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FACILITATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Facilitators, with their experience of working with people, process planning, and facilitating decision-making processes, bring valuable skills and knowledge to the public participation process. Facilitators can help the client organization consider the most appropriate approaches, ensure they have thought through each aspect, and get the result expected and needed. The facilitator may also be directly involved in the interactions with the public. In this role they can ensure that the views and ideas of all are heard and considered. As a facilitator without a "stake" in the outcome, you bring objectivity to the process and the ability to concentrate on obtaining quality input. Understanding the public participation process is key to meeting the expectations of the client organization and the public.



Defining Public Participation

"Public participation is a process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into decision-making. Public participation is two-way communication, with the overall goal of better decisions, supported by the public". The two-way flow may be through informal or formal approaches which systematically collect ideas and information. The public's views are collected in order to have grassroots input into policies and programs. The process provides an environment in which both the public and government can learn of different perspectives on issues and proposals while providing the opportunity for the public to influence decision. Consultations seek to obtain all relevant information in order to evaluate the available options and their related consequences, and to provide an objectively balanced perspective for decision-making. Consultation is a part of the decision-making process, not a substitute for it.

Principles of Public Participation

- Clear communication of expectations and outcomes
- Transparent--a clear and mutual understanding of both the purpose and process of the consultation
- Trust--ensuring good communication and constructive working relationships
- Honesty--in providing facts and views
- Openness--to new ideas and view points
- Mutual respect for the legitimacy and points of view of all participants
- Inclusiveness in enabling individuals and communities to participate in the process
- Responsibility to participate in good faith and to account to consultation participants on the outcomes of the consultation

- Timeliness to ensure that input from participants can be used effectively throughout the process

• Why?	• Benefits	• Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify issues • To make decisions • To generate ideas • To build consensus • To increase understanding • To evaluation products and services • Mandated process • To take into consideration the public's views and priorities • To improve the quality and effectiveness of decisions • To enhance the public's understand of issues and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the degree of agreement or disagreement between different points of view • Increases the probability of delivering a publicly understood decision on complex issues • Ensures decisions are more reflective of the priorities and needs of Canadians • Education of all involved through the transfer of knowledge and the creation of common information bases • Promotes 2-way communication • Utilizes the expertise and broader experience and skills in the development of policies, legislation, programs and services • May lead to more informed and widely-accepted decisions that provide for more responsive and balanced solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danger of people assuming that what they said will be the final decision • Conflicting opinions of people passionate on topic may make for an energy charged exchange

Link between Facilitation and Public Participation Methods

Facilitators bring the knowledge and experience of working with a wide variety of people to the public participation process. The skills of helping people express their ideas and views are



fundamental to the public participation process. Facilitators can bring clarity to the planning and communication process involved in every public participation process. They can also build understanding within the team planning the public participation process by working towards:

- consensus on the best approach,
- ensuring the process is well thought through,
- people take responsibility for various aspects of the process,
- communication within the team and decision makers that clarifies expectations.

Each step of the entire public participation process can use the skills of a facilitator. (see below)

The facilitator's knowledge of processes that allow people to discuss topics and issues in an open, creative and accepting manner is valuable throughout the design process and the actual event(s). The facilitator brings the experience of working with groups and people with an end product in mind. Finding the right mix of processes and approaches to meet the needs of the organization, while honouring the participants' expectations is a role of the facilitator. The ability to reassure participants and manage interactions can be invaluable, particularly when the topic or issue is one which people are passionate about.

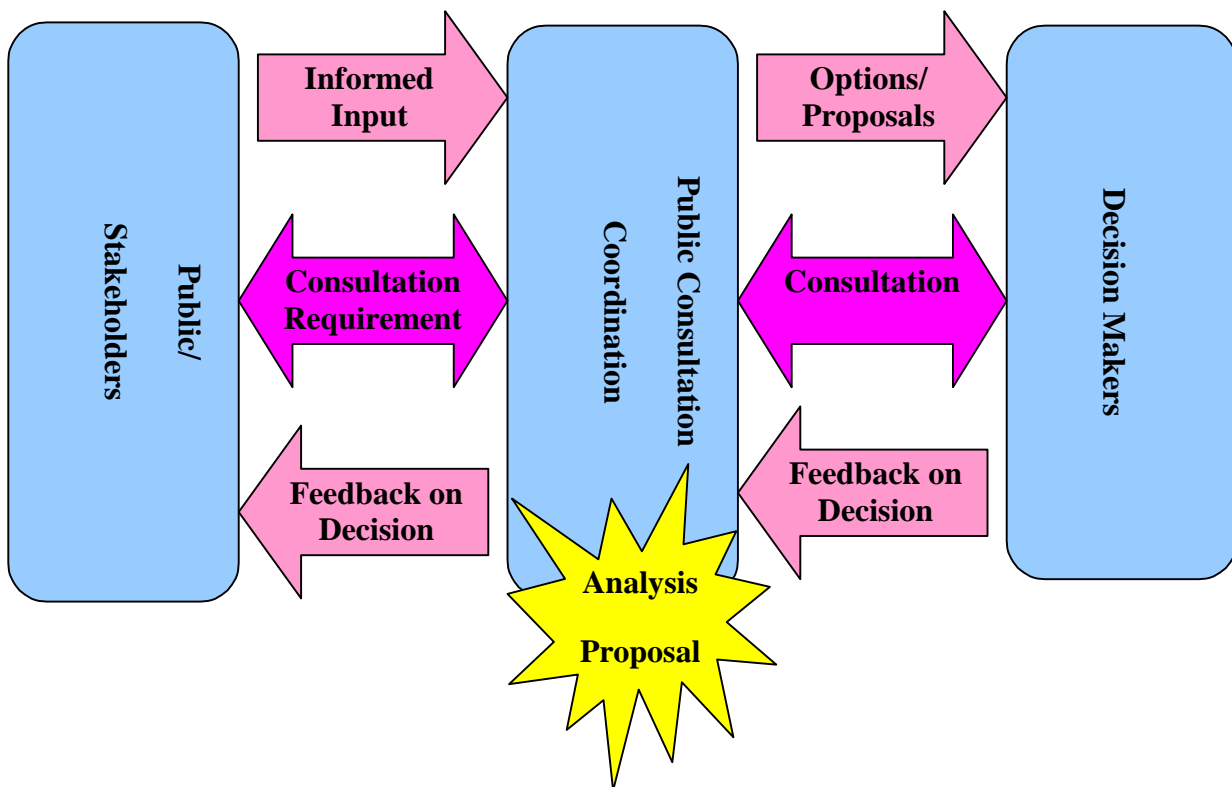
Facilitators can bring innovative approaches to the public participation process. Although there are traditional approaches and sometimes legislated processes, the facilitator can structure them in such a way to maximize the input of the public, or introduce new approaches. The principles of facilitation and public participation processes are very similar. For example, ensuring the views of all are heard is a principle both hold in common. As a person who is, at least to some degree, separate from the issue or topic being discussed, the facilitator's role is to concentrate on obtaining meaningful interaction between the public and organization. When the

topic or issue which is emotional or something that people have strong feelings about, the facilitator will use the skills of managing the interaction of individuals.

To summarize, the facilitator adds value to the planning process and during the interaction with the public. The following diagram shows each of the steps in the process. At each step the facilitator can work with all parties towards ensuring the information and views gathered are focused on the information required while facilitating an exchange of information.

The Public Consultation Framework¹

Experience, as with most things, is the best teacher. The following chart captures some



of the key success factors at each stage of the public participation process.



Public Consultation Phases, Tasks, and Key Success Factors	
<u>Tasks</u>	<u>Key Success Factors</u>
<u>Phase 1-Design</u>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze situation 2. Identify decision making process 3. Create strategy 4. Identify stakeholders 5. Select and schedule activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that consultation has clarity of purpose, mandate and desired outcomes • Ensure that appropriate resources are allocated • Identify participants in accordance to purpose and desired outcomes (including the report back to decision makers) • Ensure that the timing of the consultation allows participants sufficient time to consult with colleagues, share their views, learn from each other, and understand different positions • Create the right mix of mechanism/processes. It may be necessary to provide for more than one mode of participation. Consult in a manner appropriate for participants eg. Location, timing, setting
<u>Phase 2 -- Consultation</u>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform public 2. Consult public 3. Analyze input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate efforts with others to avoid burdening participants • Monitor results and adjust accordingly • Ensure a method of accurately and completely capturing participants views • Draft results
<u>Phase 3: Feedback</u>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence decisions 2. Feedback results 3. Evaluate process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an ongoing dialogue with those consulted and inform them of the consultation findings and impacts on proposed policy, legislation, regulation and program changes • Evaluate and report on consultations • Disseminate best practices, methods and tools

A facilitator needs to be familiar with approaches that are commonly used for public participation processes. There are new processes that the facilitator can bring to the process, while recognizing that the organization may be used to and more comfortable with traditional approaches. The skills and knowledge of facilitators can be readily applied to the public participation process.

Traditional Public Participation Approaches Requiring Greater and Lesser Degrees of facilitation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open houses • Public meetings • Workshops • Public advisory/liaison committees • Toll-free numbers • Discussion paper • Calls for submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted briefings • Public seminars • Site visits • Monitoring committee • Public hearing • Informal communications • Internet based processes
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ⁱ Public Consultation Guide, Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy, 1994