



TIPS AND TOOLS FOR PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT EVENT

Alberta Culture and Community Spirit
Community Development Branch

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Purpose

- To Share “Best Practises” In Planning and Leading A Public Engagement Event



Expected Outcome

- You Will Have Practical Information to Assist You In Planning and Leading Public Engagement Events



What We Intend To Cover In This Presentation

- Key factors in preparation for planning a successful public engagement event
- Opening/context for the event
- Process with your participants
- Closure to the public engagement event
- Logistical considerations



Key Factors In Preparation

Belief In the Core Value Of Public Participation

Examples:

- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives (IAP2)
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in public education
- Engaging the public creates the demand for excellence in the public education system



Key Factors In Preparation

Good Preparation Is Critical For A Successful Public Engagement Event!

“We practice and prepare for games relentlessly, leaving no stone unturned to ensure our good luck on game day!”

- Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers



Key Factors In Preparation

Have A Clear Purpose

- Why are we having this public engagement event?
- Why is it needed? What led to deciding it is needed?
- What purpose does it serve?
- Are there other options?



Key Factors In Preparation

Identify Expected Outcomes

- What will be different as a result of doing this public engagement event?
- What results do we want to see by doing it?
- What will we have gained by doing it?
- What will participants have gained?



Key Factors In Preparation

What Type of a Meeting Is Required?

- Input gathering
- Public consultation
- Brainstorming
- Problem defining
- Problem-solving/Solution-focused
- Information provision
- Position clarification

Or a combination of the above



Key Factors In Preparation

Participants

- Who do we invite?
- Who needs to be there?
- How do we reach them?
 - formally, informally
- How do we get them to attend?



Key Factors In Preparation

Process

- Determine a process that will best attain the purpose and outcomes intended, level of public engagement you require and reflect the time availability and budget for your public engagement event
- Can you do it “in-house” or will you need a resource “expert”, facilitator, recorders or other human resources to lead/assist in the process?
- Have back-up plans/processes (contingency plan) for less or more participants than you anticipate



Key Factors In Preparation

Determining Level of Public Engagement **IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**

- Inform** – Provide public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
- Consult** – Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
- Involve** – Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered



Key Factors In Preparation

Determining Level of Public Engagement

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation *(continued)*

Collaborate – Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution

Empower – Place the final decision-making in the hands of the public

Increasing Level of Public Impact as you go from Inform to Empower

Key Factors In Preparation

Linking Process With Level of Public Engagement IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation - Examples

- **Inform** – *fact sheets, web-sites, open houses*
- **Consult** – *focus groups, surveys, public meetings, town hall*
- **Involve** – *workshops, break-out working groups/plenary group, open space, brainstorming/idea sorting processes (ie ICA - card, focus conversation, flipchart-symbol, affinity)*
- **Collaborate** – *citizen advisory groups, participatory decision-making, consensus-building-recommendation building processes (ie - ICA workshop method),*
- **Empower** – *citizen juries, ballots*



Key Factors In Preparation

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

“Promise to the Public” for each level of Public Impact



Key Factors In Preparation

Identify Roles of All Key People Involved With the Public Engagement Event

- Chair
- Facilitator(s)/Recorder(s)
- Participants
- Observers
- Recorders
- Media
- Board/Staff members

Should have an “Orientation Meeting” prior to event with all people in non-participant roles to ensure purpose, plan, process and responsibilities are clear for the day/evening



Key Factors In Preparation

How Will The Information Be Used/Accessed?

- Be clear on how you intend to use the information that will be generated from the public engagement meeting
- You will need to inform participants of the intended use at the meeting
- Will the recorded information be made available after the event? – *(follow-up meeting, web-site, minutes, newsletter, media etc.)*



Key Factors In Preparation

Capturing The Information

- How will you capture the information that is generated?
 - identified recorder(s), facilitators who also record, participants themselves as part of small groups etc.?
 - how will you record (verbatim, key points, "theme weaver", summary, taped recording)?



Key Factors In Preparation

Sensitivities

- What could go wrong?
- Where are the “pinch points” or “hot buttons”?
- What other current issues could “de-rail” the intended purpose of this public engagement event?
- What do we need to do in advance to address these sensitivities and/or minimize them so we stay focused on our intended purpose and outcome?



Key Factors In Preparation

Logistical Considerations

- What is Required to Carry-out the Process - *flipcharts/handouts/AV equipment/communication tools?*
- Suitable Venue
- Parking
- Sound Considerations
- Handicap Access
- Room Layout
- Day of the Week/Time of the Year
- Strategic Timing – piggy-backing with another event in the school/community
- Bad weather plans/contingency plans
- Other??

Opening/Context for the Public Engagement Event

- **Welcome, Introductions**
- **Key messages for participants**
 - *why they are needed (purpose/outcomes)*
 - *what is being asking from them*
 - *what will be done with the results*
 - *how the information will be used*
 - *how the host organization (Board) will communicate back to participants after the event*
 - *also (if necessary) you may need to clarify areas/issues controversial or otherwise that this event will **not** focus on*
- **Overview of the “process” for the day/evening**
- **Description of roles of all involved with the “process”**
- **Housekeeping items**
- **Working Principles**

Who will lead this?

Opening/Context for the Public Engagement Event

Working Principles – an example

- Every one has wisdom and we need the wisdom of all for the best results
- It is as important to hear and understand someone else's perspective as it is to share your own
- We may disagree on the topic of discussion from time to time but we will always highly respect each other personally
- We are free to change our mind as we incorporate information, perspectives and learnings
- We will respect the time allotment we have together tonight by staying focused and on topic

Do you have some to add??

The Process On-Site

- **Implement the process you planned** (*or the contingency process*)
- **Monitor to ensure the process is working well**
 - are we getting the information that is needed
 - are we moving towards achieving the intended purpose and outcomes of the meeting?
 - may need to consult with planning team and participants during the meeting to affirm this
 - make changes to process only when it is clearly necessary; experience has shown if you have chosen a process carefully in your planning and explained it well in the opening context you are more than likely on the path to achieve success
 - be careful of knee-jerk reactions as a result of pressure from a few to change the process – often there is a silent majority of participants who are quite satisfied how things are going
- **Ensure process ends on time!**

Ladson

Watch those flesh tones, son-
they're too yellow... How much
they payin' you for this?
Back in my day we'd finish
a ceiling twice this big
in less than a week! 'Course,
in those days we had to
make our own brushes!



Michelangelo's father

The Process On-Site

Dealing With Difficult Situations/People

- Reaffirm purpose and outcomes
- Reaffirm working principles
- Reaffirm focused on the process – be careful of knee-jerk reactions as a result of pressure from a few – often there is a silent majority of participants who are quite satisfied how things are going
- Have a Parking Lot spot for issues
- Have someone available to speak with individual, one-on-one away from the immediate meeting space
- Take a short break – give time for situation/individual to cool down
- Use humour – when appropriate
- Often a good well-thought out process eliminates many of these concerns
- Other strategies/ideas???

(see hand-outs for more information)

Closure

- Commend participants for their input and hard work and link it to the purpose and outcomes for the event
- Reaffirm
 - *what will be done with the results/next steps in the process*
 - *how the information will be used/accessed*
 - *how the host organization (Board) will communicate back to participants after the event*
- Explain ways/methods participants can further add their input and/or participate in the project after the public engagement event
- *Thank all!*



Conclusion

“Good communication, effective process design and delivery skills, genuine interest and belief in allowing people to have a say in decisions that impact their lives will always be at the core of genuine public participation”