Effective public engagement: Asking the right questions

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Public Participation (P2)

Any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make decisions.
Why P2?

- Do you have wicked problems?
- Do you know everything your community needs, values, hopes for, fears?
- Do you want to establish trust and credibility with your stakeholders, ratepayers, voters?
- Do you want to get your plan or project completed on time, within budget?
Risks of skimping?

- Does your community believe you when you say “you care” about the impacts of what you’re planning to do?
- Does your community believe you’re listening to them?
- Does a project or plan usually get stopped due to shoddy technical work? (Hint: rarely!)
How much? When?

- What do you do when the Council says "we should really engage the public on this issue?"
- How do you know how much? When?
- What are the right questions?
- When do you decide?
### IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum

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<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Public participation goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.</strong></td>
<td><strong>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Promise to the public</strong></td>
<td><strong>We will keep you informed.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Example techniques</strong></td>
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<td>• Fact sheets</td>
<td>• Public comment</td>
<td>• Workshops</td>
<td>• Citizen advisory Committees</td>
<td>• Citizen juries</td>
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<td>• Web sites</td>
<td>• Focus groups</td>
<td>• Deliberative polling</td>
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<td>• Open houses</td>
<td>• Surveys</td>
<td>• Participatory decision-making</td>
<td>• Consensus-building</td>
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<td>• Public meetings</td>
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What level of involvement does your audience expect?

- 1-way (Keep us informed)
- 2-way (Gather our thoughts and concerns and then go make your decision)
- 2-way+ (Let us work with you; listen and learn from us and let us help develop the solution)

Can you meet their expectations? Are you willing to?
STEP 1

What is the problem to be solved, opportunity to grasp, or decision to be made?

Be clear about this. If you don’t know, how can you talk with your community about it?

Flooding? Water Quality? Fish habitat?
Four steps to planning P2

STEP 2

- Who are your audiences and what are their issues?
  - Who are you going to affect with this decision, plan or project?
  - What do they want? Not want?
  - What are they concerned about? Hope for? Expect?
  - What do your elected officials expect?
Four steps to planning P2

STEP 3

- What’s your technical decision process?
  - How will you get there?
  - Criteria? Objectives? Interim steps? Alternatives?
    - How do you measure success?
- Use the same rigor to integrate your P2 process
Sample Decision Process

1. Define the problem/opportunity and decision to be made
2. Gather information
3. Establish decision criteria
4. Develop alternatives
5. Evaluate alternatives
6. Make decision

Public Needs

- Clear understanding of the scope of the decision
- Full range of objective information about the issue to be addressed
- Clear understanding of the criteria by which the alternatives will be evaluated
- Balanced alternatives that include stakeholder issues and concerns
- Clear comparison of alternatives
- Clear understanding of who made the decision and how stakeholder issues were considered

iap2 international association for public participation
Four steps to planning P2

STEP 4

- Tools and Techniques Selection
  - When do you select the tools you’ll use for your project?

- That’s also when you select tools for your public involvement.
Inform  
Consult  
Involve  
Collaborate
It doesn’t have to be expensive

- Need to share info? Use your neighborhood’s list servs, bulletin boards, community meetings, social groups, etc. Ask them for help…explain your goals and ask if they can help.

- Need to get input? A web site can do that. Share info about the program and use those neighborhood champions to help get the word out about your website with a comment form or survey on it.

- Do point of contact interviews or surveys yourself at grocery stores, shopping malls, etc.
Get an intern. Or an army of interns. People are looking for job experience to beef up their resumes….give them an opportunity and help yourself.

Ask for volunteer help – train them and send them out to do your info gathering.

Piggy back on someone else’s efforts…coordinate efforts…pool resources.
P2 can help you implement projects. And lack of or poor P2 can help delay projects.

Don’t start with tools!

Plan your P2 just like you plan your technical work - logically and step-by-step.