



HOW TO DESIGN A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

*Office of Intergovernmental
and Public Accountability (EM-22)
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY*

**ADVISORY NATURE
OF THE GUIDE**

The Office of Intergovernmental and Public Accountability (EM-22) believes that DOE staff and contractors will find the approach described in this guide to be very helpful when preparing public participation plans. However, the material in this guide is advisory and does not constitute official EM policy or guidance.

AUTHOR

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HOW TO DESIGN A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help people who plan public participation programs to design programs that will fit their unique circumstances.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to public participation. There are, however, certain issues that arise in designing any public participation program. This guide provides a systematic way of addressing these issues.

Characteristics of Highly Effective Public Participation Programs

Highly effective public participation programs:

- *Have a clearly defined expectation for what they hope to accomplish with the public*
- *Are well integrated into the decision-making process*
- *Are targeted at those segments of the public most likely to see themselves as impacted by the decision (stakeholders)*
- *Involve interested stakeholders in every step of decision-making, not just the final stage*
- *Provide alternative levels of participation based upon the public's level of interest and reflecting the diversity of those participating*
- *Provide genuine opportunities to influence the decision*
- *Take into account the participation of internal stakeholders as well as external stakeholders*

It takes a very good job of planning to accomplish all this. That is why there is value to a systematic approach to planning a public participation program.

DOE POLICY AND REQUIREMENTS

Department of Energy Policy

U.S. Department of Energy Policy 1210.0 July 29, 1994 states, in part, that:

“Public participation is a fundamental component in program operations, planning activities and decision-making within the Department. The public is entitled to play a role in Departmental decision-making.”

EM Public Participation Policy

The Office of Environmental Management (EM) public participation policy states, in part:

The Environmental Management (EM) program is committed to fulfilling the Department of Energy’s (DOE) policy to conduct its programs in an open, responsive, and accountable manner. The public will have the opportunity to participate in the EM decision-making process for program planning, design and implementation. It is EM’s policy to support an aggressive, substantive, EM-wide public participation program in which the public is provided with accurate, complete, and timely information and early, meaningful participation opportunities. As the lead agency for its environmental management activities, DOE retains decision making responsibility and accountability.”

Responsibility for Developing Public Participation Plans

EM Policy and Guidance states:

“(3.2.2) EM Program Managers are responsible for the development and implementation of public participation plans for the technical programs/projects that they manage. They have the lead responsibility for clearly defining the decision-making process for those programs/projects as the initial input to the public participation planning process. As will be discussed in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, public participation plans are developed and approved through the responsible program office. However, experienced public participation staff are available to assist EM program managers and technical staff with the development of public participation plans. In addition, plan development and implementation should be coordinated with the designated Operations/Area Office or Headquarters Public Participation Coordinators.”

In other words, the person responsible for the decision (typically a program or project manager) is also responsible for developing the public participation plan. This person should contact public participation specialists within DOE or its contractors to help develop the plan. These individuals, jointly, are responsible for deciding who else needs to be involved in developing the plan.

Setting Up a Public Participation Planning Team

Developing a public participation plan is normally a team effort. Rarely does any one person have all the information that is needed. The information that is needed includes:

- *How the decision will be made (decision making steps and schedule) and who the decision maker is*
- *Organizational constraints on the decision or public participation program*
- *How this decision could impact on other decisions and existing programs*
- *What issues are likely to arise*
- *The history of these issues*
- *Who from the public is going to be interested in this decision*
- *What participation approaches are effective in this particular community*
- *How to design and use a variety of public participation techniques*

It is important to include all concerned internal stakeholders in planning because developing a plan is an opportunity to: (1) get commitment from all the parts of the organization who will need to contribute to making the public participation process work; and (2) work out differences between parts of the organization before going to the public.

THREE STAGES OF PLANNING

There are three stages of planning that need to occur for an effective public participation program:

- **Decision Analysis,**
- **Public Participation Planning,**
- **Implementation Planning.**

These three stages are described in more detail in Figure 1 on the next page. This guide focuses solely on the first two stages of planning.

CONDUCTING A DECISION ANALYSIS

The first level of planning — Decision Analysis — has more to do with the decision-making process itself than with specific public participation activities. However, it is a precondition for good public participation. The decision-making process must make sense for the public participation process to make sense.

Here are some problems that can occur if the decision process is not thought through carefully:

- *The decision that is of interest to the public can be so scattered between separate decision-making processes that the public can not find the appropriate forum in which to participate or must participate in numerous forums to influence one decision*
- *There may be disagreements among parts of DOE about the definition of the problem or issue that is being resolved*
- *The process may consider only one option, giving the public only a YES/NO choice*
- *The public may be offered the chance to participate after the real decisions have already been made*
- *Schedule pressures may make participation a sham*

The decision analysis stage of planning is designed to reduce the risk that these problems will occur.

Figure 1
STAGES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANNING

DECISION ANALYSIS

- *Clarify the decision being made*
- *Specify the planning/decision-making steps and schedule*
- *Decide whether public involvement is needed, and for what purpose*

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANNING

- *Specify what needs to be accomplished with the public at each step of the planning/decision-making process*
- *Identify the stakeholders - internal and external*
- *Identify techniques to be used at each step in the process, taking into account the needs of various diverse populations*
- *Link the techniques in an integrated plan*

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

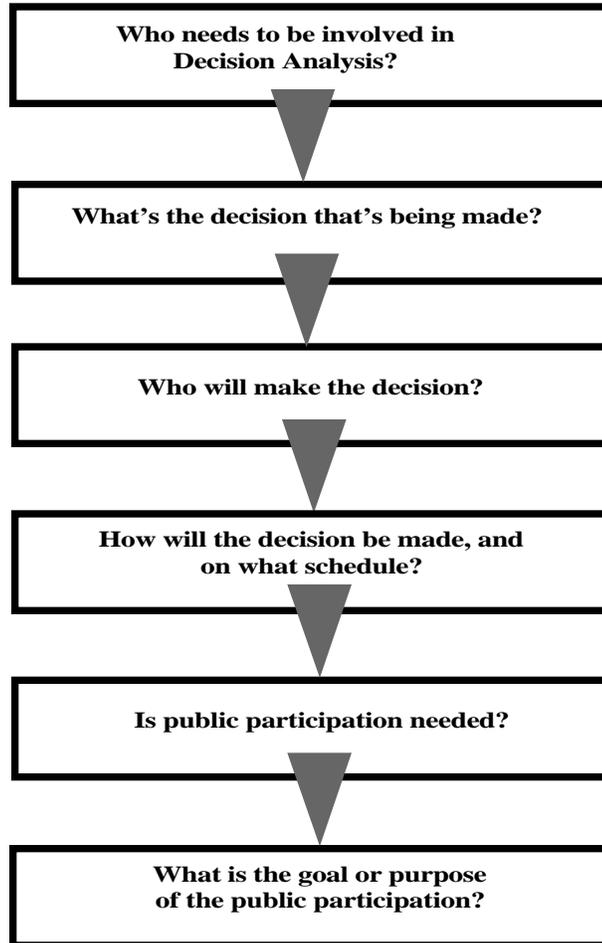
Plan the implementation of individual public participation activities

For example:

- *Develop a workshop agenda*
 - *Decide where meetings will be held*
 - *Decide who will make presentations*
-

Here are the questions being addressed during Decision Analysis:

Figure 2
DECISION ANALYSIS



Decision Analysis — Step One

Decide who needs to be involved in Decision Analysis.

Use the checklist below to identify those who should be included the planning team during Decision Analysis. People who may need to be included are:

- Individuals with program responsibility for the issue/decision, (e.g. program manager)*
 - People who understand how this decision links to other decisions (e.g. a senior manager or someone who oversees sitewide planning)*
 - People/organizational units that will be impacted by the decision or will be expected to implement the decision (e.g. other programs or operational units)*
 - People/organizational units who will be called on to assist with the public participation effort (e.g. public affairs, people who prepare environmental reports, legal counsel)*
 - People whose participation is needed for credibility (e.g. other agencies, members of a site advisory committee public participation subcommittee, key stakeholders)*
 - People with special expertise that will be needed to implement the public participation program (e.g. facilitators, writers, graphic artists, media relations).*
-

Decision Analysis - Step Two

Clarify who the decision maker will be.

Public participation programs are often implemented in the field even though the decision maker may be located at DOE headquarters or somewhere else in the organization. It is essential that the team implementing the program be able to consult with the decision maker during the planning of the public participation program.

If the decision maker is not actively involved in public participation planning, he/she may be more inclined to ignore the results of the public participation process and simply substitute his/her own judgment. This can leave those people who participated in the process feeling betrayed and used. The best strategy, if possible, is to involve the decision-maker in developing the public participation program. This will reduce the risk that he or she will disavow the process later on.

It may not be possible to have this individual actually participate in public participation planning sessions. If not, the following questions should be discussed with the decision maker:

- *What are the issues that the decision maker believes will be most controversial?*
- *Which stakeholder groups are most likely to exert influence at the HQ level?*
- *Whose participation in the process is essential for credibility?*
- *At what points does the decision maker want to be briefed on the interim results of the public participation process?*
- *What “constraints” does the decision maker believe need to be placed on the process?*

Decision makers often get their information about what the public feels on a second-hand basis, that is, they depend on staff to provide briefings or summaries. One of the problems with this is that decision makers do not always get the “intensity” — how strongly people feel — of the message. Have the decision maker participate in the process as much as possible, even if only as an listener, so that he/she experiences the intensity of public concerns first-hand.

Write a 1-2 sentence statement of the decision or issue being resolved .

**Decision Analysis
- Step Three**

Often different parts of the organization have different interpretations of what the decision is that is being made. These differences need to be openly discussed and resolved before going to the public.

Even when there is agreement on the problem definition, the decision may still not be stated — or “framed” — in a way the public can understand or relate to. Here are examples of problems with “framing” the decision:

- *Decisions are defined so narrowly that they ask a question that is not of interest to the public instead of a larger question of great interest, e.g. asking “What roads do we need?” instead of the much more interesting question “What’s the site going to be used for once cleanup is completed?”*
- *Decisions are asked in such a way that the public is asked to react to technical options rather than values choices, e.g. stakeholder are asked to comment on scores of individual remedial actions, each a separate decision, rather than larger questions such as: “Which remedial actions should be given priority?” or “Do all sites need to be cleaned up to the same level?”*

The public thinks in terms of values and priorities -- the larger questions of political philosophy -- not technical options. If it looks like the public is being asked to choose between options that differ only in technical details, they may choose not to participate or question why technical staff are not making the decision. The public finds it easier to participate if the choices are defined at a high-enough level that the different alternatives show the trade-offs between important values such as cost, safety, environmental or social impacts. If these trade-offs are not apparent to the public, then DOE needs to educate the public about the values decisions that underlie the technical options, or reconsider whether this is a decision that requires a public participation program.

Remember that both DOE and the public have time and resource constraints. The goal is to take those questions to the public that are of greatest interest to the public and which at the same time provide the most leverage for DOE technical programs, i.e. once resolved, the decisions made in consultation with the public will move the program forward in significant ways.

Decision Analysis - Step Four

Specify the steps in the planning or decision-making process and the schedule for each step.

In a large bureaucracy, "making a decision" is not a single moment in time, but an accumulation of many smaller decisions. There are decisions being made at every step in the decision process:

- *How the problem is defined*
- *The range of alternatives to be considered*
- *How the alternatives will be evaluated*
- *What mitigation options are considered*
- *The relative weight given to different values during selection*

The most frequent complaints about public participation programs are: (1) the public is involved too late in the process; and (2) there is no clear connection between the public participation process and the decision being made.

One way to answer these complaints is to ensure that the steps of the decision making process are well defined so it is possible to identify what role the public can or should play in each step.

In some cases, the decision making process has already been well defined when you begin public participation planning. In other cases it has not. If it is not well-defined, this is the time to do it.

On the next page is an example of what is meant by a decision-making process. It is simply a statement of the steps that will be gone through to make a decision, and a schedule for completion of these steps. Some decision making processes are simpler than this example. Others are much more complex. That depends entirely on the decision being made, and the approach being used to make that decision.

If it is hard to define the decision making process, remember that most decision making processes are an elaboration on these basic steps:

- *Define the problem*
- *Define evaluation criteria*
- *Identify alternatives*
- *Evaluate alternatives*
- *Decide on a course of action*

Whether it takes only five steps (or fifty) to accomplish these tasks, the basic progression usually remains the same.

Defining the Schedule

Once the steps in the decision making process have been defined, the next task is to define the schedule.

One strategy that planners recommend is to start at the “end point,” the conclusion of the process, then work backwards step by step. Often it will take several tries before it is possible to get all the steps in and still reach the end point on schedule.

One reason for starting at the end point is because it helps identify the “drivers” for the schedule. Examples of schedule drivers include:

- *Congress requires a report or action by a specified date*
- *The Secretary of Energy has publicly announced that a product will be completed by a certain date*
- *If a decision is not made by a certain date, the budget cycle will be missed and the program will be halted*
- *There is a legal or regulatory requirement to complete an action in a certain time*

Some of these “drivers” may be within the power of the DOE to change, but some may not.

Figure 3
EXAMPLE OF A
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1) | <i>Develop a problem statement and criteria for evaluating alternatives</i> | <i>May xxxx</i> |
| 2) | <i>Identify the values to be portrayed in the alternatives</i> | <i>July xxxx</i> |
| 3) | <i>Formulate preliminary alternatives.</i> | <i>Sept. xxxx</i> |
| 4) | <i>Evaluate preliminary alternatives.</i> | <i>Dec. xxxx</i> |
| 5) | <i>Present a comparison of conceptual alternatives.</i> | <i>Jan. xxxx</i> |
| 6) | <i>Select alternatives that should be considered in greater detail.
[This step may include combining alternatives or modifying alternatives to reduce unacceptable impacts].</i> | <i>April xxxx</i> |
| 7) | <i>Refine the criteria to be used in evaluating the detailed alternatives.</i> | <i>May xxxx</i> |
| 8) | <i>Formulate detailed alternatives.</i> | <i>Aug. xxxx</i> |
| 9) | <i>Evaluate the detailed alternatives.</i> | <i>Dec. xxxx</i> |
| 10) | <i>Present a comparison of the detailed alternatives.</i> | <i>Jan. xxxx</i> |
| 11) | <i>Select a preferred alternative.</i> | <i>April xxxx</i> |

Why does schedule matter for public participation programs?

As discussed earlier, one of the characteristics of effective public participation is that the public participation is an integrated part of the decision making process. This means that public participation activities must be carefully scheduled to ensure that the information from the public is available in a timely manner for each decision point. To do this, you will need to coordinate the public participation program with the other technical studies, e.g. engineering, cost or environmental studies. For example, there may be technical studies that need to be concluded so that the public can be given the information it needs (the results of those studies) to participate effectively. If the public's ideas are going to influence the decision, the public must be given the technical information in a timely manner, then the public's views must be obtained in a timely manner, to ensure that the public's ideas and concerns are considered by a certain date.

The schedule can have impacts beyond just the challenge of integrating the decision making process and the public participation process. For example, if the time frame is too short, the public may get the message that DOE is not serious about allowing enough time for genuine participation. This can undermine the credibility of the public participation process.

The schedule may also impact which public participation techniques can be used. There may be techniques DOE would like to use that simply can not be completed in the time available. This can force a switch to techniques that may not be as effective but can be completed in the time available.

Decision Analysis - Step Five

Identify institutional constraints and special circumstances that could influence the decision whether to conduct a public participation program.

The next step is to assess whether institutional constraints or special circumstances may affect the decision whether to conduct a public participation program.

Examples of institutional constraints or special circumstances include:

- *The agency is already committed to a particular decision/outcome*
- *There is opposition from within the organization to conducting public participation on this issue*
- *There are schedule or resource constraints*
- *There are constraints on release of information*

If the agency has already made a decision, then public participation may be a sham. Save public participation for times when the agency really wants it, needs it, and is willing to respond to the public's ideas.

There are times when there is enough internal resistance to conducting a public participation program that the public participation planning team may need to make a considered judgment about the risks of committing to a major program. If the opposition is too strong, the team could find itself undercut midway through the process.

Schedule or resource constraints may require the use of certain kinds of techniques, or may make it impossible to conduct effective public participation.

Although constraints on release of information have largely disappeared in DOE, occasionally there is still a situation where the public needs certain information in order to participate intelligently but that information has not yet been released.

Decide whether public participation is needed.

Decision Analysis - Step Six

Having completed the analysis above, you should now be in a position to make a decision about whether or not a public participation program is needed.

How can you decide which decisions justify public participation? Some sites consult with their site-specific advisory board (SSAB) to determine the priority that will be given to issues. This has the advantage of reducing criticism that DOE controls which issues get discussed.

Here are a few considerations:

- Does the decision fall within the jurisdiction of rules or regulations that require public/stakeholder participation?

Decisions that come under laws such as NEPA, CERCLA and RCRA are subject to the public participation requirements in those laws. This does not mean, though, that these requirements cannot be exceeded, or that a number of similar decisions covered under such laws could not be made part of a single large public participation process.

- Will the decision be controversial?

It's always hard to predict the level of controversy. There are some indicators, though. Issues are more likely to be controversial when:

- *the decision may have significant impacts*
- *the decision affects some people much more than others (i.e., there could be claims of inequity)*
- *the decision impacts an existing vested interest or use (i.e., people will have to give up something they think of as a "right")*
- *the decision ties into something else that is already controversial (e.g., anything related to nuclear power)*

- Does the decision involve trade-offs or weighing of one value (e.g. environmental protection or worker safety) in comparison with another (e.g., cost or security)

The public is usually happy to let agencies make purely technical decisions. But often decisions that are called technical are actually decisions about the relative weight or importance that should be given to one consideration or value over another. It is precisely these decisions about the relative weight or importance of various values that are the prime candidates for public participation.

- Does the decision need active support to be implemented?

There are times when the reason for involving the public in a decision is to get commitment or help in implementing the decision. This logic might apply to any decision that requires the active support of the public to be implemented. To use a non-DOE example, one way to get the public to commit to a recycling program would be to involve the public in deciding what kind of recycling program there should be.

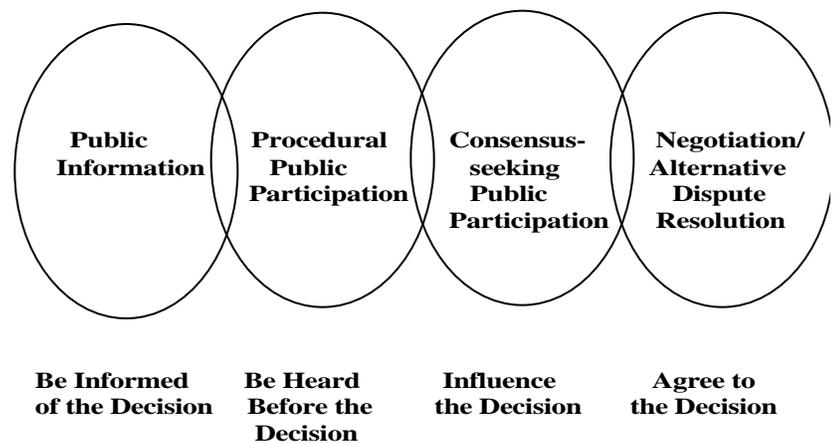
Decision Analysis - Step Seven

Determine the goal of any public participation process.

Once a decision has been made that some form of public participation is needed, the next question is: "What is the goal of the public participation program?"

The term "public participation" is used to describe very different kinds of involvement, as shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4
KINDS OF PARTICIPATION



- If the goal is to have a better informed public (but public comment is really not likely to influence the decision) it may be more appropriate to conduct a public information program. Remember, however, that a better informed public is not automatically a more supportive public.
- If the goal is to give the public the opportunity to be heard before a final decision is made, then it may be appropriate to conduct the kind of public participation programs that simply satisfies procedural requirements.
- If you need “support” or “consent” for a decision, then it is appropriate to use a consensus-seeking public participation program.
- If the situation is one where no decision can be made until the parties actually agree to the substance of the decision, then the situation requires negotiation or alternative dispute resolution. This goes somewhat beyond public participation. Full agreement usually requires:
 - *A negotiation process*
 - *A manageable number of parties*
 - *Well-defined parties*
 - *Parties able to make binding commitments or some external mechanism for binding the parties*

The appropriate level of public participation is the level that best matches the situation. Establish clear expectations within the agency and with the public about what the agency is trying to accomplish through the public participation program. Most problems arise when the public expects a higher level of involvement than the agency is willing to consider. The most important remedy for avoiding this kind of problem is for the agency to be clear with the public about what level of involvement the agency is actually seeking.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANNING

This is the second level of planning. This stage of planning concludes with preparation of a public participation plan that specifies the public participation techniques that will be used, as well as their sequence and timing.

The key questions that are answered while developing a public participation plan are shown in Figure 4 on the next page. More information on each step is provided below.

Public Participation Planning - Step One

Identify the planning team.

Since this level of planning is more detailed, the composition of the public participation planning team may need to be changed. Some of the senior managers who were needed for Decision Analysis may not be needed at this stage. But the team may need additional people with expertise in implementing public participation programs, such as meeting facilitators, writers, or media relations specialists.

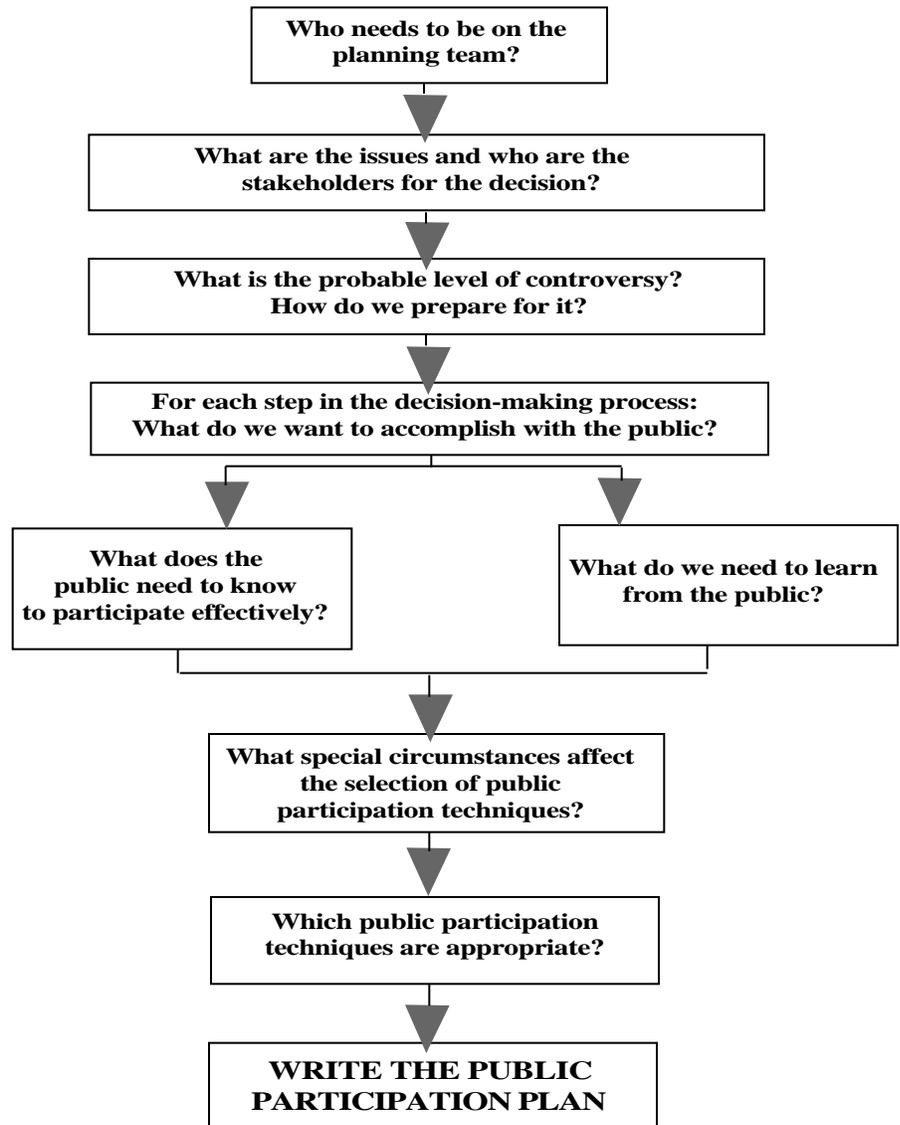
Public Participation Planning - Step Two

Identify issues and stakeholders

During this step the public participation planning team will identify the issues that are likely to emerge during the course of the public participation program, as well as the “stakeholders” who are most likely to be concerned with those issues. The lists are developed simultaneously because its easier to think about them that way: As the team thinks about issues it will find itself thinking of individuals and groups who are concerned about those issues. When the team thinks about stakeholders it will think of issues those stakeholders are bound to raise.

Who is a “stakeholder?” Simply put, stakeholders are people who perceive themselves as having a stake in the decision. This “stake” could be economics (e.g., people could receive some economic benefit or loss as a result of the decision being made), use (e.g., the decision could threaten an existing use of a valuable resource, or could make that resource available), mandate (e.g., agencies who have responsibility for land use, environmental cleanup, protection of fish and wildlife), proximity (e.g., people who could be impacted by air, soil or water pollution, or people who could be impacted by air, noise or traffic during construction), or values/philosophy (e.g., people with strong beliefs about the way the nation’s resources should be managed.)

Figure 5
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANNING



Remember that there are internal stakeholders (people or organizational units inside the agency) as well as external stakeholders. In fact, internal stakeholders often have as much or more impact upon decisions as external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders might include HQ staff, other program offices, procurement, people responsible for preparing environmental reports, legal counsel, public affairs, etc. — anybody whose responsibilities (policy, staffing, budget, compliance) could be affected by the decision. The public participation program needs to provide participation opportunities for stakeholders within the organization as well as those outside the organization.

What is the value of identifying issues and stakeholders? This step is preparation for the next step during which the team will estimate the probable level of controversy and plan for it. As the team looks at how many issues are likely to arise during the public participation program, what kind they are, and who cares about them, it will be able to assess how controversial this decision is likely to be. This will help the team determine how much public participation is required. Also, identifying the issues makes it easier to anticipate what information or studies need to be done to address these issues.

Another reason for identifying stakeholders is to begin to think about who has to be reached during the public participation program. Public participation programs are more effective if they are targeted at those individuals and groups that have an interest in the issues likely to arise during the course of making a particular decision. Some decisions may be of interest to twenty people, others to a cast of thousands. “The public” is different for each decision. The real challenge in designing public participation programs is to design a program appropriate to the particular groups interested in a particular decision.

Once stakeholders have been identified, go one step further and think about what level of participation each significant stakeholder will have. Not all stakeholders will participate the same way. One stakeholder group may see the outcome of an issue as having burning importance. Another group may see the issue as just one of many upon which it has an opinion. This difference in intensity of interest is often reflected in how the stakeholders will participate. One group might commit a tremendous amount of time to participate, while the other might just make perfunctory comments. Some stakeholders may insist on being at the table when the decision is made, while others want just to be heard before the decision.

One way to categorize the different levels of participation is: co-decision maker, active participant, technical reviewer, commenter, and observer:

Co-Decision Maker

A regulator, such as EPA or a state regulator, may be an actual co-decision maker, e.g. someone who sits at the table as a full participant in decisions both about the process and the substantive decisions. A “co-decision maker” must actually “agree” for decisions to count.

Active Participant

Other groups, such as an environmental group, may be “active participants.” They may make recommendations that will be seriously considered, but the decision maker reserves the right to make the final decision, and the environmental group (or any other active participant) reserves the right to criticize the final decision.

Technical Reviewer

Technical reviewers look at the manner in which the technical studies are conducted and appraise the adequacy of the studies. They may have considerable impact on how the studies are done, but they normally do not second guess the decision itself. In effect, technical reviewers are the equivalent to active participants, but confined to study approach and methodology.

Commenter

These are individuals or group who may “comment” by speaking at a meeting or by sending a letter, but will not participate in all the activities and are unwilling to make the time commitment to participate in something such as a site-specific advisory group.

Observer

These individuals or groups read the newspaper articles about the process, or read any public information document, but unless they become very concerned they may not express themselves. They are, however, an important part of public opinion.

While it is important to know something about observers or commenters and provide them with the information they need to choose whether to participate, it is particularly important to be clear on who the co-decision maker(s), active participants and technical reviewers are for any issue.

Here is an example of the kind of analysis a team might make for an individual project:

Example: Levels of Participation

	Technical Reviewers (Influence the Process)	Active Participant (Influence the Decision)	Co-Decision Maker (Agree to the decision)
External Stakeholders:			
EPA			x
National Academy Committee	x		
Sierra Club		x	
Internal Stakeholders:			
Public Affairs Office		x	
HQ - Program Office A			x
HQ - Program Office B	x		

Assess the level of controversy and develop a plan to anticipate potentially controversial issues.**Public Participation Planning - Step Three**

The next step is to assess the level of controversy. Even people who are highly experienced in public participation get taken by surprise. Something that seems like it should be highly controversial may not generate much interest, while something that seems quite bland may become a battleground.

There is no magic way to predict controversy, but there are indicators of probable controversy. The most basic indicator of controversy, of course, is the significance of the impacts. For example, if people are going to be re-located, if there will be emissions or discharges to the environment, if there will be major impacts on employment, or if weapons production will begin again, you can count on considerable controversy.

There are other indicators. Issues that might by themselves seem relatively uncontroversial can become highly controversial if:

- There has been a prior controversy on the same issue, (e.g. controversy over prior actions)
- If the issue ties-in to another major issue over which there is continuing controversy or a power struggle, (e.g., nuclear power or weapons production).
- If the issue touches on local political topics such as land use or economic development that are the basis for political debate within the community
- If this issue is the total reason for existence of stakeholder groups

Sometimes people within the public participation planning team will know the stakeholders well enough to make an informed judgment as to how intense their interest will be. On occasion, though, the only way to assess the potential for controversy is to meet with stakeholders and discuss their interest in the issue and their suggestions for what kind of participation is appropriate. These interviews or small group meetings can play an important role in developing a successful public participation plan.

Developing an Issue Management plan

When groups raise issues and DOE is not prepared for those issues, the agency is put in a reactive mode. Stakeholder groups can make claims or predictions about the issue that the agency cannot address or refute because the agency has not done the studies or developed the policy needed to respond in an informed manner. Sometimes these claims can become fixed in the public's mind and may not even change once the technical or scientific studies are completed.

One way to minimize these problems is to develop an Issue Management Plan. The idea behind developing an Issue Management plan is to become proactive. The Plan outlines the steps DOE needs to take to ensure the agency is prepared to address the issue on an informed basis.

To develop an Issue Management Plan ask the following questions for each issue:

- *Are there studies or research that need to be conducted to answer questions about this issue?*
- *Are there policy decisions that must be made to be able to answer questions about this issue?*
- *What publications or other information products are needed to answer questions about this issue?*

It takes time to conduct studies, develop policies, or prepare information documents. An Issue Management Plan should list the tasks, completion schedule and responsibilities to ensure that this information will be available when it is needed during the decision-making process.

Example of an Issue Management Plan

ISSUE: Is Technology A sufficiently proven to go into production?	RESPONSIBILITY	COMPLETION
Studies that must be completed before this issue can be resolved: <i>Peer review of test results</i> <i>Transportation studies</i>	XXXXX XXXXX	5/10/XX 7/5/XX
Policy decisions that must be made before this issue can be resolved: <i>Regulatory permit process</i> <i>Waste form criteria for permanent repository storage</i>	XXXXX XXXXX	8/1/XX 8/1/XX
Informational materials that need to be developed to address this issue: <i>Informational bulletin describing the technology in language suitable for the general public</i> <i>Summary of test results in language suitable for the general public</i>	XXXXX XXXXX	12/1/XX 12/1/XX
Other actions needed: <i>Complete the contracting arrangements for communications support</i>	XXXXX	7/15/XX

Public Participation Planning - Step Four

Identify the public participation objectives for each step in the decision-making process.

During this step, identify exactly what it is that needs to be accomplished with the public during each step in the decision-making process.

The steps in the decision-making process were identified during the Decision Analysis step. Revisit these steps now to be certain they are still appropriate, but otherwise just bring these steps forward and develop one or more public participation objectives for each step.

To develop public participation objectives, simply ask: "What do we have to have done with the public by the end of this step?" Then write an objective that describes the completion of that task. For example, if the decision making process followed the five generic decision making steps discussed earlier, then the public participation objectives might look like those at the bottom of the page.

Remember that objectives often specify what level of participation is required. For example:

- *Inform the public about possible options*
- *Obtain public comment on a list of options*
- *Have a dialogue on the range of alternatives to be considered*
- *Get agreement on the range of alternatives to be considered*

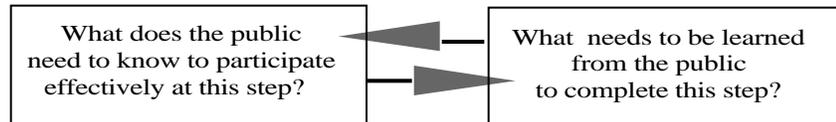
Step in Decision Making	Generic Public Participation Objective(s)
Define the problem	Obtain a complete identification and understanding of how the problem(s) is viewed by all significant interests Identify the level of public interest in the issue
Establish evaluation criteria	Identify a complete list of possible criteria for evaluating alternatives Agree on evaluation criteria
Identify alternatives	Develop a complete shopping list of all possible alternative actions
Evaluate alternatives	Develop a complete understanding of the impacts of the various alternatives, as viewed by the public Assess the relative merit assigned to alternatives by various interests
Select a course of action	Determine which alternative would be the most acceptable

Analyze the exchange of information that must take place to achieve the public participation objectives.

Public Participation Planning - Step Five

For each of the public participation objectives there is an exchange of information with the public that must take place.

For each step in the decision-making process:



Unlike all the previous steps, this analysis may be more easily completed by one person than the whole planning team. Experience shows that this step gets tedious when done in a team. It is a lot easier for one person to do this step individually, then have the team review it.

Here is an example of what this analysis might look like for one objective:

Example: Public Participation Objective #1:

Obtain a complete identification and understanding of how the problem is viewed by all significant interests.

Information exchange

From agency to stakeholders

- The nature of the study and decision-making process
- What the agency knows about the problem or issue
- Opportunities for participation

From stakeholders to agency

- How different groups see the problem
- How the problem affects different stakeholders
- The intensity of the impacts
- Which parts of the public see themselves as affected

Complete this same kind of analysis for each public participation objective.

Public Participation Planning - Step Six

Identify special circumstances that could affect the selection of public participation techniques.

During this step, consider whether there are special circumstances that may affect which public participation techniques are used. Examples of special circumstances to consider are:

- *Cultural/ethnic sensitivities (e.g. if most impacted people are from a single cultural/ethnic minority),*
- *Interest of national stakeholders (e.g., if most interested stakeholders are in Washington D.C., not near the site)*
- *Distance (e.g., if interested stakeholders are scattered over a large area geographically)*
- *Issue is connected politically to other issues (i.e., if it may be difficult to keep this issue distinct from other controversial issues)*
- *Level of interest (i.e., if people are outraged or apathetic)*
- *Political sensitivities (e.g., if key political figures have positions or reputations to defend related to this issue)*

Public Participation Planning - Step Seven

Select specific public participation techniques.

The goal of all the preceding analysis has been to provide the information needed to decide what public participation techniques to use. The following information should now be available:

- *Exactly what needs to be accomplished with the public at each step in the decision-making process and by what point in the decision-making process (time and sequence) this must be accomplished*
- *How the agency will use the information it receives, e.g. will it help determine the range of alternatives being considered, or help choose between alternatives*
- *Who the key stakeholders are likely to be, and what level of participation they will likely require*
- *What information needs to be provided TO the public, and obtained FROM the public to achieve your public participation objectives.*
- *Any special circumstances that influence the choice of techniques*

The next step is to select techniques that will achieve the public participation objectives. Below is a list of frequently used public participation techniques, followed by guidelines on how to select techniques.

Public Participation Techniques

This list is divided into techniques for getting information TO the public (one-way), getting it FROM the public (one-way) and EXCHANGING information (interaction between the agency and the public).

Information-providing techniques

- Briefings
- Exhibits/Displays
- Feature stories
- Information repositories
- Mailings containing technical reports/environmental reports
- News conferences
- Newsletters
- Newspaper inserts
- News releases
- Press kits
- Public service announcements
- Speaker's bureau
- Web sites (DOE and site-specific)

Information-gathering techniques

- Focus groups
- Mail-in response forms (including in advertisements, inserts or newsletters)
- Plebiscite
- Polls, surveys, questionnaires

Interaction/Information exchange techniques

- Advisory groups/task forces
- Hotlines
- Interviews
- Open houses
- Participatory television/cable television
- Public hearings
- Paid advertisements
- Public meetings
- Retreats
- Workshops

Guidelines for Selecting Public Participation Techniques

1) A public participation program often uses a number of different techniques all at the same time to ensure that stakeholders can participate at their own level of interest.

Here's an example of possible techniques that might be used to work with stakeholders with different levels of interest:

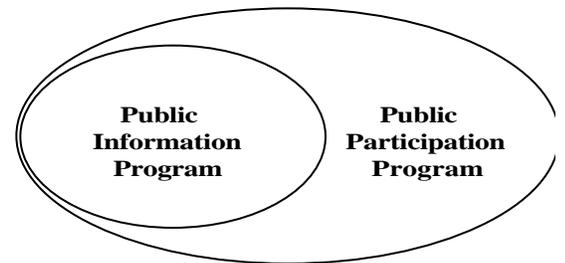
TYPE OF STAKEHOLDER	POSSIBLE TECHNIQUE
Co-decision Maker	Negotiation session
Active participant	Workshop or advisory committee
Technical reviewer	Peer review panel
Commenter	Public meeting or workshop
Observer	Newsletter or information bulletin
General public	News release

2) An apparently simple straight-forward technique, like running a series of public workshops, may require the integration of a number of techniques.

Example: To conduct a workshop may require:

- *conducting prior briefings of elected officials*
- *sending a newsletter to potential participants*
- *placing paid meeting announcements in the media*
- *preparing a workshop summary*

3) Inside every good public participation program is a good public information program — good public information is a necessary precondition if the public is to participate effectively.



4) Use interactive techniques in preference to formal meetings.

Examples of interactive techniques include:

- *workshops*
- *coffee klatches*
- *large group/small group format meetings*
- *interviews*
- *one-on-one or small group meetings*

If you must use a formal meeting:

- *Be sure it comes at the conclusion of the public participation process, and is not the first and only opportunity to participate.*
- *Consider providing other mechanisms for participation alongside the meeting; e.g., open houses, phone-in comments, etc.*
- *Use interactive meeting formats to make it less formal.*

5) During any period during which DOE is doing internal studies and there are few visible public participation activities, find mechanisms -- such as newsletters or briefings -- to maintain visibility and a sense of continuity.

6) Close the loop — every time somebody participates, acknowledge it and tell participants what you're going to do with their ideas.

7) Show people the connections between their participation and the outcomes: "What we asked was this; you said this; this is what we did with what you said."

Putting the activities in a sequence

To develop a complete public participation program the techniques that have been selected need to be put together in a coordinated sequence. Each activity should be accompanied by an assignment of responsibility (the person whose job it is to make that step occur) and a completion date.

Here is an example of what a sequential plan of action looks like for just one step in the decision making process.

Step in the Decision Making Process:	Public Participation Activities	Responsibility	Completion
Problem Definition	Prepare draft project brochure	XXXXXXXX	5/1/XX
	Obtain approvals for project brochure	XXXXXXXXXX	6/1/XX
	Conduct briefings for key agency and elected officials	XXXXXXXX	7/1/XX
	Conduct interviews with selected stakeholders	XXXX	8/15/XX
	Prepare draft Newsletter #1	XX XXXXXXXX	8/15/XX
	Obtain approvals for Newsletter #1	XXXXXX	9/15/XX
	Identify meeting sites for scoping meetings	XXXXXXXX	9/15/XX
	Publish Federal Register notice of scoping meetings	XXXX	10/1/XX
	Mail scoping meeting invitations to stakeholders	XXXXXX	10/15/XX

Write the public participation plan

Public Participation Planning - Step Eight

The final step is to actually write out a public participation plan.

Why bother to write it out?

- Writing the plan forces clarity of thought
- Writing the plan serves as a basis for getting the commitment of internal stakeholders
- People will relinquish authority to a plan that they won't relinquish to another part of the organization (e.g., people will carry out tasks in a plan that they might never get around to if asked by another part of the organization)
- The plan can be shared with external stakeholders

The plan should contain the following information:

- Plan purpose and contents - introductory overview
- Vision, goals, and objectives
- Assumptions made in planning process - explicitly stated
- Community profile - identifying the "public"
- Chronology of community involvement (can be an appendix to the plan)
- Description of key community concerns
- Public participation program description: framework and design, forums and processes, workshops, comment periods, how feedback will be provided, identify internal and external communication flows, and self evaluation mechanisms
- Organization and resources: specific roles and responsibilities, planning and coordination framework; resources and training needed to ensure effective implementation
- Appendices:
 - *Schedule of planned public participation activities*
 - *Site & facilities description (e.g. maps, demographics, geography)*
 - *List of participants*
 - *Locations of scheduled public meetings*

CONCLUSION

There is no “cookie-cutter” public participation plan that will fit every decision or issue. There is no public participation technique that will work in all circumstances.

When people talk about highly successful public participation programs they are talking about programs where the techniques matched the purpose of the program, reached the interested stakeholders, and resulted in a clear linkage between the public participation process and the decision-making process.

This guide provides the framework by which all DOE teams can achieve this kind of success.