

Introduction to Stakeholder Participation



Social Science Tools for Coastal Programs

Introduction to Stakeholder Participation

About This Publication

Some of the most challenging decisions in coastal management stem from the relationship between people and the environment. NOAA provides technical assistance to coastal management professionals addressing complex human-based problems. This publication, “Introduction to Stakeholder Participation,” is the second in a series of guides developed to bring information to this audience about the use of social science tools in their field of work. For more information, or to obtain additional copies, contact our office at *coastal.info@noaa.gov*.

NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management

“Coastal management” is the term used by communities and organizations striving to keep the nation’s coasts safe from storms, rich in natural resources, and economically strong. The national lead for these efforts is NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management, an organization devoted to partnerships, science, and good policy. This agency, housed within the National Ocean Service, oversees major initiatives that include the National Coastal Zone Management Program, Coral Reef Conservation Program, Digital Coast, and National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

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Introduction

The public's attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge can have a profound effect on the success of coastal resource management. While science can serve as a rational foundation for management, in many cases it is those groups impacted by resource management decisions that decide how acceptable a decision is and influence how effective management will be. Peoples' experiences and culture, understanding of an issue, and support of an agency can each shape their support for and compliance with coastal resource management decisions and policies.

Over the past several decades, traditional top-down, agency-driven decision-making in natural resource management has generally moved toward processes that involve stakeholders (those who have an interest in or are affected by a decision) and acknowledge the importance of public attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge. Stakeholder participation has become a fundamental component of many state and local agencies' operations, and federal legislation such as the Coastal Zone Management Act, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) mandates public participation in some form. Although there is no universally effective way to incorporate stakeholders, researchers and practitioners generally agree that stakeholder participation is important and has many benefits. Specifically, involving stakeholders in natural resource management decisions can accomplish the following:

- Produce better outcomes or decisions
- Garner public support for agencies and their decisions
- Bring to light important local knowledge about natural resources
- Increase public understanding of natural resource issues or management decisions
- Reduce or resolve conflicts between stakeholders
- Ensure implementation of new programs or policies
- Increase compliance with natural resource laws and regulations
- Help agencies understand flaws in existing management strategies
- Create new relationships among stakeholders

Of course, stakeholder participation can also pose challenges. Involving stakeholders can be costly, time-consuming, labor-intensive, and confrontational, and can ultimately delay decision-making. Additionally, if improperly managed, stakeholder participation can create new conflicts or escalate existing ones.

This document briefly examines several important aspects of stakeholder participation. While little consensus exists on stakeholder participation methods and procedures, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach, this guide presents a set of procedural elements common to many effective stakeholder participation projects and programs. Additionally, the document provides guidance on identifying coastal management stakeholders, describes some of the most commonly used techniques for stakeholder participation, and discusses evaluation of stakeholder participation.

When Is Stakeholder Participation Needed?

It isn't always clear when stakeholders should be brought into a decision-making process because every case is different. Obviously, minor decisions and emergency situations are generally not appropriate for stakeholder participation. Complex situations with far-reaching impacts, however, generally warrant stakeholder involvement and are the focus of this document. Also, stakeholder participation done proactively, rather than in response to a problem, can help to avoid problems in the future.

Consider collaborating with stakeholders when

- Proactive engagement can help to avoid problems
- A problem has been clearly identified
- The best course of action is complex or not apparent
- Support of stakeholders is necessary for the decision to be successful
- Many parties are affected by the decision
- No single agency has clear or complete jurisdiction
- No single agency has the resources or expertise to make and implement a decision
- Issues and solutions are negotiable
- Parties are willing to collaborate

(Adapted from NOAA Office for Coastal Management 2012)

Other authors (Meffe and others 2002) propose four criteria for deciding when stakeholder participation is needed. They suggest that public participation be supported for management actions that are

- Special, rather than routine—for example, development of a new statewide coastal conservation plan would require involvement, but maintenance of existing conserved sites would not.
- Major, rather than incremental—for example, significant revisions to coastal dock permitting standards would call for involvement, but a gradual shift from paper-based dock applications to an electronic application system would not.
- Required of the public, rather than voluntary—for example, development of regulations on wetland and shorefront buffers would call for participation, but development and distribution of educational guides on effective buffer vegetation would not.
- Controversial, rather than unanimous—for example, development of new regulations on beach stabilization structures would require extensive involvement, but raising fines for beach littering would not.

Conversely, the time and resources needed for stakeholder participation mean that these methods may not be feasible, effective, or beneficial for all situations. A judgment on whether to employ stakeholder participation may be necessary when

- Critical information on this issue is not available
- Quick action is required, given a mandated deadline or timeline
- Basic values or principles are the focus of the problem
- Legal clarification is needed
- Extreme polarization prohibits face-to-face discussion
- There is no stakeholder concern over the issue

(Adapted from NOAA Office for Coastal Management 2012)

Characteristics of the issue at hand and the stakeholders involved will ultimately determine whether participation is needed. If you determine that stakeholders will need to be a part of the decision-making, the following section will help you to identify and understand the stakeholders in your coastal issue.

Identifying Stakeholders

Practitioners of stakeholder participation will jokingly define a stakeholder as “anybody who wants to be.” There is much truth to this broad definition. Stakeholders are generally those who have an interest in or are affected by a decision. Stakeholders are also those who have influence or power in a situation. Stakeholders’ interests in an issue can be monetary, professional, personal, or cultural, or can arise from a host of other motivations.

But knowing what a stakeholder *is* doesn’t always help you to identify the stakeholders for a given issue or resource. For example, broadly identifying stakeholders in the health of the nation’s coasts is particularly formidable because of the seemingly endless list of people who use coastal resources, either directly or indirectly. The resident surfer who visits the beach every morning, the family who vacations at the beach every year, the workers at a bustling port, and the millions of Americans who eat seafood each have their own unique interests in how the coasts are managed.

Identifying stakeholders is sometimes described as the first step in a stakeholder analysis, discussed in the next section. The following table is one of many tools available to help brainstorm stakeholders for natural resource issues. The table describes five categories into which most stakeholders will fit and provides examples of each.

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Table 1: Categories of Stakeholders

Stakeholder Category	Description	Examples
People who live, work, play, or worship at or near a resource	Those whose everyday lives and well-being are directly connected to a resource or issue. This group is essentially made up of the “neighbors” of the issue, and they should be invited to participate because their everyday lives may be impacted.	Residents, resource users, businesses, community/civic organizations, interest groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government, Native American tribes, and the media
People interested in the resource, its users, its use, or its non-use	Those who assign values to a resource and are concerned about the way that resources are used. This group includes those who extract value from resources, as well as those more interested in conserving or protecting resources. This group should be invited to participate because of the sheer interest in the resource or issue.	Businesses, resource users, interest groups and NGOs, community/civic organizations, government, and Native American tribes
People interested in the processes used to make decisions	Those deeply interested in the legal and procedural aspects of an issue. This group includes those who want to ensure that all relevant policies and procedures are observed in reaching a decision. They should be involved because of their attention to procedural detail and their ability to derail a process or litigate final decisions.	Interest groups and NGOs, government, the media, residents, and Native American tribes
People who pay the bills	Those whose money is directly or indirectly used to fund resource management through taxes, fees, and other means. This group wants to ensure that money is spent wisely and should be invited to participate because the government is accountable for how it spends public dollars.	Residents, resource users, businesses, and government
People who represent citizens or are legally responsible for public resources	Those who have the legal authority and obligation to manage natural resources. Members of this group want to ensure the best final decision is reached and should be invited to participate because it is their duty.	Government

(Source: Meffe and others 2002)

Stakeholder Analysis

Most stakeholders fall into more than one of the categories described in the previous section, so it is important to avoid stereotyping them. Stereotyping stakeholders risks associating them with groups or viewpoints with which they are not comfortable, and potentially alienating them from the process. A cursory stakeholder analysis can be invaluable to help better understand those participating in the process. Additionally, stakeholder analysis can help to answer some of the finer questions surrounding your participatory process, such as what meeting methods should I use, what time and day of the week should I schedule a meeting, and are there stakeholders who cannot interact well with one another? The following list is a sample of questions that can be important in a basic stakeholder analysis:

A cursory stakeholder analysis can be invaluable to help better understand those participating in the process.

- What are the basic characteristics of the stakeholder (name, contact information, affiliation, position, scope of influence, likely degree of involvement)?
- Is the stakeholder representing any organized groups? If so, what are the characteristics of those groups (mission, membership, key contacts, history, authority, scope of influence, likely degree of involvement)?
- What is the stakeholder's position on the issue (e.g., in favor of permit issuance or opposed to permit issuance)?
- What are the stakeholder's interests in the issue (e.g., improving water quality, preserving aesthetics, increasing property value)?

There are many ways to collect data for a stakeholder analysis. Secondary information sources such as Web sites, newspapers, public records, organizational publications, reports of other decision-making processes, and a host of other written materials can provide a great deal of information about groups and individuals. Additionally, individuals who are thoroughly familiar with local social and political landscapes may be able to provide information on stakeholders. Of course direct communication with stakeholders through interviews, surveys, attendance of stakeholder functions, or other data collection methods may yield the most accurate and in-depth stakeholder analysis.

Key Features and Process Elements of Stakeholder Participation

As stressed earlier in this guide, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to involving stakeholders in natural resource management. The issue at hand, the stakeholders, geography, schedules and time frames, and agency capabilities are just some of the factors that determine whether, how, and when stakeholder participation should be solicited. Nonetheless, after the appropriate stakeholders have been identified and invited to participate, there are multiple process elements that if recognized and addressed can help ensure a successful process.

There are many frameworks available that propose process elements important to successful stakeholder participation. The following framework first appeared in a 2005 academic journal as the result of an extensive literature review on natural resource management processes in the U.S. The framework was originally proposed in the context of planning of U.S. marine protected areas (MPAs) but has since been applied to broader coastal and marine resource management scenarios.

Table 2: Features and Process Elements of Successful Participatory Processes

Features	Process Elements
Active participant involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for involvement • Early involvement • Motivated participants • Influence over the final decision
Decisions based on complete information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best available information exchange • Constructive dialogue • Adequate analysis
Fair decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Representative participation
Efficient administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-effective • Accessible • Limited influence of sponsor
Positive participant interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive social conditions • Constructive personal behavior • Social learning

(Source: Dalton 2005)

Active participant involvement—when stakeholders are merely consulted in a process or are simply informed of a decision, there is a much greater chance of stakeholder discontent with the process and outcome. Stakeholders should be actively and meaningfully involved in a deliberation; their input should inform final decisions, and in some cases they can help design and guide the decision-making process itself and can help to implement final decisions. Four specific elements of active participant involvement warrant special attention:

- Opportunity for input—give stakeholders ample opportunity to voice their knowledge, experience, perceptions, and ideas.
- Early involvement—bring stakeholders into the process at the earliest feasible stage, which may be during the design of the process itself.
- Motivated participants—enthusiastic and interested participants will contribute the most to a process, so try to identify those motivated individuals in your stakeholder groups.
- Influence over the final decision—ensure that stakeholder input truly has a bearing on final decisions and process outcomes.

Decisions based on complete information—although some stakeholders will undoubtedly come to the table with a deep understanding of specific facets of an issue, it is unlikely that anyone will have complete information on the overall issue and about the other stakeholders in the room. Sponsors of participation should ensure that all critical issues and stakeholder concerns are brought to light and addressed through the process. Three elements of this are particularly important:

- Best available information exchange—make the best available information on the issue and on other stakeholders available to all participants. The information should be accurate, relevant, and well organized.
- Constructive dialogue—design the process so that exchange of best available information is multidirectional. Rather than having process sponsors or facilitators only present the information, allow for dialogue, discussion, and personal interaction among participants.
- Adequate analysis—recognizing that individuals communicate and interpret things in different ways, allow participants the opportunity to analyze information and form opinions as they engage with others in the group.

Fair decision-making—fairness is a critical component of stakeholder participation. When participants believe that a decision has been fairly deliberated and that all stakeholders have been given an equal voice, they're more likely to support the outcome of the process even if they had hoped for a different outcome. Two elements of fair decision-making are especially influential in the success of participatory processes:

- **Transparency**—clearly explain the structure of the participatory process, how stakeholder input will be used, and the degree to which stakeholder input will influence final decisions. Transparent processes can alleviate participant suspicions about government agencies and other stakeholders, and alleviating these suspicions can be especially helpful in contentious situations.
- **Representative participation**—ensure that all the diverse stakeholder groups and viewpoints in a community are given the opportunity to participate. Stakeholder groups that are omitted from a participant list can derail a process after much time and work have been invested. It's also important to choose representatives or spokespeople who truly represent the stakeholder groups to which they belong.

Efficient administration—running an effective stakeholder participation process can be difficult, time-consuming, and costly. Efficient administration by the sponsoring agency or organization is necessary to ensure that the process is successful and sustainable. Three elements of efficient administration are especially relevant:

- **Cost effectiveness**—consider both cost and desired outcome when designing a participatory process. Remember that a cheaper design will not always yield the results you want, but an overly costly process may not be necessary, sustainable, or politically acceptable.
- **Accessible**—recognize that those participating are likely sacrificing time away from their home or work. Host the process at a central and accessible site, and provide all the necessary materials and support to avoid wasting participants' time. Remember that different participation methods, times, and scales may be necessary, depending on stakeholders' characteristics and preferences.
- **Limited influence of sponsoring agency**—aside from administering and supporting the process, minimize the influence of the process sponsor. By taking a "back seat," sponsors can demonstrate that participants truly are guiding the decision-making and that the process is not biased.

Positive participant interaction—managing the way that participants interact with one another can be critical because for some stakeholders, a single bad experience can alienate them from the process. Coastal management can often be a contentious or

confrontational realm, but if anticipated and controlled, this tension can be transformed into positive interactions and can foster progress. In contentious situations, it can be extremely helpful to have participants focus on their interests rather than their positions. Interests are stakeholders' underlying needs or concerns on an issue, for example, maintaining water quality or preserving scenic views. Positions are ways that stakeholders choose to protect their interests, for example, opposing issuance of a permit, or supporting increased regulation of a resource. Stakeholders' positions are not always the best or the only way to protect their interests. Trained facilitators can be critical to fostering the following key components of positive participant interactions and can help participants focus more on their interests than their positions.

- Positive social conditions—design the process so that participants can build new relationships and maintain or repair existing ones. This can influence the success of current as well as future participatory processes because stakeholders who have a good experience are more likely to participate in additional decision-making processes.
- Constructive personal behavior—request that all participants exhibit constructive personal behaviors or follow ground rules (which the participants themselves can be asked to develop). Respect, honesty, openness, dedication to the process goal, team spirit, and trust among participants will help to build relationships and foster better outcomes.
- Social learning—foster social learning, in which participants come to a greater understanding of the issue and other participants' viewpoints in a group setting. This type of learning is achieved through group problem-solving, and it may help participants focus less on their individual positions.

Stakeholder Participation in Practice

The Continuum of Stakeholder Influence

For decades, experts have envisioned the many methods for stakeholder participation on a continuum, where the level of stakeholder power or influence varies. On one end of the continuum, stakeholders are not meaningfully involved and are merely informed of an agency decision or action. On the other end of the continuum, stakeholders are the primary decision-makers and play a role in implementing their own decisions. In between these two situations lie many of the more complex and commonplace participatory designs used by agencies today. Real-world situations call for a great variety of participatory process designs, but the following figure offers a simplified description of the continuum of stakeholder influence.

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Table 3: Simplified Continuum of Stakeholder Influence

Agency-controlled		Stakeholder-controlled	
1	2	3	4
Agency has authority, makes the decision, and then informs stakeholders.	Agency gathers input from stakeholders before deciding.	Stakeholders decide and recommend actions for agency to take.	Stakeholders decide to act and then implement.

(Adapted from Bens 2005)

No matter where your process may fall on the continuum, managing stakeholder expectations of the process can be critical. When conducting a participatory process, the sponsoring agency must clearly explain from the outset how much influence participants have and exactly how participant input will be used in decision-making. Differing perceptions between participants and sponsoring agencies on participant control of the outcome can lead to poor public acceptance of the outcome and loss of public support for the agency.

Stakeholder Participation Methods

There are many methods and techniques for gathering stakeholder input on a topic, bringing stakeholders together for dialogue, and helping stakeholder groups make decisions. The Institute for Participatory Management and Planning actually identifies over 70 community participation techniques! But again, choosing the appropriate method depends largely on the issue and the stakeholders.

One key aspect of involving stakeholders in coastal resource management is disseminating information to those groups. Public notices, fact sheets, newsletters, and especially Web sites have become standard practice for distributing information to stakeholders. Though disseminating information is an important part of the participation equation, it is not the focus of this document. This document focuses on gathering input from stakeholders and fostering exchange of information among managers and stakeholders. The following table describes some of the most commonly used techniques for gathering and exchanging information. It's critical to note that many of the most successful participatory programs use a combination of techniques to meet stakeholders' needs and to ensure an inclusive and accessible process.

The Institute for Participatory Management and Planning actually identifies over 70 community participation techniques!

Table 4: Common Stakeholder Participation Techniques

Method	Description
Advisory group/ task force	Small group of people representing various interests that is set up to advise an agency on programs or actions. Advisory groups can be multi-year or indefinite arrangements, while task forces usually complete a single task and then disband.
Charrette	Intense, multi-day effort to design something or solve a problem. There are multiple versions of the charrette, most of which include a design team that attempts to translate public input into a form that could be implemented, for example, a new policy, zoning regulations, or building design.
Field trip	Trip to specific location organized so that participants can match their mental images to real, on-the-ground conditions. Participants may be asked to express their reactions verbally or in writing.
Focus group	Small discussion group led by a facilitator who draws out in-depth stakeholder input on specific questions. Normally, several focus groups are held, and participants can be chosen randomly or to approximate a subset of the community.
Hotline	Widely advertised telephone number that directs callers to someone in an agency who can answer caller questions and collect input.
Internet	Dialogue between agencies and stakeholders using Internet technology such as chatrooms, on-line bulletin boards, e-mail, and Web conferencing.
Interview	Face-to-face or telephone interaction with stakeholders conducted by the agency or by a third-party representative.
Large group/small group meeting	After an opening presentation, the group is broken into smaller groups to discuss an issue or complete a specific task. Summaries of small group discussions and an open comment period may follow.
Open house	Event in which the public is invited to drop in at any time during an announced period. Event includes staffed booths or stations on specific topics and may precede a public meeting.
Poll or survey	Written or oral lists of questions to solicit community impressions about issues at a specific moment in time. Polls and surveys can be administered in person, or via the telephone or Internet.
Public hearing	Formal, single meeting where stakeholders present official statements and positions, and those ideas are recorded into a formal record for delivery to the agency.
Public meeting	A large public comment meeting where the participants stay together throughout the meeting and make comments to the entire audience. Public meetings are less formal than a public hearing. Public meeting may also be used as a blanket term to describe many of the meetings described in this table.
Referendum	A direct vote by the whole electorate on its support of specific proposals or courses of action. Referendums should be preceded by public participation so that the options before voters are credible.
Retreat	A concentrated yet informal meeting away from the typical work setting that emphasizes social interaction as well as discussion of issues.
Town meeting	A less formal public hearing where all stakeholders have the opportunity to speak and may vote on an issue.
Workshop	Small stakeholder gathering, typically fewer than 25 people, designed to complete a specific assignment in a short time period.

(Adapted from Creighton 2005)

There are many additional innovative techniques for stakeholder participation. For especially complex or contentious situations, it may be wise to consult a professional with great experience in participatory processes and meeting design. And as mentioned earlier in this guide, having a professional facilitator present at participatory events can be critical to maintaining a positive social atmosphere and keeping participants on task.

Evaluation of Stakeholder Participation

Evaluation of stakeholder participation is perhaps even less clearly prescribed than participation itself.

Evaluation of stakeholder participation is perhaps even less clearly prescribed than participation itself. Because of the widely varying goals of stakeholder participation projects, desires of process participants, and potential outcomes of the process, there is no single consensus approach to evaluating the success of stakeholder participation. Nonetheless, researchers and practitioners have offered many sets of criteria to evaluate participatory processes. These criteria generally fall into two categories:

- Process criteria, which relate to the strength of process elements in a stakeholder participation process
- Outcome criteria, which relate to the outcomes or results of stakeholder participation

Process criteria are useful for identifying procedural components that may be weak, missing, or absolutely critical in a process. Process criteria can be devised from whatever set of process elements or best practices you'll refer to in your effort. For example, the process elements described in Table 2 of this document could be used in evaluation. Evaluation using process criteria can be conducted during the process to make mid-course adjustments or can be conducted when the process is over to improve on future projects and glean important lessons. In many cases, it may be useful to involve the participants in this type of evaluation. Participants may have special insight on how well a process element was addressed or how important that element was to the outcome of the process.

Evaluation of stakeholder participation using outcome criteria can help determine whether a process has achieved the desired short- and long-term outcomes. Of course, using outcome criteria depends completely on identifying the process goals and objectives early on, as you are designing the process. Processes can be evaluated on whether they have achieved short-term objectives, such as clearly defining the options in a coastal resource issue, reaching stakeholder consensus on a contentious issue, or developing an action plan or other tangible product. Processes can also be evaluated on achievement of longer-term

objectives and goals, such as improving the condition of a resource, increasing compliance with rules and regulations, and garnering public support for government agencies. As with evaluation using process criteria, consultation with stakeholders may be helpful in outcome-based evaluation of stakeholder participation.

Summary

Ultimately, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach for gathering stakeholder input and incorporating that information into the decision-making process. Additionally, one must assess the situation, the stakeholders, and one’s own capabilities to determine whether, how, and when stakeholder participation should be undertaken. There are clearly cases when stakeholder input is absolutely necessary, and there are times when conducting stakeholder participation requires a judgment call. For situations where stakeholder participation is the right route, bear in mind the key process elements outlined in this document. Additionally, examine the great variety of techniques available for public participation and choose those that will be most effective and efficient in reaching your goals.

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Appendix A: Guide to Common Stakeholder Participation Techniques

Method	Advantages	Limitations
Advisory group/ task force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides for interaction between agency and full spectrum of community opinion • Creates forum for interaction between groups themselves • Good forum for creating consensus • Group members become knowledgeable and make informed recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections for group members must be credible to public • Group activity must be linked to real decisions • Requires much staff time and support • Public doesn't automatically accept group recommendations as representative of larger public • Disputes over group's mandate can develop
Charrette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solves problem or creates product within specific time frame • Public typically has visual alternatives on which to provide input • Repetitive exercises during course of charrette help to build consensus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a great deal of planning • Requires a highly skilled and unbiased design team • Time commitment calls for highly motivated and interested participants
Field trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often allows for personal interaction and team-building • Helps participants gain better understanding of resources and issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of participant group is typically limited • May be difficult to systematically collect participant input
Focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful in assessing emotional and other qualitative factors • Cheaper and yields greater depth data than surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No claims can be made about statistical accuracy • Public may have false perceptions about how focus group data are used • Cannot substitute for more visible forms of participation
Hotline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that callers reach a knowledgeable person and get good information • Can be used for coordination purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness depends on person answering phone • Staff must be thoroughly prepared to provide information quickly
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows widespread access to resources on issues • Allows for participation from geographically broad audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not everyone has access to the Internet • Training may be required to use some technologies • Technology may be unreliable • Technology is still developing
Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide more in-depth information than any other method • People provide more information in private than they will in public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • The number of interviews possible is usually limited by time • Skilled interviewers are required • Interview responses are not visible to the rest of the public
Large group/ small group meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides great interaction despite large group size • Participants can solve problems or complete tasks • Produces greater enthusiasm than other large meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group may resist breaking into smaller groups • Logistics of smaller break-out groups can be cumbersome • Organized groups may dominate some small groups

Method	Advantages	Limitations
Open house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows one-on-one interaction between stakeholders and agency • Can be designed so that participants can provide written comments • Event design is highly flexible and can be made formal or informal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants may not hear the views and opinions of others • May be difficult to systematically collect participant input • Does not give stakeholder groups an audience to address
Poll or survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to assess opinions of broader public • Results can be described and presented quantitatively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires trained staff to conduct process • Faulty methods can yield misleading results • Only provides results for a particular moment in time—results may change in near future • Potentially high costs
Public hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants can have their comments recorded verbatim • Highly transparent; all participants can hear what others say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May result in speeches rather than discussion of issues • Does not provide for interaction • Can be manipulated or controlled by organized groups
Public meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be less formal than a public hearing • Participants can have their comments recorded (usually not verbatim) • Typically more interactive than public hearing • Highly transparent; all participants can hear what others say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May result in speeches rather than discussion of issues • May contribute to polarization of parties • Can be manipulated or controlled by organized groups
Referendum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widely accepted as legitimate expression of public sentiment • Allows for inclusion of all stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voters may be swayed by emotional appeals • May not be legally binding in some communities until changes in law are made
Retreat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful in building relationships between individuals • Could help break impasse • Effective for consensus-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially expensive • Participants must have significant time to commit • Public may criticize use of taxpayer funds for a retreat
Town meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater interaction and less formality than public hearing • Provides for much interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May contribute to exaggerated or fixed positions • May not provide venue for problem solving
Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective for problem solving or completing a task • Highly interactive • Useful for producing agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits number of participants that can be involved • Those with fixed positions may resent workshop process

(Adapted from Creighton 2005)



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