

A line drawing of two hands holding a globe of the Earth. The hands are positioned as if they are gently cradling the globe. The drawing is simple and uses only black outlines on a white background. The globe shows continents and oceans. The hands are shown from the side, with fingers and thumbs clearly defined.

Introduction: Public Participation

What is Public Participation?

Public participation can be any **process** that directly **engages** the public in decision-making and **gives full consideration** to public input in making that decision.

Public Participation vs. Public Relations

Public relations

Does not include the opportunity for the public to influence the decision or outcome

Public participation

Must include the opportunity for the public to influence the decision or the outcome.

What is EPA's Public Participation Guide?

www.epa.gov/international/public-participation-guide



PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION

GUIDE

Engage the public. Preserve the planet.

- Launched in March 2012 to over 700 individuals/organizations
- Purpose: Shares important considerations in the design, planning and implementation of a meaningful public participation program
- Designed for government agencies for decision-making processes, but can be useful for others as well

Time to Participate! World Café

- A **world café** is a meeting process featuring a series of simultaneous conversations in response to predetermined questions.
- Participants **change tables** during the process and focus on **identifying common ground** in response to each question.



World Café Instructions

1. Designate one person at your table as the host. This person will stay at the table and record the discussion.
2. Discuss the question at your table for 5-10 minutes. The host records the key points of the discussion.
3. When the facilitator indicates, move to a new table.
 - Try to meet new people!
 - Don't visit the same color table twice.
 - The host at each table does not move.
4. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 until the end of the exercise.
5. Each host reports the main ideas from their table.

What are the benefits of public participation?

Sponsor Agencies:

- Better and more easily implementable decisions that reflect public interests and values
- Better understood by the public

Communities:

- Develop long-term capacity to solve and manage challenging social issues, often overcoming longstanding differences and misunderstandings.

What are the necessary skills to promote public participation?

Respect

Transparency

Openness

Reliability



Flexibility

Honesty

Humility

Resiliency

What other skills are critical?

Project Management

- Situation Assessment
- Goal-setting
- Planning
- Process Management
- Meeting and Event Management
- Evaluation

Stakeholder communication

- Effective writing
- Translating complex information into understandable formats
- Presenting information in public settings
- Interpersonal skills
- Active listening

What do you need for effective public participation?



What are the necessary conditions for effective public participation?

- **Clear purpose and goals**
- **Clear structure and process**
- **Actual opportunity for influence**
- **Commitment to the process**
- **Inclusive and effective representation**

What other conditions are useful?

- Sufficient **resources** to conduct the process
- **Participative** capacity among staff and participants
- A climate of **integrity**
- A belief in the **value** of public input
- Capacity to **engage**
- Complete **transparency**

Remember!

Making **promises**

- Promise only what you believe you can deliver
- Deliver what you have promised
- Demonstrate what you deliver by communicating effectively

Importance of **transparency**

How does public participation build community capacity?

- Meaningful and collaborative approaches
- Managing difficult decisions
- Resolving disputes
- Appreciation of positions
- Understanding of differing perspectives

What are some strategies to build community capacity?

- Model the behaviors that you want to see
- Develop and share guidance on values
- Provide public participation and communication training
- Partner with community groups/leaders
- Hire neutral facilitators
- Use deliberative forums that encourage more active forms of participation
- Provide technical assistance

Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I remember.

Involve me, I understand

-Ancient Proverb

Common Misconceptions about Public Participation

As stated by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2):

- “Is engaging the public in decision-making abdicating responsibility?”
- “Shouldn’t complex technical and/or specialized decisions be made by trained professionals?”
- “Isn’t working with elected officials sufficient? Don’t they have a mandate to speak and act for the public?”
- “Doesn’t public participation take a lot of extra time and money?”
- Why bother when we can get it done faster
- Hicimos todo por las normas y todavía tenemos problemas con la sociedad civil.

Additional misconceptions or concerns?

Where to Look on the Guide

- Introduction to Public Participation
- Public Participation Foundational Skills, Knowledge, and Behaviors
- For more information on World Café:
 - Public Participation Tools
 - Tools to Generate and Obtain Input
 - In-person Tools for Generating Input
 - World Café

