

Public Participation in Planning

Planning Terminology Glossary 2

- **Capacity building:** training and other methods to help people develop the confidence and skills necessary for them to achieve their purpose. The most effective capacity building is likely to be through “learning by doing” rather than formal training courses.
- **Citizen advisory committee:** a small group (sometimes up to 20 people) chosen to reflect the views of the community-at-large. Committee members are responsible for understanding relevant planning issues and providing advice. Requires a great deal of time and effort on the part of citizen participants and the agency sponsoring the committee.
- **Communication materials:** used to keep the public informed of the planning process and opportunities for public participation or education. A variety of methods may be used, including:
 - **Direct mailing:** mass mailing of letters, brochures, or other promotional pieces to increase awareness or advertise a particular event. Mail is delivered to a large number of individuals and requires little individual time commitment. Works best to target specific groups. Expensive to use as a general publicity tool.
 - **Mass media:** the use of radio, television, newspapers, local publications, and other media sources to disseminate information. Used to keep the planning project in direct view of the public eye and inform the public regarding developments and decisions in the planning process. Able to reach a large number of people. May suffer from editing or bad coverage. Can be used to solicit input if response forms or other means of feedback or participation are used.
 - **Newsletter:** a printed source of information delivered on a regular basis to interested and affected parties. Given the right content and timing, newsletters may be used to keep the public informed and educated about the planning project. Able to be reviewed at an individual’s own pace and time.
 - **Promotional display or event:** used to stimulate community interest, obtain publicity, and provide information to segments of the public that would otherwise not participate in the planning process. Examples include a poster display in the mall, an essay, art or photo contest, or a guided tour that brings the interested public to a project site. May help to publicize public participation programs later on. An easy way to include young people.
 - **Public notice:** advance notice of meeting dates, times and locations is usually posted in public places and newspapers. This is the minimum legal requirement necessary to advertise opportunities for public participation.
 - **Website:** an online resource designed to keep the public informed and educated about the planning project. May be accessed by the general public for review at their own pace and on their own time. Must be well designed and

regularly updated. Potentially an interactive form of public education and input that can reach a moderate number of people. May not be accessible to low-income or elderly audiences and is limited by the availability and use of computers. Public computer access in libraries or municipal buildings reduces this limitation.

- **Consensus building:** A participation process where participants work together to try and reach a result which has benefits for both - a win/win outcome. It is an alternative to adversarial confrontation where one side is trying to gain supremacy - win/lose - or a compromise which neither side achieves what they want - lose/lose.
- **Educational forum:** a variety of techniques, including seminars, workshops, simulation games, roundtable discussions, brown-bag lunches and audio-visual materials may be used to improve the public's understanding of an issue and provide technical information in an easily understood format. Increases the effectiveness of the public on a particular issue by making them better informed.
- **Focus group:** a small group of people (usually 6-12) responsible for identifying issues, concerns, values, beliefs or attitudes related to a particular subject. Generally not considered representative of a community because of the small number of participants involved; participants often selected based on their knowledge of a subject. Most effective when moderated by a skilled facilitator.
- **Open house:** a semi-informal setting in which technical experts and displays are used to inform the public about the planning effort. Also serves as an opportunity for the public to ask questions, express concerns and provide feedback about proposals on a one-to-one basis. Has potential to reach a moderate number of people, especially when held in various locations or over a period of time. Care should be taken to present materials readily understood by a layperson.
- **Open meeting:** a formal meeting with a focused agenda, facilitator and operating rules. Attendance is open to the general public but participation is limited to selected participants or members of a working group. Provides face-to-face contact and the opportunity for a wide variety of people to attend. Effective dialogue with the public is generally limited. Vocal participants or attendees may try to dominate the meeting.
- **Public hearing:** an official meeting used to present technical information and obtain formal review and approval of proposals. Public officials are generally seated at the front of the audience and use formal procedures to invite public comments and questions. All proceedings become part of the public record. Oftentimes intimidating to participants and may result in confrontation or conflict. The minimum legal requirement for public participation.

- **Survey:** a tool used to systematically collect data or viewpoints from many people. Data is relatively easy to obtain, but difficult to analyze and interpret. Sample must be chosen carefully to represent appropriate population. Questions should be simple, jargon-free and brief.
- **Workshop:** interactive meeting where a facilitator stimulates the flow of creative ideas among participants. Multiple methods may be used including brainstorming, small group discussions, and a variety of group process techniques. Presenters, panels, videos, maps, models and other visual or active devices may also be used to stimulate discussion. Many techniques can be used to include the less vocal public.