



Federal Environmental Assessment  
Review Office

Bureau fédéral d'examen  
des évaluations environnementales

**MANUAL ON PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT  
IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:  
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS**



Canada

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# PREFACE

## How to Use Volume Two

**T**he Manual on Public Involvement uses several sources of information:

- A questionnaire, distributed to all line managers of federal departments represented on the Steering Committee, asked the type of public involvement approaches used to date, and those techniques and methods for which further guidance was desired.
- A review of manuals and current literature on public involvement.
- A review of ten case studies of public involvement in the initial planning phases of small scale projects. These case studies are representative of all regions of Canada.
- The experience of noted experts each of whom has worked for many years in the public involvement field.

One of the findings of the survey was that, while data collection techniques are commonly employed, greater information was desired on consultative techniques. To effectively use such techniques, it is impor-

tant to understand the decision making context in which public involvement occurs, and the public involvement process itself. The manual has been written to meet this goal. Readers are encouraged to review the material in Volumes One and Two before attempting to employ any of the techniques described in Volume Three.

The manual has been illustrated with examples drawn from the case studies to clarify and support the points being made. As well, lessons from practitioners experienced with public involvement are passed on through "The Practitioners Speak" - vignettes which appear from time to time in each chapter. At the conclusion of each Chapter, "Final Thoughts from the Practitioners" provides a summary of key points and hints to the user.

The survey indicated a wide diversity in the experience base of managers respecting public involvement. While some departments have been using public involvement for many years, other departmental representatives have little experience with public involvement.

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*The broad social and demographic trends which began in the '70s have brought about fundamental shifts in public attitudes and values which sustain the demands for participation.*

*Agencies which have initiated public involvement for the first time often find that requiring the preparation of a public involvement plan is the single most important thing they can do to get public involvement institutionalized into the organizations.*

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*The real choice is whether public agencies learn to do public involvement well, or are forced into it, resisting at every turn. The disadvantage of resistance is that this is painfully obvious, and there is no improved relationship built with a public which sees you as consulting only under duress.*

Because of this range, the manual has been developed assuming little or no previous experience with public involvement on the part of the reader. As a consequence, some of the material may be very familiar to some readers. Please refer to later sections of the manual if this is the case.

For individuals in departments or agencies of the federal government, the team hopes that this manual will assist you in "getting started" on the road to public involvement. However, remember that a manual cannot provide you with the experience base. You should contact those resource people in other departments who have had the experience. FEARO is a good place to locate contacts in other departments who may be able to assist you and provide you with pointers on public involvement based on their experience.

Finally, this volume is structured around a framework for planning public involvement programs which was initially identified in Volume One and presented here again in Chapter One.

In addition, a series of "quotable quotes" and other key factors have been highlighted where appropriate. These quotes along with the "Practitioners" quotes should be read. As a minimum, they will provide the reader with an excellent overview of the public involvement planning process.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

**V**olume One outlined the requirements for a public involvement process as including five distinct phases, summarized in Figure 1. These phases include a number of detailed steps which are presented in Figure 2.

A recent project, developed by Environment Canada under the leadership of the Niagara Institute, developed a set of principles and protocols for public consultation. These principles and protocols have been used in the design of a number of major consultation programs under the auspices of Environment Canada and strongly support the general thrust taken in this manual. Although the principles are not structured into a process like that described in this manual, they spell out the

assumptions underlying an effective public involvement program and for these reasons are reprinted in this section:

- the recognition that all parties in the process have important contributions to make;
- the need for access to a common information base;
- the need for consultation on the process itself;
- the need for a clear statement of issues and objectives;
- the view that consensus building is possible, but it requires flexibility, compromise, and sufficient time and resources.



*Much of the original resistance to consultation is a fear of the unknown, a fear of what could happen. But a track record of nearly fifteen years shows that most of the fears of public involvement are unjustified, and also shows that the benefits of public involvement for agencies are very tangible.*

**Figure 1**  
**Phases of Public Involvement**

**Phase 1. Early Consultation**

Early "reconnaissance" is required to determine the major public issues which could be raised by a project proposal, the likely level of public interest, the most likely participants and the key individuals who will represent them.

**Phase 2. Initial Planning**

Five detailed preparatory steps lead to the development of a public involvement action plan. The steps include: identifying the agency's decision making process, identifying publics, identifying special characteristics of the situation, writing specific objectives, and determining information exchange requirements.

**Phase 3. Development of an Action Plan**

Action planning begins with choice of public involvement methods keyed to the previous phases. The Action Plan includes establishment of intra-agency communications, commitment of resources and the scheduling of activities essential to conducting the public involvement methods selected.

**Phase 4. Implement the Plan**

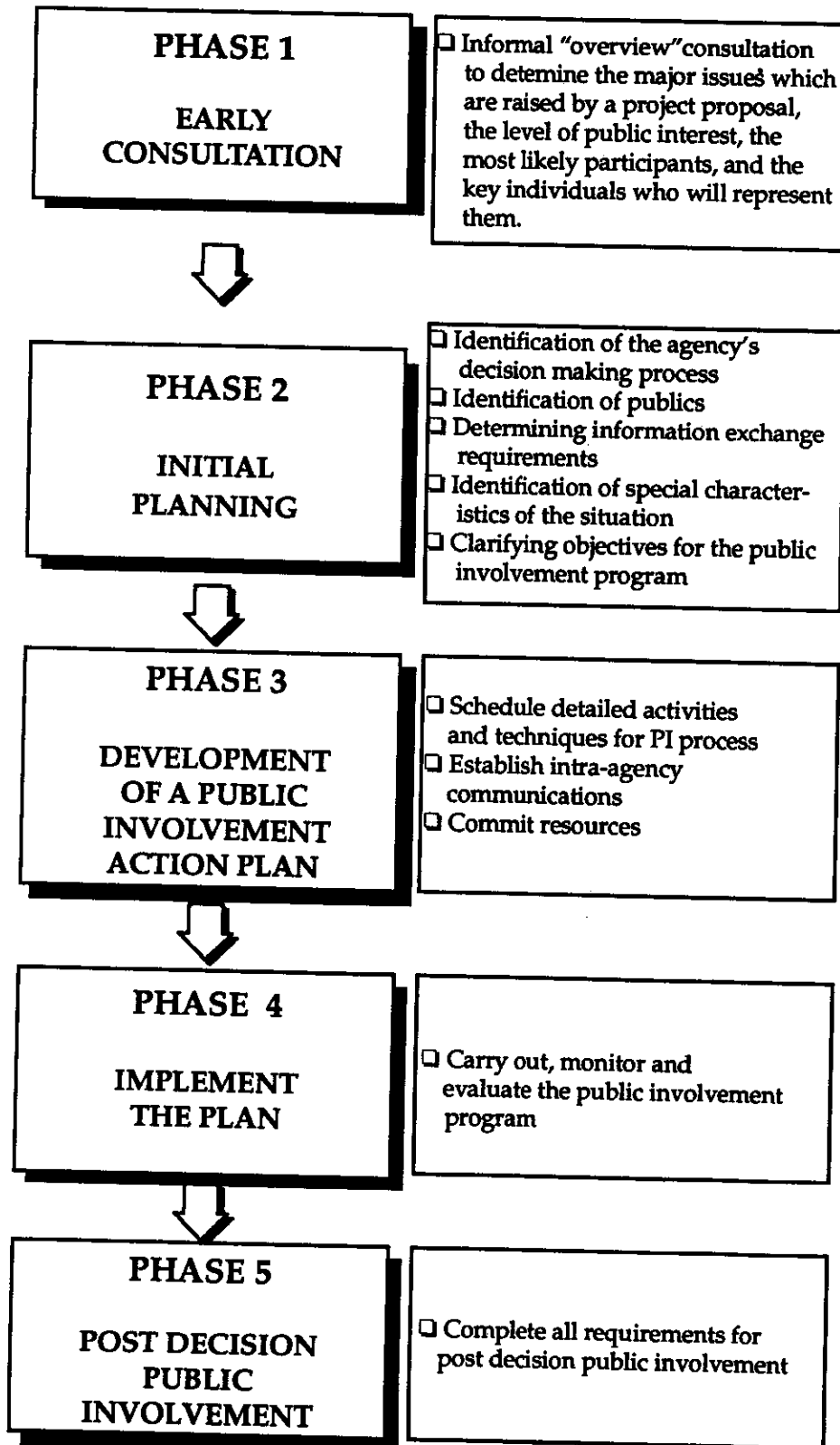
Evaluation of the public involvement process proceeds in conjunction with monitoring of the progress of the agency's project. Evaluation of the results of public involvement is carried out according to guidelines which emphasize both participant satisfaction with the process and ultimate effect on the project.

**Phase 5. Post Decision Public Involvement**

Often, decision makers assume that public involvement is finished when the decision is made. This is not the case; continued involvement is important for many of the reasons early public involvement is useful. After the decision, the public can be involved in further planning, implementation, mitigation, compensation and evaluation of the project, especially with those aspects of the project affecting the public. Also, if the project does not proceed, it is very important to tell the public that this situation exists and the circumstances that led to the situation.

Figure 2

## Steps in Developing and Implementing a Public Involvement Program



*The crucial factor in designing public involvement programs is to be sure that you are very clear on why you are going to the public at a particular point in your decision making process. Design your public involvement programs so that public comment is as necessary at key decision points as your engineering, environmental, social or economic data.*

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

Never underestimate the value of just sitting down and talking to people in small groups, outside of the formal meetings. I remember one series of workshops we'd designed. I'd done my best to design some small group exercises which would give everybody a chance to speak, and really open up communication. One group which was suspicious of our motives handed out instructions as people came into the workshops telling them how to manipulate the workshop exercises to get a predetermined result. By the end of the meeting anyone who disagreed with them felt like they'd been run over by a steam roller. To top it off, after the workshop the leader of the group came up and asked if I wanted to go have a beer. What I wanted to do was pop him in the chops.

A few days later I calmed down, though, and had the beer. We agreed to hold a couple of sessions with his group and the planning team where we'd just sit down and talk. We learned a lot and so did they. One of the things we learned was to have those kinds of informal exchanges with all the major groups.

When we ran another series of workshops a few months later the same people showed up, but this time they were cooperative and supportive of giving everybody a fair shot. The difference was they felt understood, and some trust was built between us.

## CHAPTER 2

# EARLY CONSULTATION

**E**arly consultation with the public who are interested in, or directly affected by, a proposed project is an excellent investment. Decision making processes benefit if the first phase is a "reconnaissance" of public views. It is wise to scan the broad range of issues before public statements are made and positions have been taken which must later be retracted or defended. This can save a great deal of time and effort in everything from the preparation of initial information and selection of public involvement methods to the costs if the project is cancelled.

### INFORMAL CONSULTATION

**W**hether the opportunity arises before formal project announcements are made or after, informal consultation should be undertaken. Direct personal visits or telephone calls will provide a firsthand appreciation of what interested parties actually think and feel. Meeting the same people for the first time across a meeting floor or at a public hearing may present

too great a barrier to the development of the interpersonal trust which is such a critical ingredient of successful public involvement programs. This is the time to get out of the office, get your boots muddy and hear "unvarnished" opinion.

Even if you don't have all the information assembled or analyzed for a project, it is preferable to touch base with the various publics now, rather than to wait. Let them know your schedule for obtaining the information and studies, so that if you have to say, "I don't know" in response to a query, it will be credible.

An example of the benefits of early consultation is provided by the Calgary Area Aviation Master Plan. During the initial meetings with key organizations it became apparent that quick agreement would not be possible due to conflicting interests and perspectives. It was realized that a more comprehensive planning process involving the public would be necessary. As a result, the participants developed a common understanding of the situation and of each

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## PHASE 1

**Case Study:**  
Calgary Area Aviation  
Master Plan.

## PHASE 1

*Recent books on excellent managers say they do a lot of "walking around" out where things are happening. Excellent managers use this as a way of "sensing" what's really going on in their organization, instead of having it filtered through other people. Think of early consultation with the public as "walking around" with the public. You're trying to get a feel of what's really happening. You can't get a feel for an issue if you just walk around and talk to people who agree with the agency. That's of no more use to you than getting all your management data from a "Yes-man." If you only get out and "walk-around" when there's a crisis brewing, then just your being out there talking to people changes the dynamic. But if you're out "walking around" with the public on a regular basis, then you are seen as a normal part of the territory, and you can sense any changes which may be harbingers of future problems.*

others needs. Ultimately, the committee attained consensus on the final recommendation. This would not have been possible had the extended public involvement program not been undertaken.

## IDENTIFYING MAJOR ISSUES

**D**uring informal consultation it is possible to explore the issues that may be engendered by the proposed project. This early discussion allows you to sort out those issues which are likely to cause real public concern from those which are hypothetical. Early warnings can be transmitted to the project proponent staff to see if modifications can be made before controversy is precipitated. The complexity of the project and the issues perceived by the public can set the tone for project announcements and for the internal agency preparations for public involvement.

## ESTIMATING LEVEL OF INTEREST

**T**echnical professionals usually make their own preliminary estimate of the likelihood of negative impacts of their proposed project. These estimates may depend upon extensive research or may result from

qualified opinion. It is always disconcerting for professionals to have their assessment of risk challenged by public perceptions which can be at great variance with their own.

Public perceptions of risk can be volatile. Media coverage, personal experience, competing professional views, rumors and inflammatory comment may influence public perceptions more than the evidence held within the agency. Talking to the public directly can help assess the emotional climate in which your project will be received, and the kind of information that may be required about it from the moment it is announced.

Do not assume that issues which you identify will remain the same or that new issues will not arise during the process. Change is the name of the game in development projects. It is essential that you monitor the issues over time so that you remain on top of the situation. This process has become known as issues management and is discussed further in Appendix One.

When estimating the level of interest, it is well to remember that many public interest organizations are networked. You may face per-

ceptions of risk and concern about issues from people experienced with projects from far distant places that could be real challenges but may also bear only superficial resemblance to your project.

A presentation technique to display critical issues to senior decision-makers has been developed and can be found in Appendix Two in this volume.

## IDENTIFYING KEY PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS

**A** concerted attempt to ensure that key people are identified is crucial. Interested or affected parties who are left out of the information flow may interpret this as deliberate and not an oversight on your part. Asking key people to check your list and refer you to others is a good way of making sure that no one is missed.

In identifying organizations it is useful to determine whether they have perma-

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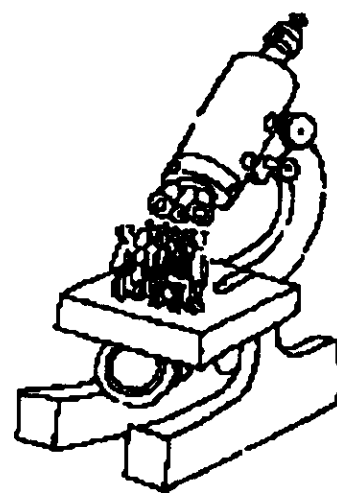
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## PHASE 1

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

One mistake I used to make a lot was underestimating public concern because I was convinced from my own technical knowledge that there was no real problem. Then I would choose a public involvement approach at the superficial end of the scale, thinking that there was no issue. Well, of course, this would be interpreted as cavalier disregard by the public and I would take a lot of flak. I've learned that the methods that you choose have to bear the heat that the project generates, even if you think that the heat is unwarranted.

I have seen projects run into trouble because they failed to see that a predecessor had sensitized the public negatively. I remember one logging proposal in a public watershed that would have been controversial at the best of times, but it followed a successful battle to exclude uranium mining from the same watershed. . .



EARLY  
CONSULTATION

13

## PHASE 1

*Highly contentious issues cannot be resolved in a short-term public involvement program. Don't expect too much. A longer term process of consultation to gradually build consensus is required.*

nent staff or are dependent on volunteers. The ability of organizations to respond to enquiry or to generate comment varies greatly with meeting schedules and organizational form. Enough must be known about the communications capacity of organizations so that you do not interpret logistic limitations as a lack of interest.

Also, contact with leaders of organizations which meet infrequently is not necessarily contact with the membership. Other organizations may have communication patterns which differ from that within your agency.

### *Final Thoughts from the Practitioners...*

- Don't be afraid to informally consult with the public very early on in the process and take a reconnaissance of the issues which may be affecting a project.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Remember, do not forget to identify "publics" within, as well as outside of, your organization. It is very embarrassing to find your own staff at odds with you when you go into the community.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Sort out those issues likely to cause real public concern from those which are hypothetical.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Do not assume that the issues which you identify will remain the same or that new issues will not arise.

## CHAPTER 3

# IDENTIFYING THE AGENCY'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The second phase of the public involvement planning process is the "initial planning" – undertaking the research and thought necessary to prepare an action plan. This initial planning process has five steps:

- identifying the agency's decision making process;
- identifying the publics;
- identifying special characteristics of the situation;
- clarifying objectives for the public involvement program;
- determining information exchange requirements.

**This chapter discusses the first step, identifying the decision making process.**

Each agency has decision making processes unique to its own mandate and jurisdiction. Departments concerned with parks, highways, airports, waste facilities or mines share some common patterns but have evolved practices which are strictly internal. Members of the public cannot be ex-

pected to know what these practices are, where they can intervene or what right they have to call for intervention at any given stage of a decision process.

When an agency sets out to develop a public involvement program, it should make sure that the call for public participation is linked to accessible steps in a clearly articulated decision making sequence.

### THE MANDATE FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Sometimes public involvement is formally mandated by legislation, policy or regulation. For example, the guidelines order governing the Environmental Assessment and Review Process (EARP) formally describes the decision making process and the points for public review. In this case, there is an established entry point for the public, and at least one method of public involvement (the public hearing) is fixed. In the case of formal hearings, public involvement is constrained to fol-

## PHASE 2 - STEP 1

*Agencies often have difficulty explaining decision making processes in simple language because the agency itself lacks clarity on the process, or is so enraptured by the details that people forget to talk about the fundamental principles behind the details. If you're having trouble explaining something to the public, use it as an opportunity to clarify your own thinking.*

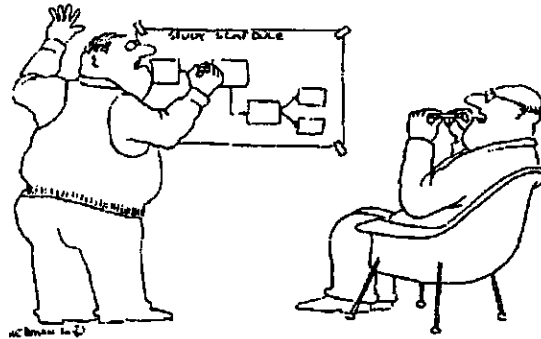


## PHASE 2 - STEP 1

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

When I first started working with government agencies I kept hearing from people about how they couldn't do things because their bosses wouldn't let them. They weren't permitted to make decisions. Then I met their bosses and they told me how they couldn't make decisions without the permission of their bosses. Then I met the guys at the top and they told me all about how their hands were tied. One of the reasons they claimed their hands were tied is that their staff had made so many decisions that their options were very limited.

Everybody wants to be in on "the decision". But the truth is that there isn't any single point in time at which "the decision" is made. Big decisions are shaped by all the little decisions which went before them. Someone makes a decision about how the problem is defined. Someone else makes a decision about which alternatives are considered. Someone else makes a decision about the criteria used to evaluate the alternatives. Someone else determines how much flexibility there is in interpreting the law. Once a final choice is made someone else decides how the decision is to be implemented. Which is "the decision"? They're all important. That's a big reason why you need the public's involvement throughout the entire decision making process, and after the final decision when the implementation activities occur.



*Where do you participate the public?*

low a prescribed path that demands a structured approach both by agency managers and by members of the public.

In the case of less formal mandates for public involvement, the entry points are flexible and can be negotiated to fit local circumstances. The decision making processes at this level are often themselves flexible or at least have some room for managerial discretion in their application. Most agencies' legislative mandates do provide sufficient flexibility so that the public can be involved in a decision without contravening the mandate.

In practice, an agency might face situations which lie on a continuum between the strictly formal and the informal or which may involve both formal and informal requirements at different stages in the life of a project. Public involvement early in the design stage of a project allows for flexibility of methods. If public involvement is withheld until controversy is well established, there is a strong tendency for all parties to gravitate to the formal end of the spectrum.

Regardless of the degree of formality, the agency that invokes public involvement must provide the public

with an explicit statement of the decision making process in use. Failure to do so runs the risk of appearing to change the rules in mid-play when participants discover stages that managers appear to "manufacture" to suit their needs.

Flexibility of decision process is illustrated in the case of the Fort McKay Interface Committee, established by Alberta's Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) as a forum in which a native community could discuss its concerns in a cooperative setting with industry and government. The committee had the mandate to discuss and debate upcoming proposals. However, if the community was not satisfied with the committee process, it could request a public hearing.

## DEVELOPING DECISION SEQUENCE CHARTS

**T**here is no substitute for an explicit sequence chart. Each decision can be divided into a sequence of steps which show the action to be taken, information elements upon which each stage is dependent, who is responsible, where the public may be included, and the implications of the decision. Each participant in a public

## PHASE 2 - STEP 1

**Case Study:**  
Fort McKay  
Interface Committee

## PHASE 2 - STEP 1

**Case Study:**  
Fort McKay  
Interface Committee

involvement process should possess a copy of the chart and it should be used to log the progress of events. This mechanism helps to keep public expectations realistically related to the agency's mandate, helps to communicate the process to senior managers or politicians, and helps to give structure to requests for budget and staff. Figure 3 presents the generic decision sequence charts for both formal and informal processes.

### INVOLVEMENT AFFECTS THE PROCESS

**M**ost decision making sequences established within an agency are developed to meet project timetables, cost imperatives and internal organizational requirements. They make sense to the professional

managers and become enshrined as "standard operating procedures". When the public enters the scene there is potential for friction and for change. Even time-honored processes may need to be rethought to accommodate determined publics. The willingness of agency management to adapt existing procedures may be taken by the public as evidence of good faith.

The case of Fort McKay shows the possibility of attaining win-win results if an agency is flexible. Alberta's ERCB, in an attempt to develop a new approach to resolving conflict at Fort McKay, spearheaded the establishment of a joint industry-government-community committee which subsequently played a major role in the review of an industry permit application, an

#### *The Practitioners Speak....*

I have run across agencies which have elaborate decision processes but no chart showing the standard sequence. When the public asks about the process, each manager explains the sequence differently from personal impressions or uses different terms, resulting in confusion of the public and embarrassment of the agency. Sometimes the preparation of a sequence chart has surprised the agency about how convoluted their own process has become and leads to useful streamlining, even before meeting with the public.

PHASE 2 - STEP 1

*The Practitioners Speak.....*

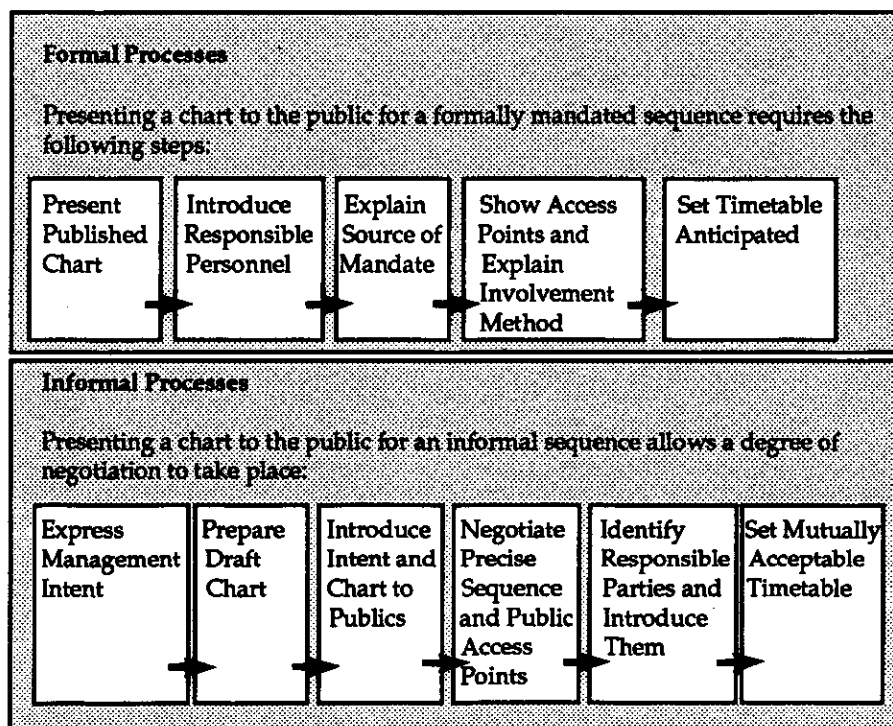
Decision making in the real world hardly ever follows a linear sequence. The pressure of events advances or retards a timetable, several steps are compressed into one or done simultaneously, flashes of insight cut through stages, or new parties to the process arrive on the scene demanding change. The value of having a charted sequence is that it acts as a framework on which to hang real events. Otherwise the unpredictable occurrences of reality look to the public like "the manipulation of a reluctant manager".

unusual step in the normal ERCB review process. The ERCB also assisted the Committee's operation by funding the services of experts.

As shown in this case study, flexibility provides agency management with the opportunity to develop public involvement programs specifically tailored to the needs of a particular project

*You simply cannot make intelligent choices about what public involvement techniques you should use until you have a clear idea of what it is that you want to accomplish at each step of the decision making process.*

**Figure 3**  
**Generic Decision Sequence Chart**



## PHASE 2 - STEP 1

*When you design your decision making process you are making a statement about what matters to your decision makers. If your decision making process considers only the "tried and true" ways your agencies have dealt with problems in the past, that will be very clear to the public. If you value control more than visibility or credibility, that will also be visible. If you think some groups are more important to hear from than others, that will also be clear. Be sure, before you go to the public, that your decision making process expresses the same values that you are going to tell the public you care about. Otherwise, your process speaks louder than your words.*

and the characteristics of the publics involved. In an impact assessment, public involvement at each step of

the generic decision making process could eliminate the need for formal public review.

### *The Practitioners Speak...*

I've learned that one pitfall on project sequence charts is showing public involvement as but a brief interlude on the timetable leading inevitably towards project construction. The "engineer" has budgeted two weeks for public consultation and the language assumes assent on schedule. Cries of "tokenism" result and the process comes off the rails. Most publics are very sensitive to signals of urgency that appear to limit a reasonable chance to intervene.

### *Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....*

- Be aware that an effective public involvement process can eliminate the need for formal public review/public hearings.
- Be willing to show good faith in the public and adapt existing decision making procedures if called to do so.
- Don't tell the public you want their involvement, then only budget two weeks for it. You'll be accused of tokenism, and the whole project will lose credibility.
- Structure the entire decision making process for public involvement throughout, not just added onto the process, after the fact. There is no single point in time at which "the decision" is made.
- Explain your decision making process in simple, everyday language. If you're having trouble explaining the process to the public, use the opportunity to clarify your own thinking.

## CHAPTER 4

# IDENTIFYING THE PUBLICS

**T**he second step of the pre-planning phase is the identification of the publics. This chapter discusses factors influencing this step.

**The public is not a single entity, a monolithic whole.** Rather it is constantly shifting affiliations, interests, and alliances. There are many publics, rather than "the public". These publics form in response to some perceived interest. People participate when they believe they are strongly affected and believe they can do something about it. They don't participate when they believe they are not affected or can do nothing about it. One implication of this is that "the public" changes for each public involvement program, and grows larger as a decision gets closer.

If people intensely experience an impact, they are likely to participate, and, if so, they will exert more political or media pressure than others who do not feel as severely affected. **This is political reality, and it is not limited to public involvement.**

In fact, the "Silent Majority" is a myth. It does not exist because it rests on the false assumption that somehow, because people are silent, they are in agreement. Everyone makes choices about when to participate, and may be part of the vocal minority on one issue, and be a member of the "silent majority" on others. The membership of the silent majority and the vocal minority are changing constantly. One definition which encapsulates this concept is: the "silent majority is simply a group of currently disengaged minorities".

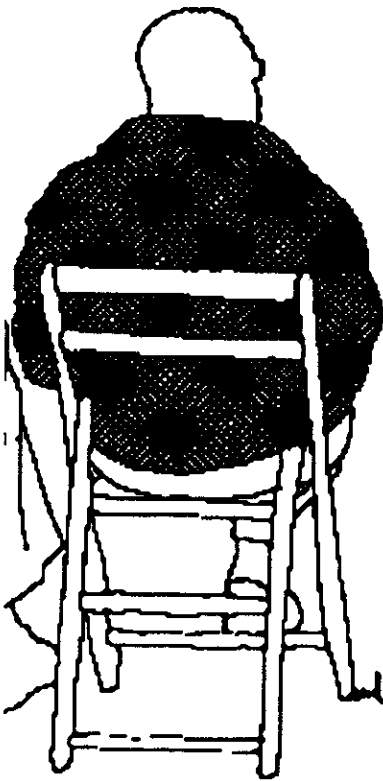
### REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

**T**here are several reasons why people may not participate in public involvement:

- **They feel adequately represented by someone in the vocal minority.** Leaders of visible interest groups often serve as "surrogates" for a much larger group who feel they are represented by the activities of the surrogate. Many people belong to some

## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

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group in which they do little more than pay dues so that the group will represent their interests. In other cases, people may not pay dues or join a group, but are reassured by knowing that such a group is active.

□ **People don't believe the impact justifies participation.** Everyone makes choices and sets priorities as to the activities in which they participate. Some people choose to participate in the daily tasks of earning a living and caring for family. Others participate actively in a number of issues. People involve themselves in those issues they believe have a significant impact on their lives. Remember, all citizens have the right to choose not to participate.

□ **People are unaware they are affected by a decision.** If people are not told of the potential impact they may not participate because they don't realize they could be affected. When they discover this is untrue they may feel doubly betrayed - betrayed because of the impact, and betrayed because they weren't told about the impact before the decision was made.

□ **People don't believe they can influence the decision.** Apathy is people's belief that no matter what they do they will have no influence on the outcome. Without well-defined methods by which people can influence a decision, only the best-organized interests are likely to participate. As an agency earns a track record in involving the public, its credibility is enhanced and people will feel more hopeful, less apathetic.

□ **People believe that the decision is already made.** If the public believes that the decision has already been made, they may refuse to participate in the public involvement program, choosing other ways to make their concerns felt.

### OBLIGATIONS TO THE PUBLIC

**W**hen people choose whether or not to participate, their decision is based on the amount of information they have about the impacts as well as their assessment of whether or not their participation will affect the decision. This - coupled with the dangers of decision making by small elites - creates obligations to the public which should be observed in planning and implementing public involvement programs.

❑ The federal agency has an obligation to provide information which informs the public of upcoming decisions and their potential consequences, so that people can decide on an informed basis whether or not to participate.

❑ The agency should inform the public how to participate if they choose to do so.

❑ Even if the numbers who choose to participate are small, the agency should be sure that it is hearing comments from all viewpoints, not just from a limited public such as "user groups".

❑ The agency should provide information and access to management to all interest groups, not just a limited few.

Once these obligations have been fulfilled, it is up to each individual to decide whether or not he or she wishes to participate.

In the Fraser River Estuary Management Program (FREMP), a major principle underlying the public involvement program is that of shared responsibility. The program took the initiative to foster awareness and information about the estuary and the program and was readily accessible to everyone interested. How-

ever, citizens and their public interest groups had to take responsibility to monitor FREMP and take some initiative to seek further information and present their views. FREMP did not try to send all its information to every resident of the estuary, but ensured there were ample windows for those interested to become informed and to be heard.

### Guidelines For Working with the Public

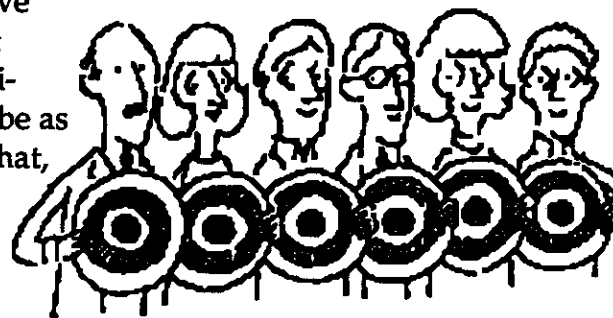
**T**arget the public for each issue. Targeting is the process of systematically analyzing which interests and groups have a probable interest in a given issue. Note that the degree to which people feel affected is a result of their subjective perception. People that agency staff think are directly affected may not be as interested as someone that, from the agency's perspective, is only peripherally involved.

It is not the purpose in "targeting" publics to exclude people or groups. Rather, the purpose of targeting the public is:

❑ To ensure the representativeness of the active minority that will participate in the public involvement program.

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**Case Study:**  
Fraser River Estuary  
Management Program  
(FREMP)



*Developing acceptable solutions to sensitive problems requires the involvement of all affected parties - relevant industries, the public, government departments and agencies.*



## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

*You cannot place your own values on other people and assume that they are the same. Those of an urban native person may differ dramatically from those of a rural native person. The same is true of a commercial fisherman versus a sport fisherman. The only way to understand this is to get out and experience the issues. Your office won't give you the answer or the judgment necessary to make the right decision.*

❑ To establish credibility by informing potentially affected publics, rather than have them discover they might be affected.

❑ To involve potentially affected publics early in the process while they can still exert some influence, rather than late in the process when they are forced into a supporter/adversary relationship.

Avoid the tendency to consult only with those who are likely to be supportive of a proposed action or decision, or with whom there has been effective communication in the past. For ef-

fective public involvement, those groups that are critical must be included. It is always better to hear criticisms early in the process, when the agency is not locked into a particular solution, or can make changes which respond to concerns expressed by the public. Only if all viewpoints are included is there any chance of a politically effective consensus.

It is better for an agency to be in the position of informing people that they could be affected by a decision than to have them "discover" it at a later date. When they discover it by

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

When I started out, I assumed that public involvement meant that we had to get the involvement of John and Jane Q. Citizen. What I quickly found out is that on most issues John Q. responded with a firm: "Don't bother me". After all, it is usually more fun to stay home and watch the game than it is to go to a meeting and yell at your neighbors. Besides people have other priorities, like earning a living, which come ahead of exciting things like long range planning.

But, I also found that there were other people that I could leave out of the process only at the risk of permanent scarring. It didn't have to make sense to me why they felt they were deeply affected and their neighbor didn't. If they felt affected by the decision, they were. The secret is to get enough good, accurate and reliable information out to the public so you can target these people before they find you. It's always better for you to be inviting them to participate than having them saying you left them out.

themselves there is often the feeling that the agency is trying to put something over on them, or is misleading them somehow. This may be difficult, because some people who may be potentially interested, such as people located near a proposed project, may not be organized. In some cases it is necessary for an agency to help such interests organize, since it is usually easier to work with an organized group than with a number of conflicting individual voices.

There are many examples throughout Canada of a public agency making a decision without public involvement, only to have public opposition develop afterwards. Sometimes a project can be salvaged; at other times it has to be completely scrapped because the opposition is so intense.

In Steveston, the Fraser River Harbour Commission had already dumped dredged sand on an island in the river at a cost of \$800,000, when public opposition halted the project. A consultation process was implemented to find a publicly acceptable means of disposing of dredged sand and to restore harmony between the Harbour Commission and the community. A joint problem solving process was embarked upon, re-

sulting in the development of an acceptable solution to the community and the government agencies. The Harbour Commission, however, was required to remove the sand already dumped. The cost of the public involvement program to develop the solution was \$34,000.

**Avoid underestimating the professional competence of citizens.** Citizen groups are often composed of individuals with expertise and competence in subject areas relevant to the issue at hand. Because these people are outside the agency, they are sometimes able to develop solutions to project issues in ways that had not been anticipated by agency staff.

**Do not ignore professional publics from associated agencies.** Staff and volunteers from associated agencies may be "stakeholders" in the project and have a contribution to make.

**Do not ignore the "internal publics" within the agency.** The agency's own staff needs to be involved in the public involvement program and informed of a decision making process developed for the issue at hand. Some issues and decisions, for example, may have different implications for other units in the agency.

## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

**Case Study:**  
Fraser River Estuary  
Management Program  
(FREMP)

## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

*When you find people within your agency resisting public involvement, ask them what their idea is of "the public." Usually, they will respond that the public is a huge, undifferentiated mass of people. The first step in getting the staff to accept public involvement is to get them to change their image of "the public." In practical political terms, there may be some issues on which the number of crucial people to have participating is under ten; on others it may be several hundred.*

## Conclusions about "The Public"

The foregoing observations lead to certain basic conclusions about a definition of "the public" that is workable and democratically justifiable:

❑ There is no such thing as "THE PUBLIC", there are only publics. "The public", even "the majority", is really just aggregates of the millions of minorities that affiliate, collapse, and re-form on a continuous basis.

❑ For any decision, the public consists of those people who see themselves as significantly affected. This conclusion is based on the reality of how and why people participate. It is justifiable democratically because of the role that interest groups play and because those who perceive themselves as most affected are those who are the most visible and usually by far the most vocal.

❑ People see themselves affected in a number of ways. For example: proximity to a proposed project, economic gain or loss, establishing or maintaining an existing use, a social or environmental impact, or values and political philosophy.

❑ Because people participate when they see themselves as affected, the size and composition of the public will differ for each public involvement program. Different people will see themselves affected as issues change.

❑ The size of the public for a particular issue increases with controversy. This is virtually a "by definition" statement, since the word "controversy" means that there is a relatively large number of people who have chosen to be a part of the vocal minority for this particular decision.

❑ The size of the public will increase the closer the decision is. The impacts of decisions become clearer as the consequences are studied. As a result, more people realize they are affected and choose to participate. As alternative actions are defined during the course of a project, these alternatives in turn have impacts on new groups. Thus, the solution to one group's problem may actually be the problem from another group's perspective. Also, as the final decision gets closer, the jockeying for power among interests increases the likelihood of efforts to enlist the support of the unorganized public. As some alternatives are eliminated, or as mitigating actions are identified, some people who believed they were affected will drop out of the public involvement program. Normally this is offset by the people who begin to participate as a decision gets closer.

The most important conclusion to be derived from this discussion is that "the public" will be different for each decision. Some decisions may involve a very small - but hopefully representative - public, while other decisions will attract the interest of hundreds, even thousands, of people. One of the first tasks in designing a public involvement program is to carefully analyze which publics are likely to be interested in the decision, and what will be the intensity of interest. Nothing is quite as discouraging to agency staff than to commit major time and resources to a public involvement effort, only to have nobody interested. On the other hand, grossly underestimating public interest can lead to charges that an agency is "excluding the public", or even that it is trying to cover something up, or "cut secret deals".

Vern Millard, the former chairman of Alberta's energy industry regulatory body, the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB), reported: "For several years, community involvement programs have been implemented by almost all applicants and have been of major importance in minimizing the number of hearings. However, they are not always conducted effectively and there has been a tendency by the ERCB to assume that where objections were filed to a proposed energy facility, they indicated an ineffective program.

"That explanation, however, is far too simplistic. Recent evidence shows that objections to some energy facilities are really due to the public's concerns about government standards relating to such sensitive issues as public health and safety or the environment. An applicant designs a proposed energy facility to meet government standards but if the public does not agree with them, then the problem will not be resolved by the applicant initiating a community involvement program. Clearly, those responsible for the standards (the regulatory agency and government departments) must be part of the public involvement process."

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

During the 1970s there was one land management agency which had advisory committees for each management unit. There was a local logger who cut timber on the land, a local rancher who grazed cattle on the land, a travel guide who took hunters into the back country, and so on. These folks kept telling the agency they're doing a fine job. Which was nice except this agency was just getting creamed in the media and in parliament with the emergence of the environmental movement. The problem was that the people selected for the committee all had the same philosophy as the agency. It was like getting up, looking in a mirror, and saying: "You're doing a fine job." The participation technique they had chosen systematically excluded all those groups which were critical of the agency, so the agency only heard what it wanted to hear. It may not be necessary to have a cast of thousands in your public participation program, but you do need to be very sure you're hearing all points of view.

## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

*One of your major obligations to the public is to provide enough information so that people can make an informed choice about whether to participate.*

## PHASE 2 - STEP 2

*Far more important than the size of the public participating is its representativeness. What you can't afford is a public involvement program which selectively omits major points of view which are then expressed outside your public involvement program, through other forms of intervention including protests or lawsuits.*

### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

In one recent situation related to an offshore energy exploration program, the government agencies and the proponents held a series of public/community workshops to let the local residents know what they were planning to do. Both government and industry brought in their technical experts in biology, oil spill technology, and emergency response planning to name but a few. Everyone made the assumption that the audience would consist of the local business people, the native population, and a few-'back-to-the-landers'. Imagine the surprise they received when, in the public meetings, the back-to-the-landers turned out to hold PhD's in some of these same disciplines--in fact, better qualified than the 'experts'. It quickly became evident that the experts were out-classed and it was time to go back and do some more homework to answer the well articulated questions. It was somewhat embarrassing and certainly stressful for those involved. The lesson....**know your audience and their level of expertise before you go into a public format. If you don't have the opportunity to do this, then do your homework well. Be prepared!!!**

### *Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....*

- Recognize your obligation to provide sufficient information to the public about the consequences of a proposed action so that citizens can choose whether or not to participate in the decision around the action.

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- There are many publics; the public is made up of constantly shifting affiliations, interest and alliances.

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- Ensure that you do a good job of defining the issues so that you can target all the publics likely to be affected and approach them, rather than having them find out through other means and approach you instead.

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- There is no such thing as the "layman" anymore. Many of the publics now have more experience than the people who run public involvement programs.

## CHAPTER 5

# ANALYZING THE SPECIFIC SITUATION

**T**his chapter focuses on the third step in the initial planning phase, examining the detailed specifics of an issue. In developing a public involvement plan it is essential to identify all the factors which come to bear on the project. In this way an appropriate approach can be developed and public involvement techniques selected which meet the special circumstances of a given issue.

Four sets of factors can affect the approach and selection of techniques for a public involvement process:

- Characteristics of the Project or Policy Issues;
- Characteristics of the Public;
- Characteristics of Other Key Agencies; and
- Characteristics of the Decision

A combination of these factors will ultimately determine the overall approach which you will have to take in preparing your Action Plan and, ultimately, the overall public involvement program.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT OR POLICY ISSUES

**P**roject or policy issues need to be examined according to several factors:

**Technical Complexity** - The level of technical complexity may result in the need for much more public information so that the public(s) can understand what issues are most crucial. This information must be written so anyone can understand it.

**Geographic Extent** - Different approaches and techniques may need to be used depending on the size of the geographic region; a high density urban area may need to be treated much differently from that of a large rural area, even though they may have the same total population.

**Scope of Interest** - Some issues may be of interest only to the client group or to technical experts, while other issues are of interest to the broadest public audience. Appropriate techniques must be used to reach these different audi-

## PHASE 2 - STEP 3



## PHASE 2 - STEP 3

### Case Study: Swan Hills Special Waste Treatment Centre

*Reactionary people can  
become positive contributors  
if they feel part of the proc-  
ess.*

ences. Understanding these audiences is key in this process.

**Perceived Risk** - The perceptions of the risk of a project sometimes vary among different public groups and the sponsoring agency. This may mean that a variety of techniques may be necessary for different potentially affected groups.

The public involvement process for the Swan Hills Special Waste Treatment Centre illustrates how a process was influenced by the particularly sensitive nature of the project. Early in the process, public acceptability was identified as a critical objective in siting the facility, as important as the technical criteria. This overriding factor influenced subsequent steps, including an emphasis on openness of information, and the decision to only consider communities which showed interest in the possible project, after receiving information about the project.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PUBLIC(S)

**T**he manager of the public involvement program needs to examine the nature of the public which is being asked to participate:

**Informed/Uninformed** - The level and accuracy of information provided to the public prior to a project proposal may affect both the requirement for information as well as the development of ways to make the information more credible to the public.

**Hostile/Apathetic** - Hostility or apathy may be reactions to either the issue or to the agency and its history of trust with the public. If hostility is a factor, the public involvement techniques selected must allow for venting the hostility before any constructive work can be achieved. Conversely, if the public(s) are apathetic, enough information must be provided to allow individuals to determine if they want to participate.

**Divided/United** - If a public is united over an issue it means the agency knows where it stands and can work toward resolution knowing what it must work with. Divided publics are more difficult to respond to as they may be divided on many issues, not only those related to the specific project. It may be impossible to have these publics work together even if they eventually agree on the project specific issues.

### **Local, Provincial or National Interests -**

Whether the publics are from the local or regional area, or are provincial and national organizations, will influence the requirements of the public involvement process. When national interest groups "parachute" into local/regional issues, hostilities can arise quickly between these "publics" as the different perspectives become apparent.

**History of Public Involvement in the Region -** If prior public involvement activity in the region has been viewed as successful by the public, then it is often much easier to work with interest groups again. If prior experiences have been bad then it may take much more time, information and energy to work with a skeptical public.

**Maturity of the Conflict -** Issues in the early stage of formation may be easier to manage or work with than those that have evolved or reached a stage of entrenchment where no one is willing to move from an adopted position. It is much better to identify issues as early as possible so that the publics are still willing to look at alternative courses of action. A discussion of identifying and managing issues is outlined in Appendix

One.

One method of analyzing the various publics is through "Policy Profiling". This is described in Volume Three, Dictionary of Techniques.

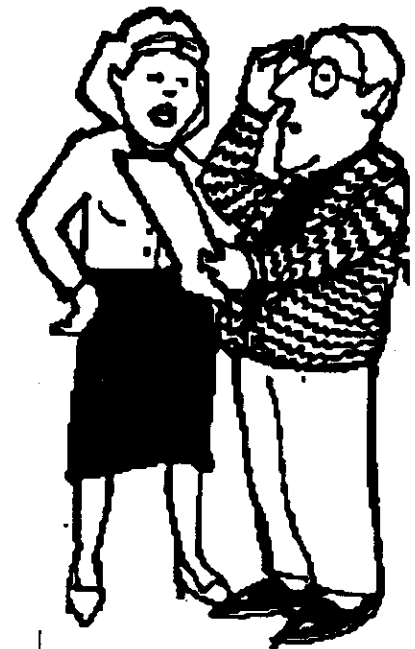
### **CHARACTERISTICS OF OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

**F**ederal Agencies and their Constituencies - Other publics can include other associated or competing agencies at the federal level. What is often forgotten is that these agencies also may bring their own constituencies with them representing a much larger group than ever anticipated. These constituencies must be recognized and included.

**Provincial/Territorial Counterparts -** Other publics also include any provincial/territorial agencies where the federal department may be developing a public involvement program. These provincial agencies may also bring their sets of constituencies with them.

**Devolution of Responsibilities -** At present the federal government is devolving many responsibilities to the Yukon and Northwest Territorial Governments as

## **PHASE 2 - STEP 3**





## PHASE 2 - STEP 3

*People sometimes become entranced with the technology of public involvement, fascinated with some particular technique or even the use of sophisticated computer technology. However, there's no substitute for a program that's appropriate to the issue, the audience, and the agency. More is not necessarily better, unless it is required by your unique circumstances. Your challenge is to design a program which uniquely fits the needs of your situation, rather than impose a predetermined methodology which may have worked sensationally on another issue, but just doesn't make sense in the particular situation.*

well as to native organizations across Canada. The situation is fluid and it is essential that anyone planning a public involvement program related to these jurisdictions be aware of the status of devolution and incorporate it into their planning.

**Local Government/Native Government** - The role of local and native governments as key publics is growing in Canada. It cannot be assumed that all native communities or local governments will have the same viewpoints on issues. The public involvement plan must adequately address meeting the needs of local and native governments.

**Simultaneous Activities** - It must be remembered that one agency is never acting alone in any setting. Anyone developing a public involvement program must be aware of the activity of other agencies (or other branches

of their agency) in the region.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECISION

The nature of the decision to be made will influence the public involvement program and the techniques selected. Decision types include:

- A policy decision affecting agency operating procedure at a broad level.
- A regulatory decision, again affecting operating procedure but at a more detailed level.
- A field decision relating to a specific issue relevant only in a given field situation.

### *Final Thoughts From the Practitioners.....*

- Be sure to take the time to pre-plan the PI program, and analyze the specific characteristics of the issue which will affect the selection of an approach and of techniques.
- Be sure that you design a program which uniquely fits the needs of your situation, rather than impose a pre-determined methodology which may have worked well in another situation, but doesn't make sense here.

## CHAPTER 6

# ESTABLISHING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES

**T**his chapter presents the fourth step of the initial planning process, the setting of objectives.

At this point, the manager will have already completed the following:

- Undertaken a preliminary "reconnaissance" to assess the level of public interest.
- Defined and clarified the decision making process and examined the opportunities for public involvement.
- Identified the "public" for the issue at hand.
- Examined the issue according to a number of specific situation characteristics.

The information derived from these steps will enable the manager to develop objectives for the public involvement program. This stage entails detailing exactly why the project manager wants to involve the public, what is the public's role, and what the project manager expects to achieve through public involvement.

Setting objectives is crucial; the nature of the objectives will influence the nature of the program and the degree of public involvement. Objectives may vary at each stage, as a project manager may want or need to accomplish different requirements at different stages.

### WHEN IS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT NEEDED?

**M**any efforts to define when public involvement is needed focus on the relative significance of the decision, or the extent to which it is controversial. One difficulty in using such criteria is that "significance" is in the eye of the beholder. An issue which looks relatively insignificant to an agency may be seen as very significant by an interest or user group. And by the time an issue becomes controversial, opportunities to prevent polarization may have been lost. A more useful approach is to consider which decisions are "political" and which are "technical".

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## PHASE 2 - STEP 4

Many questions considered by line managers to be technical decisions actually contain important assumptions about equity, distribution of wealth, acceptable levels of safety, and environmental protection. These are all topics which the public sees as very political.

### **Guidelines: When Public Involvement is Needed**

**T**here are four general rules that can be used to determine when public involvement is needed:

**Public involvement is needed when positive public support for a proposed action or decision is desired.** Whenever an agency needs active public support, and not just passive acquiescence, there is a need for public involvement. Involvement is a means by which individuals and groups "buy into" a decision and actively support its implementation. And while public involvement may not guarantee support for a decision, if a decision or action is controversial, support is unlikely without it.

**Public involvement is needed whenever a key public perceives that it has a lot to win or lose by a decision.** The key word in this guideline is "perceive". Any

issue regarding health or safety in relation to toxic wastes, sour gas or nuclear energy tends to be perceived by the public as extremely significant, even though an agency may see the probability of risk as low.

**Public involvement is needed when the results of a decision will significantly affect the economic, social, or political interests of some people or groups more than others.** Beyond the questions of the extent of potential benefits or costs, there is the question of equity of their distribution. The most controversial decisions involve significant benefits and costs that are not distributed equally among different groups.

**Public involvement is needed when a decision will significantly affect an already-existing controversy in the community.** Sociologists refer to "cleavages" within communities—issues which already divide the community and are the basis for continuing political competition. Examples include the competing interests of downtown merchants and suburban merchants, "old-timers" versus newcomers, and pro-growth versus limited growth groups. Public involvement is particularly necessary in situations where an agency's decision would tend to

strengthen the position of one side or the other in such a conflict.

**T**he nature of the public involvement program developed will depend upon such factors as the nature of the project, the amount of public interest, and any constraints imposed upon the agency.

For example, with a highly sensitive project such as a nuclear power plant or a hazardous waste treatment plant, it can be expected that the public will demand to be heard. It is essential that the agency be clear and open about the project objectives and avoid promoting unrealistic expectations. At the same time, it is important to provide a forum at which the publics' ideas are heard and taken seriously.

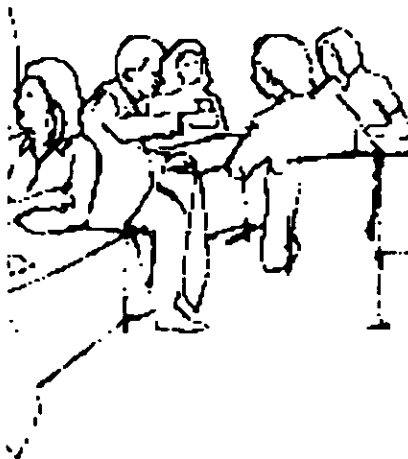
In another situation, public interest may be limited to a few interest groups and individuals. In this case, these groups would be the focus of the public involvement program, but with periodic checks with the larger public.

In some projects, the agency's alternatives may already be severely constrained by legal or regulatory constraints. In this situation, it may be better for the agency to take the political and public consequences of

making a unilateral decision, rather than spending the time and energy of both the staff and the various publics in developing a public involvement program that has no meaning and will not be used in the end, anyway. However, on the whole, an agency should involve the public, even when the decision cannot be altered.

Public involvement can address issues such as the mitigation of the environmental or social impacts of an action, or the nature of the safety program for a facility, without necessarily taking on the fundamental question of whether or not the action should be taken.

**In conclusion, almost all decision processes will benefit from public involvement at each stage of project planning and implementation. The thrust of this manual is to encourage the increasing use of public involvement at early stages in project planning.**



## PHASE 2 - STEP 4

## PHASE 2 - STEP 4

*Set realistic objectives for the public involvement process, and be frank about the limitations of results. Define legal or resource supply constraints and those items that must be decided at the political level. Indicate the approximate time necessary to obtain results. Make sure people's expectations are within the terms of reference when objectives are set by the working group.*

## PURPOSES OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

**A**fter determining whether public involvement is necessary, the project or line manager will need to clarify the general objectives for the program. These can encompass:

- tapping technical and local expertise of residents;
- using the experience and know-how of the public to develop creative solutions to problems;
- reducing later delays and costs from not having involved the public;
- creating the opportunity for the public to be heard before a decision;
- enabling the public to influence a decision;
- building public knowledge about a decision; and
- accessing field data (for example, obtaining information on residents' demographic profile or opinions).

## DEVELOPING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR EACH STAGE IN THE PROCESS

**D**eveloping a public involvement program requires a thoughtful planning exercise. It is possible to guide project managers in this planning exercise, but it is not possible to provide simplistic answers in the selection of techniques for different situations. The steps outlined in previous chapters have provided the project manager with the information needed to develop objectives for each stage of the process.

A generic example of objectives tied to stages is provided in Figure 4. In a real situation, objectives developed would be detailed and issue-specific. The development of these objectives will guide the manager in identifying information exchange requirements (Chapter 7), and ultimately, in selecting public involvement techniques (Volume Three).

**Figure 4  
Developing Objectives**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>Issues Identification/ Sensing Public Interest</b>	Obtain a complete understanding of how the issue is viewed by all significant interests.
	Identify the level of interest in future public participation activities on this issue.
<b>Detailed Identification of Impacts</b>	Undertake a scoping exercise to identify the most significant impacts.
<b>Assessment of Impacts</b>	Develop a complete understanding of the impacts as viewed by the public.
	Assess the relative merit assigned to the project by various interests, including their reasons for these evaluations.
	Develop understanding of possible mitigation procedures, as viewed by the public.
<b>Decision Making</b>	Make a decision that is technically, economically and socially feasible, and politically acceptable.
<b>Post Approval Decision Making</b>	Develop all requirements for public involvement following the decision.

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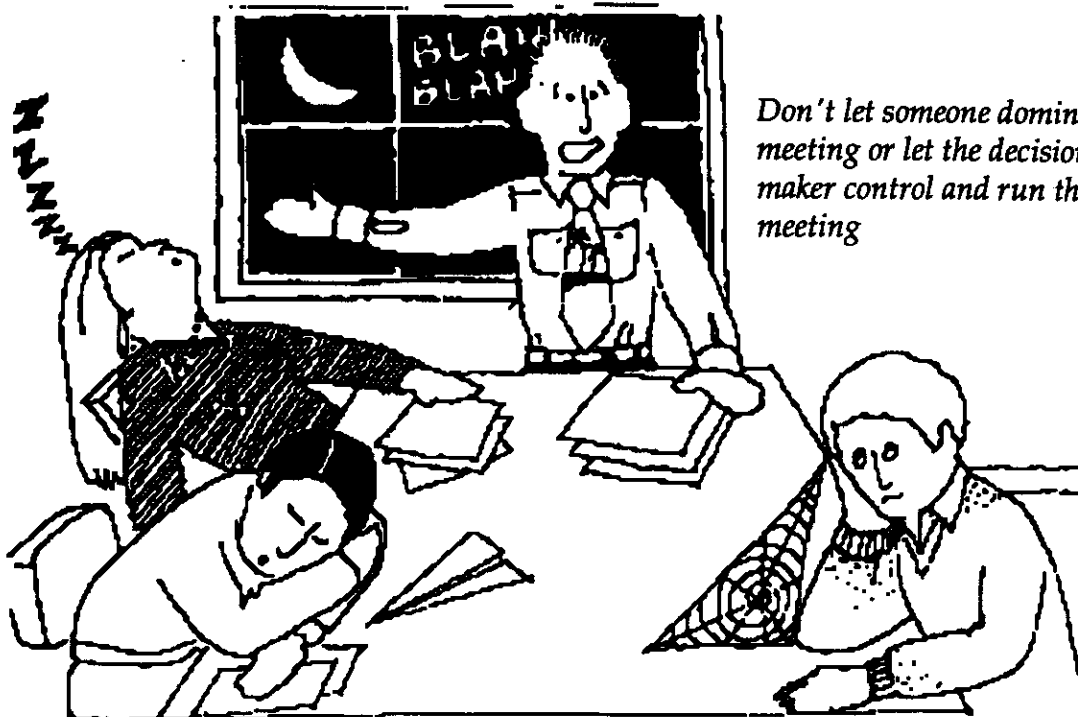
*You can't make intelligent choices about what public involvement techniques you should use until you have a clear idea of what it is you want to accomplish at each step of your decision making process. Remember, what you want from the public changes at each step. When you're "scoping out" an issue you want, and have available for the public, different kinds of information than when you're trying to evaluate alternatives.*

## PHASE 2 - STEP 4

*One of the reasons for being very clear on what you want is that the public is often very obliging and will give you exactly what you ask for. Ask a dumb question, and you'll get an answer which may not be very helpful. But it wasn't the public's fault!*

### *Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....*

- Clearly establish what you want to achieve with the public involvement program.
- Remember the importance of early public involvement.
- Make sure that objectives are developed for each stage of the public involvement program outlining what is to be



*Don't let someone dominate the meeting or let the decision maker control and run the meeting*

# CHAPTER 7

## DETERMINING THE INFORMATION EXCHANGE REQUIREMENTS

This chapter describes the final step in Phase Two of the "Public Involvement Planning Process", identifying the total range of information needed by both the agency and by the public.

Before the public can participate effectively, it must be adequately informed. This means that there is a significant public information component in every public involvement program. However, a public involvement program comprises more than just public information. The difference between the two is that public involvement stresses two-way communication, while public information stresses getting information to the public.

### INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The completion of Step Four resulted in a clear understanding of what needs to be accomplished with the public at each step in the decision making process. In Step Five the task is

to define the type of information that is needed from the public, and to establish guidelines for the information that must be given to the public.

A useful and manageable way of handling this step is to design a series of charts, one for each step in the process. Each chart would outline:

- the relevant step in the decision making process (from Chapter 3)
- the various publics who should be involved in this step (from Chapter 4)
- any special circumstances (from Chapter 5)
- the objectives for the public involvement program (from Chapter 6)

Once the public involvement action plan is completed (Chapter 8) each chart could be expanded to include the techniques selected for the given situation. Figure 5 presents a series of charts for a generic decision making process, showing how the selection of objectives influences the information exchange. In this example, each stage of the process has its own set of PI objectives,

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*The thing I learned from the government's information program is that special wastes aren't as scary as the public perceives them to be. The way I see it, the more you learn, the less scary the subject becomes.*



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its own information exchange, and ultimately would have its own unique set of techniques. In this manual, general terms are used; a more detailed and specific description of the information exchange will be needed in actual situations. Some of the Environment Canada, Parks case studies reviewed for this manual provide good examples of using different techniques at different stages in the process, depending on what the objectives are at each stage and what information needs to be exchanged. For ex-

ample, the planning process for both the Bruce Peninsula National Park and the Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve combined a wide range of techniques, including:

- information packets
- information meetings
- open houses
- newsletters
- direct contact with individual households
- establishing committees to examine special issues

**Figure 5**  
**Detailing the Information Exchange for Each**  
**Stage in a Generic Decision Making Process**

**STAGE 1:**  
**ISSUE IDENTIFICATION/SENSING PUBLIC**  
**INTEREST**

**Public involvement objectives:**

1. Obtain a complete understanding of how the problem is viewed by all significant interests.
2. Identify the level of interest in future public participation activities surrounding this issue.

**Information to the public:**

The nature of the study and decision making process.  
 What the agency presently knows about the problem/  
 issue.  
 The kinds of public participation activities possible.  
 The issues that are likely to arise.

**Information from the public:**

How different groups see the problem.  
 How the problem affects them.  
 The intensity of the impacts.  
 The publics that are interested in or affected by the problem.  
 Which publics want to participate.  
 How intensely the groups want to participate.  
 Which techniques are most acceptable or suitable.

**Special circumstances:**

**Public involvement techniques:**

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*Clarity on what information you need from the public takes the public involvement objectives one step further. You must be very specific about exactly what information you need. This will also tell you who can provide that information. Some information can only come from local governments, (e.g. local zoning or planning requirements), while information about public values should come from a cross-section of the public.*

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**Figure 5  
(continued)**

**STAGE 2:  
DETAILED IDENTIFICATION OF IMPACTS**

**Public involvement objectives:**

1. Develop a list of significant impacts.

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**Information to the public:**

A summary of the problem as defined in Stage 1.  
The range of impacts known to the agency.  
Factors usually considered in the analysis stage.

**Information from the public:**

Additional impacts known to the public.  
Additional factors that the public believes should be  
included in the analysis.

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**Special circumstances:**

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**Public involvement techniques:**

**Figure 5  
(continued)**

**STAGE 3:  
ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS**

**Public involvement objectives:**

1. Develop a complete understanding of the impacts, as viewed by the public.
2. Assess the relative merit assigned to the project by various interests, including their reasons for their evaluations.
3. Develop understanding of mitigation procedures possible, as viewed by the public.

**Information to the public:**

The factors and methodology used to assess the project, including any weighting factors.  
A description of the final evaluation and decision making process.

**Information from the public:**

Additional impacts, including the importance of the impacts.  
Additional factors that need to be analyzed.  
Suggested methodology for assessment.  
What various publics like and dislike about the project.  
Modifications to the project that could make it acceptable.  
Rankings of alternative solutions

**Special circumstances:**

**Public involvement techniques:**

**PHASE 2 - STEP 5**

*When providing information to the public it's not enough to hand people a six-inch stack of material and say; "Here's the information, react!" The information has to be presented in a form which can be digested. If you're running a workshop to evaluate alternatives, for example, the challenge will be to present information about the alternatives in a brief, succinct manner, yet provide sufficient information so that people can give you an informed reaction.*

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*Don't assume that as soon as you've completed your authoritative text on "everything anybody would want to know" that your job is done. Now you've got to make that information usable.*

Figure 5  
(continued)

## STAGE 4: DECISION MAKING

### Public involvement objectives:

Make a decision that is technically, economically and socially feasible, and is also politically acceptable.

### Information to the public:

The proposed recommendation on the project/issue.  
Reasons for the choice/factors used in the decision making.  
Process for making the final decision.  
Final decision.  
Reasons for decision.

### Information from the public:

Reactions to the proposed recommendation.  
Modifications that could make the decision more acceptable.  
Recommended implementation steps.

### Special circumstances:

### Public involvement techniques:



### *The Practitioners Speak.....*

Never forget the "\$10,000 worth of graphics" rule. If you come into a meeting displaying a proposed action, all lovingly prepared with beautiful graphics and maps, and then you tell the audience that you're open to considering alternatives, they are never going to believe you. The public is smart enough to know that any agency that spends \$10,000 on graphics to sell its plan isn't about to change it. If you want to go in with something that is going to be treated as preliminary, it had better look preliminary. Well done drawings or lettering on flip chart sheets may do the job better than fancy graphics. Or make up enough maps so that the public can draw alternatives all over them. Some of these little things tell the public whether you really mean it or not.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**T**o be credible, public involvement requires objectivity and a willingness to consider all points of view. Traditional views of public relations in an agency are that this function may reduce objectivity in order to present the agency in a favourable light.

Materials which suggest that an agency or department

has a pre-determined position, or suggest an unwillingness to hear criticisms or alternative ideas, will seriously undermine the public involvement effort. The purpose of all materials used in public involvement is to provide adequate information to the public(s) so people can participate effectively, not to convince the public of a department's answer. Guidelines for dealing with the media are beyond the scope of this publication; other references are available on media or public affairs programs.

PLANNING AND  
IMPLEMENTING  
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT  
PROGRAMS

VOLUME TWO  
DEVELOPING A PUBLIC  
INVOLVEMENT PLAN

## **PHASE 2 - STEP 5**

PHASE 2 - STEP 5

*Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....*

- The public must be adequately informed before the public can participate effectively.
- Give careful thought in advance to the kinds of information required from and to be given to the public at each stage of the process.
- Be prepared for unfair criticism; no matter how well planned your public information programs, you still may receive complaints about quality, quantity, appropriateness, and distribution of information.

