

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

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

MODULE 5.  
**DESIGN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION  
TO MEET YOUR CONDITIONS**



**PUBLIC  
PARTICIPATION**  

---

**GUIDE**

*Engage the public. Preserve the planet.*

## Introduction

*The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.*  
— Lao Tzu

The success of any public participation program is largely determined by how thoroughly and thoughtfully it is planned.

***Public participation is a process, we will not be successful by holding a single meeting or event.***

The potential success of every individual activity is determined by the degree to which an agency effectively commits to, and prepares for, the entire process.

### Planning Steps in Module 5:

1. Set clear goals for public participation
2. Select an appropriate level of public participation
3. Integrate Public Participation into the Decision Process
4. Match Public Participation Tools to Public Participation Objectives Throughout the Process
5. Commit to public participation



## Planning Step 1. Set Clear Goals for Public Participation

*A goal without a plan is just a wish.*

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Sponsoring agencies must determine the appropriate level or degree of public participation for the decision at hand and set the public's expectations accordingly.

Start every project with a detailed discussion of how public input can help you make better decisions and ensure the effective implementation and management of these decisions long-term.

***First determine whether public input has any chance of influencing the outcome or decision.*** Ensure that you are seeking to obtain and use public input and not merely seeking public buy-in to an already determined outcome.

If there is little or no room for public influence over the decision, then public participation is not a reasonable option for your project. Instead, consider good public information and other activities to engage and build positive relationships with the community.

### **Be clear about where you will consider public input**

***If public influence is possible, clearly identify where public input is desired and would be most useful.*** It is not always possible for the public to be involved in all major decisions, or in all aspects of any given decision or action.

It is essential for an agency to clarify for itself the specific issues and questions where public input is desired and where the public can have influence.

In setting clear goals for public participation, consider the following:

- Any constraints to public input need to be identified. The more clearly you articulate the areas for input, the more meaningful the ultimate input will be.
- Focus public participation on the issues and in the areas where you are most likely to achieve success.
- Don't involve the community in everything, focus on areas that are most important to them and where they can have the biggest impact, and make sure to do that very well.

The result of this analysis should be a well-defined goal statement for the public's role in the project that is real, practical, and shared among stakeholders, including vulnerable populations and marginalized communities.

Remember, ***it is important to get agreement on the public participation goals across the entire project team*** and have the strong commitment of the ultimate decision makers.



## GROUP EXERCISE

### Identify Your Goal for Public Participation

1. Split up into small groups of 4-5 people. You will stay in this group for exercises throughout this module.
2. Identify a project to use for a case study throughout this module, make sure that it is a project where public input will be possible and can have the potential to influence the outcome or decision.
3. Discuss the following questions as a group, and use the results of this conversation to write a goal statement for public participation:
  - What knowledge or information does the community have that are important to the project?
  - In what aspects of the project could the community provide helpful input and information?
  - Where will decision makers be most open to public input?
  - Are there aspects of the decision that will not be open to public input?
  - Do we have the time and resources needed to support public input in the areas we have identified?



## Planning Step 2. Select an Appropriate Level of Public Participation

The different levels of public participation were described in Module 3. Refer to that module as needed and the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

### IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

International standard.

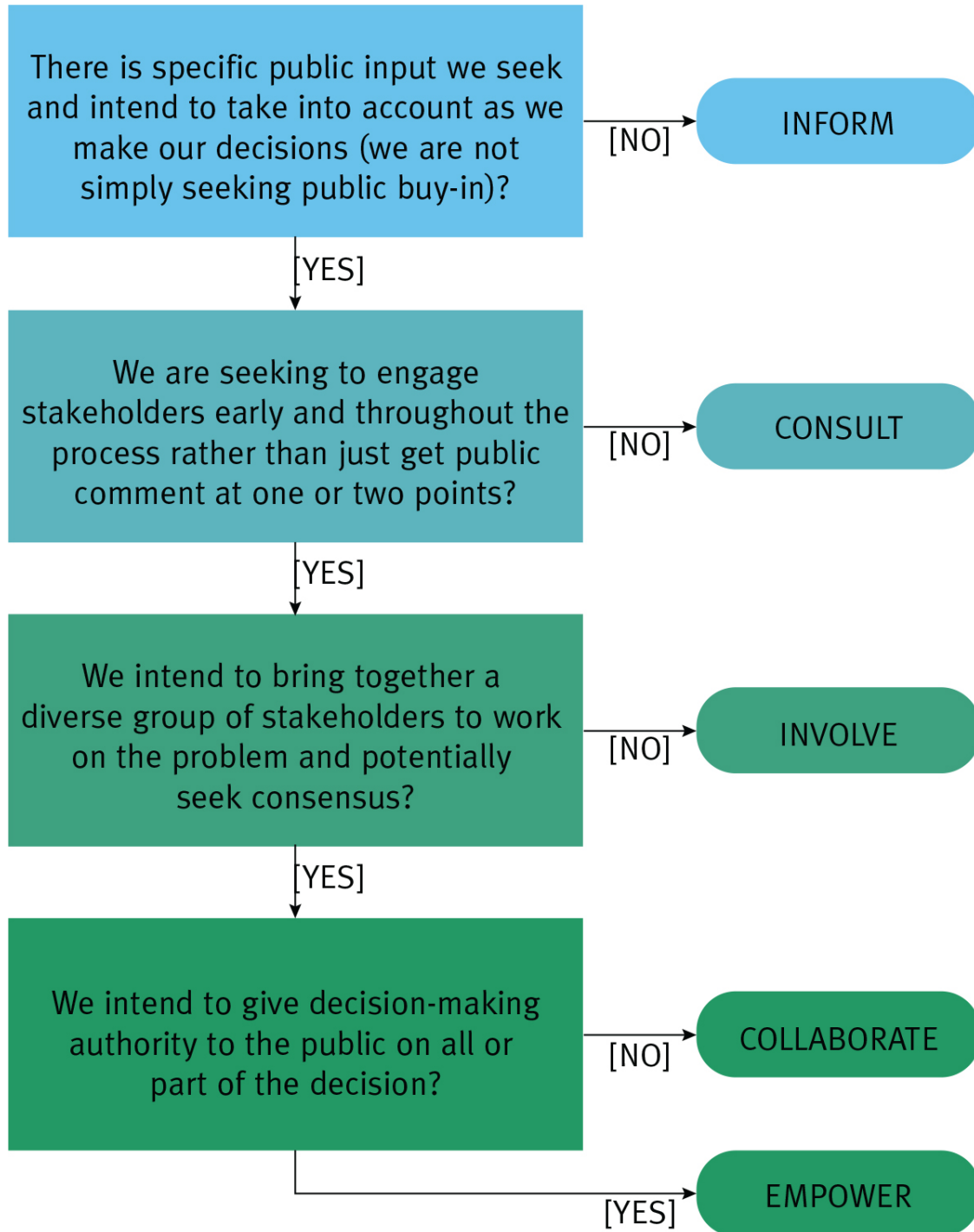
		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, 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.

***There is no “right” level of public participation.*** For each project, agencies must consider the circumstances, their willingness and ability to share power, and the nature of the stakeholders’ desire and need to participate.

As a rule of thumb, it is a good idea to try to meet the participation needs and desires of key stakeholders. ***Stakeholders who are shut out of a process that is important to them will not simply go away.*** Rather, they will look for other venues – such as legal, political, or media – in which to influence the decision.

However, ***in no circumstance should an agency ever commit to participation at a level higher than the decision-makers are willing or able to engage stakeholders.***

The following flowchart can be useful in *understanding your intent and matching that to an appropriate level of public participation*. You can also think about additional questions to ask yourself at each stage.



Once you identify the appropriate level of public participation for your project, remember that you must ***develop a clear goal statement*** for public participation so that everyone on the team has the same understanding of the role of the public. If you already have a goal statement, review it to ensure that it aligns with the level of public participation you select.

You must also ***prepare a clear promise to the public***, so that all stakeholders understand their potential for influence on the decision and what they can expect from you as the process progresses.

***At the core of every public participation process is a promise to the public.*** This promise represents what they can expect from the sponsoring agency with regard to access to and potential influence on the decision. The promise also defines the level of information and communication that can be expected.

### ***Clear expectations are fundamental to building trust***

Failing to clarify your promise to the public or making promises that cannot be kept will undermine public confidence in the agency.

Sponsoring agencies that make clear, explicit promises will set clear expectations with their stakeholders and will be held appropriately accountable. Without clear promises, the public will interpret a wide range of expectations, most of which are not intended and cannot be met.

**When making promises**, it is important to follow through and consider these three factors:

1. **Promise only what you believe you can deliver,**
2. **Deliver what you have promised, and**
3. **Demonstrate what you deliver by communicating effectively.**





## GROUP EXERCISE

### Select an Appropriate Level of Participation

1. Work through the flowchart using your case study and identify the level of participation your agency is likely to support.
2. Based on your knowledge of this case, discuss whether this level seems appropriate for your stakeholders. If not, how might you be able to influence your organization to conduct a higher level of participation.
3. Finally, write a promise that reflects what the public can expect from you.



### Planning Step 3. Integrate Public Participation into the Decision Process

***All stakeholders need to have a clear understanding about how the decision will be made and how public participation will be conducted within that process.***

This requires all stakeholders to fully understand the decision process being used.

Creating a visual representation of the participation process can help create common expectations.

Both internal and external stakeholders must have the same understanding and expectations regarding the decision process and how and when public input will be obtained.

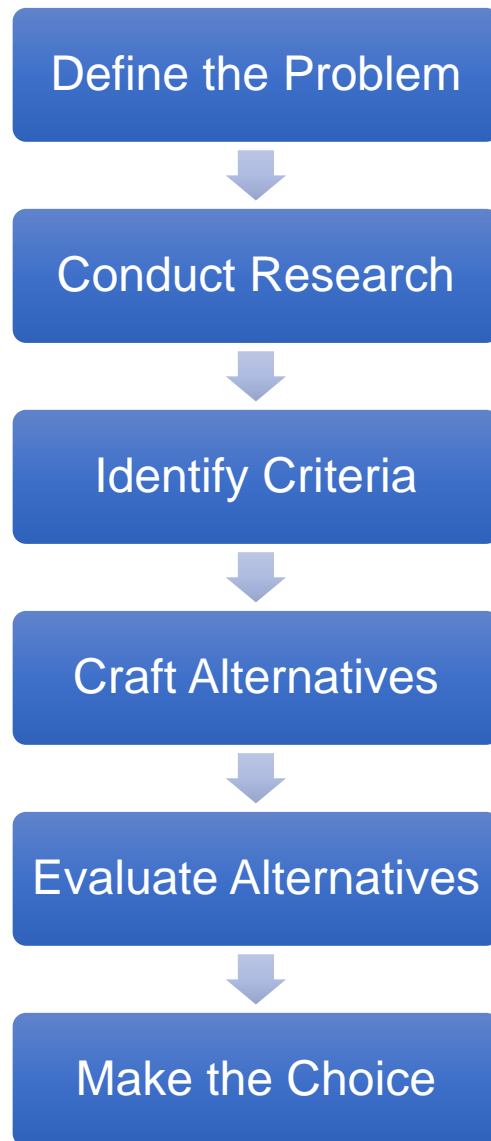
Key points to consider in describing the decision process include:

- What are the key steps and timing in the process?
- At which points will public input be obtained and used?
- How will the public be kept informed throughout the process?
- How will decision criteria be established?
- How will alternatives be developed?
- Who will make the final decision?

It is essential to start public participation early so that stakeholders and staff are on the same learning curve about issues and development of alternatives and solutions.

Most important, it is essential that stakeholders have a common understanding of the problem to be addressed and the criteria that will be used to arrive at a decision. These early activities are critical to getting meaningful input and an overall understanding of the final decision.

A typical decision process might look like this:



Meaningful participation requires that public participation activities be integrated directly into each step in the decision process and you should establish objectives for public participation at each step. To establish clear and meaningful objectives at each step, ask yourself questions such as:

- What **information** does the public require at this step?
- Do we want to obtain **public input** at this step?
- Are there **areas of agreement** we want to seek?
- Do we need to **provide feedback** to the public?



## GROUP EXERCISE Set Objectives for Public Participation

1. Define the decision process that will be used. Identify the clear steps in that process and think about how you might create some sort of graphic to represent this process.
2. Then ask yourself the four questions for each step to identify objectives for what the public needs from you and what you need from the public. You will not have every objective at every step and for small or less important projects, you may not have agreement objectives at all.

Planning Step	Information required	Public Input to be gathered	Feedback to the public needed	Possible areas of agreement
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				



### Planning Step 4. Match Public Participation Tools to Public Participation Objectives Throughout the Process

## Assess and Assemble Needed Skills

A wide variety of skills and experiences are required to plan and implement meaningful public participation. Paramount among these are:

**Communication.** The ability to identify and to portray the information that the public requires in order to participate meaningfully. The ability to listen for and understand the public's interests and concerns.

**Facilitation.** The ability to recognize the importance, role, and appropriate use of a facilitative presence and apply it effectively in facilitating both the overall process and specific events.

**Conflict Management.** The ability to recognize the role of conflict in reaching a final solution and to work through and manage conflict situations.

## Identify and Commit Needed Resources

Identify the individuals, resources, organizations, and contractors that you will need to conduct the various facets of public participation and meet your promise to the public. Identify any training and development that is necessary for the team to succeed. Get these in place early so that all team members can plan together and begin developing needed stakeholder relationships.

## Pick Appropriate Tools

Once the decision process is designed, it will become clear where and how the public is to be engaged as defined by your goals and objectives.

With clear goals and objectives established, you are then able to identify the appropriate tools to meet your objectives and work within the project circumstances and meet the needs of your stakeholders. In any given process, a variety of tools will likely be required including:

- Tools to inform
- Tools to collect input
- Tools to explore agreement

An overview of these tools is provided in EPA's online Guide at:

<https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-tools>



## GROUP EXERCISE

### Select Participation Tools

1. Select two or three of the public participation objectives you created at different points in your in your decision process.
2. Look at the tools described in the online Guide and discuss which ones that might be most appropriate to your project considering your stakeholders, resources, and any other opportunities, constraints, and conditions that would impact the implementation of activities.



## Planning Step 5. Commit to Public Participation

*Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality.*

-Abraham Lincoln

Managers and staff alike must be committed to the full range of activities required to make public participation work and be willing to obtain and consider public input in making the decision.

### The whole team needs to commit

***Help everyone involved in the project to see the value that can be gained through participation.*** Once it is determined that real public participation is your intent, it is important to engage all levels of the sponsor organization, especially the decision-makers, to understand their willingness to engage the public in the decision or action, and what the organization is seeking to gain from public participation. Factors to consider include:

- Are decision-makers open to and committed to considering the public input we have identified?
- What needs to be done to affirm and strengthen this commitment?
- Have we fully considered the constraints we face that limit the ability to engage the public?
- What will a “successful” process look like?
- Are there conflicting or competing priorities or any hidden agendas that could undermine our ability to be successful, if so, how do we plan to manage these?
- Will we commit the necessary resources?
- Can the required staff commit the necessary time?
- Is there internal public participation capability? If not, can it be developed with additional training? Can we contract for any missing expertise needed?



## GROUP DISCUSSION

### Discuss Commitment to Public Participation

Gaining commitment from the whole project team can be challenging. Discuss how you might have this conversation in your organization. Consider the following:

1. Who should lead this conversation and who should be involved?
2. Where should this conversation be held?
3. What are some of the challenges in asking these questions of the right people and what are some strategies we might use to ensure success?
4. How can we help skeptics within the organization to see that public participation can be an important investment in better outcomes and more sustainable decisions?