



Tools Training Strategy Facilitation

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Community consultation **A best practice checklist**

Devised by participants at the Local Government Public Relations Association annual conference, Wollongong, February 2003.

Before you start

- Involve the public from the start.
- Really listen - token consultations spark conflict.
- Beware of pre-conceived results - the public will see right through you.
- Ask the right question! Many processes fail because they focus on secondary technical questions that pre-judge the result. For example: Don't start with 'Where do we locate the skate-board complex?' Instead ask 'What can we do about needs of young people in this area?'

Communications

- Use multi-layered processes: multiple forms of communication and multiple, personal avenues for participants to be heard.
- Never use 'sell' techniques where there is conflict over the facts.
- Keep the community informed and follow-up afterwards.
- Make sure materials and plans are up-to-date.
- Celebrate success - especially when the outcome actually happens.
- Avoid self-returned surveys - they have no statistical validity.

Running public events

- Go out to the people - at hours that suit them.
- Select locations that are non-intimidatory e.g. a service club.

- Agree on clear objectives - and stick to them.
- Agree on the timeframe and clearly communicate it.
- Agree on the rules for each stage - and make clear what will happen afterwards.
- Balance the audience - don't let one group dominate.
- Dynamically capture participants' own words with physical actions.
- Double-check the outcomes - to make sure participants really understand what they agreed to.
- Food - the universal peace-maker!
- Provide independent expert advice to support consultation committees - ensure the research is solid, accurate and in plain English.
- Support marginalised participants so their input is credible (e.g. you might set up special small group or one-on-one processes for those whose voices are easily drowned or discredited).
- Facilitators must be independent and professional.

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<http://media.socialchange.net.au/people/les>