

DEQ Public Participation

Public participation at DEQ means an exchange of ideas, concerns, information or preferences related to decisions that are going to be made about the environment. DEQ knows that involving the public in decisions can bring important benefits from the public, such as:

- Better decisions, more perspectives, and increased knowledge of the public on whose behalf the decisions are being made.
- More lasting commitment to implementation.
- Greater support for government policies, programs or projects.
- Independent action by individuals and groups to accomplish program purposes.

Core Values of Public Participation

Public participation is based on the premise that:

- People should have input about decisions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
- The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
- The public participation process involves participants and how their input was or was not utilized.
- The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Guiding Principles in Public Participation

Encourage public participation in all aspects of environmental decision making. Communities, including all stakeholders, and DEQ should be seen as equal partners in dialogue on environmental issues. In order to build successful partnerships, interactions must:

- Encourage active community participation.
- Institutionalize public participation.

- Recognize community knowledge.
- Utilize cross-cultural formats and exchanges.
- Maintain honesty and integrity and articulate goals, expectations and limitations.

Critical Elements in Public Participation

Preparation

Developing, co-sponsoring and co-planning relationships with community organizations is essential to successful community meetings. To ensure a successful meeting, DEQ should provide co-sponsors and should share all planning roles. These roles include:

- Decision making.
- Development of the agenda.
- Establishment of clear goals.
- Leadership.
- Outreach.
- Educating the community to allow equal participation and provide a means to influence decision making.
- Regionalizing materials to ensure cultural sensitivity and relevance.
- Providing a facilitator who is sensitive and trained in environmental issues.

Participants

The following stakeholders should be involved in decision making about environmental issues:

- Community and neighborhood groups.
- Government agencies (federal, state, county, local and tribal).
- Environmental organizations.
- Industry and business.
- Community service organizations.
- Educational institutions and academia.

Identify key stakeholders, including:

- Affected communities.
- Policy and decision makers.
- Educational institutions.

Logistics



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Where

- Meetings should be accessible to all who wish to attend (public transportation, child care and access for the disabled should be considered).
- The meeting must be held in an adequate facility (size of the audience must be considered).
- Technologies should be used to allow more effective communication (teleconferences, adequate translation, equipment and other factors should be considered).

When

- The time of day and year of the meeting should accommodate the needs of affected communities (evening and weekend meetings accommodate working people and careful scheduling can avoid conflicts with other community or cultural events).

How

- An atmosphere of equal participation must be created (avoid using a "panel" or "head table").
- A two-day meeting, at a minimum, is suggested. The first day should be reserved for community planning and education.
- The community and the government should share leadership and presentation assignments.

Mechanics

- Maintain clear goals by referring to the agenda, however, do not be bound by it.
- Incorporate cross-cultural exchanges in the presentation of information and the meeting agenda.
- Provide a professional facilitator who is sensitive to and trained in environmental issues.
- Provide a timeline that describes how the meeting fits into the overall agenda of the issues at hand.
- Coordinate follow-up by developing an action plan and determining the contact person who will expedite the work products from the meeting.

Distribute minutes and a list of action items to facilitate follow-up.



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