. An open meeting does not always mean public participation beyond an ability to attend and observe proceedings. But it is a good idea to provide people who come to watch an opportunity to participate in some way.

17. Participation Style Radio Show

A participation style radio show allows you an opportunity to both provide information and receive input. Sometimes you are allowed to respond to questions by people who call the radio station while your show is being broadcast. It is a way to reach a large audience, while still maintaining control over the information that is released. However, since a participation style radio show is typically broadcast live, there are definite risks involved in this technique. It is essential that you are well-prepared and informed on the issue you want to talk about and any related issue. It is also important that you maintain your composure and resist attacking a caller who might be critical, attacking, incorrect or misinformed. Just like when you meet constituents face to face, it is important that you treat people like this with respect, even if they are disrespectful to you. If you do not know an answer, do not just make one up. This will do more harm than good for you in the long run. If there is a 'host' of the show who is not from your organization, do your best to brief them on the issue so that they are prepared to interact well with you and ask you relevant questions.

18. Public Hearing

This is the most basic and widely applied citizen participation technique. Many government activities require that public hearings be held at various stages in the decision-making and policymaking processes. Public hearings must be publicly announced, well before the event. They should be held at a time and place convenient to the public. They are usually organized around a specific topic or issue. They usually

begin with a short staff presentation, and are followed by an opportunity for the public in attendance to ask questions and make comments about the issue and what was presented. Doing an effective, fair job moderating a public hearing is an art form. It is important to provide effective follow-up responding to the input you received.

19. Public Meeting

A public meeting is more than an open meeting (16). It is an official meeting to which citizens are invited to attend, but the term implies that there are opportunities for them to be actively involved in the proceedings. Public meetings should be organized and always managed according to a written, distributed agenda. Officials must appear to be in charge, but not in an overt way that might have a chilling effect on the public's involvement.

20. Samoan Circle

A Samoan Circle is a good group process technique for discussing controversial topics. You set up as many chairs as needed in concentric circles, leaving aisles to the center. In the center, place a large round table with four chairs. The idea of the Samoan Circle is to have a conversation among the four people at the center table. Anybody attending the event can occupy one of the four seats at the table, and only the four at the table can speak. If someone wants a seat at the table, they simply get up and walk down one of the aisles toward the table and wait for one of the seats to be vacated. Those sitting at the table should be aware of how many people are waiting as an indication to vacate their seat. People may take a seat as often as they wish, but must allow others an opportunity at the table. Generally, there tends to be no 'chair' of the meeting, except for one person who explains the ground rules. This same person also helps to end the meeting by removing one chair at a time until the meeting winds down. This technique is useful when trying to address controversial situations. It empowers the participants and restructures the 'debate' into more of a conversation. The Samoan Circle is a tool for communication, not necessarily problem-solving, conflict resolution or education. It affords an opportunity for people to discuss the issue.

21. Site Visit

A site visit provides an opportunity for people to visit a project site (or proposed site) to ask questions, gather information, and provide input. Depending on the nature of the project and situation, a site visit can be used to view a proposed site and evaluate it, or it can be used to monitor progress of an already agreed-upon project. During a site visit, a brief tour or presentation can be given, followed by questions and answers, statements of concerns, and input from the visitors. You may even choose to set up some type of brainstorm, public meeting, or workshop to assist in the evaluation of the site, if applicable. (A related tool is a field demonstration)

22. Town Meeting

This term has come to mean two things: a general meeting sponsored by an elected official, or a regular, chartered meeting held by a local government. Each is an open, public meeting in every sense. It is managed according to a published agenda and usually begins with a presentation made by public officials. Public reaction to the presentation is invited and encouraged. But agendas for town meetings should also include a specific time for citizens who attend to raise issues important to them, too.

In-Depth

23. Citizens Panel

A steering committee that is a balanced group of knowledgeable people on the topic at hand is assembled. They conduct a survey of randomly chosen individuals and an agenda for the panel's meetings. From the survey participants, a lay panel of 15 individuals is carefully chosen to be representative of the community. The panel meets twice for weekend-long moderated sessions. During the first day, the lay panel meets in a public setting and hears presentations from experts and stakeholders in the issue. Following the presentations, the panelists deliberate in private. On the second day, the panel publicly cross-examines the presenters from the previous day. The panel then continues to deliberate in private and drafts a report. The report is then issued to the public on the third day. Having assistance from a facilitator familiar with the technique is helpful when it is tried for the first time.

24. Consensus Process

This process takes the form of community meetings in which citizens voluntarily participate, held throughout the jurisdiction affected by the issue or project. During the meetings the participants work their way through prepared packets of information and questions. This meeting guide is designed by an advisory committee composed of people knowledgeable in the issue area. The participants break into small discussion groups and report back to the group at large following their discussions. The guide provides questions to be answered and issues to be considered during the small group discussions. The results of all the community meetings are compiled in a summary document.

25. Deliberative Poll

A deliberative poll consists of randomly selecting a large group of citizens and bringing them together for a weekend of expert presentations and deliberations. The participants break into small groups to identify the questions to be posed to the experts. The participants are polled at the beginning of the weekend (prior to presentations) and at the end of the weekend (after presentations and deliberations). The results of the poll likely reflect 'what the public would think' if it were informed, not 'what the public is actually thinking.' Through publicizing the results of the poll the conclusions of an 'engaged microcosm' are made known, helpful to an agency developing an educational campaign about the issue.

26. Seminar/Workshop

A seminar is an opportunity to provide in-depth information to the public and potentially generate well thought out discussion and ideas. A seminar or workshop can range in length from a couple of hours to a full day, but includes presentations from you about your project or issue, as well as small and large group discussions pertaining to your project or issue. Depending on the issue stage, a seminar can be used to develop alternatives, evaluate options, prioritize criteria, further discussion, or educate the public. Typically, each seminar session consists of fewer than 30 individuals, but it is possible to assemble a larger group and then break into smaller groups. A seminar often involves staff and experts, but can be planned and organized to recruit citizen participants as well.

27. Study Circles

The Study Circle consists of informal, face-to-face, sustained small-group discussions about social and political issues. Study Circles have 5-20 participants. They usually meet three times, hardly ever, more than six. Leaders and participants do not attempt to convert each other; the focus is on learning and discussing different perspectives. Study Circles use written and sometimes visual materials (like Power Point presentations) to stimulate learning and discussion. Those materials can be developed by the organizations assembling the group. Participants are usually interested citizens and an expert or two.

Processes

28. Facilitation

Facilitation involves the use of a neutral discussion leader. Stakeholders, interest group leaders and interested citizens can be brought together for a group discussion. A good facilitator is a big help in making any of the public participation tools and strategies work that feature group work prominently. It is the job of the facilitator to bring out all points of view and stimulate discussion. A good facilitator will work to uncover areas of agreement, and work through areas of disagreement. Facilitation encourages individuals to fully present their views and concerns and work through them. Facilitation is an open process. It is essential to have all perspectives 'at the table' so that any agreement or compromise that is reached within the group will have some legitimacy. Facilitation should most often be done by a trained outside, experienced facilitator, rather than a member of your staff.

29. Mediation

Sometimes a situation or a controversy reaches a point where opposing sides find no apparent room for further compromise, accommodation or resolution. A possible

solution to this problem is to bring in a third party to help resolve the impasse. The third party, a mediator, should be trusted and invited into the process by all sides involved. Usually, the mediator first meets separately with each side, to ascertain bedrock positions on the issue (each side's 'bottom line'). Subsequent sessions begin the process of identifying the common elements in each side's position and attempting to fashion something that each stakeholder group can at least grudgingly agree to. Most of the mediator's work usually involves shuttling between opposing camps and meeting with them separately until terms of a tentative agreement are hammered out. But occasionally successful resolution can occur in a general meeting attended by everyone involved.

30. Negotiation

Negotiation is a process to resolve conflicts and disputes between parties unable to reach agreement. Negotiation is essentially 'bargaining' between two or more interests. In a negotiation, the interested parties meet together to resolve a dispute, sometimes with a facilitator, sometimes without. Negotiation is a problem-solving approach that tends to be less formal than mediation. When conducting a negotiation, it is essential to involve all interested parties and stakeholders, often representatives of these groups. If you choose to negotiate with representatives, it is important that a high level of trust and cooperation exist. Negotiations can be designed in several different ways, including one in-depth meeting, or a series of meetings over time. Your organization may, at times, be a third party to the negotiations. Negotiations are designed to address a dispute between various interests, and, in certain circumstances, can help you decide the best policy or project you should pursue. And there may be occasions when your organization is one of the interests directly involved. In such cases, it is imperative to involve a third party to help facilitate the negotiations, to provide legitimacy to the process. Negotiation is most effective if it occurs before polarization.

"Proactive Strategies – Laying the Foundation"

Communication

31. Advertisement

Designing an advertisement can be a good way to provide important information to a large number of people. You may choose to advertise a number of different things: your organization; a project or program; a decision-making process; a specific meeting you have arranged. But remember to be forthcoming in your advertisement. Unlike a commercial advertisement, a public sector agency cannot use an advertisement simply to 'sell' an idea. An advertisement should be used to provide accurate information in an easy to understand format. Advertisements can be placed in newspapers, billboards, radio or television. You must be sure to present clear, accurate information in your advertisement, or you may undermine the public's trust in you.

32. Briefings with Key Individuals

Briefings are a way to keep key individuals informed about the process and progress of your project or program development, as well as gather their comments and input. Briefings can be designed to be formal or informal. You can schedule a series of regular briefings with key individuals or groups, or just hold one or two prior to major decision

points. Organizing briefings with key individuals or briefings open to anyone who wants to attend is a good way to keep interested people, stakeholders, interest groups, media and others aware of the decision-making process, as well as aware of the direction you are heading. Periodic briefings also allow you to gather input before you head too far in a specific direction. Think of briefings as 'check-in' points for you and key individuals and groups. It is a way to keep the lines of communication open throughout the process.

33. Fliers/Brochures

Fliers can be posted or distributed, and brochures can be mailed and placed in appropriate locations for interested citizens to pick up and read. As with all public information materials, you must be sure to design them carefully and use language that is appropriate for the target audience. Avoid using jargon and technical terms. Always include contact information for people who may have questions or want to get involved (address, telephone number, web address). Make sure that all the information on the flier and the brochure is accurate. You may choose to involve the public in designing your brochure or flier.

34. Informing the Public about the Decision-Making Process

A lot of the public's frustrations stem from their feeling that government and the decisions it makes is done in dark rooms behind closed doors. Information is illumination. Informing the public about the decision-making process will alleviate a considerable amount of anxiety that they may be feeling. Making the public aware of the process will 'de-mystify' it and bring it out into the open. Simply doing this will help the public assume that you have a fair and thorough decision-making process, because they will assume that you would not publicize a jaded or unfair process. Even if they decide not to participate in the process, they will be more likely to support the outcome because they trust the process by which the decisions were made. And if they do want to get involved, they will be fully aware of the decision-making process and know at what points in the process citizen input and ideas will be most effective, both for you and for them. You can publicize your decision-making process in a number of ways: mailings, website, newsletter, radio announcements, newspaper articles, presentations at public meetings. If you choose this technique as part of your public participation program, you must fully inform the public about the decision-making process. Do not selectively publicize components of the process that involve the public or just the parts of it that you think will 'look good' to the public. You must inform them about the entire decision-making process if you choose this tool, or it has the potential to do you more harm than good. Publicize the entire process, even if it contains components that do not include the public. This way, the public will understand how their citizen input fits into the whole decision-making process.

35. Initiating Communication with Stakeholders

Sometimes it is better for you to go to the stakeholders first rather than letting them come to you. It shows that you are proactive. It let the stakeholders know that you are aware of them and their concerns. It lays the foundation for constructive engagement and exchange. Initiating communication with stakeholders can be accomplished in several different ways, but it is important to remember that your goal is to initiate communication (two-way communication). This is not solely an opportunity for you to provide information about a plan, a policy, a program or an organization, but also an

opportunity to extend yourself to the stakeholders. These stakeholders might be easily identified and defined, or may take the form of interested groups, but the important thing to remember is to set the right tone and send the right message of openness to the people. And this is also a great opportunity to gather ideas and concerns while you are still in the initial planning stage.

36. Mailing List

Mailing lists can help your agency manage communications. Computers have made it possible to easily manage a large number of names on a mailing list. They can be designed to reach a broad base of people, as well as focus on a targeted group. Mailing lists can be used to provide information and announce meetings and solicit response for recipients (a survey). They can be developed by your agency from meeting sign-up sheets and logs kept of visitors to your facility, voting records and other types of public information. Keep a few things in mind when using mailing lists: be selective about how many times you choose to mail something to someone; be sure to provide information about how to be removed from the mailing list; provide contact information for people who have questions or concerns about anything written in a mailing; make sure the information provided is accurate.

37. Media

Media can be a very useful tool and strategy to provide information about your project or issue, but can also be very risky. 'Media' can include a wide variety of techniques including news conferences, press releases, event coverage. Media techniques can be risky because you have little or no control as to what is actually written or aired. They may completely miss the message you are trying to convey or, worse yet, get it wrong. Even getting your message slightly wrong could cause more harm to your project and organization than getting no coverage at all. Media is especially risky because it can reach a large number of people in a very short timeframe. But this is also one of its big advantages. If the media get your message right, they can disseminate it very quickly. Make sure that the issues you bring to the media's attention are truly ones of public concern. Plan your media strategy carefully.

38. Models

Models are useful ways to communicate information. For specific situations, a model (on a computer, on paper, three-dimensional) can convey a significant amount of information. Models often present a clearer picture than a written or spoken description. They are especially useful in planning-related projects. Models can be presented at almost any type of public meeting, or can be put on display at an appropriate location. If a model is displayed, include 'fact sheets' with additional information about the project. Also provide a 'comment box' for people to write down concerns, questions or ideas. If a model is presented at a public gathering, be sure that a knowledgeable staff person is in attendance to answer questions.

39. Newsletter

A newsletter is a way to keep the public informed about a project or plan, communicate important information and meeting notices, and provide an avenue for response and input. It can be developed for the organization as a whole, or for one specific project. A newsletter can range in length and cost, but make sure it is well-designed and well-written. There are several desktop publishing programs that allow you to produce a

fairly high-quality newsletter without much outside help. Your newsletter needs to contain several different articles of varying lengths, as well as photos and graphics, in order to be effective. Make sure that you include information in your newsletter about ways for the reader to contact you about questions, concerns, or ideas they may have.

40. Poster Campaign

A poster campaign is not truly a technique for public participation, but rather a 'public information' technique. In a poster campaign, you produce fliers or posters that explain your project and illustrate the points you need to make. You should also address some of the concerns that you know that the public has regarding your project or issue. This lets them know that you are aware of their concerns. The technique is useful to communicate with people who do not regularly attend the more traditional methods of public participation. Posters should be well-designed and include contact information (address, telephone number, web site) for people who may have questions. It is important to consider the community in which the posters will be displayed and make them appropriate for each distinct community (language, design).

41. Website

The Internet is a tool that if used correctly can be extremely useful. Designing a website for your organization or a specific project can provide a significant amount of information to the public in a very simple, easily accessible way. If you choose to set up a website, make sure that it is well-designed and easy to navigate. Be aware that not everyone has access to computers, knowledge about how to use them, or is comfortable navigating the Internet. Think about your audience and decide if a website is an effective tool to reach them. A good website will feature well-organized information, 'frequently asked questions', and contact information (e-mail, telephone) for someone who has questions, ideas or concerns. Be sure to publicize the web address well. Include it on every piece of literature you distribute. Make sure you maintain your website and keep it updated. There are several good software packages available that make it possible to design and maintain a website in-house.

42. Working with Civic Groups and Institutions

One of the biggest difficulties in any public participation effort is gathering input from a wide range of people. However, in the community in which you operate, there are groups of people that may not readily participate in a traditional form of public participation, or may not have the time. This includes civic groups, church groups, athletic associations, professional associations. Contact them and ask if you can attend their meeting and give a brief presentation and listen to their concerns. Many of the people who belong to these types of associations are active in their community, but simply don't have the time to attend a 'public meeting'. By going to them rather than making them come to you, you will not only expose yourself to a wide diversity of people and opinions, but you will also increase your credibility and the public's confidence in you and your organization. You will convey a message of openness and a willingness to hear from the public.

Procedural, management and Staffing Adjustments

43. Community Information Representative

A community information representative is a staff assignment that provides a regular, dependable communication link between your agency and the community. This can be especially effective if a proposed plan or policy has an impact on a specific and definable geographic community. The CIR is responsible for informing your agency of the concerns, problems, questions and suggestions brought from individuals or organized groups in the community. Likewise, the CIR is responsible for informing the community about agency concerns, efforts, studies and anything relating to planning, policymaking and programming that directly or potentially impacts the community. The main focus of the CIR is providing information and problem-solving. This is usually a part-time position that lasts for the duration of project planning and implementation. This person should not be a current staff member of your agency, but rather a respected, active member of the community.

44. Improving Office Procedures

A lot of the public's perception of your organization and the trust level they have comes directly from how they are treated when they contact your organization. If they are treated with respect and their questions are answered honestly, their trust level will increase. If they are forwarded to the correct person with the accurate and complete information they seek, they will believe your agency to be organized and competent. On the other hand, if they are given the runaround, or are given incorrect or inconsistent information, or if they feel they are not being listened to or taken seriously, that will adversely affect your organization, its plans, programs and policies. So creating and maintaining office procedures that will more efficiently and effectively deal with the public as they interact with your offices will go a long way in developing trust and respect for your organization, which, in turn, will go a long way in developing support for your plans, programs and policies. Attend to all the ways a member of the public might contact or interact with your organization: telephone, mail, in person. Establish procedures and guidelines for handling each circumstance: enforce a quick turn-around time for response to written requests for service, questions and complaints; set up guideline for behavior when staff deals directly with the public; instructions to staff about how to identify the appropriate person to service a member of the public with a question or request.

45. Internal Communication

One of the most frustrating things for citizens trying to work with a public agency on a specific issue is to receive different, sometime contradictory information from different sources inside the agency. It makes the public feel that the agency is incompetent, uninformed and that the 'left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.' It undermines confidence in your organization. Improving communication within your organization is a good way to improve the public's perception of you and grow the level of trust and confidence they have in you. E-mail makes it easy to send out updates on projects and activities to all the people on staff who need to know about them. Staff meetings are useful to keeping everyone up-to-date and on the same page. It is not only

important to keep all the members of the 'team' updated, but also the members of some of the other 'teams' that might be affected by your work. Set up guidelines and procedures within your organization that encourages your staff to talk about their programs and projects. Sponsor lunch once a week with several teams, have weekly staff meetings. The goal of improving internal communication is two-fold: improve efficiency; grow citizens' confidence and trust in your organization by always providing them with correct, current and consistent information.

46. Logging Citizen Contacts

Citizens are increasingly initiating contact with government agencies, often concerning a very specific problem. Keeping close track of these types of contacts is another tool to assist you in knowing what citizens care enough about to motivate them to contact you and your staff. Set up a forms and procedures where citizen-initiated contacts can be logged and reviewed. Include columns in the form like: date; source; input/comment; relevance; response. This technique can also be adapted to help track follow-up to citizen complaints and requests for service. It can assist you in identifying priorities and be especially useful in service-delivery areas and program evaluation.

47. Ombudsman

This is a job whose full time responsibility is to handle and solve citizen and customer complaints and requests for service. Ombudsmen should be people-oriented, organized and have the ability to manage multiple tasks at the same time. It is important that ombudsmen have the confidence, cooperation and support of the rest of the organization's staff. Efficient and effective procedures must be in place to handle caseloads and manage follow-up.

48. Presenting the Full Range of Alternatives

This is a strategy that can be carried out in a wide variety of ways: by way of publications, open houses, public meetings, websites, press releases. The main idea of this strategy is to present the full range of alternatives to the public and collaboratively narrow down the possibilities. This is not a way to 'sell' a project that has already been decided, but rather to work with the public in a making a decision that will affect their quality of life. The strategy helps to build your credibility because, not only are you working with your constituents, but it also shows you are considering a wide range of alternatives to solve the problem at hand. Even if there are alternatives you believe are unfeasible, you should present them. Establish, with public input, a set of criteria to evaluate all the alternatives. You should also clearly outline the constraints under which you are working. If a proposal to address the problem is truly unfeasible, then you and public can cross it off the list. This process requires that a significant amount of information be exchanged with the public and requires lots of opportunity for discussion. If that is unreasonable to expect, then a variation of this strategy may be effective: you can present a full range of alternative, together with reasons and criteria that pick off alternatives that you think are unfeasible or unrealistic. This, however, transforms this strategy from 'public participation' to 'public information.' You can also take this kind of a step to narrow the field to a workable number of alternative solutions, and then work closely with the public to narrow the alternatives further.

49. Volunteerism

Volunteers can assist your organization in many ways. Besides providing assistance in delivering services or implementing a plan, volunteers can be mobilized to help develop plans. If you have a good volunteer program already established, these volunteers can be tapped to help you make decisions. Volunteers tend to be civic-minded and active people and their contributions can not only be useful, they can help build support and confidence in your organization. They act as a liaison between your organization and the community. Volunteers also often have intimate knowledge of a program and acquaintance with the people who might be affected by your plans. Consulting with them can provide a perspective that might otherwise go unheeded. Find ways to gather input from your volunteers in a manner that does not significantly add to the time and energy they already contribute. Make them feel useful and empowered, but not taken advantage of and over-used.

Research and Data Collection

50. Analyze Potential Opposition

Understanding people and organizations who may oppose a potential project or policy can help you work with them more effectively. This can involve looking at the nature of their leadership, past actions, publications. This helps you understand where they are coming from and where they might be going. It will help you avoid ambushes and prepare you for what each separate outside interest wants, needs and expects from you. It will help you know how they will attempt to get what they want. Knowing and understanding as much as you can about those interested in your project, policy or organization can help you work with them. However, be aware that people and organizations do not always act in predictable ways and that there be potential opposition in places you haven't looked. There may also be organizations that spring up in direct response to your plan or policy.

51. Background Study

A background study is used to identify and understand the characteristics of a community. By understanding the concerns, goals and values of the people affected by a potential project, program or policy, you can better relate any proposal to them. You will be better able to predict objections and concerns in a way that increases the chances of creating a successful plan or policy. Considering the social and cultural aspects of a proposal are just as important as factoring in its technical components. Failure to do this inevitably leads to over-all failure and non-acceptance. A Background Study can take several forms, ranging from an in-depth study that includes surveys, research, interviews, to having informal conversations with several community leaders. The more contentious your issue is, and the more important public acceptance is, the more in-depth the background study should be.

52. Delphi Technique

This is systematic way of asking questions to specific efforts that will yield you information helpful when doing long-term planning or predicting the impact, effects and outcomes related to a specific issue. To identify Delphi experts, first consult with a number of individuals that you know to be knowledgeable in the issues that concern you. Ask them to generate a list of names of people who they believe are knowledgeable

in the issue, including themselves if appropriate. Contact their nominees and ask them the same. Continue this exercise until you keep hearing the same names. These are the names of the people who will make up your Delphi panel. Contact each expert and ask them to predict for you what they feel will happen in the future, given their knowledge. Once you have gathered the predictions of all of your experts, preferably in writing, prepare a document that summarizes the different predictions and reasons they were made, without identifying who the experts were. Send this report to each panel member and ask if, upon reading the other predictions, they would like to revise their thoughts. Continue this cycle until you feel you have a good picture of what the future might hold. As mentioned, this outcome can prove to be a useful aid in the process of developing a long-term plan.

53. Focus Group

A focus group is an opportunity to bring together a group of people to get their input, ideas and reactions. A typical focus group is 8-12 people, meeting for between 30 minutes and two hours. The group can be selected in a variety of ways, though it is usually randomly selected (from among your target audience, if possible). In addition to gaining ideas and input, a focus group can also be used for 'message testing,' helping you learn how best to communicate an idea or proposal to the public. You must use a skilled moderator to ensure that your focus group is productive and useful. Focus groups are helpful in predicting public reaction as well as gather input from a small group of people, but it is often difficult to 'bring the message' from a focus group to the larger public.

54. Key Contacts

This technique utilizes key individuals you can identify who will offer helpful advice and information when you need it. This is a very informal technique and should be done in the very early stages of a project. First, identify several key people who represent differing perspectives. These may be community leaders, interest group leaders, experts, or citizens with whom you have worked previously. Talk with them to help you identify issues and concerns that may relate to your project, as well as ask their advice about ideas and strategies for proceeding with the project. Key contacts can be utilized not only for your project planning, but also for your public participation program planning. But be careful that this is not the only strategy you use. It can lead to public criticism that you are only consulting an 'elite, hand-selected few.'

55. Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a way to gather information. It can be relatively straightforward, but you should be careful about how you use them. Be careful in drawing hard conclusions from the questionnaire. In order to produce a statistically significant result, your questionnaire must be written, administered and analyzed in a rigorous and specific manner. Consult with professionals with experience if you want to gather accurate and significant information. However, a questionnaire can also be used in a less rigorous way to gather general information. This type of questionnaire can be distributed by mail, at information points, at public meetings, or at your offices. Make sure to include instructions about what to do with a completed questionnaire (where to drop it). This 'less rigorous' questionnaire can include sections where respondents can write their answers and comments. They are simply gathered and tabulated, but not quantified and

analyzed. They can give you good ideas and input and a general picture of feelings, perceptions and values. But use the results with caution and be careful about drawing hard and fast conclusions.

56. Survey

A survey is a useful tool to gather information about the public's attitude and perception toward a specific issue, project or program. They should be carefully designed, administered and analyzed in order to produce accurate results. A survey is typically administered over the telephone using randomly selected telephone numbers. Surveys can also be administered on a door-to-door basis. The main difference between a survey and a questionnaire is that a survey is designed to be statistically significant and administered to a randomly selected population. But like the questionnaire, exercise great caution in drawing conclusions for the information you gather. A survey should be designed and administered by professionals with experience.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

What is a public hearing?

Public hearings are the most familiar and frequently use citizen participation technique. In places like the United States, they are often required by law to be held before a public policy is adopted or a major piece of legislation is brought to a vote. The same laws that require them usually prescribe minimum standards for promoting and advertising them.

Classic public hearings feature a formal agenda that includes a staff presentation and time for public comments and questions. A public official chairs the meeting, formally recognizes people who want to speak, and keeps the meeting on track. After everyone who wants to speak on the topic has had a chance to speak, the public comment portion of the meeting is over and the hearing is ended.

Strengths

- The usual public hearing procedure is one familiar to public officials and citizens who attend them.
- They are open to anyone who wants to come and are always announced and advertised beforehand
- Many public officials prefer them over other public participation techniques because they develop the meeting's agenda and manage the event.

Potential Problems

- Citizens are sometimes intimidated by the process and procedure.
- It's difficult to time-manage a public hearing, as care must be taken to assure that everyone who wants to speak at them can.
- Because the meeting's format usually leads off with a staff presentation about its topic, it's sometimes difficult to convince the public attending that an official course of action hasn't already been determined and that the public's opinions and concerns expressed at the meeting will be seriously considered.

Moderator's Role

- The procedure is usually highly structured. The moderator

- calls the meeting to order, manages the meeting's agenda and the public comment process.
- The moderator should be skilled in the ability to assure the public in attendance that their comments are appreciated , taken seriously, and will be considered.

Planning

- Public Hearings are usually difficult things to arrange quickly.
- They must be advertised in advance of the event. The hearing's announcement often has to include the meeting's agenda.
- Arrangements should be made to produce a written record of what happened at the hearing.
- Any official presentation that's part of the meeting should be informative, concise and easy to understand – well planned and organized beforehand.
- Be sure that the meeting concludes with its chairperson
- recapping highlights of the input the public provided, a statement about where the process goes from here, and a sincere thanks to people in attendance for coming.

Doing Public Hearings Better

A public hearing does not have to be conducted in a classic way. In fact, more meaningful citizen input is often produced when it isn't. Here are three suggestions about how to make public hearings better:

1. Be sure to schedule them before you are in the last stage of your decision-making process, so everybody who attends and participates has an honest chance to influence the outcome.
2. Make the event as participant-friendly and less intimidating as possible. Although public hearings may be prescribed by law as having to be held, there is usually discretion about how they can be conducted, provided the public has a legitimate opportunity to participate. The format is flexible enough to apply tools and strategies like nominal group work, open houses, even focus groups.
3. Hold public hearings at times and in places that are convenient for the public.

CITIZENS COMMITTEES

What are they?

There are many types of citizens committees. Some are ad hoc committees, established for a specific purpose. When the committee's mission is over, it disbands:

- Task force Blue Ribbon committee
- Feedback Panel Working group
- Depolarizing committee Negotiating committee

Others are standing committees, a permanent part of the public institution's organizational structure:

- Plan Commission Police Commission
- Oversight committee Board of Land Use Appeals

Structure and Function

- They often feature "mixed" representation – private citizens
- and public officials on the same committee.
- Citizens committees meet regularly and their meetings are
- almost always open to the public.
- The committee usually elects its own chairperson who fills
- that role for a fixed term
- A citizens committee's work product is usually advisory, a
- notable exception being a planning commission, which is often allowed to make routine land use decisions.

Strengths and Uniqueness

- Much of a committee's or a commission's work is at the
- front end of the decision making or the policymaking process.
- They have real opportunities to influence outcomes.
- Appointing authorities get the benefit of input, often expert input, from community leaders, people who work outside government. They frequently offer a fresh perspective.

Problems

- Citizens committees are usually made up of the community's elite, its business and community interest organization leaders. They traditionally afford little chance for rank-and-file citizens to be involved.

- Although the public can attend committee and commission meetings, they often do so as observers. Business meeting formats don't usually present many opportunities for public involvement if you're not a committee member.
- Committees can get bogged down studying an issue and can take a long time to develop concrete recommendations.

Moderator's Role: The elected or appointed chairperson runs the Committee's meetings, usually according to Roberts Rules of Order.

Planning

A committee or commission is usually authorized by the jurisdiction's chief elected official or its legislative body. Meeting notices usually have to be posted and published beforehand. Regular staff are often assigned to the committee to arrange its meetings, provide it technical help, and record its proceedings.

Determining an effective committee structure

Refer to the following chart to help determine what type of people should be on a committee - based on its goals and objectives:

Objectives	Members
Hear concerns Allow interaction/empathy with opponents Force sides to make trade-offs with each other De-polarize opponents Hear different perspectives	Stakeholders Interest groups
Learn about different perspectives Separate facts from emotion Hear about best practices, issue history	Experts in the field
Hear needs and concerns directly Get feedback regarding alternatives Get reactions to proposals	Users Clients (service receivers)
Improve internal communication Learn ways to complement efforts Get an "inside" yet "outside" perspectives	Other agency staff
Bring diverse opinion inside the decision making process Avoid ambushes Hear a full range of perspective Educate people upset about the problem -- from the agency's perspective	Opponents

FOCUS GROUPS

What is a Focus Group?

A carefully planned discussion with a carefully selected panel, designed to obtain people's perceptions about a product, a program, or a problem.

Strengths and Uniqueness

- People's perceptions are formed in interaction with others
- Non-judgmental environment encourages disclosure
- Points of contrast and agreement tend to define and sharpen perceptions
- Opportunity to explore opinions in depth
- Can complement other public participation techniques

Potential Problems

- Very little control over potential outcomes
- Digressions
- Uneven participation
- Group Think

Planning

- What do we want to know?
- How will we get the information we need?
- Time length?
- Appropriate location

Composition of a Focus Group: Representative -- ideal number of participants is 8 to 12

Moderator's Role

- Guide the flow of discussion
- Maintain objectivity and neutrality
- Make appropriate use of open-ended questions, probing techniques, pregnant pauses

Event Structure

Introduction

Welcome and introductions

Overview of the technique and purpose of the exercise

Body of Questions

Icebreaker

Lead-In

Key questions (6 to 10)

Closure

Summarize what was learned

Where we go from here

NOMINAL GROUP WORKSHOP

What is a nominal group process?

It's a technique that can be applied to identify and prioritize issues and concerns affecting a situation or a project.

Event Structure

- Assemble a representative group that includes all the different interests and perspectives surrounding the issue (usually more than 25 people)
- Facilitator arranges a balanced presentation that provides participants with good, useful background information
- Break the participants into small groups (3 to 5 people)
- Working within the small group, each participant writes down issues he thinks are important and his reason why.
- Taking turns within the group, each individual offers up one of his issues and explains his reasoning. This process continues until everyone's list is exhausted. Group report lists all the group's issues on a flip chart, consolidating and combining similar issues that are expressed in small group.
- Each group posts its list and reviews it before the reassembled larger group. (Similar issues are consolidated with concurrence of the groups that posted them.)
- Everybody votes for which posted issues they think are most important. (Individuals usually get up to five votes that they can allocate among all the items on the various lists, as they see fit.)
- Issues are re-listed in order of priority. Discussion of the priority list follows, assuring participants that the list accurately reflects the larger group's opinion.

Strengths and Uniqueness

- Everybody participates in the process, so each person makes an input
- The process produces a somewhat informed opinion
- It may produce a consensus point of view
- Good technique for large groups

Potential Problems

- May not work well in situations where consensus is not a likely outcome.
- Hard to do in two hours. Requires a strong facilitator to keep it organized and moving along.

Moderator's Role

- Process is highly structured. The facilitator needs to be familiar with it.
- Present a good background report about the meeting's topic at the beginning of the event. And explain the nominal group process clearly.
- Keep the meeting moving and on task.
- Be sure to save or copy all the developed priority or issues identification lists.

Planning

- It's important to assure that a large representative group attends the event.
- Use a good moderator who understands the nominal group process.
- Organize a concise, informative background report that can be delivered in no more than 20 minutes.
- Participants need to know about the process, their roles, and its intended outcome.
- The meeting's venue should be a place where people can easily move from a large group to a small group, back to a large group setting.

Exploring Opportunities for Public Officials to Work With Citizens, Non-Profits and Community-Based Organizations

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