

# Session Four

## Critical Components and Considerations to Effective Public Participation

### 1. Foundations of public participation planning

To design and carry out effective public participation, certain components and considerations are critical. Project staff or contractors will hold primary responsibility for these features. However, as the decision maker, you also need an understanding to model and lead the project team. In addition, understanding these elements will help you to adequately manage those with primary responsibility for public participation.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has identified three foundations for effective public participation. Project staff and contractors that understand the relevance of these foundations will enhance their effectiveness.

1. **Values-based** – Values held by of the community, stakeholders, and sponsoring agency form their opinions, concerns, fears, hopes and dreams. Within a project, values will affect how people:
  - perceive the decision process
  - participate – or not
  - perceive the decision outcome
2. **Decision-oriented** – A decision is to be made. The participation of the public can affect the decision's formulation and outcome.
3. **Goal-driven** – Specific, purposeful, productive outcomes are to be achieved with the public throughout the phases of the project. For example: information is communicated; input or feed back is sought; collaborative development of alternative criteria is desired.)

Some of the critical components and considerations are as follows:

**Get agreement on what is/are the issue(s) on the table.**

**Develop full understanding of who needs to be involved. Be sure all the players and critical issues are considered.**

**Define the appropriate level of public participation. Make appropriate promises and keep them.**

**Understand and accept the core values of public participation. Make sure your approach and process meets the needs of the participants as well as those of your organization. Understand the ethics that guide the work of public participation practitioners.**

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**Design your public participation process, reflecting values and resources. Public participation must be planned and integrated with the decision-making process.**

**Evaluate and adapt, continuously.**

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### 1. Clarify the decision and decision-making process.

Before you can effectively decide if and how to involve the public or others in your decision, you must first be clear on what the decision is and how it will be made.

#### Clarify the decision

You must agree on the problem to be solved, the decision to be made, or the opportunity to be grabbed. You may have a different perspective than your staff. Often, the public will have different perspectives as well. It is difficult to reach agreement on approaches and solutions if people do not first agree on the issue-at-hand.

Your organization will need to work with those interested and affected to get clear understanding of the scope of the issue to be evaluated and considered.

If you cannot be clear on what the decision is, you will have trouble identifying your decision-making process or getting valuable and useful input to your decision. The process will be inefficient as you and the stakeholders spend time talking about different or irrelevant matters. Confusion will lead to distrust and, perhaps, unnecessary concerns.

- What are the interests and concerns that can be addressed by this process?
- What are the interests and concerns that cannot be addressed by this process?
- What is the role of the public in helping to determine this?



Universe of interests and concerns important to various stakeholders

Concerns and interests that can be addressed in this process

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### Examples

**When making a decision on an air quality permit for a proposed medical waste and tire incinerator, the agency could only consider impacts on air quality. But the public was also concerned about traffic, infectious diseases, and land-use impacts on their town.**

**When a federal military facility wanted to expand its bombing range, it proposed swapping some of its land for some forestland belonging to a neighboring county. The natural resources agency's responsibilities extended to the ecological integrity of the forest and, based on that integrity, would rule on whether the swap was acceptable. The public, however, cared mostly about the potential for increased bombing practice activities.**

**When a utility company was working with a mountaintop community, participants discovered the utility had been talking about where to run the power line, but the community had been talking about how to get power to their town . . . and they were not the same discussion.**

**In a rural area, sheep ranchers wanted federal regulators to legalize use of a chemical called 1084, which was a promising method for killing coyotes that had been preying on their lambs. Ranchers defined the problem as "how to legalize 1084." The state wildlife agency sympathized with ranchers but was concerned about impacts on endangered birds and defined the problem as "how to kill coyotes." Local environmentalists worried about impacts of 1084 and saw coyotes as part of the natural environment and believed the problem was "how to save the lambs."**

**A sustainable agriculture advocate might define the issue as "how to support the agricultural economy so people can live and ranch in the area without harming the environment."**

**In 1971 in Durham, North Carolina, an unlikely pair was charged with co-leading a committee to integrate the city's schools. Ann Atwater, a militant African-American community and civil rights leader, and C. P. Ellis, a low-income white man who was president of the local Ku Klux Klan, were bitter enemies. After working together for some time, the two discovered their commonalities and redefined the problem together. They realized their common problem was "how to improve the education of kids in low-income neighborhoods," an issue which touched each of them deeply and personally.**

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### Some strategies

What can you do when everyone sees the problem or decision differently?

- **Design your involvement process to work toward common understandings and definitions. Often this involves enlarging the definition of the problem (see example 4, above). People must be careful not to make the problem too big to be addressed and may have to agree to work on smaller pieces.**
- **Identify and clarify what problems and issues your process will and will not address and why. Let people know where and how their other issues might be addressed - if there is another agency, level of government, process, or organization that can address their concerns. Do not discount someone's issues, but help the person understand why this process is not addressing them.**

**CAUTION:** This will not necessarily make these other issues disappear. Some people will continue to raise issues over which you have no control. They will do so because they are frustrated or because it is a good strategy for them in light of their objectives.

- **Many times, a problem or proposal has multiple decision makers. For example, a proposal for a new facility may involve decisions by the project proponent, the state or provincial environmental agency, local zoning boards, sewerage districts, a transportation department, federal agencies, a tax incentive agency, and elected officials.**

**The various decision makers could work together in a more coordinated process, particularly for working with the public. For example, a state environmental agency may be able to coordinate with local officials who make land-use decisions or to encourage a project proponent to work to address other public concerns. This linking and coordination of decision processes will require up-front work and bridging multiple organizational missions and cultures. However, the public will find it easier to participate in one unified process than in multiple disjointed processes.**

**A project proponent could work with the affected communities and stakeholders – in advance – addressing the range of concerns and modifying a proposal (e.g., before approaching the multiple jurisdictions to seek permits and approvals).**



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### Clarity on how the decision will be made

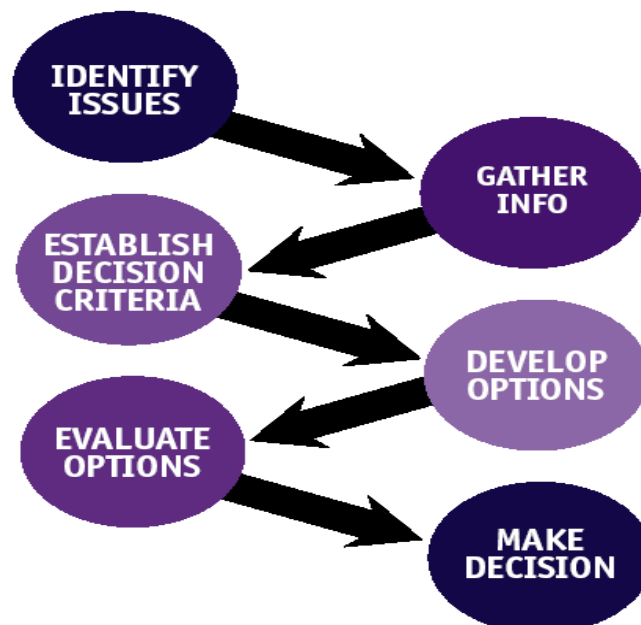
If a decision process exists, write it out explicitly. What are the steps, timing, and responsibilities from beginning to end?

Your public participation process must be integrated into the decision-making process. Each step of the decision process is a potential opportunity to involve others in some way.

If a process does not exist, you must develop one. Clarify who and how decisions will be made and who will make them. Include any intermediary decisions in your description.

Laws and regulations may prescribe some of your decision processes. You will have more flexibility with others. Regardless, a clear and well-understood process is important.

To illustrate, we use a generic process with typical decision steps to examine when, why, and how to use public participation:



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### **2. Develop a full understanding of who needs to be involved.**

**When we speak about the “public” in public participation, we mean any groups and individuals that are affected by or interested in your decision or project. This might include government agencies, businesses, associations, non-profit organizations, interest groups, elected officials, tribes, community groups, single individuals and people or groups within your own organization.**

**Your public participation process should:**

- **Ask key stakeholders who they think will be interested; do not identify stakeholders in a vacuum**
- **Identify organized groups and types of individuals who will be interested due to potential or perceived impacts of the decision, process, or project**
- **Consider any groups that may have special needs**
- **Identify any groups or individuals that may not fall within your traditional stakeholder categories or parties**
- **Do NOT neglect the individuals or groups who will be most adamantly opposed to the project, initiative, or decision**
- **Consider whether other dimensions such as geographic or demographic representation are important**

**As a decision maker you should also be cautious not to promise any individual stakeholder that he or she will be involved in a specific manner before checking with your public participation practitioner. Otherwise, such promises can have consequences you may not have considered or intended. Two examples illustrate the point:**

- **A decision maker promised a powerful stakeholder that he would be put on the advisory committee, however, it was not clear that an advisory committee was an advisable technique for the project. Once such a promise is made it is hard to retract, and the promise may drive the public participation process rather than the situation and objectives.**
- **A project used a technical advisory team as one aspect of its public participation process. The team focused only on the technical biological aspects of the situation. A decision maker agreed when a non-technical but very vocal person with a single-issue viewpoint pressured the decision maker to add him to the technical advisory team. This angered all the other non-technical stakeholders and they also wanted to be included on the technical team. Soon the technical team became large and overloaded with non-technical members and could no longer effectively serve its role.**

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**Another way to think of stakeholders is by their level of interest. Some people will be extremely engaged, attending every meeting and consistently being part of the process. Others will comment occasionally or from afar. Still others might know your process is going on but will not become engaged.**

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### **Orbits of Participation**

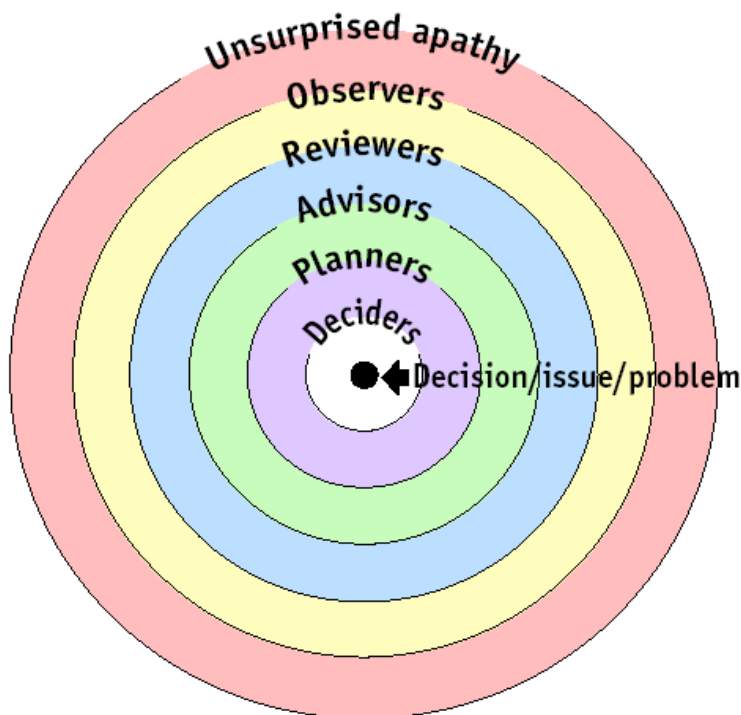
**This concept is represented by the Orbits of Participation, a model developed by Lorenz Aggens of INVOLVE in Wilmette, Illinois. This model helps visualize the need for opportunities to be engaged at varying levels at different steps of the process. Some people may be willing to work collaboratively with you, but others just want to give input or be informed. People and organizations may move from one orbit to another throughout your project as their interest, awareness, availability, and priorities change.**

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### Orbits of Participation

by Lorenz Aggens



The model shows a decision-making center surrounded by “orbits” of activity. The closer to the center, the greater the activity and energy within it. If you are in a closer orbit, you may have more influence, but you will need to devote more energy to the process and your involvement.

This model clarifies there is no single public, but different levels of public based on differing levels of interest and ability to participate, even within a single interest group. The design of a public involvement plan must take into account multiple levels of the public. Your public process needs to provide for the needs of those in all orbits.

People may move from orbit to orbit. The outermost orbit includes people who know of your project, but choose not to participate. People uninformed of the project or decision are outside all the orbits.

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### **The Fallacy of the Silent Majority.**

**Many times people in government, businesses, or other organizations, when considering the public and who gets involved, express a sentiment such as “I just wish we’d hear from the silent majority who agree with us and have no trouble with this proposal.”**

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In a sense, this sentiment talks about the Observers and the Unsurprised Apathetics in the Orbits of Participation, as well as those not even in the orbits (i.e., those people who do not know about the initiative).

You can NOT assume what these people are thinking, much less that they “agree with you.” Try this experiment with your project team:

1. **Pick a topic of some controversy and importance that has nothing to do with your work. Pick a topic you have not actively engaged in – you haven’t written a letter to an official, gone to a meeting or hearing, chained yourself to anything related to the topic, etc.**
  
2. **Identify the reason you have not become engaged. Is it because:**
  - **You trust the government/decision makers to make the best decision and you will completely agree with them**
  - **You are too busy with other things**
  - **You don’t think it will make a difference or that they will listen to you**
  - **You don’t know enough to participate**
  - **You don’t feel comfortable going to or speaking at meetings**
  - **You don’t know how to get involved**
  - **You just don’t care what happens**
  - **You didn’t know it was going on**
  - **Other?**

**These are some of the reasons stakeholders give. VERY few give the first reason. Did you?**

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### 3. Define the appropriate level of public participation.

You want to select a level of involvement that best fits both the participants' and project's needs.

You need to define the objectives for involving the public so your public participation process is tailored to the needs, purposes, and intentions of both your organization and the stakeholders. This also helps keep expectations realistic and helps people understand their role and the anticipated level of involvement. **Importantly, this decision involves making a promise, which you, as the decision maker, must honor.**

Look at your decision-making process. At each step and decision point, what will be the role of the public and the purpose of your public participation effort? How will you use public input or involvement? What value and information can the public bring to the decision? Who will make the decision and how? In other words, embed the public participation process within the decision-making process right from the project's start.

IAP2's Spectrum lists five umbrella objectives for public participation. Each objective represents a different level of public involvement.

**Inform:** Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, and/or solutions.

**Consult:** Obtain public feedback on the analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.

**Involve:** Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.

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

**Empower:** Place the final decision making in the hands of the public.

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### IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
<b>Public Participation Goal:</b>	<b>Public Participation Goal:</b>	<b>Public Participation Goal:</b>	<b>Public Participation Goal:</b>	<b>Public Participation Goal:</b>
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.
<b>Promise to the Public:</b>	<b>Promise to the Public:</b>	<b>Promise to the Public:</b>	<b>Promise to the Public:</b>	<b>Promise to the Public:</b>
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 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 look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b>	<b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b>	<b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b>	<b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b>	<b>Example Techniques to Consider:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fact sheets</li> <li>● Web sites</li> <li>● Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Public comment</li> <li>● Focus groups</li> <li>● Surveys</li> <li>● Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Workshops</li> <li>● Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Citizen Advisory Committees</li> <li>● Consensus-building</li> <li>● Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Citizen juries</li> <li>● Ballots</li> <li>● Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

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**The spectrum illustrates four important points. There is a range of how much impact stakeholders may have in any process or step in a process. This range reflects different levels of involvement.**

**Realize that you may have different levels of involvement and objectives at different stages of your decision-making process or with different segments of the stakeholders. The orbits of participation illustrate how different groups will want and expect different levels of involvement, reflecting their interest, stake, and commitment.**

**1. The objective you select to involve the public will define and drive your process. The objective to be achieved via participation and role of the public is critical as each level of involvement reflects a different objective.**

**2. Each objective carries a promise YOU are making to the stakeholders.**

**Be sure you can honor that promise before you commit to it. As the decision maker, you are the keeper of this promise. Be clear about what roles the public will play in the decision making and who makes the decision.**

**3. The objective will drive the actual process and techniques you use to involve the public. Different tools and techniques are better, and worse, at different things. To help pick and design appropriate public participation tools and techniques, your public participation plan will want to add more details and specificity to the general objectives. Some examples of more specific objectives for public participation are:**

**Clarify the problem, issue or need**

**Gather specific, defined types of information or data to help frame the initiative**

**Understand the range of needs and concerns about a proposal or situation**

**Identify all the alternatives to solving a problem**

**Get feedback on a particular draft or proposal or specific element of the project**

**List and analyze the full range of impacts of any given solution to a problem**

**Have the public design or help design a solution to a problem or situation**

**Manage conflicts around a particular issue**

**Understand and set priorities for resources or future work**

**Involve the community with an initiative from beginning through implementation**

**Recruit volunteers to implement a plan**

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### Factors to consider when selecting a level of public participation

1. **How controversial is the project now or how controversial is it likely to be? How likely is it that the media will want to cover it? How polarized are the stakeholders?**

Generally, more controversial projects call for higher levels of impact by the public and a level further right on the IAP2 Spectrum. This is also true when there are conflicting or even polarized interests. Projects for which there is little concern or likelihood of impact usually need a lower level of public participation.

2. **How much trust or distrust is there? Is your agency, business, organization well trusted by the public or not? Has there been an incident in the community recently that has elevated distrust?**

Generally, the greater the distrust, the more open your process needs to be and the more influence you should give the public. Consider moving a bit to the right on the IAP2 Spectrum.

3. **How much is the project likely to affect members of the public, interest groups, or organizations?**

The more they will be impacted, the more say people will want in the decision.

4. **How likely is it that the public will be able to influence the decision? How flexible can you even be in considering their input?**

Don't make promises you cannot keep. If the decision will be determined mostly by factors out of your control, over which the public has little influence, then there is no point in encouraging an intensive level of participation. Do not waste the public's time.

For example, some decisions and decision processes are dictated largely by existing laws. If a law or regulation only allows consideration of a small number of factors, factors over which there is little control or concern, you and the public may have little chance to modify a decision.

5. **How complex and difficult is the project?**

The more complex the project, the more likely that there are public needs and issues that can be addressed and that there are elements over which the public could improve the decisions.



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### **4. Embrace the Core Values of Public Participation.**

**As an international leader in public participation, the International Association for Public Participation developed the “IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation” for use in developing and implementing public participation processes. These core values were developed over two years with broad international input to identify those aspects of public participation that cross national, cultural, and religious boundaries. The purpose of these core values is to help make better decisions that reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities.**

**The core values represent standards and best management practices for public participation.**

**Effective public participation processes reflect these core values.**

**“There is something more important than information. Values are far more important, and it is by understanding common values that decisions are made. We come to understand values through dialogue.”**

Jack Blaney, President of Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

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### IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation

**The public should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.**

**The public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.**

**The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.**

**The public participation process seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.**

**The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.**

**The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.**

*“Core values provide best practice guidance to the public participation process.”*

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Yes, there are powerful systemic forces that can make it difficult for us to do the right thing. In the last analysis, however, ethics is our individual responsibility.

Michael S. Josephson, ethics writer

**In addition, a professional code of ethics guides the work of public participation practitioners. As a manager, expect that all project team members and contractors will abide by these ethics. Your leadership and support related to the ethics is essential. Together, you and the project team and contractors are guardians of the process and will be working to keep the integrity and the effectiveness of the process. They will not be advocating for a particular point of view.**

### IAP2 Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners

**IAP2's Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners supports and reflects IAP2's Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation. The Core Values define the expectations and aspirations of the public participation process. The Code of Ethics speaks to the actions of practitioners.**

#### Preamble

**As members of IAP2, we recognize the importance of a Code of Ethics, which guide the actions of those who advocate including all affected parties in public decision-making processes. To fully discharge our duties as public participation practitioners, we define terms used explicitly throughout our Code of Ethics. We define stakeholders as any individual, group of individuals, organization, or political entity with a stake in the outcome of a decision. We define the public as those stakeholders who are not part of the decision-making entity or entities. We define public participation as any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions.**



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**This Code of Ethics is a set of principles, which guide us in our practice of enhancing the integrity of the public participation process. As practitioners we hold ourselves accountable for there principles and strive to hold all participants to the same standards.**

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### **PURPOSE.**

**We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.**

### **ROLE OF PRACTITIONER.**

**We will enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.**

### **TRUST.**

**We will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.**

### **DEFINING THE PUBLIC'S ROLE.**

**We will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.**

### **OPENNESS.**

**We will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.**

### **ACCESS TO THE PROCESS.**

**We will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.**

### **RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES.**

**We will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interests or that appear to "divide and conquer."**

### **ADVOCACY.**

**We will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party, or project outcome.**

### **COMMITMENTS.**

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**We will ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are in good faith.**

### **SUPPORT OF THE PRACTICE.**

**We will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.**

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### **5. Ensure your public participation process reflects values and resources, is aligned with the decision process, and is driven by the public participation objectives**

The process for public participation needs to be designed. A good process:

- **Identifies the stakeholders**
- **Defines the issue or decision**
- **Is driven by the public participation objectives and appropriate levels of involvement from the IAP2 Spectrum for both the overall process and for each step of the process**
- **Is aligned with the decision-making process, explicitly describing the role and level of involvement for each step of the process**
- **Respects the core values of public participation and the needs of the stakeholders**
- **Reflects the available resources for carrying out the planning process**
- **Carries the decision-maker's promise to participants about the level of impact they will have on the decision**
- **Includes evaluation of the public participation process and results**

A stepped approach can aid in the design of a public participation process. Often managers know they should involve others in their decisions and projects, but they don't know how. A step-by-step process can help one think through the design of an effective public participation process.

IAP2 teaches such a process: the Planning Course of its Certificate Training Program. An outline of that process is on the following page.

Regardless of what planning process is used to design the public participation effort, it should have the key elements bulleted above.

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### IAP2's Five Steps for Public Participation Planning

- | Step | Action   |
|------|--|
| 1.   | Gain Internal commitment                                 |
| 2.   | Learn from the Public                                    |
| 3.   | Select the Level of Participation                        |
| 4.   | Define the Process and Participation Objectives          |
| 5.   | Design the Public Participation Plan & select techniques |