

Measure 2c. Tips for Successful Meetings and Committees

Your public involvement program will involve holding public meetings as well as meeting of the Citizen's Advisory Committee. Here are some ideas about how to make sure those meetings go smoothly. All information on this fact sheet has been summarized from the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) of Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana.

Some specific strategies for effective meetings:

- Select a convenient time and location. Evening meetings are usually best for people who work during the day. Lunch meetings are also possible. Ask people what they prefer.
- Establish specific procedures and objectives. Clearly define your own role as a leader. Get agreement on the meeting objectives and processes for conducting the meeting. Maintain focus and direction of the group.
- Develop an agenda and send it out before the meeting. Ask for suggestions on the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Refer to the agenda to keep the meeting focused and on time.
- Arrange tables and chairs so that everyone can be part of the discussion. Circular tables work well as do large rectangular ones. Provide water, coffee and other refreshments.
- Respect your members' time. Never allow meetings to start or end late. Only hold meetings as often as necessary to carry out your work.
- Take minutes. These serve as reminders of what people have agreed to do. Be sure to record the group's decisions and/or concerns.
- Promote shared decision making. Give as few directions as possible. Check for consensus at appropriate times. Ask questions and encourage sharing of ideas.
- Monitor and improve group processes. Make sure the group is moving along and not getting stuck. Be patient and don't interrupt, especially during discussions or reflection. Make sure all members have an opportunity to speak and be heard.
- Foster good relationships and a positive climate. Allow for creative conflicts and disagreements over issues. Discourage interpersonal confrontation or personal attacks. Avoid being defensive if you are challenged by a group member.
- Before the meeting ends, try to get a sense of how it went. Ask people what they feel the meeting accomplished. Determine what unfinished business is left for next time. Set the time, place, and tentative agenda for the next meeting.

Some specific strategies for successful committees:

- Early on, establish a sense of need and direction - All partners need to know they're working toward a worthwhile purpose and what is expected of them. It is a good idea to develop a purpose statement that defines general goals and responsibilities. A carefully worded statement will serve as a yardstick for decision making, measuring progress and motivating members. The statement should be developed based on the consensus of all members.
- Pay particular attention to the early meetings and activities - First impressions mean a lot. People are often skeptical at the first meeting and may be suspicious of other partners.
- Set some specific ground rules related to meeting participation, discussion, confidentiality, constructive feedback, and expected contributions. It is also important to agree on decision-making procedures that encourage participation. Most effective decisions are made by consensus. This doesn't mean that everyone will be completely happy; but that everyone can live with the decision and feel decisions are fair. Your group should determine how formal the partnership needs to be. Members could meet on a regular basis or only be contacted as needed.
- Start with a few short-term tasks that have a good chance for success. Be sure that early projects are realistic and will be seen as "winners" in the eyes of the partners. Subcommittees could be formed for specific activities or information gathering.
- Spend time together (outside of meetings if possible) to get to know each other.
- Use positive feedback and recognition to reward the members of your Citizen's Advisory Panel.