

U.S ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION VIDEO
TRAINING PROGRAM**

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

MODULE 4.
**ENGAGE ALL STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**



**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

GUIDE

Engage the public. Preserve the planet.

Introduction

The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.

— Theodore Roosevelt

In public participation, we often use the word “stakeholder.” This includes anyone who could be impacted by the decision, anyone who has an interest in how the decision may impact individuals, a community, or society at large, and anyone who could potentially affect the outcome of the decision.

This is a very broad term and it reminds us that if we are to conduct public participation in a meaningful way, we need to identify and understand the full range of perspectives that are interested in our project.

Sections in Module 4:

- 4.1 Identify the Full Community of Stakeholders
- 4.2 Build Relationships with Your Stakeholders
- 4.3 Focus on What Matters to Your Community
- 4.4 Build Community Capacity for Participation
- 4.5 Seek Out Local Champions and Resources

SECTION 4.1:

Identify the Full Community of Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any individual or group who has or perceives that they have a stake in the outcome of a decision or action.

In most communities, there are stakeholders who hold strong opinions at extreme perspectives of any issue. These folks often stake early positions on the issue, may have very narrow agendas related to the decision, and can be very active and forceful in letting their opinions be known. There is nothing wrong with this and they represent legitimate perspectives in the community. However, they do not represent the community as a whole.

The loudest and most visible stakeholders do not necessarily represent the views of the whole community

When we conduct meaningful public participation, we need to understand the views and concerns of the whole community, not just those who are most vocal. If we don't, we risk having "the public" defined by those who have the most radical views.

In reality, our communities are almost always diverse and complex in their views and it is our job to understand those views, and ultimately seek to find the common values and interests that will help us to define the characteristics of successful and acceptable decisions.

As we discussed in Module 2, rather than simply identify the individuals who are most active, vocal, or powerful, a good stakeholder assessment begins by identifying the range of stakeholder perspectives that should be involved in your project.

It is important to conduct a situation assessment to understand who might be impacted, who should be involved, and what concerns they bring to the process.

It is essential to identify all of the viewpoints and interests that must be heard to create a fully participatory process.

Beyond the usual stakeholders who are already known to you, you should work to identify all the stakeholder groups that may be impacted or interested in the project. Many of these stakeholders will not automatically be informed or seek to engage in the project.

Consider a broad range of interests that may be important to the community such as:

- Health
- Safety
- Environmental impacts
- Property values
- Jobs
- Congestion
- Crime
- Local economy
- Transportation

By matching specific groups and individuals to the identified interests, you will ensure that your process will engage the full range of perspectives needed to conduct meaningful public participation.

You need to identify all of the stakeholder interests that should be involved in your project

At the end of this assessment, you should have built a comprehensive stakeholder list. This forms the foundation for your outreach and ensures that you are reaching the full range of community interests throughout the project.

Your stakeholder list should grow throughout the process as more stakeholders are identified and become interested. It is important to identify reliable means for communicating with each stakeholder.



GROUP DISCUSSION

Identifying Stakeholders

Think about the project you explored in your situation assessment in Module 2 and discuss the following:

- How did we identify our stakeholders? Did we reach out to stakeholders who should be interested? Did we rely on those who showed up at our meetings or contact us directly?
- Who are the most vocal stakeholders? Do we think that their views reasonably represent the views of the whole community?
- Which stakeholder perspectives were we missing?
- Are these missing perspectives important to our ability to use public input in our decision-making?
- Were under-served communities identified?
- What can we do next time to improve our identification and connection with key stakeholder groups?

SECTION 4.2:

Build Relationships with Your Stakeholders

Once you have identified the full range of interests that need to be engaged and have contacts for specific groups and individuals that are representative of those interests, it is important to begin the process of understanding your stakeholders and relationship-building.

You cannot effectively participate with people you do not know

No effective participation process can be designed without first learning about and developing some level of relationship with the stakeholders that will be engaged. The kinds of public meetings where agency staff make formal presentations and stay at the front of the room often fail to meet the important goals of public participation because we don't take the time to build the relationships upon which to base effective communication.

Relationships define the ability to fully understand one another and give proper consideration to one another's needs, issues, and concerns. In designing a public participation program, you need to pay a great deal of attention to creating the types of environments and opportunities to get to know key stakeholders. Most important is to create the kinds of spaces that allow for the dialogue necessary to build trust and understanding.

Relationships require face-to-face communication

Meeting and talking directly with stakeholders throughout a project will help you to know your public, make them more accepting of you and the information you provide, and help you to design a public participation program that responds to their needs and concerns.

The interview process we discussed in Module 2 involves going directly to your stakeholders and asking them about their concerns, interests, and values. In this process, you get to know members of the community as people and let them get to know you as well.



GROUP DISCUSSION

Stakeholder Relationships

Think about the project you explored in your situation assessment in Module 2 and discuss the following:

- Do we have relationships with stakeholders that help us to conduct meaningful public participation? Why or why not?
- How would meaningful relationships with stakeholders help us to improve our understanding of the community and conduct better public participation?
- What strategies and activities work best to foster these meaningful relationships with stakeholders, including stakeholders in underserved communities?
- What types of activities could we explore to improve our relationships with stakeholders?

SECTION 4.3

Focus on What Matters to Your Community

If you want to find out what matters to the community, you just need to ask them.

As we develop better relationships with our community, they become more comfortable in talking with us in detail about what is most important to them and to their communities.

The better we understand our community, the more we can focus our public participation efforts and resources on what matters to them.

Think about the following as you build your communication with stakeholders:

- Ask them about the issues and concerns that are most important to them and why.
- Don't waste time engaging the community on things they don't care about.
- Look for the areas where public input will most help you and that are most important to your communities.
- Make the focus of public participation the areas where public input will matter most and can actually help to shape the decision.
- In some cases, things that are critically important to the community may not be evident to them. Help them to understand why something is important and how it may impact the community.

SECTION 4.4:

Build Community Capacity for Participation

Effective public participation depends in part on a sponsor agency's willingness and ability to involve the public in the decision processes. While it is critical that sponsor agencies develop the skills to think through, plan for, and implement a public participation process, it is no less important that the public develop the capacity to participate effectively in decision processes. Hence, it is important for government agencies to support the development of the community's capacity to engage.

Communities do not automatically know how to participate effectively

Don't assume that people understand either the value or process of participation. Most people have little experience in meaningful participation and don't understand how their behavior can contribute either positively or negatively. In fact, in many cases, people simply don't believe that it can work, so are reluctant to try at all.

Building participation capacity can be achieved in many ways. Consider some of these ideas as you plan and implement your programs:

Model behaviors you want to see from your stakeholders. The community will look to you and their own leaders to understand how to participate. Design forums that encourage more active forms of participation and encourage people to talk to each other and work together.

Communicate continuously. Don't just act, help people understand both what you are doing and why. Explain the reasons for doing things a certain way and what they can expect from you, as well as what you expect from them. Most important, help people to see the possibilities and their own self-interest in working together.

Invite the community into the planning process. Don't just ask for input, ask stakeholders to work with you in the planning process to think through what will work for their community. Identify their information needs and the forms of communication they use most. When people are involved in the planning process, they understand what you are trying to achieve and the importance of their own participation, and are more committed to working on the project.

Look for teachable moments. As processes progress, look for those moments when things happen, both good and bad, and help stakeholders to understand why. Always explain what you are doing and why it's important. Identify facilitative leaders within your agency to mentor community groups and leaders by partnering with them during the planning and implementation of the public participation process.

Get young people engaged. Often our best hope is to teach the next generations the attitudes and skills of participation so that they become habits. Engage schools and educators with an interest in teaching students about participation. Work with them to develop possible projects and materials. Students can design and implement pilot projects for credit.

Develop simple outreach materials. Develop simple materials explaining how public participation works, that promote the values of public participation and delineate best practices, and distribute among community leaders and organizations to use locally.

Celebrate and communicate progress. Don't let good things pass by unnoticed. Communicate and celebrate the good things that happen. Recognize people and point out and explain the behaviors and activities publicly so everyone understands what it took to bring about success.

Conduct training and workshops. Train community leaders and stakeholder representatives in foundational public participation and communication skills. Consider hiring professional third-party facilitators to conduct shared workshops and provide training for the sponsor agency staff and external stakeholders on participatory behaviors and techniques.

Provide technical assistance. Provide independent technical assistance to the public or community groups to help them understand technical information relevant to the decision.

Depending on your project, staff, and communities, using these strategies can help build the public's capacity for participation. You will probably never use all of these strategies at one time, but ***consider how early investment in the capacity of your community can bring great value to you over time.***

SECTION 4.5:

Seek Out Local Champions and Resources

Resource constraints are often a reality for you as the sponsor agency. Look for ways to build on the resources that both you and your community have in place. You don't need to create everything from scratch or do everything yourself. There is already a lot of help out there in your communities.

Understand and engage community leadership. Get to know your community and who are the most trusted and effective leaders. Community leaders can be found in many places, some obvious and some not. Make sure that the people who claim to be leaders truly do have the respect of their constituents. Once identified, reach out to community leaders and explain what you hope to achieve and how it can help their communities, and explore ways that they can help.

Engage NGOs and other organizations. Local organizations often have many resources that can help, including good understanding of community members and culture, capacity to communicate and engage people, and a desire to build the capacity for participation at the grassroots level. Schools, churches, and universities can also play an important role, especially to find respected leaders and engage youth.

Engage local resources. Local organizers, communicators, and facilitators are all essential to conducting effective participation. We rarely have the resources to do all of the work on the ground effectively. Local organizations and individuals are often willing to volunteer or barter their time in exchange for the community benefits that may come with the project you are seeking to implement. Meeting locations, equipment, communication vehicles, and community networks are present in many locations. Seek to attend existing meetings before asking people to come to yours; it will save time for everyone. Seek out co-sponsors for your projects—you will add resources as well as work with people who have the trust of the local community.

Communicate through existing channels. Identify communication pathways that people already use. Part of getting to know your community is learning about how they already communicate around issues that are important. Look for opportunities to provide information about your projects through those same channels.

The growing prevalence of cell phones is helping to bridge the digital divide. Communication can happen very quickly over cell networks through messaging on traditional phones and through apps and internet resources where smart phones and other internet connected devices are available. The focus should always be on strengthening the use of technology people are already comfortable with. Where new resources could help a community, work with them to create new things that people

actually want and will use. Learn about how your community uses social media and their willingness to try new things before investing too much. Start with small useful applications of technology and use the many free or very low cost applications that already exist on the internet.



GROUP DISCUSSION

Capacity-Building Strategies

Consider the strategies presented in sections 4.4 and 4.5 above:

- Which of these strategies would work for us as we seek to improve our public participation programs and our relationships with communities?

- Identify some specific examples where some of these strategies might have improved past projects.

- What types of decisions or actions would be required for us to explore using some of these strategies?



GROUP EXERCISE

Building Community Capacity for Participation

Using the same project as in your group discussion from earlier, work in small groups to design a project to build community capacity for participation.

1. Think about how the community could best engage in the project and what skills or capacity are most needed by stakeholders in that community to enhance that participation.
2. Identify key leaders, groups or institutions who you could partner with to conduct capacity building activities.
3. Consider the approaches identified in Section 4.4 above and any other ideas that you have to design an activity for building capacity in the community.
4. Share your ideas with the rest of the class and get feedback.