



Success factors in community engagement

These two check lists can help improve the design of virtually any type of participation process that involves commitment of time and energy by members of the public.

They can be used either as formative design tools, or as evaluative/action learning tools.

The lists are based on a review of published Australian and International literature, as well evaluations of projects under the NSW Stormwater Trust. They were developed for a recent training program for the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation.

Particularly useful guides and studies were found to be:

Guides:

- *Effective Community Engagement Workbook and Tools*, DSE Vic www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/childdocs/-0B996EB412EAB883CA2570360014F01A?open and look under "Resources"
- *Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System* (no longer available)
- Aslin, H.J. & Brown, V.A. 2004 *Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT*, Murray-Darling Basin Commission http://publication.mdbc.gov.au/product_info.php?products_id=156

Studies:

- Buchy M., Ross H., and Proctor W., 2000 *Enhancing the information base on participatory approaches in Australian natural resource management*, Land & Water Australia
- Tuler, S., and T. Webler 1999. *Voices from the Forest: What Participants Expect of a Public Participation Process*. *Society & Natural Resources*, 12: 437-535

Qualities of intention (score each out of 10)

- Agency commitment:** Is the lead agency genuinely committed to the public participation process? *
- Framing:** Does the process focus on issues the participants believe to be at stake? Does the process focus on the common good? (Rather than simply the agency's needs)
- Meaningful:** Is the purpose clear? Is it linked to authoritative decision-making? Can you give a commitment that something will happen as a result?
- Shared decision-making:** Will you start the process early, without set ideas in advance? (either 'a blank sheet' or an honest disclosure of the agency's constraints)
- Preliminary research:** Have you had initial discussions with local players and residents to ensure you understand local issues and perceptions?
- Representation:** Do the participants represent all relevant players, including minority interests (youth, indigenous, CALD, disabled)?
- A multidisciplinary team:** Is the project supported by multiple branches of your organisation?

* Though no agency can be expected to be perfect in its commitment and respect for public participation processes, the greater the commitment and respect, the greater the chance of success.



Success factors: Checklist 2

Qualities of process (score each out of 10)

- Access:** Is there physical access at times and places that suit the participants?
- Responsiveness:** Can the participants genuinely influence the agenda, process and timeline? Will participants' requests for more information be met, or reasons given? Will minutes be taken? Will people see their words in print?
- Neutrality:** Is there a skilled, neutral facilitator? * Have you considered running the project as a partnership with a local organisation or group? Have you considered an independent chair?
- Relationships:** Will the ground rules facilitate respect, openness, honesty, understanding, listening and trust? Will the process build better personal relationships (an 'extended family')? Will it be fun? Will there be food?
- Depth of analysis:** Will the process go beyond assertions and try to empirically verify facts? Can the process commission new research? Will the process reflect on the values underlying the discussion? Do participants have to give reasons for their assertions?
- The coordinator:** Is the coordinator enthusiastic and approachable?
- Honouring commitments:** Will you be specific about your commitments and follow through (or explain why not)?
- Visible results:** Will something observable happen as a result of the process?

* A skilled, neutral facilitator is vital where there is existing or potential conflict.