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des évaluations environnementales

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



Canada

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is the reference manual on appropriate techniques for public involvement programs. It is divided into two parts: **Part 1** contains the general introductory overview, followed by three chapters which provide detailed information on some of the most commonly used techniques. **Part 2** contains the "Dictionary of Techniques". This is a comprehensive directory of all of the available techniques in public involvement, including those which are relatively recent in development.

HOW TO USE THIS VOLUME

First, a caution: before attempting to employ any of the techniques in this reference volume, it is essential to be familiar with Volume 2 which outlines the process for developing a public involvement program.

Second: The reader is not expected to read this manual from cover to cover. The techniques are presented and organized to enable a project manager to key in to

those particular techniques compatible with the approach intended, and with the public involvement objectives to be achieved.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING TECHNIQUES

Techniques can be selected using Table 1 as a guide. However, it is critical to understand that most techniques can be used in many different ways, depending on the resources employed, the information employed, the objectives of the program, and the depth of the program.

Techniques act as facilitators; they are a necessary part of a public involvement program, but they are not sufficient by themselves to ensure effective public involvement. The techniques should be used as part of an overall public involvement plan, integrated into the decision making process.

Similarly, a program can be using the best technique(s) available, but if the agency lacks sincerity, integrity and commitment about the value of public involvement, the

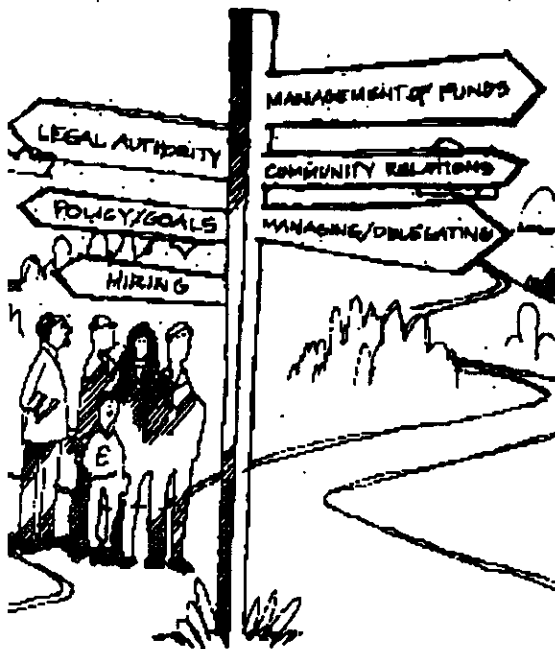
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public will be skeptical and the program will fail.

Virtually all of the techniques outlined in this volume need to be employed with, at a minimum, the advice of someone experienced and trained in public involvement.

There is no one single best technique for a given activity in a project. Any one of a number of techniques may be appropriate; how effective they are depends as much on the people in the program and their flexibility in handling issues as on the specific content of the techniques. It is always possible to change a public involvement plan and incorporate new or different techniques. Similarly, the public can change during the process; at different points or stages, different techniques may be necessary.

It is advisable to use several techniques in a program, rather than to rely on just one. Different techniques will reach different groups of people, and some are appropriate to accomplish one involvement objectives, and others a different objective.

THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

While many systems have been developed for classifying public involvement programs and techniques, one that has proven to be useful is outlined in Figure 1.

The danger of showing techniques on a continuum is that it is easy to assume that there is only one consensus building technique appropriate to a particular situation. In fact, during the course of a complex decision it may be desirable to use a wide variety of techniques.

The techniques in this manual fall into one of five categories:

- public information/ education
- information feedback
- consultation
- extended involvement
- joint planning

The survey of federal agencies and departments in February and March 1987, identified the need for further information on consultation, extended involvement and joint planning techniques in particular. Public information and information feedback techniques can be used on their own or in conjunction with one of the more in-

Figure 1
A Continuum of Public
Involvement Approaches and
Selected Techniques¹

THE
CLASSIFICATION
SYSTEM

*"Knowledge
 about a
 decision"*

Public Information

Advertising
 Newspaper Inserts with Reply Cards

Public Information Feedback

*"Being heard
 before the
 decision"*

Briefs
 Focus Groups

Consultation

Public Meetings (traditional format)
 Conferences
 Workshops/Problem-Solving Meetings

*"Having an
 influence on the
 decision"*

Extended Involvement

Advisory Groups/Task Forces/Char-
 rettes

Joint Planning

*"Agreeing to
 the decision"*

Consultation/Mediation/Negotiation/
 Niagara Process

1. Note: This chart presents a continuum of public involvement approaches. You, as the practitioner, must determine what it is that you want to achieve in terms of involvement. It is then up to you to identify the most appropriate approaches/technologies/actions which you will need to use to achieve these ends.

volvement-oriented approaches.

Each of the general approaches is defined in the following pages. The remainder of the chapter then discusses factors which affect the selection of an overall approach.

□ Public Information

The simplest form of communication with the public is to keep them informed about ongoing agency decision making. Whether these efforts are elaborate publications or regular press releases and news stories, there is one crucial point to remember: the public has a well-developed sense for recognizing self-serving propaganda. Extensive media advertising has caused most citizens to become very skeptical of 'glowing reports'. Keep this in mind when publishing any information. It is important to stick to the facts, and to exclude editorial opinion, or at least separate your views from the rest of the text. Striving to portray the realistic situation, including the admission of past and present mistakes, will build public trust in your program. 'One-way' communication methods are rarely used alone, but are normally used in conjunction with information feedback, consulta-

tion or extended involvement methods.

Some public information techniques are:

- news releases
- news conferences
- newsletters/pamphlets
- viewing centres/
audio visuals/public displays
- technical papers

□ Public Information Feedback

Public information feedback techniques are used to obtain information from the public. They include methods used to develop overviews of general public opinion, as well as techniques inviting the public to respond to a specific proposal or set of proposals.

Public information feedback techniques include:

- analysis of newspaper coverage
- surveys of knowledge and opinion
- community profiles/social profiles
- briefs and written submissions in response to position papers

□ Consultation

Where issues call for considerable discussion between line managers and the public, some form of consultation is needed. A consultation method may be used as your principal method, or it may be used as part of an extended involvement program. Remember, however, whatever method is used will demand substantial commitment in organization, support, staff time, and use of the results.

Many of the public's interests in environmental issues and resource use are represented by organized environmental groups. Some organizations are unique to local communities, but most are part of provincial or national associations. There is, therefore, a good network of groups which have access to common information and resources, and are often concerned with your project.

As part of your overall approach to ongoing public involvement, you can keep the lines of communication with these groups open by:

□ including them on a mailing list for department publications;

□ holding meetings with organization executive members to air general concerns and trade information; and

□ holding an annual meeting with organized groups to assess progress in your area, and to identify concerns.

Another good way to promote dialogue with the public is to meet with service clubs, unions, the Chamber of Commerce and similar organizations. By attending their meetings and requesting a place on the agenda, you get a chance to contact many people without having them give up another evening.

Consultation techniques for specific projects and policy issues include:

- working plan reviews
- public meetings
- workshops
- open houses

□ Extended Involvement and Joint Planning

Extended involvement and joint planning techniques demand the most support from project managers. Therefore, they should be selected only where the issues are major, complex, or particularly controversial. Extended involvement techniques stretch over time periods and require the support of both public information and consultation techniques; thus they provide the most scope for adapting to local conditions. Joint



planning techniques result in shared decision making, in which the public is represented on decision making or problem solving bodies. As there is generally much dialogue between members of the public and project managers, extended involvement and joint planning methods result in a knowledgeable group of citizens who can assist in future issues, or give advice on an ongoing public involvement program.

Techniques include:

- advisory committees
- task groups
- joint planning teams

CHOOSING AN APPROACH

The selection of an approach to a public involvement program is a matter of judgment, although the decision should be made easier if the process outlined in Volume 2 has been followed. Depending on the program's objectives, a project manager may choose to limit the public involvement program to education or information feedback techniques, or may wish to utilize more participative approaches. Some situations invite the use of consultative approaches, while others demand extended involvement or joint

planning approaches.

Table 1 provides some guidelines in selecting between consultation and extended involvement approaches, a choice which project managers can sometimes find difficult.

The seriousness and complexity of the situation affect the use of various consultation and extended involvement techniques, and the amount of effort and support required to make the program work.

Public involvement programs take time, cost money, and raise expectations. This is not bad, if a manager understands the need for a clear commitment to the program selected. In general, the more complex the method chosen, the greater must be the agency's commitment to support the process and to use the results. The public often come to a public involvement program jaded and suspicious that their views will have little real impact on decisions. Growth in public support, personal satisfaction with participation, and effectiveness of results depend on how the manager conveys his/her commitment to working with the public, and on heeding it's advice.

Table 1
Choosing a Public Involvement Approach

Considerations Which Suggest Consultative Approaches	Considerations Which Suggest Extended Involvement or Joint Planning Approaches
Issues have minor impact on the environment, or are mainly a matter of public preferences which can be accommodated by changes in design of plans.	Issues have serious implications for the environment; significant economic and/or social impacts, with trade-offs, are likely.
Narrow range of issues is involved.	Wide range of complex issues is involved.
A small number of people are interested in the situation, generally focussed on a special area of interest.	Many public and agency groups are concerned with the issues; concerns are shared by diverse advocates.
Issues are urgent and must be dealt with in a short period of time (weeks or two to three months).	Issues are important but there is time available for planning (six months to one or two years).
The public is concerned but is not demanding an extensive formal involvement program.	The public strongly desires a formal involvement program.
The agency has the capacity to support a modest program.	The agency has the capacity to support a complex program.

**CHOOSING AN
APPROACH**

Commitment not only applies to the agency people 'on the firing line' but also to the senior officials to whom they report. A manager must check the limits of decision-making authority with superiors in advance, so they can provide backup when the going gets rough and the unexpected, but ever possible, occurs. As the degree of public involvement increases, so does the degree of commitment required on the part of the agency.

The remainder of the volume is structured as follows. Chapters 1 to 3 of Part 1 provide detailed information on some of the most commonly used techniques.

Chapter 1 Public Information Feedback Techniques: Polls and questionnaires; interviewing; social profiles; content analyses

Chapter 2 Public Consultation Techniques: Public Meetings, Open Houses and Workshops

Figure 1
Degrees of Public Involvement and Commitment

Degree of Involvement	Message to the Public
Public Information Release	You want them to know about it.
Public Education Program	You want them to understand and support your program.
Opinion Sampling	You care about what people think and conduct yourself accordingly.
Checking Plans for Acceptance	You are willing to alter plans and operations to accommodate their views.
Extended Advisory Involvement	You seriously expect to implement most of their advice.
Joint Planning and Decision-Making	You are fully committed to using the results in all but the most extenuating circumstances.

Chapter 3 Extended Involvement Techniques: Advisory Committees, Consensus Guidelines, and Chairing Extended Involvement Groups

Part 2 of this volume is a dictionary of virtually all

public involvement techniques which are in current use. Since new techniques are developed from time to time, and others tend to be discontinued, the dictionary may not be exhaustive. For each technique, a brief description is provided, and its advantages and limitations noted.

As a General Rule, The Higher the Degree of Involvement . . .

- The more staff time and energy is required.
- The more money it costs to support the involvement process.
- The more detailed and sophisticated resource information is requested by participants.
- The greater is the expectation of participants that their contributions will be valued and used.
- The greater visible commitment must be made by the professional to using the results, adhering to plans, keeping participants informed of progress, and explaining any deviations from participant recommendations or decisions.

Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....

Use several techniques in a program, rather than relying on just one.

Remember that as the degree of public involvement increases, so does the degree of commitment required on the part of the agency.

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PART ONE - USING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER 1 INFORMATION FEEDBACK TECHNIQUES

This chapter provides in-depth detail on the three most common public information feedback techniques: polls; and questionnaires, interviewing; social profiles.

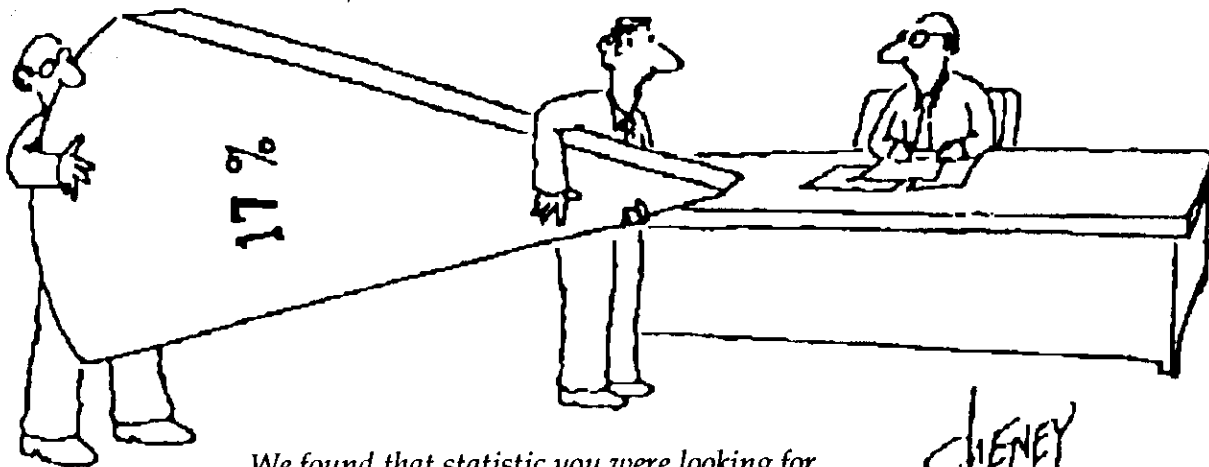
USE OF POLLS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Polls and questionnaires are both effective means of assessing public opinion. Their use by federal agencies is, however, strictly regulated by Statistics Canada.

Nature of Polls and Questionnaires

Polls are a technique for measuring the mix of opinions held by the public. They are conducted by trained interviewers who ask each person interviewed exactly the same questions, and in the same order.

These questions are pre-tested to be sure they are clear, unbiased, and elicit the information desired. The people interviewed will be part of a sample population chosen using rules accepted by professionals in the field as guaranteeing the



We found that statistic you were looking for.

CHENEY

“randomness” or lack of bias in the sample chosen. Statistical research has been conducted to establish standards for how many people must be interviewed from a total population to ensure reliability of the findings to certain levels of confidence, e.g., the figures are accurate to plus or minus five percent. The level of confidence can be increased by increasing the number of interviews conducted.

Polls differ from questionnaires in that the responses are tallied by the interviewer. Questionnaires are completed by the person responding, and are often more open-ended. Because they may provide more information, including information other than that anticipated by the questioner. However, polls – precisely because they are not open-ended – have greater statistical reliability.

Use of Polls and Questionnaires

Before any claims of statistical validity or reliability can be made for the results of a poll or questionnaire, the design of the “sample” – those people invited to complete the interviews or questionnaire – must meet rigorous standards to ensure that the sample is truly random. In addition the questions need to be pre-

tested to ensure that they are not biased, and obtain the information they were designed to elicit. This means that the design of any interview protocol or questionnaire should be done by someone with professional expertise in questionnaire design. Amateurish questionnaires may produce charges of bias or invasion of privacy, and not result in information that is credible enough to be used. The very virtue of polls and questionnaires – their quantifiability – is also their weakness if they are badly done. Because results of polls and questionnaires are quantifiable, they give an aura of objectivity that no other technique can give. This can be very reassuring to a decision maker who must make a difficult decision in the face of strong opposition no matter which choice is made. But a poorly designed poll will be quoted as “fact” just as much as a well designed poll. For this reason, polls, and to a lesser extent questionnaires, should normally be conducted by people with extensive training in conducting them. This usually means, however, that external consultants must be used, so the costs of conducting polls are relatively high.

USE OF POLLS AND QUESTIONNAIRES



Advantages and Limitations

The primary advantage of polls and questionnaires is their ability to reach out beyond the organized groups to the "unorganized public". With most public involvement techniques it is possible to determine the range of views held by the public, but not the proportion of people who hold each view. If carefully designed, a poll or questionnaire will help determine the proportion of people holding the different views. If there is a concern, for example, that only a small vocal minority is being heard from, a questionnaire would tell to what extent the views being heard are held by the public at large. Polls and questionnaires also gather opinions from people who would be unwilling to speak out at a public meeting or other forum. A questionnaire could be administered by local people hired especially for this purpose, or by volunteers, resulting in further community interest in and "ownership" of the project.

There are, however, important limitations on the use of polls and questionnaires. Drafting the background planning report to a questionnaire and obtaining approval from Statistics Canada for the survey can be a

time-consuming process.

Another limitation of polls and questionnaires is that both give equal weight to all respondents, even though this does not reflect political reality. A person who cares deeply about an issue is given the same weight as an uninterested individual, whatever their political clout. Knowledge about the mix of views in the general public does not necessarily tell the political balance of power in the community. Polls and questionnaires can be designed to solve this problem, though, by asking questions about the respondent's familiarity with the issue, and by showing differences in opinions among people who are very familiar with the issue, as distinct from those who are not.

Polls and questionnaires give a snapshot picture of public opinion at a given time. That opinion can change rapidly, particularly if the public starts out largely uninformed about the issue. A completely accurate picture of public sentiment at one point in time may not be at all accurate two months later.

The costs of analyzing large numbers of the responses to polls or questionnaires can also be high. It usually takes a staff member at least as long to analyze and record

each response as it took the citizen to provide the response in the first place. When dealing with several thousand responses, this can run into considerable staff time. Because of the costs involved, if it is not necessary to know the exact proportion of viewpoints in a community, but simply general information about public attitudes, it might be preferable to conduct a series of informal interviews or focus groups.

Despite the virtues of polls, they do not replace the political process. They do provide some indication, though, of how representative the people participating are of the public at large.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Advantages and Limitations

Informal interviews can be an effective part of public involvement programs. A series of 30-60 minutes interviews with representatives of all the key interests can provide a quick understanding of the issue, the dynamics between the interests, and the intensity of their interest in the issue. Several days of interviews can often produce an extremely large amount of information.

Informal interviews permit the exploration of a subject in some depth. They do not limit respondents to the choices that might be shown on a questionnaire. They also enable exploring preferences, which helps to understand the motivations and intensity of feeling which underlie these opinions. Interviews also permit exploration of topics other than those which are predetermined to be important, and in this way can be helpful in identifying new issues or concerns that had not previously been considered. Interviews help build trust and credibility as well as an information base.

The inherent problem with interviews, though, is that they are time-consuming, and it is possible to interview only a limited number of people. A 30-45 minute interview may take a total of 2-3 hours of staff time to set up the interview appointment, plan the interview, drive to the interview, conduct it, work up one's notes into a summary report, and transcribe the interviews for the files. This usually means that it is normally possible to interview only a limited number of people. This can be perfectly appropriate if the information needed is the opinions of the organized interests, or community leaders. But it is not possible to know for sure either

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

that the people talked to are representative of all the interests in the community or what the proportion of viewpoints is in the larger community.

A less time consuming and costly alternative to face-to-face interviews is interviewing by telephone. This should be used when in-depth interviews are not required.

Interviews also lack visibility, since only the people interviewed know what occurred in them. This means that the public (and the decision makers) have to take it on faith that the interviewers have accurately reflected the information received in the interview.

The emphasis in informal interviewing is on qualitative, not quantitative, information. There are two major reasons why it is not appropriate to claim any quantitative validity for the information received through informal interviews: "sampling bias" and "interviewer effect". "Sampling bias" simply means that by targeting the groups and individuals to be interviewed, rather than making a random selection, a "bias" has been introduced into the sample. It may be a very useful bias – a bias towards the people who have the kind of information needed

– but it precludes making any quantitative statements about what the public feels since it may be an unrepresentative sample of the public.

"Interviewer effect" refers to the fact that when questions are asked in different ways, or by different people, different information is elicited. As a result, the way a question is asked one time may produce different information than apparently the same question asked a different way another time. The response that is given to one staff member may be different than to the same question asked by another staff member. This is why the wording of questions is so carefully designed and pretested as part of conducting a poll or survey. Even if the same topics are covered in the course of a series of informal interviews, the fact that the wording is a little different each time and the context in which the topic comes up is different, produces an interviewer effect that removes any possibility of claiming quantitative validity.

Guidelines on Conducting Interviews

Clarifying the Purpose:

The first, rather obvious, step in conducting interviews is to clarify exactly what is to be learned from

the interviews. When the first call is made to set up an appointment the question that will be asked is, "What is the purpose of the interview?" Not only is a clear succinct answer needed to get people to agree to be interviewed, but clarity about the purpose of the interview is also necessary in order to know who it is that needs to be interviewed. Although interviews do permit unstructured discussion, they should not be disorganized "fishing expeditions", or people will be offended.

Selecting the People to be Interviewed: Even when no pretense is made of taking a scientific sample, the credibility of a public involvement program requires that an effort be made to include all major points of view. Major groups which have been left out will then assume the assessment is biased. If there are 10 environmental groups it is not necessary to interview all 10. However, representatives of enough groups should be interviewed to be sure that the differences among them, as well as their political dynamics, are understood.

Some groups may act as an umbrella for others. It is sometimes a good idea to phone those you don't intend to interview and ask, "If I visit with (an organiza-

tion) to discuss this issue, do you think I will cover most of the concerns your organization has on this issue?" If not, you can respond to any remaining points then on the phone. This is a cost-effective use of the interest group leaders' time as well as the agency's. The interest groups' usually appreciate it. As well, the informal network that exists among non-governmental organizations will enable you to learn of other organizations that should be interviewed. It will also help communicate the results of your interview rapidly.

Setting up Interviews: It is normal practice to arrange an appointment in advance for the interview. Fortunately there is a subtle flattery involved in asking someone for an interview – the implication is that their views are very important or they are very wise – so most people will willingly set up an interview. They will, however, want to know: 1) the purpose of the interview, 2) how the information will be used (including its confidentiality), 3) who or what kinds of people are being interviewed, and 4) how long the interview will take.

If possible, it is best if the person who will conduct the interview sets up the appointment, since this gives a

chance to establish some initial rapport. But since this is a time-consuming process it is often done by someone else. If this is the case be sure that the person setting up the interviews is thoroughly acquainted with the purposes and uses of the interview indicated above. Also be sure that the person setting up interview appointments allows time for: 1) travelling from interview to interview, and 2) about 30 minutes after each interview to fill in notes while the interview is fresh.

If the appointment has been set up several days or more in advance by someone other than the interviewer, the interviewer may want to call the day before to confirm the interview. This reassures both the interviewer and the person being interviewed that their time will not be wasted, and may begin to build rapport.

Ideally, the interviewee should be met "on his or her ground", at a place and time determined by them - for example, at the citizen group's office.

Length of an Interview:

Normally, leaders of active groups, interest, or agencies are willing to give 30-60 minutes to an interview. Anything longer than 60 minutes will depend on how interested the person being

interviewed is in the topic. Anything shorter than thirty minutes will be so rushed - particularly since some time is invariably lost getting in and out of their offices or homes - that many of the benefits of informal interviews will be lost. Some experienced interviewers have found, though, that even if an individual will only schedule for a short time, if they are interested in the topic that time will usually be permitted to expand. But if a limited interview time has been scheduled, and the person being interviewed is clearly restive, do not insult them by just taking the time whether they are comfortable with it or not.

Asking Questions: An effective way of conducting interviews is to use an informal structured approach, in which the question areas are identified beforehand and used as a guide in conducting the interview, although the order in which questions are asked may change. It is especially important to have a structured format if more than one interviewer is used, in order to have some degree of comparability.

When several interviewers are used, there should be frequent meetings so that interviewers can compare notes on issues, interview structure, questions, and interview techniques. Often

interviewers change their approach over time and it is important to maintain consistency.

There are two general rules to observe in how questions are posed. These are:

Don't ask leading questions. When a question is asked such as "Don't you think that Project X is needed?" it's clear that the answer the questioner wants is "yes". The question is structured in such a way that it "leads" to the desired answer. Research shows that people who do not have strong opinions are likely to allow themselves to be led. The desired answer will be obtained, but it will be worthless as a predictor of people's position on the issue. People who already have a strong opinion are likely to be insulted by leading questions, and will draw the conclusion that the interviews are biased.

Questions should be open-ended. If the question asked is, "Do you believe Project X is needed?" the answer is likely to be "yes" or "no". Obviously such an answer is only minimally helpful when in-depth information is needed about what kinds of problems are occurring, or how important they are. As a result it is better to ask open-ended questions – questions that cannot be an-

swered with a yes or no answer. Examples of open-ended questions are "What do you think future requirements will be?" or "What do you think are the pros and cons of Project X?" or "How can issue Y best be resolved?" Such questions encourage more complete answers, and also permit the person being interviewed to address topics or raise issues important to them. Follow up on some points with "What leads you to say this?" (Phrasing it this way gets better results than "Why?")

Note Taking: It is important in conducting an interview to establish a comfortable relationship with the person being interviewed. This is difficult to do if poring over notes, maintaining little or no eye contact, and struggling to keep up with the individual. Most experienced interviewers use either of two strategies:

Brief Notes/Prompt Review. One technique frequently employed by experienced note takers is to keep brief notes of the interviews, stressing only the most significant points, and to go to a quiet place immediately after each interview and fill in the notes from memory. The original notes serve as reminders of other notes which need to be written down. Time for this "de-

briefing" must therefore be built into the interview schedule.

Brief Notes/Tape Recorder. Some interviewers prefer to take brief notes, but use a tape recorder as a back-up to fill in the notes later. This is particularly good if there is premium on having the person's exact words – as there would be for a journalist. Some people may feel intimidated by a tape recorder, or may be more cautious with their comments for fear the tape will get into someone else's hands. On the whole though, most people seem to be comfortable with a tape recorder, and in fact, appreciate its accuracy. However, transcribing from a tape recorder is a very time-consuming process.

Confidentiality: In return for getting candid information, the interviewer must usually make a commitment about the confidentiality of the information. Normally the commitment would be that only people within the agency who are working directly on the project or study will have access to the summaries from individual interviews. If there is a need – and there usually is in public involvement programs – for an overall summary of the interviews which will be distributed to a larger audience, then the report must

be written in ways that protect the identity of individuals who provided sensitive information. Anytime the information is going to be made available to people other than the interviewer, the interviewer has a responsibility to inform the person of this at the beginning of the interview.

Sharing Information: Almost invariably as an interview ends the person being interviewed will ask questions like "How did Group Z feel about this?" or "What have other people you've interviewed felt about ...?" These questions immediately raise all the problems for the interviewer of confidentiality, leading, or bias. Yet there is a simple reciprocity to these questions which is hard to ignore: this person has just given some information and is now asking for some in return. Obviously this is a judgment call, but within the limits of confidentiality most interviewers do respond with some general statement similar to those which would be contained in the summary of the interviews which will be made public. The important thing is to be prepared for the possibility of such questions, so that confidentiality isn't inadvertently violated if the interviewer is taken by surprise.

COMMUNITY PROFILES

The community or social profile is a comprehensive summary of the key characteristics of the people of a community or study area. Its purpose is to orient planners, engineers and administrators to the social and cultural realities which they need to understand and take into account if a project, program or policy is to be accepted. It can also be applied to a corporation or government agency by a citizen group.

Rationale

In the past, new policies and projects have often generated hostile public reactions because the proponents failed to understand and respond to the values, goals, concerns and views of the people affected. The community profile provides the core of a social data base needed to balance the technical information available to planners and decision makers with an appreciation of the humanistic and political considerations involved.

For these key people to make sensitive decisions, they need a character sketch of the community so they can relate their responsibilities and proposals to it.

From the community profile, they should grasp how and why this community is different from others, and how it is likely to respond to a new activity just as a personal profile of an individual enables a manager to judge how this person might respond to a new assignment.

Data Collection

First, review non-reactive sources of information, many of which will often be available outside the community eg. back issues of the weekly press; aerial photographs, preferably 10 years apart; local histories in the regional library; university theses and government reports on the community. Make a content analysis of this material, identifying information under key headings such as: community issues; active organizations; leaders; attitudes towards growth; knowledge of and attitude to the client and/or the proposal.

Second, identify any people knowledgeable about the community who live beyond it eg. civil servants now in a provincial or regional centre who presently service the community or who used to live in it. Interview some of these people by telephone or face to face in an informal way; have a list of issues and questions you want to

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explore, but allow the conversation to be flexible rather than using a structured questionnaire.

Next, visit the community and initially immerse yourself in it, observing its people and how they spend their time and effort. Experience a day in the life of the community as unobtrusively as possible and reflect on how its residents view their world.

Now start to visit some key people and interview them informally. A conversation about the history of the community provides a comfortable starting point and usually yields many insights into leadership, issues, factions, etc. Through it you will often be introduced to the elders of the community.

Look for people who have had long residence in the community, much contact with its residents and are sufficiently secure in their positions that they can talk freely. Some of these are the public health nurse, leaders of voluntary associations, some business people, bank managers, clergy, the staff of service agencies, the school principal (and the janitor). Interview local government officials and elected representatives later so you will be better able to interpret their positions and discuss them in depth.

In talking with these people, explore subjects until you obtain a consistent position from at least three sources. If a certain organization appears to be a key factor in community decision making according (a) to your analysis of the local weekly, (b) according to a provincial civil servant located in the capital but knowledgeable through his work in the community, and is (c) corroborated by two of these conversations in the community, count that as a fact established. You do not need to raise it in subsequent interviews, but can focus them on other subjects which are still unclear. This approach employs the navigator's technique of "triangulation" to establish facts with reasonable accuracy.

In some cases, the range of people interviewed is restricted by the fact that clients do not want their interest in the community to become public knowledge. However, there are usually some key people from whom valid information can be obtained and who are accustomed to working under these constraints (eg. bank managers, clergy, provincial or federal civil servants, etc.).

The foregoing approach to data collection is always modified by the size and unique circumstances of

each community.

Level of Effort

A trained and experienced social researcher (typically with the equivalent of a master's degree in applied social science) usually requires about ten days to complete a social profile. This usually breaks down into 1-1.5 days of pre-entry work, 5-6 days in the community and the remainder to write the 30-40 page report. This has proven workable with small rural communities, regional municipalities and cities up to the size of Calgary and Edmonton.

The social profile is designed to provide a charcoal sketch of the main features of the people of the area and how they view and manage their world. Subsequently, it can readily be updated and carried out in greater depth, as may be needed, for example, as part of a Social Impact Assessment. However, it is not a substitute for a standard sociological study, using a random sample of the population; should this methodology be required, a previously prepared social profile can be very helpful in designing the questionnaire.

The Report

The writing style must be simple and direct so that a busy manager or engineer can grasp the main points quickly and easily. Start with a map; eliminate jargon; omit heavy footnoting; place any large tables in an appendix, but first question if they are necessary. A photograph or two is often a more informative use of space.

The introduction to the report should indicate the sources of data, the limitations on data collection, the level of effort invested and a request for comments and suggestions.

Following the usual table of contents, executive summary and map, the remaining chapters can follow the headings outlined below.

In addition to a written report, some organizations which have to orient a number of project staff to the community will find it worthwhile to develop an audio-visual presentation of the social profile. This can be a 10 minutes video production or a simple one-projector with a pulsed soundtrack; portable equipment can provide instant orientation to visitors and new employees.

Suggested Report Contents

1. Local History

- identify early settle-
ment, key events and past
leaders
- what are the trends in
land use?
- note population trends
eg. age-sex distribution; mi-
gration; ethnic origin; occu-
pations; education (see Cen-
sus or planning studies).
- how does the history of
the community help to ex-
plain its present position
and character?

2. Industries and Occupations

- what are the main em-
ployers, markets, skills?
- how do these affect the
community's behavior?

3. Development Issues

- what issues arose in
past five years; who got in-
volved; what happened;
how was each issue re-
solved?
- what are current issues
and what, if anything, is
being done about them eg.
planning studies etc.?
- identify attitudes to
growth.
- what are the implica-
tions of the above for the
agency and/or project?

4. Organizations and Leadership

- list the principal
groups, their activities and
officers, their role in the
community.
- identify and give a brief
description of community
leaders and influentials eg.
who have followers and are
respect- ed for their opin-
ions?
- what does this imply
for the proponent and its
plans?

5. Communication Channels

- outline the formal me-
dia eg. geographic coverage,
capacity and credibility of
each; circulation/audience
of each.
- describe the informal
networks - key nodes on
grapevines; strategic listen-
ing posts in the community.
- what relevance have
these channels for the
agency and/or project?

6. Knowledge of and Attitudes to Client/ Industry/project

- what valid information,
myths and areas of igno-
rance are evident in key
people and groups?
- how does the above af-
fect information and educa-
tion requirements for the
proposed activities?

Pages 23-26 are excerpted with permission
from Conner, Desmond M., "Social Profile
Workshop" in *Constructive Citizen
Participation: A Resource Book*, Develop-
ment Press, Victoria, B.C., Revised edition,
1988, pp. II 1-4.

7. Publics Affected

- summarize the key characteristics of each public eg. language; education; media and grapevines appropriate; organizations and leaders relevant etc.

- what implications has this for the formation of a Citizen's Advisory Committee and other techniques?

8. Observations and Conclusions

- provide a succinct outline of how the characteristics of the community appear to affect the agency and/or project and their implications for a public participation program.

ANALYZING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT DATA (CONTENT ANALYSIS)

Once a public involvement program has been underway, extensive information about the views of the public, interest groups and other levels of government begins to accumulate.

Two major questions arise:

❑ How does one analyze and use all "public's" comments on the issue(s)?

❑ How does one organ-

ize and determine the relative importance of the data for the decision-makers who will ultimately respond?

Unfortunately, these two questions frequently are overlooked in the frenzy to complete the public involvement program and document it for the decision makers. This section, therefore, focuses on these two topics.

Analyzing Public Comment

In the early days of public involvement programs there was a tendency to sort public comment into two categories: for the proposed action and against the proposed action. The summary of several public meetings and several hundred letters might show that 427 supported the project and 373 opposed it. Since the potential number of people affected would be in the hundreds of thousands or even millions, the only conclusion to be drawn from this summary was that the proposed action was controversial - something which was already known.

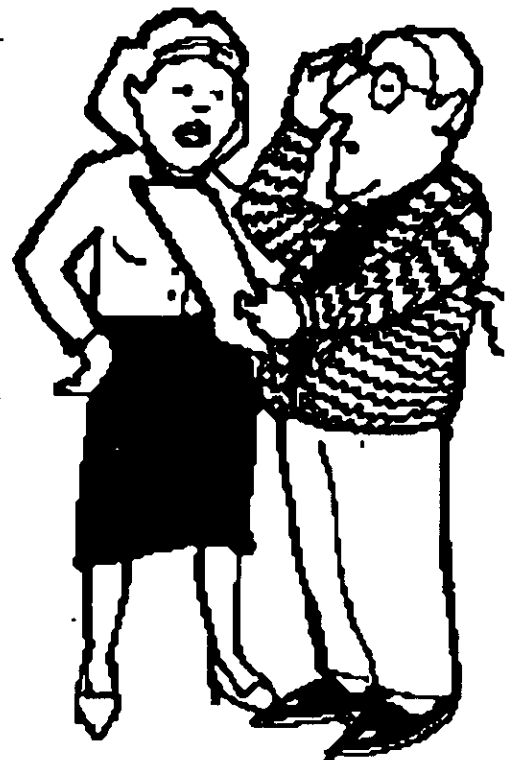
Obviously, this kind of summary was unfair both to the public and to management trying to interpret what the public said. A four-page argument for a position and a one-sentence postcard were given equal weight. Man-

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agement couldn't tell why people supported or opposed the action, the differences in opinion among various kinds of groups, or points of agreement among them. The choice for management was either to make decisions based on limited information, or laboriously wade through transcripts and hundreds of letters.

In recent years more sophisticated tools have been developed which better address the public's comments and provide important information for the decision-maker. In part these techniques have been developed to handle the massive amount of information generated by public involvement programs. Public involvement programs conducted by other agencies have, in a few cases, generated as many as 20,000 comments or letters to analyze. Since this made it impossible for management to be personally involved in reading the comments or letters, techniques had to be developed which provided management with adequate understanding of the nature of the public's comments.

The Difference Between Analysis and Evaluation

The purpose of an analysis is to summarize and display public comment in such a way that maximum informa-

tion is available to decision-makers (and to the public) about what was said. To the extent possible, analysis should display public comment without interjecting interpretation or judgment.

Evaluation of public comment takes place after analysis and includes judgment and weighting, or assigning relative value. This is the task of the decision-maker, who may have to evaluate the relative importance, for example, of 315 handwritten letters versus 400 names on a petition. The decision-maker may also have to weight the importance of various user groups with the concerns of environmental groups living throughout the region. Obviously evaluation is an essential element of decision making, and analysis is the process of getting the information ready so that evaluation can occur.

Analytic Techniques

The most useful analytic techniques are based on content analysis. This is a research tool used in sociology, journalism, and political science to analyze the actual content (arguments, facts, logic) contained in newspaper articles, letters, and so forth. Content analysis has been used, for example, to conduct research comparing the relative fre-

quency of certain topics in letters to the editor, as a means of identifying public priorities. The best-selling book, *Megatrends*, based its predictions of future trends on the increasing frequency with which certain topics were appearing in national media.

Two variations of content analysis that have been most useful in analyzing public comment are Content Summary Analysis and Codinvolve. For the purposes of this document, a brief description of Content Summary Analysis will be provided.

Content Summary Analysis is designed to capture the actual language of the public in describing its reasons for supporting or opposing a proposed action; it gives the decision-maker a "feel" for the intensity of the language used or how well thought out the arguments are. Content Summary Analysis is simple to use if the number of comments is relatively small. It becomes more complex if the number of comments is very large.

The steps in Content Summary Analysis are as follows:

1. Code responses for identification, origin, and affiliation. Each letter or comment received is as-

signed an identification code telling when and how the comment was received, and any information about the affiliation of the person making the comment. The identification code is important because it provides a means of answering questions about how people of different affiliation or living in different geographical areas feel about the issue, eg., how do people from outside the project area feel about the project compared to those living in the area? Does one user group feel differently from other user groups? Do taxpayers from one area of the region feel the same as those from the other parts of the region?

2. Make multiple copies. This step applies when comments are going to be physically stored on paper. If information is stored on a computer this step is unnecessary.

3. Select file codes. The next step is to identify the basic files or categories which will be needed. These can range from very simple to very sophisticated. Only two files might be needed - one for comments supporting the action and one for comments opposing the action. However, after reviewing the comments it may be observable that there are basically five reasons that people oppose the action

and three reasons that they support it. In this case it would be useful to establish 10 files (six for opposing comments, including one for people who oppose it but do not give a reason, and four for supporting comments, including one file for people who support it without giving a reason). Each file or category is assigned a code number.

4. Conduct a first analysis. Read the entire comment or letter for its overall meaning. Then reread the comment, underlining all portions in which the content is related to the categories defined.

5. Code the comments. Go back through the comment or letter again assigning the appropriate code to each underlined comment. This coding process should include both the file code and the identification number. The identification number is noted for two reasons: it leads the decision-maker back to the entire letter if the comment is of particular interest, and it allows the comments in that file to be analyzed by origin or affiliation.

6. Conduct a second analysis. To ensure that the comment or letter has been analyzed objectively, it is recommended that the coded comment be reviewed by a second analyst. Any differences in opinion on

how the comment should be coded can be resolved by discussion between the two analysts.

7. Store a complete copy of the marked-up comment or letter. This copy should be kept in a master file as documentation so that the public or management can always be shown how the analysis was done.

8. Store the coded comments in the appropriate files. If storing pieces of paper, a marked-up copy will need to be cut up and the slips containing the appropriately coded comments placed in the appropriate files. With computer storage, a program is needed to send portions of the total comment or letter to designated categories.

9. Prepare a report. When working with pieces of paper, a report can be prepared by simply pasting-up all the comments by category. Obviously this paste-up procedure limits the usefulness of Content Summary Analysis for large quantities of comments. Also, cross-comparisons by origin and affiliation can become cumbersome. A computer can simply print out all the comments stored in particular categories, and cross-comparisons are easy to make. Nevertheless if the number of comments is

large, the report will be very thick.

Comments on Statistical Reports

It is often a good idea to accompany statistical displays with a narrative summary, for example: "a majority (61 percent) of interest group indicate support of the proposed action for these three reasons..." Many people, including not only the public but many decision-makers as well, are intimidated by statistical analyses and will understand the material in narrative form.

It is essential, however, that the narrative simply summarize the analysis rather than evaluate the comment. Content Summary Analysis strictly an analytical technique. Using it for evaluation will undermine its credibility.

Analyzing Public Comment for Underlying Values

Content Summary Analysis (and Codinvolve) concentrate on the content (arguments, facts, logic) of the comment or letter. Another important dimension of public comment is the values or underlying political philosophies expressed in the comment. Values are the yardsticks by which we judge things to be right or

wrong, moral or immoral, fair or unfair, and so forth. While the content of people's views on a topic often changes in response to new information or dialogue with other groups, basic values positions are relatively permanent. As a result values are often a better long-term predictor of people's eventual positions than content.

The difficulty with analyzing values is that they are often implied rather than stated explicitly. This makes it more difficult to do an objective job of analysis, because the analyst must surmise the values, rather than dealing with explicit material. In addition, some letters will clearly contain only content, so it is impossible to record them in a values analysis. This can lead to charges of ignoring some letters or comments. As a result, the results of any values analysis can usually be reported only in qualitative terms and not quantitatively.

There are several indicators of implied values. These are:

- Values-laden language: "corporate rip-offs", "energy pigs", and so forth.
- Predicting dire consequences: "A working man won't be able to afford electricity"



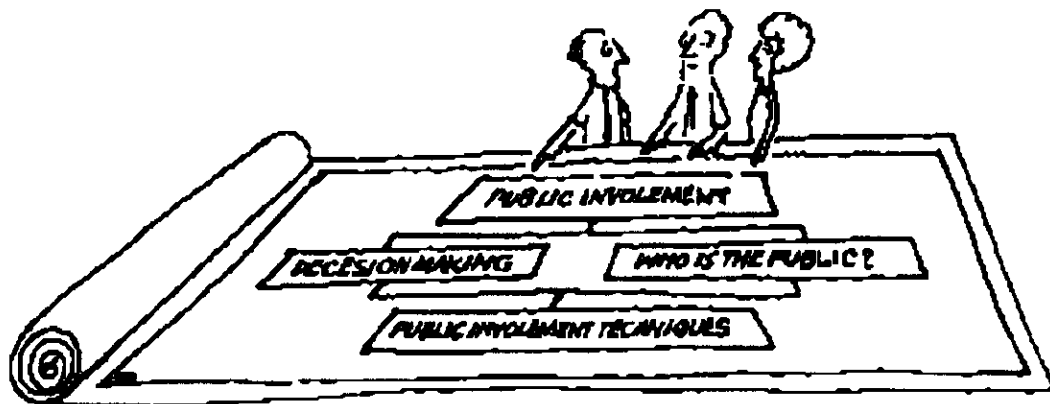
❑ Characterizations of opponents: "hippie freaks", "yes men", or "rip-off artists".

❑ Quoting venerable sources: Quotes from the Bible, the Meech Lake Accord, leading thinkers or writers.

By looking for these indicators an analyst will often be able to come up with a reasonable estimate of people's values and beliefs based on a spoken or written comment. One of the best checks to ensure objectivity is to undertake a second analysis without knowledge of the results of the first. Any differences in interpretation would be worked out

by discussion between the analysts.

Values comments could also be coded in the same way as content, with values categories set up in just the same way as content categories. Given the limitations of values analysis mentioned above, it would be more appropriate to store actual comments from the public in each category rather than to tally the number of responses in each category. This way management could be given the "flavor" of the values expressed, without any misleading claims to a statistically valid analysis.



CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings appear to be the simplest, most direct way of gaining contact with the public. All that seems needed is to hire a hall, send invitations, draw up an agenda, and show up. In reality, the public meeting is one of the most complex, unpredictable, and demanding situations, for these reasons:

❑ You only have one short chance to do things right. A mistake or false impression may not be changed easily, and can be made worse by a few angry people.

❑ Public meetings can be taken over by interest groups or individuals who want to air a favorite theme at length.

❑ Many people are afraid to speak in front of large groups. They may have important and positive things to say but will not say them at a meeting.

❑ Regardless of why the meeting was called, people may use it to talk about other things which are beyond your scope. It is hard to put aside issues if people are concerned about them.

❑ A lot may be going on in a community which affects how people react to your meeting announcement, your agenda items, your way of putting things, your timing of events, or your sense of what is important. People expect the person who called the meeting to know the local area and will be angry if they sense that you feel local issues are unimportant.

❑ Community leaders will feel that important issues may be raised at the meeting. They may worry about your impact on local government plans or political objectives.

❑ It is hard to know how many people will come, and therefore the facilities and services required.

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All these problems can be lessened with careful research and preparation beforehand. Budget sufficient time and energy to do this.

Public Meeting Formats

There are numerous alternative formats for public meetings, depending on the purpose of the meeting, the size of the audience expected, and the level of interaction needed between participants. Among the major formats are:

- Briefing/Question and Answer
- Town Meeting
- Panel/Round Table
- Large Group/Small Group format

These meeting formats are discussed in Part 2, the "Dictionary of Techniques".

Know the Meeting Purpose

Selection of a format will depend upon what is to be accomplished with the meeting. By having a public meeting, you show openness and willingness to have the business done where it can be seen by everyone. While there are other ways of obtaining widespread consultation with the public, no forum is more important than the public meeting for giving everyone a chance to hear others' views and

plans, and to get immediate clarification from each other. This aspect of exposure is fundamental to understanding the organization and conduct of public meetings.

Some of the reasons for public meetings are:

- to provide a forum to air concerns;
- to communicate plans, proposals, or decisions, along with background reasons, and to gather reactions;
- to seek views, preferences, or ideas;
- to give all parties a chance to hear from each other first hand;
- to present problems needing consideration by the community;
- to seek general agreement on ways of dealing with issues; and
- to share information.

It is common to expect too much from a public meeting. You might have too many agenda items to cover anything in depth, or you might be asking people to make complex analyses or decisions on the spot. The public meeting is useful for sharing information, but is not a good decision making arena. Except in very simple situations, the public meeting cannot qualify as a full public involvement program because it does not provide the extended think-



ing time necessary to deal with complex problems. Public meetings should rarely be used for long speeches from the sponsor. Such speeches lead to audience frustration, unless there are chances to ask questions or discuss issues.

Other techniques can also perform the same functions as a traditional a public meeting, with more "light" and less "heat". Be careful in selecting which technique to use.

Know the Audience

The other major factor in selecting a meeting format concerns the audience – its size, intensity of interest in the issue, familiarity with various types of meetings, and perceptions of the agency's credibility.

Audience Size: If an audience is very large, it becomes cumbersome to utilize small group processes. If the audience is broken up into small groups, for example, the logistics of providing flip charts, meeting rooms, etc. for all the small groups becomes very complex.

Intensity of Interest in the Issue: People who are very interested in a topic will probably be willing to utilize a structured process or other meeting format that

encourages participation. If people are only moderately interested in the topic, a more passive format may be appropriate.

Familiarity with Meeting Formats: If leaders of the interests have participated in meetings where small group processes were used successfully, they will be more comfortable in using this kind of format again. Otherwise there may be discomfort with unorthodox meeting formats.

Agency Credibility: Whenever a meeting format is used that is substantially different from those familiar to the audience, agency credibility is on the line until it is demonstrated that this new format will be productive. In locations where the agency has substantial credibility, this may be no problem. Where the agency's credibility is already suspect, there may be resistance to an untraditional meeting format, even though it could be productive. In particular, an audience that is antagonistic to the proposed action or to the agency may see efforts to break into small groups as a "divide and conquer" tactic.



Seating Arrangements

Seating arrangements are a direct reflection of the type of meeting to be held and the relationship among participants. If agency staff are positioned at the front of the room, with the audience in rows, this seating arrangement establishes a relationship in which all participants talk to the meeting leaders at the front of the room, rather than to each other. This is appropriate for information giving, but not for interaction among participants. The potential for interaction is increased somewhat if the seating is semicircular, rather than in rows. The semicircular arrangement means there is some eye contact with others in the audience, which encourages interaction.

The ideal arrangement for interaction or consensus forming/negotiation is a circular arrangement, although this is sometimes limited by rectangular tables. In these cases the closest approximation to a circle is desirable. Not only does a circular arrangement establish eye contact between all participants, but it also removes any "head of the table," so everyone is equal in status. One approximation is the "hollow square of tables": 3 rows of chairs around a 15 ft. square will accommodate 100

people; sit four team members one on each side and citizens beside them to create an immediate conversational environment.

A typical banquet seating arrangement is a natural seating arrangement for a large group/small group meeting. People can turn to hear the opening presentation, then turn back to the people at their tables as the group with whom they will communicate. This means that the assignment to tables must create a random mix of people at each table, so that groups have a mix of opinions.

If the meeting is being held in a cafeteria, gymnasium or other large multipurpose room, it is possible to have two meeting set-ups: half the room is devoted to chairs in rows for the large group portion of the meeting, and the other half of the room is set around small tables for the small group discussion.

Time and Place of Meetings

Meetings should be held at a time and place convenient to the public, with the convenience of staff a secondary consideration. Usually this means that meetings will be held in the evenings, although meetings to be attended primarily by repre-

sentatives of governmental entities or organized groups may be more convenient during the day.

One of the first considerations in selecting a meeting place is whether the facility can accommodate the desired meeting format and seating arrangement. It may also be better to have the meeting away from agency facilities, on "neutral" ground.

Other factors to consider in selecting a meeting place include:

- Location of the facility (central or outlying).
- Public transportation access.
- Space for parking.
- Safety of the area.
- Access for handicapped.

Preparation Checklist

- Conduct research phase.
- Check with local leaders and other potential participants to get a good understanding of local context and estimate of interest, explain what will be required from them.
- Prepare agenda and review it with other participants.
- Select location, time, and date.
- Publicize the meeting (press releases; newspaper notices; advertising; feature

stories in the press; community organizations advertising and/or sponsoring the meetings)

-Prepare a background statement for the media so they have accurate information prior to the meeting.

-Advertise the meeting at least two to three weeks before, on the day before and on the day of the meeting.

-Ensure proper arrangements for seating, public address system, refreshments, access to the hall, projection screens, table for slide projector, displays, wall maps and charts, and the printing of agendas and other handouts.

If using visual aids, be sure they are big enough and clear enough for the room size. *Remember, simplicity is the key in any graphics.* You can always talk around anything related to the graphics, however, it is really easy to turn off an audience totally if they can't see or understand your graphic presentation.

General Rules for Leading Meetings

The manner in which meetings are led is a major factor in their effectiveness. An ineffective leader can cause the public to believe that the meeting was poorly run and a waste of time, while an autocratic leader can cre-

ate resentment and antagonism towards the agency.

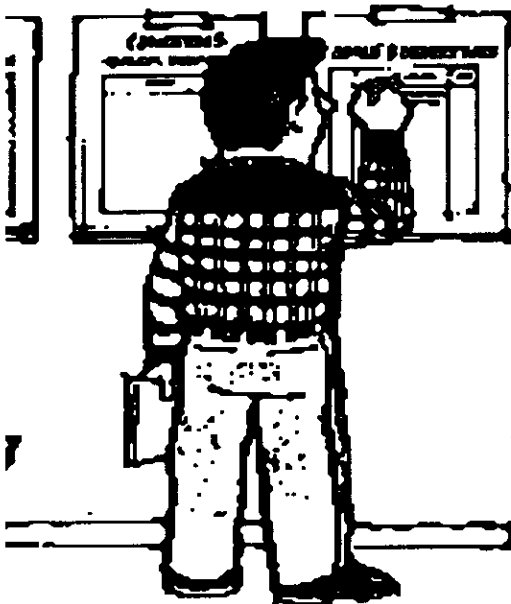
An effective leader is one who is flexible enough to change formalistic meeting rules when appropriate, accepts comments from audience even though they may be emotionally laden, and conveys enthusiasm, sincerity and commitment for the public involvement process.

In many agencies the tradition has been that the highest ranking official of the agency leads the meeting. The advantage of this is that the public likes to know that its comments are being heard by someone high up in the agency. In addition, many top executives have good presence in front of an audience. The disadvantage is that it is harder for a top official to appear neutral. He or she may instead – under pressure – make commitments that should not be made. Also, antagonistic groups are more likely to try to use an attack against a high ranking official as a way of undermining the agency. One alternative is to have the highest ranking official open the meeting, say a few words of welcome, then turn the meeting over to a chairman. This makes it very clear that top management is as the meeting to hear the public's comments, but that the chairman's role is to estab-

lish and maintain a structure that works in everybody's interests, and is not just a role bestowed by virtue of rank. If top management's meeting leadership skills are very high, though, these skills may compensate for the risks run by having the top manager up in front of the meeting.

There are several basic principles to effective meeting leadership:

The participants "own" the meeting. The fundamental premise of effective meeting leadership is that of democracy itself: all power derives from the consent of the governed. Put another way: people accept meeting leadership because it is in their interest to do so. To accomplish anything in a meeting there must be some structure. Limits need to be set on topics, procedures must be established for recognition of speakers, and so forth. As long as the leader provides this structure in a manner that the participants consider equitable and reasonable, it is in their interest to cooperate. If challenged, the leader will usually be supported by the rest of the audience. However, if the structure is not considered equitable or reasonable, the leader's power is diminished and is subject to challenge.



Leading the process, not the content. The meeting leader should concentrate on providing an equitable meeting process and avoid assuming the role of an advocate or participant by commenting on the content of the meeting. If the agency needs someone to be the "expert" on the topic being discussed, this should be someone other than the meeting leader.

Avoid power symbols. Large numbers of experts, thousands of dollars of displays, or costly maps and graphics all communicate that the agency and the people leading the meeting are more important than the public. This can breed resentment and antagonism.

Guidelines for Conducting Large Meetings

A number of factors influence the effectiveness of large meetings:

Format: One of the first considerations in setting up a large meeting is the format of the meeting. Normally – except where legally required – the formalistic procedures of a public hearing should be avoided. The more formalistic the procedures are, the more people either feel intimidated by the procedures and will not speak, or feel resentful at having to "play the game

by the agency's rules".

Just because a meeting begins with a large audience does not mean that it has to stay that way. Depending on the purpose of the meeting, it may be possible to break a large audience down into small work groups which either present brief verbal summaries at the end of the meeting, or hand in written reports. This approach can be effective if the purpose of the meeting is to collect information from the public, such as problem identification. If the topic of the meeting is very controversial, though, people may resist being broken up into small groups, claiming this is an effort to "divide and conquer". Under these circumstances people may want to hear how everybody feels, and efforts to use sophisticated meeting designs may be seen as an effort to manipulate the public.

If working groups are used, these general rules apply:

- the sub-group should have a prepared agenda;
- the sub-group should have a facilitator and minute recorder who know the task of the group;
- the sub-groups must report their results to the main meeting, so the underlying principle of exposure is not violated; and

-if a major job is expected of the sub-group, you should be running a workshop rather than holding a public meeting.

If a meeting is extremely controversial, it may be appropriate to meet with leaders of the various interests several weeks in advance to discuss the meeting format. If the key actors have been consulted regarding the meeting format, it is harder for groups to claim later that they have been abused.

Ground Rules: When going into a large meeting where strong antagonism is anticipated, there will be a need to set ground rules for participation. Examples are: time limits on speakers, the order in which speakers will be taken, limits on the topics to be discussed, etc. In a large meeting a ground rule such as a five minute time limit may be necessary to guarantee everybody a chance to speak; but such a time limit may be challenged by an organized group in an effort to win advantage for their position. The chairman of the meeting should explain the ground rules to the meeting participants and then give the reasons for using them. If it is possible, the chairman should meet with interest group leaders.

Increasing Participation: one of the disadvantages of large public meetings is that only a limited number of the public attending the meeting actually speak. The result is that the feelings of a number of attendees are never known. This problem can be minimized by providing a response form or hand-in workbook to everybody who attends a meeting, inviting their written comments. While not everybody will hand in a written comment, a significant percentage will, increasing confidence that the feelings and concerns of the total audience have been identified, not just those who speak.

Rules of Thumb for Public Meetings

- Plan the meeting to last no more than two-and-a-half to three hours
- Hand out a printed agenda at the meeting
- Introduce the person taking minutes, the government people, and the local leaders
- Arrange chairs so the chairperson can see everyone, but do not elevate the head table (if there is one)
- Use floor microphones for larger meetings so everyone can hear questions from participants, as well as answers from the chair
- Allow time to let participants speak without being cut off.

CHAIRING A PUBLIC MEETING

Conducting a public meeting is an art. It requires a balance of openness to meeting the needs of participants, as well as firmness in pursuing the agreed-upon agenda. If there is strong public concern over issues, the chair-person may be held in suspicion or openly challenged. A proposal to waive the prepared agenda may be made, or a speech by one person may alter the climate and make your aims untenable. Here are some guidelines for preparing to chair a meeting:

- Always check out the agenda with participants before starting (remain open to altering the agenda).

- Limit speakers only when necessary to give fair time to others (present time limits with this proviso).

- Never put down or ridicule a speaker who has annoyed or challenged you (courtesy is always necessary, especially when limiting a speaker or ruling someone out of order).

- When soliciting comments, look around the hall systematically and leave enough time for hesitant people to come forward before moving on.

- Treat all points of view as valid, and do not editorialize on what people present (you are a facilitator, not a judge).

- If people seem uncomfortable with the way things are going, ask for comments and deal with them directly. Sometimes a 'straw vote' helps clarify how an audience feels about an issue. For example, you may ask: "How many people feel we have given enough time for questioning the last speaker?"

- If the meeting is running long, you may have to choose between extending the time or re-convening another meeting. Sometimes an extended meeting is essential for a resolution; at other times it becomes a frustrating squabble as people become increasingly tired and distracted. It is preferable if the chairman makes the decision, explains the reasons, and asks for assent; avoid calling for a vote, as this can act as a precedent in other areas.

OPEN HOUSES

The Open House frequently replaces the public meeting as a consultative technique. Some practitioners feel that it is a more constructive vehicle than are public meetings. A greater number and diversity of interested people can obtain information and register their views.

General Guidelines

An Open House is an event at which citizens can drop in at a central facility during announced hours to view displays, ask questions, or discuss issues with agency staff.

The Open House is usually located in some valued local space, such as a room in a library, school or church; and runs from 2-9 p.m. so that it is accessible to mothers with small children, teenagers returning from school and adults, before or after supper. Visitors may come at any time and stay for as long as they like. (In some rural areas in winter 1-6 p.m. works best.)

A series of display panels, arranged on easels in a rough circle, present the purpose of the project, the study team, various aspects of the issues, evaluation criteria, alternative solutions, etc. Often a diagram on one

panel is followed by a short text explanation on the next so the visitor can obtain a grasp of the whole project without being led by the hand and talked at.

An automatic slide presentation on a small cube with a 3-5 minute cycle is useful to present visual aspects of the subject. Note – if chairs are provided, occupants will inhibit the desired flow.

A table with hand-out material is usually provided. Coffee and doughnuts or sandwiches should be available, preferably by contracting with a local group. The primary character of an Open House is a free-flowing conversation directed by the visitors. People can come whenever they wish, stay as long as they wish, and address whatever topics interest them in whatever order they choose. As a result, the staff talk with a larger number and broader cross-section of the population than happens in the typical public meeting. The quality of the exchanges is usually much higher; the participants pose thoughtful questions and wrestle with alternative solutions. In many cases, problems can not only be raised but actually resolved, unlike what usually occurs in a public meeting.

An open house can be effectively combined with a public meeting or other activities. For example, an all day open house might be followed by a public meeting held the same evening. The open house would provide information to the public, then in the evening the public could give reactions back to the agency.

A variation on the open house is to invite interest groups to set up booths, so that citizens can walk around the room and get a sampling of the opinions of all the major actors. In several cases the open house has even been expanded into a "fair", with recreational and social activities part of the program, along with food and beverages.

Feedback

The systematic gathering of informed public response is a vital feature of the Open House. Staff, wearing name tags which also indicate their subject matter, carry pads of Open House record forms (see sample) on which to record individual comments, concerns, questions and suggestions. Where staff cannot provide immediate answers, they note the name, address and phone number for later follow-up. Visitors are most appreciative when staff undertake to refer questions or concerns

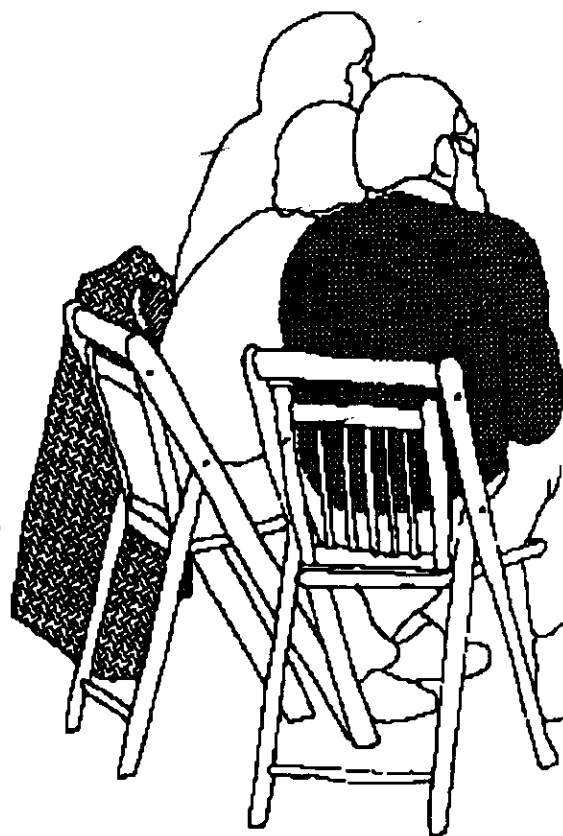
which are not part of their project to the relevant organizations.

While an Open House is free to enter, visitors must pay to get out – by completing a short exit check list! This generates quantitative data such as weights on evaluative factors or ranking of alternatives. Background data obtained, such as geographic location or occupation, enables cross-tabulation.

Staffing

Staffing can usually be lighter during the day than in the evening. It is important to manage so as to avoid overcrowding. An Open House held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. may readily deteriorate into a regular public meeting, in contrast to one held from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. which is unlikely to do so.

In one recent case, 250 people attended an Open House from 2-9 p.m. Two staff were present from 2-6:30 and four for the evening. Some 30 Open House record forms and 130 exit check lists were completed. The staff were able to interpret the project appropriately to housewives, environmentalists and businessmen.



Pages 42-44 are excerpted with permission from Connor, Desmond M., "The Open House" in *Constructive Citizen Participation: A Resource Book*, Development Press, Victoria, B.C., Revised edition, 1988, pp. 11-14-15.

When staff are preparing Open House panels, it is important that these are informative rather than persuasive and informal rather than formal. Finished graphics have a non-verbal message that additional suggestions are too late.

The Open House is a powerful learning and problem-solving device which is readily adapted to most planning projects and the characteristics of most of the participants. It typically attracts a larger number of people and a broader cross-section of the community than the typical public meeting.

Preceding Publication

An Open House is designed to follow 7-10 days after a publication has provided people with the basic information on the subject and an opportunity to reply with little effort. This could be a display advertisement or tabloid insert in the local newspaper with a tear-off coupon or a brochure, distributed by householder mail, with a reply paid postcard.

During the incubation period following the publication, people have an opportunity to follow media coverage of the issues, discuss it with neighbours and become more prepared to

make the best use of the Open House.

Staff Training

As a minimum, staff should gather to identify probable questions and establish brief, correct and consistent responses to them before the Open House.

Prior to a set of Open Houses dealing with one very controversial project, the staff reviewed some 30 probable questions and role-played their responses as if each were asked (a) by an interested housewife, (b) a high school science teacher, (c) an older farmer and (d) an angry environmentalist. An assertiveness training film "When I Say No I Feel Guilty" (International Telefilms) was also used with considerable value.

Follow-up

After one or more Open Houses, it is important to:

1. Have a debriefing meeting with the staff to obtain their reactions, insights and suggestions for improvements at future events.
2. Analyze the response and make it available (a) to the planning team and (b) to the local media in a news release so residents will know the sentiments of the community at large.

3. Get back answers to questions recorded at the Open House and forward requests for action by other organizations.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops are extended public meetings in which participants are engaged in review of information, detailed definition of issues, problem solving, or plan review. Workshops are expected to produce results, as well as being forums for educational materials.

Workshops are useful when dealing with complex topics where the public needs briefing on technical matters, as well as time for detailed consideration. Workshops can be used at many stages of a public involvement program. A workshop is particularly useful as a method for detailed public review more expeditious than the extended involvement methods.

Some uses of the workshop format could include:

- selecting a public involvement program from among various options.
- reviewing a plan, or developing a single mutually acceptable plan.
- defining issues or problems, possibly in rank order.
- developing alternative so-

lutions to a specific problem.

- reviewing the operational results of a plan which has been implemented.
- presenting a technical study and reviewing its implications.
- developing terms of reference for studies.
- developing a list of the critical impacts that must be considered in evaluating alternatives.

Selection of Participants

The optimum size for group effectiveness is 5-7 people. The need to have all interests represented, however, usually means that most small group meetings will have as many as 20-25 participants. Even with larger numbers, however, some people may feel excluded. Some of the methods which can be used to prevent this problem include:

Repeat Meetings. A meeting format can be developed which can be repeated as often as necessary, allowing opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate to go through the same experience.

Daytime Meeting/Evening Meeting. One approach to the problem of people feeling excluded is to conduct the workshop during the day, followed by an evening meeting at which everybody gets a chance to review the

WORKSHOPS

product generate during the day. Attendance at the small group meeting would be designed to ensure that the full range of values within the community is represented.

Interest Group Selection.

An alternative method is for agency staff to conduct a careful analysis and identify the interests that need to be represented. Through consultation with the interests, agency staff would then identify those people whom the interests feel could best represent them.

Steps in Designing a Workshop

The following steps are useful in designing a workshop or small group meeting:

1) Identify the Desired Product. Identify precisely what the product is that should result from the meeting, such as a set of alternatives, a list of impacts to be evaluated, and so forth.

2) Identify the resource information that the public will need. Identify what information the participants will need in order to complete the desired product. This information should be written in simple, understandable, layman's language, and presented in a format which makes it easy

to find and grasp, so that the least amount of meeting time is spent locating needed information. This material might be incorporated in a small workbook which contains group or team assignments, exercise instructions, resource materials, and any hand-in response forms.

3) Select or design a series of activities which will result in the desired product. In some cases there may be previously used meeting formats which will result in the desired product. If not, design a set of activities which will produce the needed materials. The usual technique is to write simple, clear instructions for group activities and give the groups substantial responsibility both in how the activity is completed and the product which is produced. The series of activities could incorporate small group processes such as Brainstorming, or Nominal Group Process.

4) Design a simple mechanism for evaluating the product. Once participants have worked together there is still a need for them to evaluate what they have accomplished or to place some priority on what they think is most significant. Without an opportunity to evaluate, participants may feel restricted by the meeting for-

mat or feel that all points covered during the meeting are receiving equal weight. This evaluation mechanism could be a hand-in response form or a straw vote or weighted vote to establish priorities.

Using Small Group Processes

A number of small group processes are designed to improve group effectiveness in one way or another. Two of these are described in Chapter 15 of the manual.

Brainstorming. Brainstorming is a technique for increasing the number and creativity of ideas expressed in a group. It is an effective means of developing a lot of ideas in a hurry, but does not help in evaluating those ideas.

Nominal Group Process. Nominal Group Process is a technique to help groups generate and prioritize a large number of ideas. It has also been successfully used for consensus formation. Nominal Group Process is based on research suggesting that people generate more ideas working by themselves, but in the presence of others.

General Rules

Many of the problems with preparing a public meeting

apply to workshops; however workshops are more structured and less likely to go "off the rails". Here is a checklist for preparation:

Follow the "preparation checklist" for a public meeting:

- Vary the agenda between general presentations to the assembled participants and small group working sessions with from seven to 15 participants.

- Ensure there are fully briefed facilitators for each working sub-group. Finding experienced facilitators is often difficult; ask your local service club for assistance.

- Supply all sub-groups with instructions, agenda, tools, documents, and work space.

- Have a coordinator visit each sub-group to answer questions and keep contact with what is happening.

- Ask each sub-group to record their results on a blackboard or flip charts and to present them when called back into general session.

- Arrange for publication of a workshop summary for circulation to all participants.

- Hold a post-mortem to assess workshop results and decide on any further action.



CHAPTER 3

EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT

ADVISORY GROUPS

One of the most frequently used public involvement techniques is the establishment of an advisory group, a relatively small group of people who represent various interests, points of view, or fields of expertise, to advise the agency on proposed actions or a specific proposal.

Advisory groups can:

- Help set study priorities, or help "scope" the study.
- Review technical data and make recommendations regarding its adequacy.
- Help resolve conflicts between various interests.
- Help design and evaluate the public involvement program.
- Serve as a communication link between the agency and other interests and agencies.
- Review and make recommendations concerning the decision making process.
- Assist in developing and evaluating alternatives.
- Help select consultants acceptable to the public.

- Review and make recommendations regarding the study budget.
- Review written material prior to release to the general public.
- Help host and participate in public meetings.
- Assist in educating the public about the proposed action and the decision making process.

Advisory groups are effective because:

1. They provide a cross sampling of public views and concerns.
2. Members of the group have a chance to become informed about the issues before coming to conclusions, and have a better understanding of the consequences of decisions. The result is that their counsel to management combines a citizens' perspective with a thorough understanding of the situation.
3. Because personal relationships are developed in the group, members of the group develop a deeper understanding of the concerns of the other interests, and

establish relationships which serve as a moderating influence on more extreme views.

4. Advisory groups can serve as a communication link back to the constituencies they represent, and advisory groups may be able to reach a consensus among conflicting groups.

Guidelines for Establishing an Advisory Group

There are several general principles that should be observed in establishing advisory groups:

□ An advisory group must represent the full range of interests and values of the interested publics. An advisory group that represents only interests that have traditionally supported agency activities misleads the agency and undermines the credibility of the entire public involvement effort. To be effective, an advisory group must provide representation for all groups that see themselves as potentially affected by the proposed action.

□ The group's role in decision making must be clearly defined. Confusion about the role of the advisory group, coupled with the natural desire on the part of the members to exercise maximum influence on the outcome, can be a source of

problems. This problem can be avoided if there is a candid discussion of the group's role in decision making at the outset. A written mandate which carefully outlines exactly what is expected of the group and project time lines is helpful.

□ Normally the life of the group – or at least the terms of the group's members – should be limited. The longer a group exists, the more likely it is to become an elite. Public advisory committees have a tendency to outlive their usefulness, and so the group's purpose, as well as the members' tenure, should be monitored. Most public involvement comes from issues which have a direct effect on groups or individuals.

Once those issues are resolved, the original participants lose interest in attending meetings. Sometimes a group's purpose is still valid, but the danger exists of appearing to co-opt potential adversaries. This can be resolved through regular change in representation.

□ Efforts should be made to insure that members of the advisory group maintain regular communication with the constituencies they are supposed to represent. Group members should inform their constituencies through briefings, organiza-

ADVISORY GROUPS

tional newsletters, public meetings, or occasional interviews or discussion with other leaders from their constituency. This will ensure that the representative reflects the views of the constituency, and that the group is educated along with the representative.

□ Agency participation should include line managers. It is extremely important that responsible line managers interact with the advisory group, both so the group feels that it is being heard by people with genuine authority, and so that managers hear public concerns firsthand.

□ Agency representatives must speak the public's language when working with advisory groups. This is essential to communicate effectively, but is no simple task; it requires the ability to simplify technical language and jargon without appearing to be patronizing.

□ The agency must be prepared to provide time and logistic support commitment.

Selecting Advisory Group Members

In an informal advisory group questions of membership will be low priority since membership may be changing constantly. But in

a formal advisory group, it is crucial to use a technique for selecting members which ensures that the group is representative of all the interests.

While there are always many voices in a community, there are usually only a few clear categories of public interest. When you want representation from a community, it is often better to draw members from among those who identify with a particular interest category, rather than a particular organized group.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, this approach gives a comprehensive but manageable group. Secondly, it ensures that even with small numbers, no important set of public values is unrepresented.

There are five basic methods for selecting advisory group members:

1) Members can be selected by the agency with an effort to balance the different interests. This is by far the most frequently used technique, but on very controversial issues runs the risk that the public will believe the agency has established the group to support its position.

The danger that the public will see the membership as

biased can be reduced if affected interest groups and agencies are consulted prior to selecting the members and the selections clearly reflect this consultation process.

2) The selection of the advisory group can be turned over to a third party or group. Depending on how localized the issue is, the selection process could be turned over to a local elected body, a community leader or politician, a public involvement consultant, or to a small group representing the major interests who in turn select other members.

3) The agency can determine the interest groups it wishes to have represented and allow the groups to select their own representatives. This can create problems for volunteer groups, which sometimes have difficulty coordinating among themselves to select a representative. However, it eliminates the risk of being seen as "stacking the deck".

4) Use any of the three methods above and augment the membership with volunteers. This allows the different interests to adjust the membership of the group by obtaining volunteers from their ranks. If the advisory group will vote on issues, though, this method permits the various groups

to "stack the deck" by adding a large number of additional volunteers.

5) Membership can be determined by a popular election. This last method has been used only in a few cases where there was some existing structure for selecting representatives, such as neighborhood councils.

Establishing Procedures for Advisory Group Meetings

Balance of public interest in working groups does not guarantee harmony, effective compromise, or acceptable results. Balanced membership does give the group initial credibility. When the work begins, continued credibility depends on:

- the quality of group process
- clear commitment from the government agency to support technical and information needs of the group
- participants levelling with their colleagues
- good communications with the wider public

There are a number of procedural issues which normally have to be settled at some point with groups that will be working together for some time.

An advisory group may choose to devote its first meetings to agreeing on procedures, although protracted debate can seriously undermine enthusiasm. It may be advisable to prepare and pre-circulate a draft of proposed guidelines for revision and adoption by the advisory group.

Voting. Probably the single most important procedural decision is whether or not subsequent decisions will be made by voting.

Most groups in Canada are used to voting on issues and assume automatically that this is the right way to make decisions. However there are several reasons why voting is usually not the best way for advisory groups to make a decision.

First, despite efforts to make the advisory group broadly representative, there is no guarantee that representation of interests on the advisory group is proportionate to those interests among the public at large. A vote may merely reflect an imbalance in the composition of a group rather than a view of the majority of the public.

If the objective is to work towards some sort of consensus outcome, a badly divided group serves little purpose. Only if there is some kind of consensus is

the advisory group likely to have much impact on either the public at large or agency decision makers. A split vote simply means there is a continuing disagreement, which could have been determined without an advisory group.

An alternative to voting is to obtain a "sense of the meeting". The meeting leader listens carefully until there appears to be a consensus, states this as his or her "sense of the meeting", and checks to see if it is acceptable to the group. This approach requires a good sense of timing, the ability to summarize effectively, and a credible leader. If it is impossible to reach agreement on the sense of a meeting, the meeting leader asks the group how to resolve the controversy. One possibility is to keep talking. Another is to vote. Another is to have majority and minority reports. Still another is to obtain agreement on procedures for resolving the key factual issues that prevent resolution. Finally, it may be best to drop consideration of an issue until the next meeting, giving people a chance to think about the issue more.

Attendance. Some groups wish to establish minimum attendance requirements for membership, eg. a member who is absent more than a

certain number of times is dropped from the group.

Alternates. Another issue related to attendance is whether or not members can send alternates to participate in meetings. This can be a problem if the group has decided to make decisions by a majority vote. But if voting rights are not involved, then sending alternates is one way to keep everybody informed. If alternates are not kept informed of what occurred at previous meetings, however, it is very frustrating to the regular members.

Participation of Observers. A ground rule may need to be established concerning observers, eg. if they are welcome at group meetings and, if so, whether and when they may speak.

Subcommittees. It may be necessary to establish subcommittees to accomplish specific work tasks. If so, the responsibilities and authorities of the subcommittees should be clearly defined.

Confidentiality of Materials. If the group will be reviewing documents that will undergo substantial modification before being made public, rules may be required to govern the confidentiality of these materials. Many experienced public

involvement practitioners simply assumed that anything turned over to advisory groups, regardless of requests for confidentiality, is now a public document.

Constituencies. Specific mechanisms may need to be set up to ensure regular communication with constituencies being represented by group members.

Parliamentary Procedures. Formal parliamentary procedures, such as "Robert's Rules of Order", assume an adversarial position among the participants, and also assume that issues will be resolved by voting rather than consensus. For this reason, it is advisable to minimize the use of formal meeting procedures. If the group leader has the trust of the group, it is usually possible to get things done more readily without the use of complicated meeting procedures.

Group Member Expenses. It should be established right at the beginning whether travel expenses and other costs related to participation in the group will be borne by the agency or by individual members. In the event they will be borne by the agency, the rules for expense reimbursement should be clearly defined.

PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTING
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
PROGRAMS

VOLUME THREE

DICTIONARY OF
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
TECHNIQUES



CONSENSUS GUIDELINES

One way of getting working compromises is to make decisions by consensus. A decision reached by consensus is an agreement where all parties accept a balance of gains and losses to achieve a single result. If the parties start from very different positions, consensus-seeking may take much longer than a simpler 'majority rules' approach. The results, however, are more likely to be used and to be more durable in practice. The following guidelines will assist working groups to achieve consensus:

- Take time in the beginning of the group's life for members to meet other members as colleagues, rather than as antagonists across a negotiation table. This may require field trips, guest speakers, or other common activities where resource issues are looked at in general.
- Have each member write a short statement of what they wish to achieve through the group's work, then discuss these expectations in an information sharing meeting.
- Ensure each member understands the group's final terms of reference, and the kinds of results consistent with those terms.
- Before trying to address issues, make sure that there is a clear and satisfactory statement of what the issues are.
- When proposals for a decision are being made, seek a number of options, rather than trying to draft a single statement. The options must embody the differing viewpoints of participants. They can then be examined by everyone for pros and cons.
- When different viewpoints or options are presented, take the time to hear each participant, without judging or condemning the proposal at first hearing. Most communication gaps begin with problems in listening, and unwillingness to let a speaker make his point.
- Everyone must be willing to re-open issues or concerns already decided, if a new compromise changes the way a member perceives the balance of interests taking shape. Tolerance for this review must be balanced by a respect for the group's work by each member.
- Consensus cannot survive if any members of the group are working to a hidden agenda or manipulative strategy. Concerns have to be explicit and all cards must be placed on the table.
- Sometimes, compromise is not acceptable to one or more of the participants in a working group. In these cases, it may not be possible to achieve consensus on a single proposal. The remedy for this situation is to present either a minority report, or to present a range of alternatives. With either approach, it is essential to give reasons for the alternatives, so that they can be assessed by the agency. It should be remembered that the closer to consensus a working group can get, the more likely it is that their recommendations will be accepted and implemented.

Scheduling Meetings. One of the issues that haunts every advisory group is whether to have regular group meetings or schedule them as needed. If meetings are called only when needed, it is difficult to notify members of each meeting and there are often scheduling conflicts. On the other hand there is no surer way to discourage interest and participation in an advisory group than to hold regular meetings that are unproductive or seem to have no purpose.

Staffing. Often advisory groups raise questions which require considerable study or follow-through. One important question that needs to be answered early is the level of staffing which will be provided to the group, and for what purposes.

Minutes. Agency staff are normally responsible for keeping the record of group meetings, but if there is a history of suspicion or mistrust, the group may want to assume this responsibility.

External Consultants. If advisory group members are suspicious of agency staff, there may be requests for external consultants who will assist the advisory group in reviewing highly technical plans or reports. External consultants are

sometimes more credible to the advisory group than are agency technical staff.

Resolving issues such as these in the first few meetings can prevent hard feelings at a later date.

CHAIRING EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT GROUPS

The chairperson of a working group is responsible for assisting the process of group discussion and decision making. This role can only be managed if the person is either disinterested in the outcome of the work, or is capable of separating the function of the chair from advocacy of a particular position. A chairperson must be a competent and objective facilitator, and must have the confidence of the entire group. In many conflicts, the various participants begin the process with suspicions about each other. This decreases with time, through the offices of an even-handed chair-person. To achieve initial acceptance of the chairperson, you may need a community member from outside the group to chair the working sessions, as a community service. People willing to act in this capacity may be sought from educational institutions, service clubs, the clergy, or various professions where group facilitation skills are provided by

CONCENSUS GUIDELINES

CHAIRING EXTENDED INVOLVEMENT GROUPS

training and experience.

Guidelines for the Chairperson

Your role is to assist members in achieving results by ensuring fair and complete participation in the events at hand, and ensuring that the group focuses on the issues.

Develop agendas in advance and check them with the group before proceeding at any meeting. Change agendas to meet emergent needs only after gaining approval of the group.

Have a common set of rules of procedure.

Agree on who shall speak for the group to outside parties, especially to the media.

Arrange for regular minutes which distinguish records of discussion from decisions, and action requiring follow-up by a group member.

From time to time, review the terms of reference and objectives of the group to assess progress. If necessary, remind the participants of the time constraints.

If you must speak for an interest, vacate the chair for a brief period, handing it over to someone else while you make your comments.

If you feel a personal conflict of interest arising, state the problem clearly to the group and ask for guidance. Maintaining group confidence of your impartiality is essential to continued progress.

If, as chairperson, you have reacted to an outside request for information or attended a meeting in which the group's work was discussed, report this to the group at the next available opportunity. If you have the chance, let several group members know by telephone prior to the event, to find out their reaction. Sometimes you may have to refuse an outside discussion, without first checking with the group. This will likely be required in the early stages of the group's work, but is less likely to be a problem later.

The working group's productivity and its relationship with the wider public is generally improved if you arrange for regular public reporting, both to the media and through publication of interim reports.