

Tools and techniques for public involvement

Technique	Description and use	Advantages	Disadvantages
Level 1. Education & information provision			
Leaflets/ Brochures	Used to convey information. Care should be taken in distribution.	Can reach a wide audience, or be targeted.	Information may not be understood or be misinterpreted.
Newsletters	May involve a series of publications. Care should be taken in distribution.	Ongoing contact, flexible format, can address changing needs and audiences.	Not everyone will read a newsletter.
Unstaffed Exhibits/Displays	Set up in public areas to convey information.	Can be viewed at a convenient time and at leisure. Graphics can help visualise proposals.	Information may not be understood or be misinterpreted.
Local Newspaper Article	Conveys information about a proposed activity.	Potentially cheap form of publicity. A means of reaching a local audience.	Circulation may be limited.
National Newspaper Article	Conveys information about a proposed activity.	Potential to reach a very large audience.	Unless an activity has gained a national profile, it will be of limited interest.
Site Visits	Provides first hand experience of an activity and related issues.	Issues brought to life through real examples.	Difficult to identify a site which replicates all issues.
Level 2. Information feedback			
Staffed Exhibits/Displays	Set up in public areas to convey information. Staff available.	Can be viewed at a convenient time and at leisure. Graphics can help visualise proposals. Groups can be targeted.	Requires a major commitment of staff time.
Staffed telephone lines	Can phone to obtain information, ask questions or make comments about proposals or issues	Easy for people to participate and provide comments. Promotes a feeling of accessibility.	May not be as good as face-to-face discussions. Staff may not have knowledge to respond to all questions.
Internet	Used to provide information or invite feedback. On-line forums and discussion groups can be set up.	Potential global audience. Convenient method for those with internet access.	Not all parties will have access to the Internet.

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Public Meetings	Used to exchange information and views.	Can meet with other stakeholders. Demonstrates proponent is willing to meet with other interested parties.	Can be complex, unpredictable and intimidating. May be hijacked by interest groups.
Surveys, Interviews and Questionnaires	Used for obtaining information and opinions. May be self-administered, conducted face-to-face, by post or telephone.	Confidential surveys may result in more candid responses. Can identify existing knowledge and concerns.	Response rate can be poor. Responses may not be representative and opinions change.
Level 3. Involvement & consultation			
Workshops	Used to provide background information, discuss issues in detail and solve problems.	Provides an open exchange of ideas. Can deal with complex issues and consider issues in-depth. Can be targeted.	Only a small number of individuals can participate. Full range of interests not represented.
Open-House	Location provided, e.g. at a site or operational building, for people to visit, learn about a proposal and provide feedback.	Can be visited at a convenient time and at leisure.	Preparation for and staffing of the open house may require considerable time and money.
Level 4. Extended involvement			
Community Advisory/Liaison Groups	People representing particular interests or areas of expertise, e.g. community leaders, meet to discuss issues.	Can consider issues in detail and highlight the decision-making process and the complexities involved.	Not all interests may be represented. Requires on-going commitment from participants.
Citizen Juries	Group of citizens brought together to consider an issue. Evidence received from expert witnesses. Report produced, setting out the views of the jury.	Can consider issues in detail and in a relatively short period of time.	Not all interests may be represented. Limited time may be available for participants to fully consider information received.
Visioning	Used to develop a shared vision of the future.	Develops a common view of future needs.	Lack of control over the outcome. Needs to be used early in the decision-making process.

Source: *Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (1999)*