

Framework Driven Citizen Input Processes

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Key Words

Civic Engagement, Citizen Input, Public Participation, Framework

Background

While public participation has deep roots in American society, recent research indicates participation in democracy and voluntary groups is declining.¹ This decline is believed to be due to deficits in citizens' civic skills and attitudes as well as shortfalls in the ways institutions and governments conduct democratic input processes.¹

Public participation in government decision-making has long been considered a key facet of democracy. The core principle is that people who are affected by a decision should have input in the decision making process. While there are no hard and fast rules that dictate the role of public participation in modern democratic government, participation can, and should, take different forms in each unique situation or community.²

Public participation should allow everyone with a vested interest in the topic, issue, or decision a voice in the process. The voice of the public is vital to encouraging systematic thinking in government decision making. Public participation also acts as a way of breaking down the barriers and gives both sides more credibility (p.14).³

There are no strict guidelines that public engagement must adhere to in order to be classified as public participation.² However there is a vast amount of literature that suggests guidelines, theories, and frameworks to guide public engagement and encourage participation to yield creates positive outcomes.^{4,2,1} For example, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation's (NCDD) *Resource Guide on Public Engagement* offers descriptions of twenty-two different types of public engagement.⁴

The NCDD suggests seven *Core Principles for Public Engagement*.⁵ These "reflect the common beliefs and understandings of those working in the fields of public engagement" (p. 3) and to serve as a recommended framework for planning and implementing a public participation process.⁵

An Example Framework for Public Engagement⁵

- Careful Planning and Preparation
 - Identify goals
 - Select and recruit participants
 - Design appropriate type of process
- Inclusion and Democratic Diversity
 - Provide a diversity of stakeholders an equal opportunity to express ideas and be involved
- Inclusion and Democratic Diversity Cont.
 - Design activities to ensure commonly marginalized or silent groups have an



- equal opportunity to participate and be heard
- Collaboration and Shared Purpose
 - Seek to facilitate collaboration among the public, local government, and other institutions with a stake in a community-wide, common goal
- Openness and Learning
 - Participants should feel free to share their opinions, listen to others, and learn more about the issue or goal
- Transparency and Trust
 - Transparency from the beginning is key to building trust. If *Collaboration and Shared Purpose* and *Openness and Learning* are reached, this phase will follow.
- Impact and Action
 - Citizens must feel their participation will have an impact on decision making.
- Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture
 - The process should foster a “culture of participation.”
 - Citizens should be motivated and mobilized to participate in the ongoing process.

What Communities Can Do

- Take the time to set clear goals and outcomes for input processes;
- Ensure a diverse, representative group participates in the process;
- Adopt a framework as a guide to all processes designed.

Relevant Extension Resources

For information or assistance in engaging in a citizen input process, contact your local county agent or Extension specialist. For additional materials, the following related resources are available on the Select Presentations section of the Urban and Municipal parks webpage:

- Engaging Citizen Input Activity Worksheets (agrillife.org/urbanparks)
- Paths to Participation: Developing Engaging Input Processes (agrillife.org/urbanparks)
- Going to the People and Getting the Feedback You Need (agrillife.org/urbanparks)

References

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