
ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Public Participation Plan

Effective public participation is both functional for planning and meaningful to the public. Participation is functional when it helps to create better decisions and a more thoughtful plan/document. Participation is meaningful when the public has opportunities to influence decisions and feels a sense of ownership for the community plan.

A Public Participation Plan (PPP) communicates generally what is needed to effectively involve the public. Like a blueprint, the PPP provides general information to help reach a desired result.

Guiding Principles

Public participation should be functional for the process.

- Public involvement should help us identify relevant community needs and make better decisions that more accurately reflect the public's values and knowledge.
- Plans created with support from a broad set of public stakeholders, are more likely to get implemented into action. Public advocates are required to help encourage positive change.

Public participation should be meaningful to the public.

- This Plan will affect the lives of community members, and they deserve opportunities to become involved. The public's judgment about issues that affect their lives are valid.
- All members of the public must be provided with the equal opportunity to become involved. Participation should enable the public to be more active in governance. Active participation leads to taking responsibility for one's community.

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is an individual or group that has an interest or "stake" in an issue, decision-making process, or activity because they are likely to be affected by or have some influence over its outcome.

Objectives & Techniques

It is helpful to think of public participation as a social contract or promise to the public. We should only ask for input that you are willing to incorporate in your decisions. We must be very clear about the purpose of each tool and explain how the public process will be used to influence the decision.

There are five key types of participation:

1. **Awareness** – to make the public aware of an issue, process, or decision.
2. **Education** – to provide balanced and objective information to help the public better understand.
3. **Input** – to obtain public feedback on an issue, process, alternative, or decision.
4. **Interaction** – to work with the public to make sure their input is understood and considered in the decision.
5. **Partnership** – to provide a formal role in the decision-making process.

Matching information needs with public involvement techniques is an opportunity for creativity. The following table identifies common public participation tools and related objectives. The glossary and reference list at the end of this plan provide additional detail on these and other tools.

Techniques for Public Participation

Method	Awareness	Education	Input	Interaction	Partnership
Public Notice	×				
Direct Mail	×	•			
Mass Media	×	•			
Internet Technology	×	•	•		
Exhibits and Displays	×	×			
Open House	×	×	•		
Field Trip	•	×			
Visual Simulation	•	×	•		
Educational Programs	•	×			
Public Meeting		•	×	×	
Workshop or Charrette		•	×	×	
Public Hearing			×		
Opinion Survey			×		
Focus Group			×		
Referenda			×		×
Advisory Committee			×	×	×

× Primary objective – almost always able to achieve this objective

• Secondary objective – may be able to achieve this objective if structured appropriately

For the purpose of this review process, we will use the following techniques:

- Internet Technology
- Education Programs
- Opinion Survey

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- Public Meeting
 - Visual Simulation
 - Workshop

Documenting and Evaluating the Results

An often forgotten, yet critical component of public participation is documenting and evaluating the results. Documentation provides a record of public involvement and allows the public to see how their involvement was used in the decision-making process. Evaluation is used to gauge how well the process is working and to adjust as needed. Documentation and evaluation can occur throughout the process—for example, at the end of individual participation activities, following the completion of major stages of the planning process, or at the conclusion of the public participation program.

The following is a list of tools we will use to document and evaluation our process:

- Participant log (e.g. sign in sheet, website counter, etc.)
- Informal discussion with participants
- Content analysis of feedback or media coverage

- **Glossary of Public Participation Tools**

This glossary contains brief descriptions of tools and techniques commonly used for community participation.

- 1. Direct Mail**

Direct mail is used to provide a specific message to a target audience. A mailing can take many forms including a newsletter, postcard, letter, brochure or other promotional or informational piece. This technique works best when you have a simple message and an easily identifiable audience. It can reach a large number of people and requires little time commitment on the part of citizens. It is important to be creative in crafting and delivering the message as it may be easy to overlook in the large volume of mail received by most people. The primary costs involved with this technique include design, printing, and mailing.

- 2. Mass Media**

Media campaigns involve the use of local radio, newspaper, and television coverage to generate public awareness on issues, to disseminate specific information, and to influence and reflect public views. Media campaigns should consider the various forms of media available in a community, assess their coverage and credibility, and seek coverage suitable to the task at hand. Some of the more common uses of media include press releases, letters to the editor, media interviews, and public interest stories.

- 3. Internet Technologies**

A variety of internet technologies are available to enhance the ability of citizens to participate in local issues. Some of the more common techniques include virtual bulletin boards, web postings of the latest drafts of documents, an email listserv of people interested in the process, and an email address or website where citizens can send comments. If well-timed and well-designed, these techniques can help to keep the public informed. They work best to provide resources to the public for review at their own pace and on their own time. Depending on the availability and use of computers, these techniques can reach a moderate to large number of people. However, they are unlikely to reach populations that are uncomfortable with or do not have access to computers.

- 4. Exhibits and Displays**

Exhibits and displays can be used to inform the public and stimulate people that might not otherwise participate. They can be set up in publicly accessible spaces (i.e., shopping mall, town hall), at community events (i.e., farmers' market, sporting event), or within the context of other public participation events (i.e., workshop, open house). Exhibits and displays are most effective when staffed by a knowledgeable person able to answer questions or supplemented with a hand-out containing background information and contact information. Displays can often be reused multiple times, thereby reducing costs.

5. Field Trip

Also known as a site visit or walk-through, a field trip is an organized, instructional tour of one or more sites by local officials, staff, consultants, residents and other stakeholders. Sites may be selected to illustrate specific project conditions, design concepts, or local issues and concerns. Observational analysis may be used to record the main features of the site, both successful and unsuccessful. Visual documentation, such as photographs, annotated sketches, and plans can provide an instrument for ongoing discussion and monitoring. Field trips are an excellent tool for developing a common understanding of an issue and initiating group discussion, particularly when followed by a meeting or workshop.

6. Visual Simulation

Visual simulation techniques are used to present information in clear and easily understood formats such as maps, pictures and displays. The results can be simple or complex and include interactive maps and graphs, artist's drawings, photo-simulations, three-dimensional renderings, and animations such as walk-throughs, drive-throughs and flythroughs. Visualization techniques can be used to simulate proposed changes to an existing situation or to analyze the effects of a range of future planning scenarios. Visualization techniques can take advantage of common hardware and software or utilize more advanced techniques such GIS, CAD, photogrammetry, and specialized planning applications. The use of visual simulation can serve to inform, educate and interest the public in local planning decisions. It can also stimulate discussion and help citizens make more informed decisions

7. Educational Programs

Educational programs are conducted to improve public understanding of an issue, to present technical information in an easily understood format, and to improve communication between citizens and decision-makers. Education may be conducted formally through seminars, workshops or lectures, or less formally through simulation games, brown-bag lunches, publications or audiovisual materials. When held in concert with other public participation techniques, education can help citizens feel less intimidated and more likely to express their views, especially when they differ from those of professionals or other participants.

8. Public Meeting

The term *public meeting* is used as an umbrella descriptor for all types of meetings, including town-hall style discussions, educational forums, open houses, workshops and public hearings. Public meetings can be used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. Meetings may differ in terms of size, composition, audience, format or purpose. In general, they should follow a set agenda and be facilitated or chaired by a designated person. Minutes should be kept to record discussion items and decisions.

9. Public Hearing

A public hearing is a specific type of meeting usually conducted in response to a statutory, ordinance or administrative requirement. The primary purpose of a public hearing is to provide the public with an opportunity to provide input on a pending application, petition or policy proposal. A public hearing is usually conducted in a much more formal manner than other public meetings. It must incorporate a public comment period during which participants may submit oral or written testimony. All proceedings become part of a public record that is available for review. To make the most out of public hearings, it can be helpful to hold a public informational session prior to the hearing, present a summary of the issue at the beginning of the hearing, allow time for questions and answers, and provide a break so that participants can absorb the information presented at the hearing and reflect on their reactions prior to providing input.

10. Open House

An open house provides an informal meeting setting for citizens to interact with local officials and learn about an issue or proposal. An open house is usually held for an extended period of time with an open invitation for citizens to drop by at their convenience. A common element of many open houses is a series of educational or informational displays. Displays should be staffed by people who are knowledgeable about the issue and able to answer questions. Citizens may be able to provide feedback directly to staff or through another mechanism such as a comment card or survey. If well-advertised and held in a central location, an open house has the potential to reach a moderate to large number of people.

11. Workshop

A workshop is an interactive meeting format in which participants work in small groups to perform an assigned task. Workshops may be open to all community members or limited to invited participants from key stakeholder groups. Simple tasks may require only one workshop, while large, complex or controversial tasks may justify a series of workshops. The ultimate goal may be the development of a shared vision, analysis of alternative scenarios, generation of design concepts, or completion of other community planning tasks. Workshops often require a significant time commitment from participants and facilitators, but usually result in tangible work products.

12. Opinion Survey

A survey is systematic tool for determining the views and opinions of community members on a particular topic. If given to a large enough sample size, the results are considered indicative of the larger community. A survey may take the form of a written questionnaire or structured interview and may be administered in person, by phone, or by electronic media. It can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In some instances, it can also be used to generate interest and involvement in a project. Costs will vary based on the media chosen and the ability of in-house staff to design, administer, tabulate and present the results. While surveys

provide an objective basis for planning and future action, they may overlook important citizen concerns unknown to those designing the survey.

13. Focus Group

Focus groups are conducted with small groups of participants that are selected either randomly or to represent a particular segment of a community. Participants are presented with ideas or proposals, after which they are asked for their reactions to what they have heard. Focus groups are very useful for uncovering issues and concerns, understanding the values, beliefs and attitudes that underlie positions, testing degrees of difference or consensus, and identifying the language that people use to talk about an issue. Because focus groups do not have statistical validity, they are not helpful in predicting the number of people in the larger community that will take a particular position. Focus group selection and facilitation requires a trained facilitator.

14. Citizen Advisory Committee

A citizen advisory committee is a small group of people (usually less than twenty-five) selected to represent various interests, points of view, or expertise in a community. Advisory committees are often charged with helping to update a comprehensive plan, review significant policy proposals, or study issues in-depth. They bring time, energy, expertise and perspective that may not be available elsewhere. They can also help to provide a degree of political insulation for elected and appointed officials. Serving on a committee takes a considerable amount of time. Therefore, local officials should be careful to make the best use of members' time and to absolve the committee once its purpose has been fulfilled. Advisory committees work best when the government is genuinely willing to partner with citizens in the planning process.

15. Referendum

A referendum is a form of direct democracy in which citizens provide a vote for or against a particular decision. There are two types of referenda: With a binding referendum, citizens make policy decisions by a simple majority vote without the advice or consent of the local government. With an advisory referendum, citizens advise the governing body on a policy decision, but the governing body makes the final decision. A referendum works best when the government faces an "either-or" decision. Highly complex or technical issues are better served by other methods. Given the high-profile nature of a referendum, it has the potential to engage a relatively large number of participants.