

Public Involvement Consultants

Constituent Meeting

Public Involvement Task Force

Thursday, June 5, 2003, City Hall, Pettygrove Room

Attendance: Suzanne Roberts, Cogen, Owens, Cogan; Peggy C. Ross, PC. Rossgroup; Bill Rollins, Lions Clubs International; Doug Zenn, Zenn Associates; Richard White, Portland State University; Sumner Sharpe; Rey Espana, Latino Network; Adin Rogouin, Co-Intelligence Institution; Elliot Shuford, University of Oregon, Deliberative Democracy Project; Jeanne Lawson, Jeanne Lawson Associates, Inc.; Katy Brooks, JD White Co., Inc.; Clay Moorhead, CDA Consulting; Clark Worth, Barney & Worth

Facilitator: Jeanne Lawson

Note Taker: Katy Brooks

Overall Themes

Process note: The facilitator summarized and the group confirmed that the following issues represent the primary themes of the meeting. Listings are not in order of priority

1. **Accountability:** The public needs a way to hold the City accountable for good public involvement. Often the public feels their input was not used only because they were not informed of how they had affected the process. A *critical* step in demonstrating accountability is communicating back to public how their input was used.
2. **Assessment:** A useful standard could be a common means of assessing projects up front to determine whether, how much, who and what kind of realistic and potential public involvement is needed.
3. **Clear roles and expectations:** The City should communicate/work with a community to clarify roles and expectations up front. This would help avoid expectations that a community is being asked to *make* the decision rather than to advise on that decision.
4. **Flexibility:** The City needs to be able to customize each PI strategy to meet needs of distinct constituencies and respond to specific project issues. No one approach is appropriate for all programs.
5. **Staff training and education:** Principles of public involvement need to be reinforced for staff on a regular basis. The failure of the public involvement principles in the past is due at least in part to the lack of knowledge of and/or commitment to those principles by mid and senior level staff.
6. **Evaluation:** Assessment of process, even when outcome is not unanimous.
7. **Common set of principles:** Establish/maintain a standard set of PI principles (such as pro-active and innovative outreach).
8. **Access to the process:** Ensure the public has full access to the public process.

9. **Consistency of Outreach:** Commitment of resources to public involvement on projects varies from bureau to bureau, project to project. No common criteria for staff and financial commitments based on type or dollar size of project.

Problems, Issues and comments discussed:

The following often do not reflect consensus of the group, but are suggestions mentioned by individual participants. Organized into categories matching workgroup themes the public involvement taskforce will be working with.

City Adopted Principles of Citizen Involvement

- Principles should include these key themes.
 - 1: Planning for public involvement.
 - 2: Clarity about expectations – if not here – where they say.
 - 3: Public engaged in discussion.
 - 4: Opportunities for input.
 - 5: There must be a feedback loop.
 - 6: Transparent communications.
 - 7: Access to decision process.
- Policy commitment that Portland will involve citizens in key public policy decisions.
- Provide adequate funding to implement policy. But also, overcome excuse that there aren't enough resources.
- There must be a policy commitment and accountability for project managers to follow policy.

Process Design and implementation

- Develop standards for needs assessments that assist in early pre-planning to assess project/public/issues. Provide a template for simple assessments. For example: assessing the intensity of community response early on is important. What are economic, social, political costs to the community?
- Develop a “public involvement needs list” for each project to be used by project managers.
- Early planning and early notifications of public before decision made.
- Address how to eliminate inconsistencies in city outreach.
- Determine what types of projects and decisions require public involvement.
- Higher cost/impact to the public (social and economic), the higher the need to involve them early in the decision-making process. How does the city measure these costs?
- Define stakeholders/public for each project. Create checklist, such as economic and geographic criteria, to define who is “relevant/affected”.
- Keep stakeholders abreast of what is going on throughout a project.
- Must be an honest attempt at reaching affected public stakeholders.
- Consistently keep public informed of what is the decision-making process, how they can participate, and what place in the process they are currently at.
- Provide enough time for public input.

- ❑ Provide for greater/broader discussion of issues to set context.
- ❑ Allow the public involvement process to inform the decision-making process.
- ❑ Need “road map” to help public understand how they get to decision-maker. Clarify how citizens get access to staff with decision-making authority.
- ❑ Adequate resources need to be committed commensurate to size of public involvement process.
- ❑ Three-minute limit on public comment is not enough time to present issues before a decision-making body.

Diverse and accessible

- ❑ Outreach techniques needs to be more unconventional to reach constituencies that do not usually get involved.
- ❑ Acknowledge there are varying levels of ability for low-income people and people of color to participate.
- ❑ Develop skills and cultural competency of staff to reach diverse constituencies.
- ❑ Every middle manager needs to go to neighborhood and knock on five doors to ask for their story.

Education and skills training

- ❑ More education of public involvement process at the beginning of a project.
- ❑ At earliest point, help people understand what public involvement is, etc. Expand skills training. Provide opportunity to understand rules, process, etc. At the start of each public meeting define who, what, when, where, why to help people understand.
- ❑ Have criteria in the hiring of public involvement staff so they have skills to do quality public involvement.
- ❑ Once recommendations implemented need to educate bureaus and staff on what is expected.
- ❑ Develop skills and cultural competency of staff to reach diverse constituencies.

Accountability

- ❑ Be clear when there are “strategic management agendas” – when public agencies must construct/move forward with the project – project must happen.
- ❑ Be clear on what is role of public and power over decision. Is it advisory or participatory in decision-making process. If participatory, how deeply is public involved in decision-making? Breadth of input, how many are informed/involved?
- ❑ Clarify who the decision-makers are upfront.
- ❑ Council needs to define the policy and hold implementers, bureau directors and project managers, accountable to accomplish (yearly evaluations?). Incorporate PI performance into staff evaluations. Look at Port of Portland guidelines.
- ❑ Public wants debate and engagement. Public involvement consultants should be allowed to do this, rather than conduct a process that is already a foregone conclusion.
- ❑ After project is concluded, close the loop by following up to tell people how their input changed the final outcome. Public must see how their input is heard/used.

- ❑ Share follow-up with community – demonstrate how input was used, what changes were made and why some things/input weren't used.
- ❑ Be clear about what decisions are open to change.
- ❑ Public involvement consultants should give feedback on whether more public involvement is needed.
- ❑ Keep public abreast of what's going on throughout project.
- ❑ Information we provide must be honest.
- ❑ It's important how standards get measured. Have evaluation measurements.
- ❑ Clarify how do citizens "reach back" to the city?
- ❑ Define a successful public involvement process. Public agreement (i.e., vocal minority) does not always define a good process.
- ❑ What happens if PI consultants or staff asked to do something unethical. What do we do? Need to uphold certain democratic values.

Communication

- ❑ Public needs a single point of access to city for information and assistance.
- ❑ Expand use of electronic communication.

Standards Vs. Guidelines

- ❑ Don't want the city to have a "standard" checklist that is a set of boxes to check.
- ❑ Standards are limiting and don't clarify principles of public involvement.
- ❑ Standards are "You must do this," vs. guidelines are suggested best practices.
- ❑ Guidelines and standards can both be used – standards as criteria while guidelines provide suggested methods.
- ❑ Public involvement practices constantly change. Be flexible.
- ❑ Standards include (pink sheet) 2, 7, 13, 16 expectations and perceptions.

General Comments

- ❑ Define terms. What does successful Public Involvement look like? Clarity on what we mean by public involvement.
- ❑ There will always be opposition, regardless of amount of public involvement – Portland is very good at public involvement – the issue is making your best effort.
- ❑ Going back to grassroots public involvement may be more effective in reaching public than traditional public involvement tools.
- ❑ "Perception of legitimacy" of PI process is key to public acceptance. What guidelines can be set up to ensure legitimacy? There will be perceptions that a process is not legitimate because outcome was not what they wanted.
- ❑ Commissioners need to commit to "real" implementation.
- ❑ Balance between \$ for public involvement and projects – it is difficult to reconcile. Sometimes there is not enough money to do proper public involvement.
- ❑ Commissioner form of government makes it difficult to respond to multiple bureau agendas.

To Do:

- ❑ City of Calgary, "Engage" process. Have them visit Portland. Ask Doug Zenn.
- ❑ Ask Eliot about University of Oregon professor's document about his PI project.