

**Georgia Department of Community Affairs
State Planning Recommendations**

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

A number of techniques are available to engage the public in the planning process. Communities generally have varying conditions that dictate which program techniques suit them best. The list below offers a variety of community participation techniques that take into consideration a community's budget, schedule, and target audience. Be creative in designing your program and keep in mind that a combination of techniques can be used to reach the largest audience.

In an effective community participation process the following principles can ensure that the process is meaningful and productive:

- *The public has a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives;*
- *The public is involved as early as possible in the community participation and decision-making process in order to build trust;*
- *The involvement of those potentially affected is sought and participants are encouraged to assist in defining how they participate;*
- *Participants are provided with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way; education and participation are directly combined whenever possible;*
- *The needs and concerns of the public are listened to and their input is integrated into the outcome.*

Participation Technique	Description
PUBLIC EDUCATION TECHNIQUES Training, instruction or informative experience communicating knowledge to the community.	
Press Conferences	The use of press conferences allows the opportunity to reach all media outlets in one setting. This technique is best reserved for news-worthy events.
Information Centers	The information centers may have a variety of locations including libraries, schools and other facilities appropriate for the storage and the distribution of project or program related information. The centers are often not widely used by the public, especially when not well advertised or when the project or program is not controversial or is well liked. The centers also have displays and exhibits.
Kiosk/Lobby Displays	Posting maps, photos, and alternative plans in a prominent location in city hall, county courthouse, or public library. These displays provide information to visitors to view at their leisure and outside of a formal public meeting.

Speakers Bureau	A speakers bureau consists of a team of staff members providing an introductory presentation to the public on a particular topic or issue.
Kick Off-Public Information Meetings	An event to announce the planning process to the citizens and other stakeholders and to view a presentation covering the project purpose and general plan approach. Initial opinion surveys and volunteer sign up forms are available at this meeting.
Printed Information	The printed information consists of brochures, fact sheets, maps, future meeting opportunities and newsletters, among others. The information can be disseminated through information centers, bill stuffing, or as newspaper and magazine inserts.
Television	The use of television programming is also ideal as it allows for the simultaneous presentation of information in several geographic areas, in a format that many people will use, as many people will take the time to watch television rather than read the paper or other printed information. There is often high exposure, but high expense, as well.
Newspaper/Magazine Advertisements	Advertisements in newspapers and magazines should be placed in commonly read sections and during days most likely to reach intended audiences. The advertisements often satisfy legal requirements. They are relatively expensive and provide limited amounts of information.
Websites	In addition to providing information on the community's website, allow citizens to give feedback via online surveys and e-mail.
Media Plan and Press Releases	A plan to develop a relationship with a local newspaper or other reporter and editor by providing newsworthy milestones and public meeting notices on a regular basis throughout the planning process.
Open House	If you cannot go to the public, bring them to you. An open house is an informal setting in which people get information about a plan or project. It has no set, formal agenda. Unlike a meeting, no formal discussions and presentations take place, and there are no audience seats. Instead, people get information informally from exhibits and staff and are encouraged to give opinions, comments, and preferences to staff either orally or in writing.

<p>Speak at Meetings of Professional and Service Organizations</p>	<p>If funding is tight and staff is too overworked to organize and conduct a series of workshops, public comment and ideas can be gathered during speaking engagements. Prepare just one talk and write one general letter notifying the availability of a staff member to speak about the state's planning program. Send a copy of the letter to the program planner in various civic, business, professional, and related organizations throughout the state.</p>
<p>Mailing Lists</p>	<p>Computer technology has revolutionized the process of compiling and updating mailing lists -- a staple of most public involvement programs. Simplicity, ease, flexibility, and speed now characterize the once cumbersome process of maintaining and using collections of names of those affected by or interested in a project or plan -- including organizations, residents, media, elected officials, agency personnel, interest groups, and others. Agencies use mailing lists throughout planning and project development to keep in touch with the community and other key people. Lists include addresses but may also include telephone and FAX numbers or other information to aid in contacting people in a variety of ways.</p>
<p>Briefings</p>	<p>Briefings are information meetings with a community group or leader. Elected officials, business leaders, the media, regional groups, or special interest groups can participate. Briefings usually involve issue-focused communication between agency administrators, project managers, board members, or other staff and a specific group or part of the community.</p>
<p>Video Techniques</p>	<p>Video techniques use recorded visual and oral messages to present information to the public, primarily via tapes or laser disks. Although many people now prefer video as a means of getting information, public agencies are just starting to tap its potential use.</p>
<p>Media Strategies</p>	<p>Media strategies inform customers about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, billboards, posters and variable message signs, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of fliers. Working with the media, an agency takes an active role in disseminating information.</p>

Computer Presentations and Simulations	Computer presentations and simulations are electronic displays of information. Their power derives from a computer's ability to provide quick access to enormous stores of data and its capacity to display and rearrange images on demand.
Participation Technique	Description
<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC INPUT TECHNIQUES Contribution, comments, and suggestions solicited from the public to help make decisions.</p>	
Meetings /Hearings	Public Meetings or Hearings are one of the more traditional methods of participation. These are legislative requirements to inform the public of changes and planning phases in the community, as well as proposals or issues that may already be on the table. The tight structure of the groups often does not allow much time for discussion. In most cases, only the most aggressive will participate in the discussions and often dominate them. Public reactions in these types of meetings are usually determined by a show of hands.
Opinion Polls/Surveys	Opinion Polls are surveys of what the public would like to see done. If properly done, they will give a representative sample of the population polled. However, this is difficult because such surveying often tends to miss many people such as - those at work, those without telephones, and those that speak languages other than English. Also, many people are unwilling to participate in opinion polls. Pollers may often receive superficial responses to pacify or get rid of them. This method is best used if there is a need for easily quantified and rapid results.
Participation Technique	Description
<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC INTERACTION TECHNIQUES Communicating and working with the public to make decisions.</p>	

Brainstorming	Participants "brainstorm" when they come together in a freethinking forum to generate ideas. As now used, brainstorming is no longer an unstructured method of eliciting ideas from a group. Used properly -- either alone or in conjunction with other techniques - - brainstorming can be a highly effective method of moving participants out of conflict and toward consensus.
Conferences, Workshops, and Retreats	Conferences, workshops, and retreats are special meetings to inform people and solicit input on specific policy issues, plans, or projects. In size and importance, they range from a subset of a larger meeting to a large multi-day event.
Telephone Techniques	The telephone offers a unique, two-way medium for public involvement. It can be used to obtain information and to give opinions. Its use has entered a new era of potential applications to community participation, going beyond question-and-answer techniques toward the evolving new multi-media connections with television and computers.
Civic Advisory Committees	A civic advisory committee is a representative group of stakeholders that meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While these groups are often called citizens' advisory committees, the term civic is used here, since citizenship is not a requirement for participation. Civic advisory committees (CACs) have been used for many years and are not in themselves innovative, yet they can be used very creatively.
Vision Goals and Objectives Meetings	Facilitated meetings to determine answers to the three key planning questions – "What do you have?" "What do you want?" and "How will you get it?"
Student Programs	Direct involvement of students from local schools, through such efforts as poster contests, essay contests, appointing high school student representatives to committees, or sponsoring a "city planning" study unit.
Email blasts	Periodic mass mailings by email to provide important notices and other information. At public meetings, offer the option of attendees providing their e-mail addresses on the sign in sheet. Create a database and send periodic progress e-mails and future meeting announcements to the distribution list.
Workshops	The workshops are often small informal meetings that may include exhibits and presentations designed to be interactive among participants. They foster one to one and small group communication and are excellent for the discussion and critique of

State Planning Recommendations: PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES

	problem solving. They may require several facilitators depending on the size of the group.
Charrettes	With the charrette method, there is a presentation of information; the information is reviewed; then there are questions and answers; and the group breaks up to voice their ideas notably about what should be done regarding a particular problem. This method is best used when there is sufficient time set aside for the process. Given the length, this method may be viewed as a more participatory approach of public involvement.
Focus Groups	Focus Groups are a face-to-face interaction technique consisting of small groups of about six to ten persons. A facilitator presents one or more proposals to the group to determine opinions and reactions. Like opinion polls, focus groups are seldom representative of the entire populace, and the audience is usually selective. Many people are missed. As a result of the lack of attendance and input by the public, planners are not often truly aware of the needs or wants of a community. This method is best used when one wants to learn about a particular issue through a selective audience.
Community Preference Surveys	The community preference surveys are community meetings where the public evaluates a series of visual images commonly categorized by housing types and styles, streetscape, open space, commercial areas and other land uses, etc. Participants are asked to select "preferences" displayed as photos or renderings.
Visit Agencies and Organizations	When various localities or groups are under-represented in your community participation activities, make arrangements to visit them in their own offices and towns. Not only will this serve to educate your staff regarding those groups and their issues, but it also offers a great opportunity to learn about the communities in which those people work and live.
Fairs	A fair is an event used to interest community members in specific projects or programs. It is typically a one-day event, heavily promoted to encourage people to attend. Attractions such as futuristic vehicles can be used to bring people to the fair, and noted personalities also draw participants.

Games and Contests	Games and contests are special ways to attract and engage people who might not otherwise participate. They often vividly demonstrate issues and the consequences of decisions. They are unusual, lively, and more stimulating than formal meetings or reports. People play games and enter contests for diversion or entertainment, a prize or an objective, or for the possibility of winning.
Role Playing	In role playing, participants act out characters in a predefined "situation" dealing with controversial aspects of planning or project development. A role playing session is followed by an evaluation of the interaction and the statements made.
Non-Traditional Meetings: Places and Events	These are locations that are not the usual meeting hall or public building where many participation events are traditionally held. These non-traditional options include shopping centers, elderly drop-in centers, county fairs, neighborhood fairs and block parties, and sporting events. Traditional places such as schools, town halls, board rooms, and libraries do have benefits. Space in these buildings is readily available and inexpensive. They are usually central to the community and the neighborhoods and can be perceived as neutral in a socially polarized area. However, to reach people who don't typically participate, an agency needs to go to where they congregate and feel comfortable -- in other words, to their own turf.
Interactive Television	Interactive television is a person-to-person technique that allows two-way communication. Unlike conventional one-way television (TV) or radio broadcasts, most interactive TV enables viewers to respond by telephone. A further refinement of the technology uses sophisticated equipment, TV cameras, and special connections at both ends so participants can see and hear one another. This kind of interactive TV is usually limited to small groups for long-distance conferences.

Participation Technique	Description
--------------------------------	--------------------

PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP TECHNIQUES
 Mutual cooperation and responsibility for the purpose of achieving a specific goal.

Technical Advisory/Steering Committees	Established to provide feedback, advise the planning team and shape the overall planning process. The Steering Committee is typically comprised of a small number of representatives from local authorities, the business community, key non-profit agencies, and citizens groups.
Citizens on Decision and Policy Bodies	Community people serve on policy and decision-making committees and boards. They represent groups organized around civic, environmental, business, or community interests, or specific geographic areas, or they serve as individual experts in a field. They need not be elected officials or agency staff.
Stakeholder Meetings	The stakeholder group should be representative of the demographic diversity (race, income, etc.) of the area. Stakeholders should include local elected and appointed officials, key property owners, neighborhood leaders, chamber and other economic development professionals, community service providers, area residents, and others with strong opinions and some stake in the future development of the area. The community should shoot for a maximum number of attendees, which may mean inviting more than 100 people.
Intergovernmental Partnership Meetings	Planning "summit" meetings held by the elected officials with groups interested in the comprehensive plan, such as the board of education, appointed boards and authorities, other city and county government representatives, utility providers, state agencies and departments, and regional planning entities.
Task Forces	Task forces are typically results of specific community directives. They are charged with addressing an issue and recommending a proposed policy or course of action.
Piggy-back with workshops of other organizations	If a tight budget does not permit your office to single-handedly organize and conduct workshops, other organizations and agencies may accept co-sponsors and presenters at their workshops.