

U.S ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION VIDEO
TRAINING PROGRAM**

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

MODULE 3.
**SETTING GOALS FOR
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**



**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

GUIDE

Engage the public. Preserve the planet.

Introduction

Begin with the end in mind.

— Stephen Covey

The most important step in any public participation project is establishing clear and achievable goals regarding the public's role in the project and their potential for influence on the decision.

Sections in Module 3:

- 3.1: Not all Public Participation is the Same
- 3.2: Be Clear About Your Intent
- 3.3: The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum
- 3.4: The Five Levels of Public Participation
- 3.5: Selecting a Level of Public Participation

SECTION 3.1:

Not all Public Participation is the Same

There are numerous levels at which you might wish to invite public participation. We decide how much public participation may be appropriate based on the details of the project, the stakeholders who may be affected, and the types of the decisions to be made.

To identify the appropriate level of public participation for your project, you must first answer the following question:

How much potential influence on the decision are you willing to provide to the public?

In other words, you need to know ahead of time whether decision-makers will even consider public input in making their decisions, and if so, to what degree and on what issues.

The answer to this question will determine the purpose and goals of the public participation program you will design and is very important to the ability to have a successful participation project.

In this module we present the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum which helps to identify and make sense of the different levels of public participation.

In Module 5, we present a flowchart that will be useful in understanding your intent and matching that to an appropriate level of public participation.



GROUP DISCUSSION

Clarifying the Level of Potential Public Influence

How much influence is your agency generally willing to provide to the public in decisions that are important to them?

How much influence does public input generally have on your projects?

Is the potential for public influence on a decision something you discuss before the project begins?

Why is it important to have this discussion?

SECTION 3.2: Be Clear About Your Intent

Before you begin any public participation program, you need to be clear about what you are hoping to gain from public participation and what the public can expect from you as they participate. Most important, of course, is their potential influence on the decision itself.

When we communicate with the public about our projects and their role, they will be looking for clues about whether and to what degree their participation will matter. We often refer to these messages as our “Promise to the Public.”

It is not uncommon for agencies to promise the public far more potential influence than is likely or even possible. In general, this is not done on purpose, but rather due to a lack of understanding or careful consideration of the role of the public at the conception of the project.

The risks of not clarifying the public’s role are significant.

If stakeholders perceive they will have significant input to and influence on a decision, but ultimately they do not, then they will be dissatisfied with the outcome of the process, regardless of how much public participation activity may have occurred.

The number of activities, the expense, and the time that an agency devotes to public participation does not automatically translate to the value of that participation to the agency or to stakeholders.

More important, the level of effort put forth in the public participation program does not automatically reflect the potential for actual public influence on the decision. We will discuss this further when we talk about public participation design.

In public participation, a great deal of time, effort, and resources can easily be expended on the wrong pursuits, in turn leading to negative results. If we ask for input on something where it turns out that public input can have no impact, then we have essentially wasted their time and ours, and the public will feel a sense of anger at having been misled.

This is particularly true when you follow a prescribed set of activities in a law or regulation without first establishing a clear role for the public.

For example, we are often faced with the requirement to obtain public input to a proposed decision. Furthermore, we can be directed by law or regulation to hold a public meeting or public hearing, so we do. However, if that meeting does not have a legitimate role in decision making and public input does not really have the opportunity to help shape the outcome, again

the public will react negatively. Not only are they frustrated with this process, but the overall credibility of the agency is harmed.

To help us create clear expectations, the role for the public should be defined in two specific statements:

- 1. The Public Participation Goal.**

The goal of the public participation project describes the agency's intent with regard to engaging the public in the project and is used to make sure that common expectations across the project team and within the entire sponsor agency are established and maintained.

- 2. The Promise to the Public.**

Every public participation program results in a promise to the public regarding the level of their potential influence on the outcome of the project and what they can expect from the sponsor agency. Promises should be clear, explicit, written public statements in order to create common expectations among all stakeholders.

In both cases, we articulate these statements to establish clear and realistic expectations to those stakeholders who are potentially involved in the project.



GROUP DISCUSSION

The Importance of a Goal Statement and The Promise to The Public

Why is it important to articulate these two statements separately?

How are we doing in setting clear goals for our organizations, and clear expectations to our stakeholders?

SECTION 3.3: The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Agencies around the world have designed and used a wide variety of tools to assist in the selection of the appropriate level of public participation and determine the goals and promise to the public. One of the most popular and easy-to-use tool designed by The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

International standard.

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

In fact, the US EPA used the IAP2 Spectrum as the model for its own tool.

The IAP2 Spectrum is organized around the principle that public participation is directly tied to the level of potential public influence on the decision or action being considered. This potential influence can vary anywhere from none at all to total. The spectrum is designed to understand the key levels that should be considered within these extremes for designing a public participation program.

The IAP2 Spectrum is organized around

the concept of the public's *potential* influence

It is important to recognize that we are only talking about *potential* influence and we are not making explicit promises about how public input will actually be able to shape the decision. In few cases can you promise the exact nature of the public's ultimate influence. How public input is used is generally not apparent until the end of a well-implemented program, when full consideration is given to the input received.

You can, however, conduct thoughtful planning to fully understand the dynamics of the project, the desired and likely nature of public input, and the opportunities to address public concerns, values, and interests. The agency then must take this input seriously in making its decision.

Five levels of public participation are described on the Spectrum ranging from no influence (Inform) to total influence (Empower). In between are three levels of participation with increasing levels of potential public influence on the decision. Under each level, the spectrum provides an example goal statement and example promise to the public.

The IAP2 Spectrum is a guide to help you articulate your specific goals and promises for public participation

The goal statements on the spectrum are intended to provide generic guidance and are not expected to be used exactly as written. As you approach each new project, you should give careful thought to identifying the specific goals that apply to your conditions, opportunities, constraints, and stakeholders.

As with the goal statements, the example promise statements on the spectrum are intended to provide generic guidance and are not expected to be used exactly as written. You should always give careful thought to creating promise statements that fit the conditions, circumstances, and stakeholders for that project.

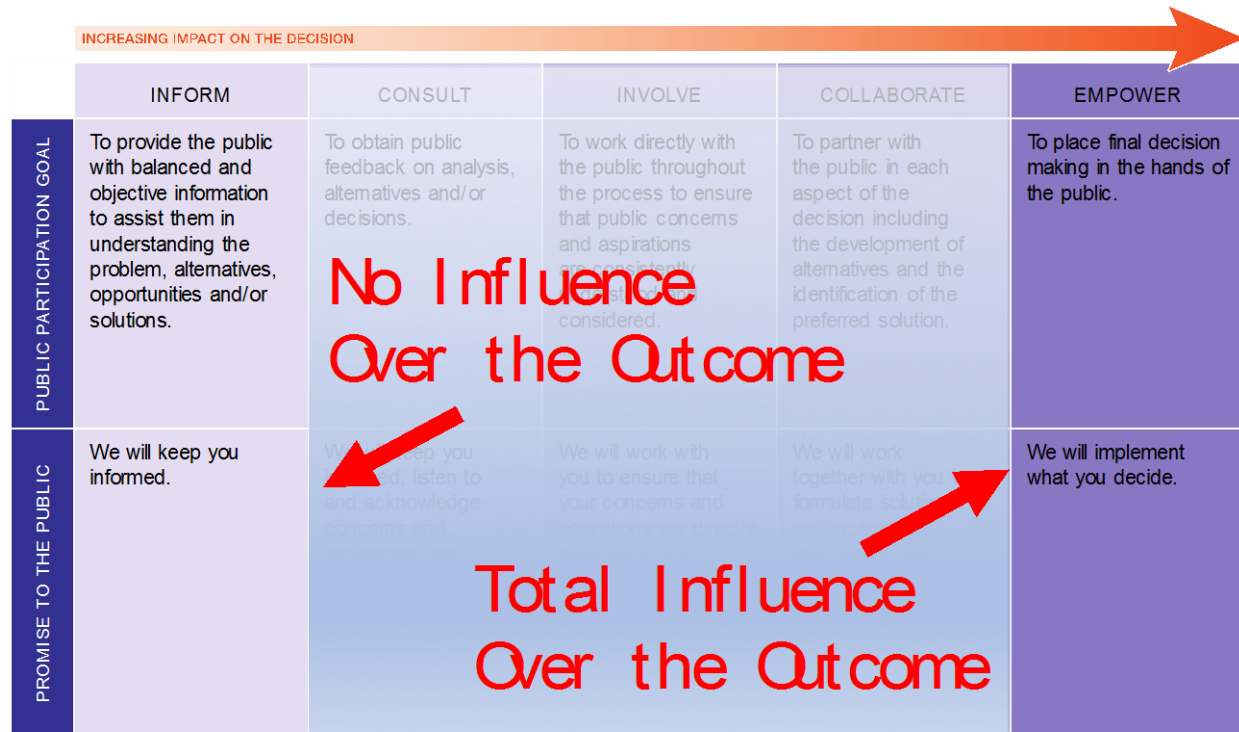
SECTION 3.4: The Five Levels of Public Participation

The two ends of the spectrum define the extreme levels of potential public influence, from no opportunity to influence (the inform level) to total influence over the outcome (the empower level). These two levels of public participation work to frame the spectrum, but are not actually where most agencies conduct public participation.

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM



The IAP2 Federation has developed the Spectrum to help groups define the public's role in any public participation process. The IAP2 Spectrum is quickly becoming an international standard.



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The first column in the Spectrum is the inform level. At this level, there is no real opportunity for public influence, so we do not actually even obtain public input. However, it is there to remind us that sometimes we don't have the opportunity or it is not appropriate to get public input. In such cases, we still have an obligation to provide good information to the public. It also reminds us that regardless of the level of public participation, good information forms the foundation of all interaction with stakeholders.

INFORM	
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.

The **Inform level** of public participation does not actually provide the opportunity for public participation at all, but rather provides the public with the information they need to understand the agency decision-making process. This level is on the spectrum to remind agencies that sometimes there is no opportunity for the public to influence decision-making and simply informing them is the appropriate activity. When you conduct the “inform” level of public participation, it is important to recognize that you are not trying to persuade or manipulate the public in any way. The inform level is not the same as a public relations campaign. Rather, the inform level of public participation requires the agency to serve as an honest broker of information, giving the public with the information that they need to fully understand the project and decision and to reach their own conclusions as to the appropriateness and adequacy of the decision.

The fifth column on the far right-hand side of the spectrum is the empower level. At empower, public input is used directly to make the decision, such as in a ballot process. This represents a level of influence that government agencies rarely provide to the public. In fact, most agencies are not legally permitted to hand over their decision authority.

EMPOWER	
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will implement what you decide.

At the **Empower level** of public participation, agencies provide the public with the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. The most common activities at this level are public voting or ballots, but there are other techniques available as well. Government agencies rarely conduct public participation at the empower level. In general, agencies are not permitted to delegate their decision authority to the public, and creating a fair, legitimate, and inclusive process for empowerment beyond basic voting is complex and challenging. Basic voting by itself often fails to create the level of public knowledge and broad range of public input that is needed for meaningful public participation because the parties involved generally use persuasion to get voters to agree to one position or another and the issue is simplified into very narrow range of solutions.

Thus, it is in the middle three levels where most public participation occurs: *consult, involve, and collaborate.*

CONSULT	
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.

The **Consult** level of public participation is the basic minimum opportunity for public input to a decision. *Consult simply means to ask.* There is no invitation to sit down together and work on things in any cooperative way. The agency merely asks the public for their ideas, opinions or reactions, and considers the input it receives as it makes the decision. At consult, agencies generally ask for input at a limited number set points (often only once) in the process and do not provide an ongoing opportunity for input.

- **The public participation goal at the consult level** is to obtain and consider public input.
- **The promise to the public at the consult level** is to consider the public input received and to provide feedback as to how that input influenced the decision.

INVOLVE	
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

The **Involve** level of public participation is more than a consultation. *To involve means to include.* At the involve level, the public is invited into the process, usually from the beginning, and is provided multiple, sometimes ongoing opportunities for input as decision-making progresses. However, the agency is still the decision-maker and there is no expectation of building consensus or providing the public with any sort of high-level influence over the decision.

- **The public participation goal at the involve level** is to work directly with the public and consider their input throughout the decision-making process.
- **The promise to the public at the involve level** is that the public will have access to the decision process and decision makers, and they will be provided the opportunity to give input throughout the process and receive direct feedback on how their input helped to influence the decision.

COLLABORATE		<p>The Collaborate level of public participation includes all the elements of involve and usually adds some level of seeking common ground. <i>To collaborate means to work together</i>. At the collaborate level, the public is directly engaged in decision-making. Collaborate often includes the explicit attempt to find consensus solutions. However, as at involve, the agency is still the ultimate decision-maker. The degree to which consensus will be sought and how much decision authority the agency is willing to share must be made explicit. In the end, the agency will either use any consensus that was achieved or consider all input received in making its decision. Collaboration level programs are time-consuming and resource intensive and should not be entered into lightly. If stakeholders do reach consensus and this is not given serious consideration by the sponsoring agency, it can have serious negative consequences on the project and on future relationships with stakeholders.</p>
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	<p>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.</p>	
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	<p>We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</p>	

- **The public participation goal at the collaborate level** must consider a process that seeks effective partnering with the public on some or all aspects of the decision.
- **The promise to the public at the collaborate level** is that the public will be fully engaged in all key activities and decisions, and their input will be incorporated to the maximum extent possible. Consensus is often pursued but not automatically included at the collaborate level; the degree to which consensus will be sought should be an explicit part of the promise.

SECTION 3.5:

Selecting a Level of Public Participation

The level of public participation that you select for your project or decision is generally defined by the most intensive, or highest, level of public participation that you will perform on the project. However, you will also be conducting public participation at all of the levels of the spectrum beneath that highest level. This is because stakeholders will choose the level of public participation at which they want to participate and not all stakeholders will want to engage at the highest level of public participation that is available.

**The higher the level of participation,
the more effort required by both the agency
and its stakeholders**

Lower levels, particularly inform and consult, can accommodate many stakeholders as we use tools such as mass media and on-line engagement that allow stakeholders to participate without attending meetings or workshops. Higher levels of participation require more effort on the part of both agencies and stakeholders to design more in-depth learning programs and efforts to engage stakeholders in dialogue. These higher levels of participation generally attract fewer stakeholders who are able to provide that level of effort.

A robust collaboration project, for example, involves consensus-seeking and is often limited to a representative group of stakeholders involved in long-term processes, such as long-term advisory boards where participants meet regularly and spend a great deal of time and effort to learn about the project and discuss choices and their ramifications. Watch the video on The Passaic River Community Advisory Board in the EPA Guide to understand how powerful such programs can be.

**Regardless of the level of participation you choose,
it is important to think about how all stakeholders
may choose to participate**

Though you may be at the collaboration level, the members of the advisory group should never be the only stakeholders that are engaged in the project. At the same time, many additional stakeholders may be engaged in the project at the involve level, attending public workshops and events, and even more stakeholders at the consult level providing input through letters or the internet. Still, more stakeholders may choose to engage at the inform level, keeping track of the project through media or neighbors, but offering no direct input.

Thus, a single project can actually be operating at many different levels of public participation. Don't worry though, this does not mean that you have to design four different projects, just make sure that you work to make the information available and create opportunities for all interested stakeholders. Stakeholders will choose to access and get involved in different ways and at different levels that suit their levels of interest and time. This broader input is essential to understanding your full community and serve as further input to the advisory board or other collaborative activities.

The level of public participation you choose is essential to establishing clear expectations for your stakeholders. It also defines all of the information you will produce and all of the activities you will plan for in engaging your community.

We will talk more about this and how it is incorporated into our design for public participation in Module 5.



GROUP EXERCISE

Using the IAP2 Spectrum

Think about a project you are currently conducting or have recently completed where you considered obtaining public input. Talk about the following:

- What is the purpose of the project?
- What are the potential impacts on the public?
- What are the likely concerns of the public?
- What are the key stakeholders who will be interested?
- Have we considered and paid attention to vulnerable populations and marginalized communities?
- How could public input help us to make a better decision?
- In what ways would public input actually be considered in decision-making?

Reflecting on your answers to these questions, look at the IAP2 spectrum and determine the following:

- Which level of public participation would likely make the most sense for this project?
- How would you describe the public participation goals for this project?
- What would be included in our promise to the public to help create realistic expectations for public participation?