



Part 1

Essay

Essay

Summary

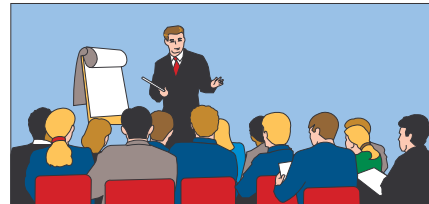
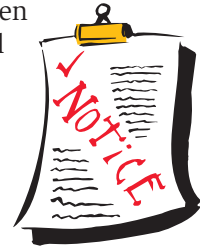
This essay examines ways that citizens interact with their local governments. We provide a definition of citizen participation and describe the benefits to a local government that establishes and uses citizen participation policies and techniques. We discuss obstacles to the use of these policies. Finally, we provide a compendium of techniques that can be used by local governments to involve citizens in a timely and constructive way in the development and implementation of public programs.

Definition

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION is any process through which citizens influence public decisions that affect their lives and the lives of other citizens. The participation can be active as when citizens interact with their elected officials or the staff of a local government to influence a public policy decision. Or the participation can be comparatively passive as when citizens simply attend a public meeting to receive information on the status of a new government program or when they show up to vote at an election. The most effective citizen participation brings people together to learn and discuss as well as to give their input, and these opportunities are particularly useful for building a consensus that can be a meaningful guide for government action.

Why should a finance manager know about citizen participation?

1. To ensure that citizen participation's legal requirements are met in the most effective manner i.e., hold public meetings.
2. To support and legitimize a financial manager's budget allocations.
3. To provide a finance manager with new insights and solutions to complex finance and budget issues, i.e., priority setting.



4. To meet and respond to the needs of citizens.
5. To advise elected officials on appropriate techniques to solicit public input in finance related matters.
6. To anticipate and be prepared for the time when citizen participation is the norm rather than the exception.

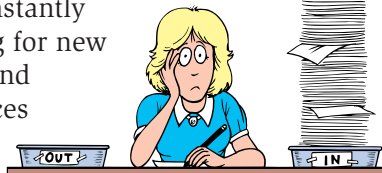


7. To provide leadership and advice to other department heads about techniques used in meeting citizens' information needs.
8. To effectively communicate financial information to the public, businesses and community organizations.
9. To serve as a means to get tangible work from volunteers to support financial activities.

Citizen participation in financial management

As a financial manager, you probably feel most comfortable when you are working with systems, numbers, and processes. No doubt, the prospect of voluntarily interacting with the “public” may be a bit unsettling. To minimize or exclude public participation in financial planning and management, the argument is sometimes heard from financial managers that involving citizens is too expensive and time consuming. Besides, continues the argument, citizens lack the necessary technical expertise and sometimes become emotionally involved in issues rather than detached and rational. Do these arguments sound familiar?

As we move into this important topic, we want to introduce you, as a local government financial manager, to another way of thinking about citizen participation. We don't need to remind you that the business of financing local government gets more complicated all the time. The most astute financial managers are constantly looking for new ideas and resources they can



use to help them cope with this growing complexity. In any community there are citizens with extensive backgrounds, responsibilities and financial credibility in business, banking, or the non-profit sector. There are also citi-

zens who may have no financial background but who may have an intelligent, common sense way of approaching issues. These citizens are accessible to you and deeply interested in being of help inasmuch as they have a vital, personal stake in the fiscal soundness of their community.

In financial management, the most common opportunity for citizen participation occurs with the discussion and adoption of an annual budget. But there are many other areas where public input can be helpful, such as establishing principles or rules for community property fund management, establishing purchasing and payment guidelines, serving on revenue and investment commissions, gathering community support for capital investment programs or general development programs. In other words, you can be a better financial manager to the extent you recognize and take advantage of the expertise that exists all around you in your community.

But there are other reasons for involving citizens. Not involving them in the affairs of local government can have grave consequences in a democratic society where people expect an opportunity to be heard and to exercise their influence. Leaving them out risks losing their confidence in local government, possibly causing them to withhold their support for important public improvement proposals. And it may even lead citizens to begin undermining government programs either by passive inaction or direct confrontation.

It is our position in this handbook that the question is no longer whether or not to involve citizens in public decision making. The question is how to involve them. Through the pages of this handbook you will find countless examples of how you, as a finance manager, can take advantage of citizen participation to convey information, solicit advice, head off conflict, create good will and build lasting public trust and cooperation. In short, we want you to recognize the value of citizen participation as a tool for successfully managing the financial affairs of your own city.

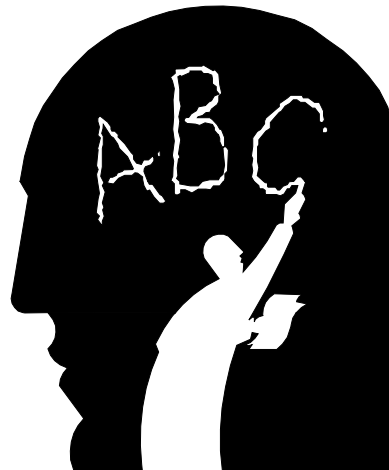
Reflection

Give three examples of how your local government involves citizens in the decision making process and where in that process citizens are involved. Is this adequate? Explain your answer.

Where there are legal requirements for public meetings or hearings, does your government just do the minimum or has it done more? Are there policies that require citizen participation? Are they formal or informal?

Concepts and ideas

A concept underlying every democratic society is that those who are affected by public decisions have the right to participate in making those decisions. In fact, in a democratic system it is fair to say that it is the public that determines where it wants to go, and it is the role of the elected representatives of the public and their staffs to get them there. Citizen participation is an affirmation of every citizen's right to have a voice in government and government's duty to find opportunities to inform, educate and involve citizens in meaningful ways in the process of public planning and decision making.



The difficult business of involving citizens

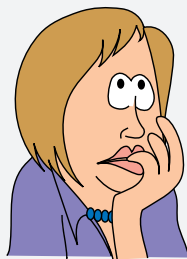
Public officials share a common complaint about citizen participation. A mayor recently lamented. *“I really would like to improve our citizen participation, but our citizens don’t want to be involved. We hold public hearings, but no one shows up.”* Citizens, on the other hand, complain about the “goings on” down at city hall. How many times have you heard a conversation like this?

“Did you hear—those people down at city hall are talking about balancing the budget this year? That means another campaign to raise taxes. I paid more taxes this year than ever before, and now they’re going to try to talk us into another increase. If I was on the council, I’d show them how to live within their means.”

Between these two extremes of perceived apathy and vocal hostility there is a middle ground. There is a place for the responsible involvement of informed

Reasons Citizens Don’t Participate

- People may not be able to attend a public meeting, hearing or citizen participation event on the scheduled date. They may have to work or have other commitments. Some locations may be difficult to get to without a personal car or may be at a location that is considered unsafe.
- People may not have heard of a public meeting or read the published notice on the sign boards or may not have heard or read about it because of short notice.
- In some cases, otherwise interested citizens may find it difficult to get in touch with the staff person in charge for more information about the meeting and, failing in the attempt, may decide not to attend.
- People feel uncomfortable when they don’t know much about the issue to be discussed at a public meeting or what might be expected of them as meeting participants.
- People with little or no experience as participants in public meetings may be suspicious of government’s intent for inviting them as manipulative and self-serving.
- In a neighborhood meeting, people may be reluctant to be the only ones expressing a particular viewpoint, especially if taking the position might make them unpopular with neighbors, friends, associates, clients or employees.
- People are reluctant to spend time discussing and debating issues when they believe the final decision has already been made.
- People do not like to supply information if they feel that their contribution will not be valued or seriously considered.



and concerned citizens in their local government. But finding the place is challenging for the local official. Have you ever wondered, for instance, why people don't get involved in the process of local government? The table provides a few reasons from the citizen's perspective.

Some local governments have attempted to address these misgivings about citizen participation by encouraging citizens and groups to get involved in local government and community projects. This handbook concerns the many ways that local officials can use to inform and educate citizens about the public issues that face their communities and to involve citizens meaningfully and productively in public planning and decision making.

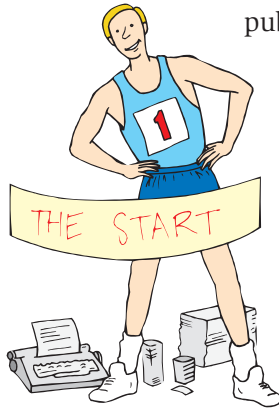
Benefits of citizen participation

There are many benefits from efforts to involve citizens in the affairs of local government. From the elected officials' perspective, citizen participation allows local government officials to make better decisions by bringing into the process a deeper and broader understanding of problems, issues and concerns. Government decisions or proposals are more readily accepted by the public if citizens have been given a voice in the process. Further, opportunities for participation can motivate individuals and groups to become more involved in their community, thereby spreading responsibility and accountability for what happens in the community over a larger number of citizens.

Benefits of Involving Citizens from the Local Government Staff Perspective

1. It brings insight on local issues to the forefront for consideration. These may come in the form of suggestions for improvement or problems that need to be solved. The process also helps identify the trade-offs between competing interests and viewpoints.
2. It helps community districts develop a sense of local pride in their respective areas by gaining some measure of influence and control over the decisions that affect their areas.
3. It assists the local government in establishing priorities and thereby promotes better financial planning and budgeting by allocating funds in response to identified community needs.
4. It brings citizens and community groups with experience and expertise beyond that which exists in the city organization into the process and thereby enlarges overall understanding of problems and provides a more accurate basis for decisions.
5. It develops leadership and knowledge within the community—a critical ingredient of the democratic process. When citizens learn how local government operates, they are more inclined to want to be a part of the process. If the local government is doing a good job, people who are involved gain respect and appreciation and as a result will be more cooperative and supportive of local government. Citizen involvement provides an effective training ground for future elected officials.
6. It produces tangible work (i.e., from volunteers) that directly benefits the community. Citizens contribute a significant number of volunteer hours in local governments in all parts of the world. For example, one city in the United States calculates that 80,000 hours of work each year is attributable to the work of community volunteers.





From the public's perspective, early involvement of citizens in the public decision-making process, especially by those directly affected by an issue or program, can increase understanding, minimize conflict and create conditions for a wider public consensus in decision making. Including citizens early in the development of new government

policies and programs ensures that their issues and concerns are heard and taken into consideration, thereby assuring that the overall public interest is better served. In general, including citizens in the decision making process makes local government appear more open and approachable. When citizens perceive their government as open to them, they are more likely to gain knowledge and understanding of local government issues and, thus, become more able to assist in the resolution of these issues.

In summary, citizen participation aids decision making, increases understanding, cooperation, and appreciation of what local government does, reduces conflict, generates support for the implementation of a project or community plan and makes local government more open to citizen problems, concerns and issues. Citizen participation is fundamental to a democratic society.

Public information as participation

When a public notice is posted or distributed, or citizens are assembled to learn about a new government program, a local government is engaging in citizen participation. Any effort by a local government to inform or educate citizens is important, for meaningful citizen participation depends on an enlightened public. In order to give informed comment and play a meaningful role in decision making, citizens must understand the issues. Citizens cannot evaluate alternatives intelligently unless they are adequately informed.



There are two types of information that a local government might provide to help citizens participate more effectively. The first type of information is to furnish citizens with details on a specific task, program or activity such as a review of the annual budget or specific project included in the city's capital improvements program. The second type of information is rather general and more educational in nature as when a public official lectures to a class of school children or explains the working of local government to a civic club, professional group or business organization. Whether specific or general in nature, a flow of timely and understandable public information is essential for citizens to participate effectively.

Public Information

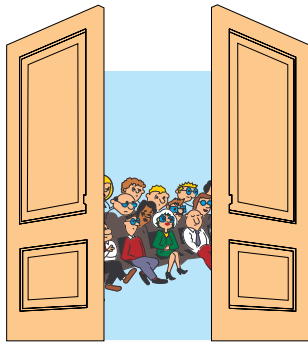
Supports a citizen participation program regarding a specific task, program or action

Provides general information about the local ongoing activities and programs

Examples

- Public hearings on capital improvements (investments) program
- Budget hearing
- Speeches for civic groups or school children
- Informational matters for businesses, educational institutions or community groups

Open Meetings



Openness in or access to the public policy decision-making process is a fundamental concept of a free and democratic society. Openness means that decisions should be made, not “behind closed doors,” but “out in

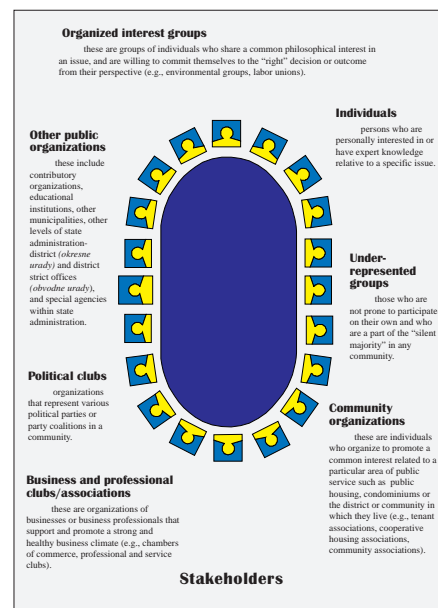
the open.” The intent is the expression of both a real and symbolic principle that all interested citizens will be informed and encouraged to dialog with their public officials toward more enlightened public decisions. Denied this right and opportunity, citizens who have an interest in local government will lose it and even become cynical about their elected leaders and the role of government generally. In many democracies, the principal of citizen accessibility to the activities of local government is so important that guarantees of access are written into “open meeting” laws. Where such laws are enacted, they assure citizens notice of and access to meetings of city councils and other public bodies except under conditions that are enumerated in the law.

Factors that trigger citizen participation

When is the right time to involve citizens in the affairs of a local government? The answer to this question is easy enough—anytime the staff or governing body believes that the participation of citizens would result in a better outcome (e.g., a more informed decision, a better designed plan, a more voter-acceptable revenue package) than were citizens not involved. Shown below are some examples of how a finance manager might involve citizens.

- Seek input from council-citizen based commissions to ensure the annual budget reflects the needs of the citizens.

- Ask citizens with financial backgrounds to evaluate two alternatives for raising revenue in terms of cost, fairness and public acceptance.
- Organize a group of **STAKEHOLDERS** to plan ways to resolve an issue of environmental sustainability concerning a chemical plant that is a historic generator of toxic waste but can provide a strong and needed boost to the local economy.



(see next page)

- Set up focus group meetings to find out how citizens feel about the privatization of a service previously provided by government.
- Conduct a survey to learn how the citizens feel about the need to impound stray dogs, cats and other animals.
- Create a residents committee to choose at which two intersections of five with extremely high accident rates to install traffic signals. There is enough money for signals at only two intersections.
- Create a citizens’ task force on “youth in trouble” to determine the causes, effects and offer possible solutions to reduce crime and vandalism in the community.

Who participates?

A well established principle of organizational change that applies as well to the activities of local government is that people tend to support what they help to create. Following this principle, it is important to involve in specific government issues those individuals and groups who are most directly concerned with those issues. Such

concerned individuals and groups are sometimes called “stakeholders.” Citizen participation programs are more effective if they identify those individuals or groups that have a stake in a decision to be made or a problem to be solved. Typically, these stakeholders, individuals or groups, consist of the following:

Organized interest groups

these are groups of individuals who share a common philosophical interest in an issue, and are willing to commit themselves to the “right” decision or outcome from their perspective (e.g., environmental groups, labor unions).

Other public organizations

these include contributory organizations, educational institutions, other municipalities, other levels of state administration-district (*okresne urady*) and district strict offices (*obvodne urady*), and special agencies within state administration.

Political clubs

organizations that represent various political parties or party coalitions in a community.

Business and professional clubs/associations

these are organizations of businesses or business professionals that support and promote a strong and healthy business climate (e.g., chambers of commerce, professional and service clubs).

Individuals

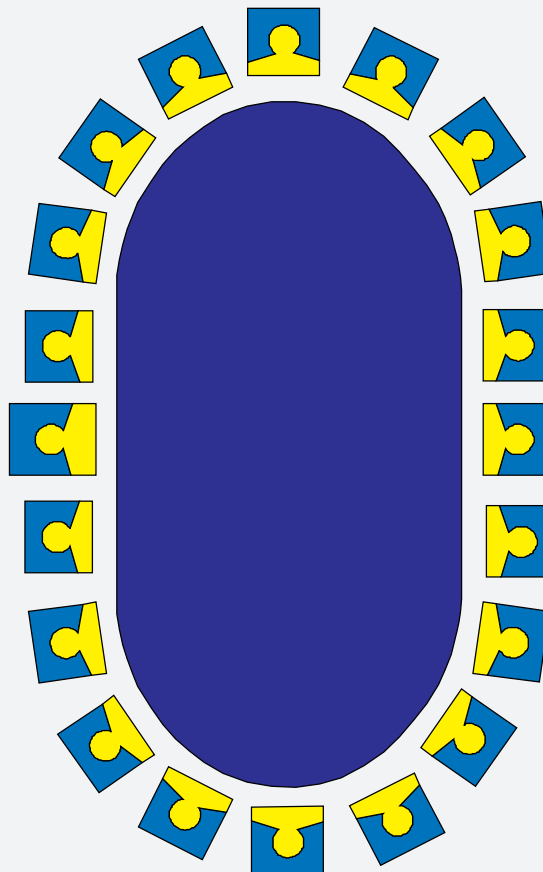
persons who are personally interested in or have expert knowledge relative to a specific issue.

Under-represented groups

those who are not prone to participate on their own and who are a part of the “silent majority” in any community.

Community organizations

these are individuals who organize to promote a common interest related to a particular area of public service such as public housing, condominiums or the district or community in which they live (e.g., tenant associations, cooperative housing associations, community associations).



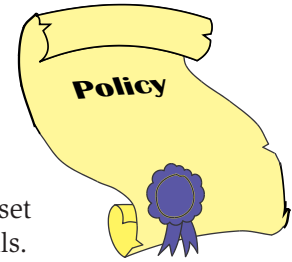
Stakeholders

Citizen roles in the participation process

The roles of individual citizens and citizen groups will vary by issue. Some citizen groups may represent particular segments of the overall “public interest” (e.g., preserving green spaces and wetlands from the encroachment of new development). Some will work on behalf of the economic, political or social interests of their various constituencies. Local government officials can play an important role in discerning which interests need to be represented when addressing a particular public issue and seeing that as many of them as possible are present when the issue is being addressed. Government officials may be the best equipped of all the parties to keep the group’s focus on the real “public interest” that underlies any issue or discussion. Moreover, it is the local government that is most likely to be aware of the various legal and policy considerations that must be observed in reaching a decision. Shown below is a description of some roles citizens may choose or be asked to play in governmental affairs and the nature of the issue or activity in which they are involved.

Policies

The formulation of public policy is a local government’s way of declaring its intent to commit itself and its resources to a specific set of principles and goals.



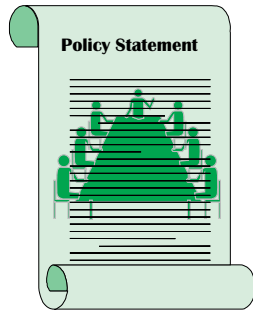
Most local governments have no participate in governmental affairs only when necessary to satisfy legal requirements. For example, Slovak Republic law requires that *“the municipal budget be published for at least 15 days in a way which is common in the municipality so that the population can comment on it.”*



Laws requiring citizens to be invited to participate in some limited event “live review” of the budget should be viewed as a starting point for much more extensive public involvement in governmental decision making. In other words, mandate citizen participation in all activities of local government as a matter of policy. The adoption of a statement of policy on citizen participation by the city council is the public’s assurance that their local government is serious about citizen participation and that specific imple-

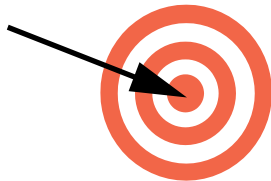
Role	Issue or Activity
Self-interest	Providing input on a specific topic like zoning, animal restraint laws, or the sale of an asset, like park land.
Advocacy	Citizen task force charged with examining a specific subject and to offer evidence supporting a recommendation.
Shared power	Community groups and boards gather facts and present information on technical issues based on citizens, academic, business leader or consultant input.
Expert resource	Persons who have firsthand experience provide information to enlarge the understanding of public officials about a problem or issue.
Service quality feedback	A sizable number of citizens asked to offer reactions and opinions about service quality or other matters that could affect decisions on the allocation of public funds.

mentation procedures and programs can be expected to follow. Such a statement should include, at a minimum, types of citizen participation, providing the public with information, and “open” meetings. (See Handbook 3 in this series on *Financial Policy Making* for additional information on the development of public policy). The policy should be designed for local needs, prepared in writing, and adopted by the city council.



Goals of a citizen participation policy

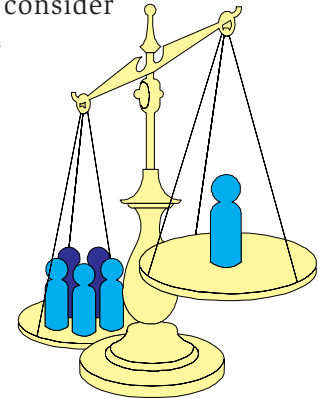
A **GOAL** is a long term, attainable statement of intent for a local government. Goals should reflect a local government’s priorities and the community’s interests. In the case of citizen participation, the following goals, in some form, should be considered for inclusion in a policy statement on citizen participation.



- to ensure the best possible living environment for citizens;
- to encourage citizens to play an active role in caring for and enriching the community;
- to ensure the public has full and timely access to and influence on public policy and decision-making, assuring full disclosure and ready access to public information;
- to ensure equal representation for all interests in decision making processes, balancing different values and needs;
- to foster trust among citizens, local government officials and staff;
- to develop a new, citizen-centered approach to city governance.

When to involve citizens

The policy should call for compliance with all legal requirements for citizen notice and hearing, but should go much further to consider initiating citizen participation activities at the beginning of any new decision making process when a project will alter or influence government’s relationship with its citizens. Some areas to be considered for inclusion in a policy statement:



- health and welfare of citizens,
- the character of a neighborhood or a district,
- public values or expectations,
- streetscapes (e.g., landscaping, trees),
- traffic, parking characteristics, and pedestrian movement,
- public safety,
- tax rate and service charges,
- economic health and the sustainability of growth,
- level of service (e.g., tram or bus transport)



A Sample Policy Statement on Citizen Participation

We, the city council of xxxxxxxxxxxx, believe that:

Citizens represent an integral part of local government functions, programs and activities since they receive services and benefits of local government and elect local officials to represent them, and

Consulting with citizens on issues that directly affect them or their community at the beginning of the process represents a new approach to governance,

Participation in the local decision making process fosters trust among residents, elected officials and staff;

It has been demonstrated that citizens involved in the decision making process play an active role in caring for and enriching their community:

It is the intent of this city council, therefore, that:

Citizens will be provided timely information about decisions that are being considered by the local government and will be provided the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

Citizen participation programs will be designed and conducted in connection with the establishment of new city policies or significant changes to existing policy.

All local government departments, offices, agencies and staff will cooperate to the fullest extent possible by including citizens in decision making.

If questions arise, the need for citizen participation should be determined in consultation with those individuals, organizations, and other local governments that might consider the action significant.

Note: A policy statement such as this implies responsible judgment on the part of decision makers. For example, how big does a decision have to be to constitute a decision? How important does an action have to be before it is considered "significant"? These are questions that should be addressed by local officials and the policy made more specific to meet a specific jurisdiction's needs.

A budget policy illustration

Shown below are illustrative policy statements relative to the involvement of citizens in local government's annual budgeting process. Opposite each policy statement is a rationale for the policy.

Together these policy statements open the door to a variety of ways for citizens to become involved. Note that the local government in the wording of the second policy statement has gone beyond the Slovak Republic's legal requirements for citizen participation in the budget process by opening council budget workshops to the public.



Policy Statement	Rationale
1. The budget will be prepared in such a manner that citizens and elected officials have no difficulty understanding.	One of the stated purposes of the budget is to present a picture for the citizens of the city government's operations and intentions for the year. Presenting a budget document that is understandable furthers the goal of effectively communicating finance issues to both elected officials and the public.
2. In addition to required public hearings, the council or council commission will hold work sessions on the budget which will be open to the public.	Work sessions provide all citizens with a forum for meaningful participation in the budget process. They enable citizens to: obtain an understanding of the budget that cannot be acquired by the document itself, provide public input to the proposed budget, and to monitor the council's or council commission's changes to the proposed budget.
3. Copies of the proposed budget will be made available to citizens and elected officials prior to the work sessions.	Providing citizens with copies of the proposed budget in advance of the work sessions enables them to become better informed on the issues facing the council and the administration during the budget work session.
4. The local government will maintain a policy of full and open public disclosure of all financial activity.	Full and open public disclosure of all financial activity provides the public with assurance that its elected officials and administrators communicate fully all financial matters affecting the public.

Reflection

Because citizen participation is so important to local government decision making, we suggest that you stop for a few moments and reflect on your government's policies regarding them. What are the most serious citizen participation problems facing your government? Citizen apathy? Under-educated citizens? Limited accessibility? Fear? Limited opportunity?

What are the consequences of these problems? If citizen participation in your local government is low to nonexistent, what can you do about it?

Citizen participation techniques

The term “technique” is used in this handbook to describe any method planned by a local government to inform, educate, or solicit the assistance of citizens in planning and decision making. Fifteen common citizen participation techniques are described in the following tables. Two types of techniques are identified: Type 1) techniques that are specifically

designed to involve citizens in the decision making process; and Type 2) techniques designed to educate and inform citizens but not necessarily to obtain their ideas and opinions. More detail on these fifteen techniques with descriptions and examples of their use can be found in the *Compendium of Citizen Participation Techniques* that concludes this essay.

Type 1 Techniques	Definition/Purpose	Example
Public hearings or meetings	Formal structured hearing, usually called by the city council	Meet legal requirements to inform citizens about the proposed budget
Town hall meeting	Informal assembly usually held in a recreation building, school, church, bank or other facility	Status report on capital improvements program in specific geographical area
Citizen opinion/attitude survey	Gathering information about citizens’ attitudes without holding a group meeting	Reactions to a proposal to pay increased fees for cultural events
Focus group	Meeting of selected citizens to gauge the probable response of a larger group	Find out the nature and strength of citizen sentiment about a controversial local issue
Advisory committee and task force	Group of citizens appointed to provide advice on issue(s); may be on-going or, in the case of a task force, focused upon a single issue	Investment committee to suggest alternatives for investing unused cash
Boards and commissions	Groups of citizens appointed to provide control, management and maintenance of a specific function	Advisory board for review and evaluation of the annual budget process
Technology application (Cable TV, Internet)	Cable TV is an alternative to “over the air” TV; TV signal is sent through a coaxial cable to homes, apartments and offices	Live broadcast of the city council meeting; posting of city job openings
	Internet—large group of computers exchanging information; citizens can send to and receive information from the City	Send electronic mail rather than phoning or physically going to city hall
Community association/board	Group of citizens organized around a common interest or issue	Group formed to defeat a proposed fee increase for the use of a city facility such as a recreation building
Community office	Funded and operated by the city, this is a “satellite city hall,” established to serve a geographical area where citizens can come to receive certain services	Services could include health care, social assistance, payment of fees, requesting police assistance

Type 2 Techniques	Definition/Purpose	Example
Ombudsman	A nonpartisan public official who investigates people's complaints about government officials or agencies	Resolving a complaint over a code enforcement citation
Open door program (accessibility)	A method to encourage citizens to visit city hall or a community office on a walk-in basis	Come in without an appointment to complain because your trash was not picked up this morning
Public information	Information provided in the form of press releases, interviews, pamphlets, etc.	Publication of a flier that describes city health care services
Education programs and popular reporting	Direct information/education programs that provide citizens an opportunity to meet face-to-face with their elected representatives Popular reports are easy-to-understand summaries of the city's financial condition and achievements	Speech to school children about the budget Use of graphs to demonstrate where financial resources were spent in the past year
Citizen service request office (complaints, suggestions and information)	Centralized clearinghouse established to receive and respond to citizen requests for assistance and information	City representative acts as an agent for the citizen to refer a payment complaint to the department concerned, and reports back to the citizen with the result
Media relations	Interaction with the media (newspapers, radio and television)	Press release written and submitted to the press on the city's proposed capital improvement program

Which citizen participation technique to use?

A strategy for selecting a citizen participation technique is to focus on the purpose to be achieved by involving the citizen. Typical purposes are to:

- **inform** the public about local government initiatives and keep them informed as they take part in the decision-making process;
- **educate** the public about the rationale for a local government initiative, or the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives;
- **solicit** information from the public to augment other sources of information;
- **consult** with the public to learn what they know and how they feel about a local government initiative;
- involve the public in **planning** to develop program goals, strategies and visions for the future;
- obtain **feedback** from the public about the impact of a local government initiative on them or their neighborhood;
- provide **feedback** to the public on the impact of local government initiatives in general and follow-on activities; and
- **involve members** of the public directly in decision making through participation in the activities of on-going boards, commissions, and committees.

The following table shows which citizen participation techniques are best suited for attaining each of these purposes.

Technique	Matching Citizen Participation Techniques to Purposes						
	Inform	Educate	Solicit Information	Consult	Plan	Feedback	On-going Interaction
Public hearing	•	•	•	•			
Town hall meeting	•	•	•	•		•	
Opinion survey	•		•	•		•	
Focus group	•		•	•		•	
Advisory committee	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Boards/commissions	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Cable TV Internet	•	•	•	•		•	•
Community assoc.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Community office	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Ombudsman	•	•	•	•			
Open-door	•	•	•				
Public information	•	•					
Education programs	•	•					
Citizen service office	•	•					
Media relations	•	•					

Techniques of citizen participation are sometimes compared according to the intensity of involvement and the degree of impact their participation might have on government policies and programs.

A graphic in the form of an inverted pyramid arranges seven typical techniques of citizen participation from lowest to highest involvement.



Citizens' Participation **An Example from the City of Trnava**

Around the middle of the 4-year election term, the mayor of the City of Trnava convened meetings with citizens of particular constituencies. The formal preparation of these meetings was secured in the following way:

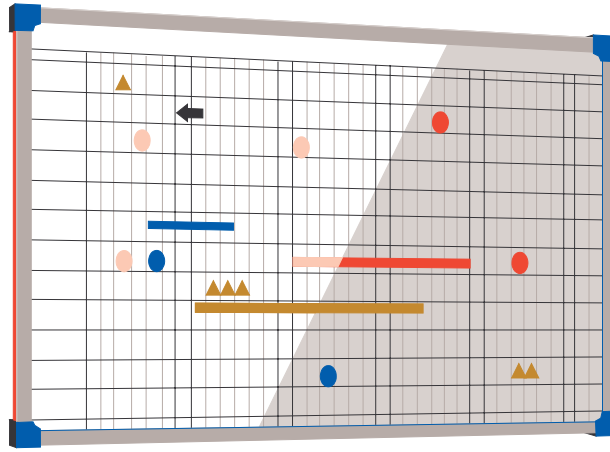
- posters informing about the meeting were arranged on notice boards and other places which are used to publicize notices;
- leaflets were distributed to citizens' post boxes in individual constituencies;
- invitations were communicated through regional radio stations, regional press and the municipal radio (municipal cable channel was not yet available—today this method is used for announcements.)

Preparatory task force of the municipal office secured the conference rooms, arranged for their notification for citizens' orientation, seating arrangement for elected representatives in adequate proximity to citizens, and supplied attendance sheets. Where appropriate, microphones were provided, and participation of the owner or administrator of the building where the meetings were held was arranged for.



A structured program was prepared for the meeting which basically guided all the meetings and proceeded as follows:

- Introduction of the mayor and other elected representatives, i.e., deputy mayors and councilors for a particular constituency;
- Introduction of leading city officials and directors of municipal companies stating areas of their responsibilities;
- Mayor's introductory address lasting approximately 20-30 minutes;
- Discussion time with individual speakers asked to give their names;
- Municipal office workers were writing down questions and comments raised according to their responsibility;
- Where possible, questions or comments were responded to immediately. Where this was not possible to do at the meeting, citizens were informed subsequently in writing.



Time and resource requirements

Citizen participation initiatives require time and resources (personnel and operating) to be effective. Local officials should consider the following time considerations when planning a citizen participation program.

Schedule of events

- A clear and concise schedule of events should be developed at the beginning of the project.
- The schedule should include major milestones and decision points.
- There should be a variety of activities in which citizens can participate.
- Scheduling changes should be communicated to all interested parties as far in advance as possible.

Lead time

- The schedule for individuals and groups to get materials, review them and make plans to attend scheduled activities.
- It should be recognized that groups rely on voluntary resources and meet infrequently (i.e., monthly); therefore, internal communications between members may be slow. Large organizations may need time to circulate materials and coordinate responses.

Holidays

- Citizen participation activities should not be scheduled during seasonal holidays when prospective citizen participants are engaged in other activities.

Speed of decision making

- Some organizations can make decisions quickly because of their organizational structure and staff capabilities. Others, such as community groups and neighborhood associations, may not be able to make decisions without polling their broader membership. A group that needs more time to ratify a decision may feel pressured by the decision process to make a decision prematurely.

Coordination

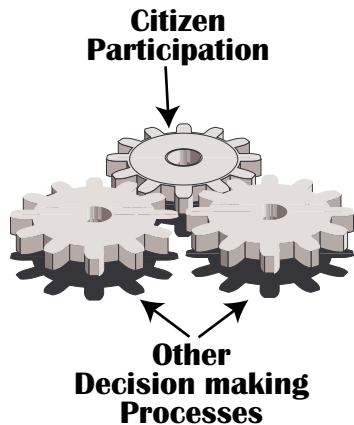
- Citizen participation activities should be coordinated by the city staff with all affected groups to avoid transferring the burden to a group's volunteer resources unable to handle the increased workload.

Length

- The length of the citizen participation process should be established after considering all factors that go into the final decision.

A valuable tool but no panacea

Citizen participation is a tool for improved planning and decision making. It should not be regarded as a solution to local government's problems but rather an important contributor to solving problems so that they stay solved. It is a complement to existing decision making processes, not a substitute.



When local government is isolated from the public, citizens may come to regard their officials with suspicion and mistrust. Breaking down these barriers takes considerable time spent in efforts to inform citizens, familiarize them with how government works and the issues it faces, and involve them in resolving problems that are of direct concern to them. Consistent efforts to reinforce the belief that citizen views and ideas are needed and wanted can help to overcome the cynicism and distrust that so often characterizes the relations of citizens with their public officials.

There are several ways to get maximum value from the involvement of citizens. As already mentioned, how citizens are used in planning or decision making depends on the objective or what is to be accomplished more satisfactorily with citizen input than without it. A group of neighborhood residents, selected at random, might be a poor choice for a task force to develop criteria for the attraction of new businesses to locate in the community. However, they might be ideal for a focus group on increasing resident accountability for the health and safety

of a neighborhood. Find opportunities to encourage positive and healthy interaction among citizens, particularly when there is a climate of suspicion and distrust. Bring people together in familiar surroundings, make them feel comfortable, use simple language they can understand to explain the issues and what is expected of them, and convince them that what they are being asked to do is important and is expected to make a difference. *Appendix A* (page 41) contains a detailed list of steps for planning and implementing a citizen

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APPENDIX A Steps for Planning and Implementing a Citizen Participation Process

<p>Planning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the key issues 2. Define the objective; relate it to overall organizational goals 3. Seek organizational commitment from local officials to a participating approach within City Hall 4. Consult with others at city hall Coordinate other departments, agencies, affected governments involvement Determine need for a facilitator Review schedules and availability of key persons 5. Identify key persons, departments or organizations that will be affected Develop a profile of the community Identify persons, agencies, etc. by name Clarify issues Develop contacts and rapport Interview community leaders <p>Program Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Draft Participation Program Circulate information, issues, and options 	<p>Determine the decision making process for the program Determine objectives for each stage of citizen participation Design citizen participation opportunities with techniques Establish monitoring and evaluation efforts</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Meet with key persons affected by the process or program Confirm issues and options Confirm objectives for each step of citizen participation Confirm selection of facilitator, if applicable See advice on the overall design of the program and techniques used in each stage. 8. Finalize program design Finalize program requirements (personnel and financial resources) Finalize information requirements Finalize monitoring and evaluation efforts Finalize schedules and work assignments 9. Consult with key persons and other public agencies on final design as applicable Analyze results Make changes as needed Revise the draft Determine additional decision making processes as needed.
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Citizen Participation

participation program and *Appendix B* (page 43) a checklist for planning a successful neighborhood meeting.

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APPENDIX B Checklist for Preparing and Conducting a Successful Town Hall Meeting

<p>Pre-meeting Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Has a meeting space been located and reserved? — Has the meeting space been checked and arrangements made for keys, seating set-up and clean up? — Does the meeting space have adequate lighting, can room be darkened? — Are audio visual equipment, microphone and extension cords available at the meeting space? If not, who will provide? — Is location accessible by bus transport? Is there ample parking for autos? — Are participant handouts prepared: agenda, information sheets, feedback forms? — Is sign in or registration form prepared; are there adequate pens and paper? — Are name tags needed? — Are signs posted to direct participants to the correct building/meeting room? — Are refreshments being provided: coffee, tea, mineral water? — Are flip charts, easels, markers and paper available in the meeting room? — Have facilitators, note takers and presenters been assigned? — Do other local officials who plan to attend know their roles? 	<p>Meeting Notice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Has a mailing list been developed/ updated? — Has the public notice for sign boards and advertisement in newspaper been posted/ published; is the wording of the objective consistent? — Has the news media been contacted? Press release written? — Have key community persons, Council members and departments been personally contacted regarding the meeting. <p>At the Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Are seats placed in a circular arrangement to encourage discussion among the participants? Don't use the stage. — Are there too many chairs?; people tend to sit in the back; avoid a front table—use chairs only. — Identify water closets (WC) and smoking areas. — Clarify the role of the facilitator if used. — Review the rules of the meeting and attempt to get buy in. — Ensure that the participants understand and accept the objective of the meeting. — Start on time and finish on time; advise participants at the beginning of the meeting how long the meeting will last and expected time to adjourn.
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Citizen Participation

Obstacles

There are obstacles to the implementation of an on-going effort to involve citizens in local government activities. Of course, these programs can be costly and time consuming. An even more serious barrier is the threat citizens pose to established ways of doing things. The involvement of citizens may be resisted in governmental activities that in the past were the sole responsibility of elected officials or bureaucrats. The threat is most pronounced where the involvement of citizens results in a shift toward decentralized policy making authority and empowering neighborhood districts at the expense of a traditional political power base. A word of caution for local governments that have not involved citizens extensively in the past: move slowly into



citizen participation by first involving citizens in areas of activity that pose little threat to existing power bases.

Finally, don't expect too much from citizen participation. It is no guarantee that any decisions reached by a citizen's group will satisfy the expectations of all citizens. Citizen participation only permits different views to be aired and discussed through an open process. As a rule, final decisions will be made by the mayor and city council. There is no magic in citizen involvement; however, on-going dialog between citizens and government officials can be useful to reduce tension within the community over unresolved issues and produce a better understanding of real needs and concerns.

Reflection

Involving citizens effectively in local government decision making is important to the long-term success of local government. However, we often hear that citizens are not interested in local government and, therefore, do not want to participate. Do you agree with this statement? If you do, list the reasons that you believe keep people from participating more actively in your local government.

What actions could be taken successfully in the next six months to involve your citizens more fully in the decision making processes of your local government?

Summary of concepts and key ideas

- Citizen participation is more than allowing citizens to be heard prior to a public policy decision being made; it is providing citizens the opportunity to **influence** the decision from the beginning to the end of the decision making process.
- Citizen participation is fundamental to the democratic process.
- Citizen participation aids decision making, increases understanding, cooperation and appreciation of what local government does, reduces conflict, generates support for the implementation of a project or community plan, and makes local government more open to citizen problems, concerns and issues.
- There are a lot of reasons why people do not get involved with government.
- To guide their own actions and encourage citizen involvement in the community, local government councils should consider adopting written policies on citizen participation, public information, and open meeting activities in their community.
- Citizen participation programs should be designed for inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.
- A workable strategy for selecting a participation technique is to focus on the purpose of the process; practically speaking, the real question is not which technique is most appropriate, but rather which techniques can best be used together to achieve the purpose.
- Citizen participation is not a magic potion. It does not guarantee that majority expectations will be met, that different viewpoints will be reconciled, or that negative attitudes toward government will be erased. It simply provides various forums for these differences to be aired and dealt with in the open.

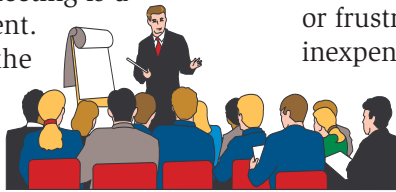
Compendium of Citizen Participation Techniques

This section of the essay discusses a number of citizen participation techniques used by local governments.

1. Public hearing or meeting

Definition/Purpose

A public hearing or meeting is a formal, structured event. (For ease of reading, the authors use public hearings as synonymous with public meetings.) It is commonly used to gather citizen comments related to the annual budget. A public hearing may be a requirement of law or policy.



ments and to clarify facts or ideas. All sides of an issue can be heard. A public hearing provides a forum for community leaders to express their positions on issues and provide for venting of anger or frustration. A public hearing is an inexpensive means of obtaining citizen comments on an issue.

A public hearing has limitations. It is not an effective forum for conveying complex ideas or detailed information. Public hearings do not provide for in-depth discussions or appreciation of different viewpoints as they can be dominated by vocal individuals with narrow interests. Public hearings are not well suited to building consensus or making a decision. Facilitation is critical and difficult—public hearing can stray off the planned agenda. It can be difficult to prevent confrontation.

Process

The council calls a public hearing by posting notice in a public place (on sign boards) or publishing the notice in a local newspaper prior to the meeting. The date, time, location and purpose of the hearing is included in the notice. The council usually holds the hearing during regularly scheduled council meetings at city hall. The council sets the format of the public hearing and it may include presentations by staff. The council establishes rules that govern the public hearings and may limit speaking time to ensure that all citizens are given an opportunity to be heard. Where large numbers of citizens are expected, speakers may be required to sign up in advance to speak before the council.



Appealing to People's Pride and Sense of Fairness

The local finance director began his remarks at a crowded public hearing on the budget by acknowledging his and the participant's shared concerns. "I understand your neighborhood's concern about the need to invest more in adequate traffic control. My ten-year-old son crosses Liptovska Road every day to go to school, and in our neighborhood we parents formed a safety patrol to try to slow down traffic in the morning." Later he commented, "we've all watched our city grow, and I'm proud that so far we've been able to work together to solve the tough issues."

Advantages/Disadvantages

A formal public hearing reaches large numbers of people and provides opportunities for the public to comment directly on an issue. There can be an opportunity to respond directly and immediately with questions and com-

2. Town hall meeting

Appendix B contains a checklist for local officials on how to set up and conduct a successful public hearing or town hall meeting.

answer any citizen questions and record the comments of the citizens. Local elected officials are usually present and moderate the discussion.

Definition/Purpose

Town hall meetings are a variation of the formal public hearing, serving the same purpose—to solicit citizen comments—but it is less formal. Meeting dates and times are coordinated with local residents and are held in the community or neighborhood.

The agenda focuses on a single issue. The informal structure of the town hall meeting allows for in-depth discussion, direct and immediate response to questions and comments, and clarification of facts or ideas. It may be a requirement of local policy.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Because the town hall meeting is informal and focused on a single issue, it is an effective technique to solicit, receive and discuss public comments on an issue. Town hall meetings, because of size and informal structure, are better suited to build consensus for decision making.

The logistics of setting up and conducting a meeting outside city hall, the need to hold multiple meetings in different parts of the community, and expenses may be viewed as disadvantages to this technique. However, from a different perspective, the first two objections can be positive aspects of the technique. If city hall is seen as being out of touch with the citizenry, town hall meetings can be a perfect opportunity to get out into the community, change that perception, and demonstrate commitment to citizen participation. Facilitation is critical to a town hall meeting to keep it on the planned agenda.

Process

As an example, a town hall meeting is called to discuss the development of a neighborhood improvement plan. First, city staff gives a presentation on the issue which provides a common informational basis for citizens in attendance. Members of the responsible departments



Advertising a Public Meeting

A city council in a small community was anxious that all its citizens would be informed about a town hall meeting being held to consider the merits of a proposed comprehensive land-use plan. On advice of staff, the council invested in a fifteen-foot banner and hung it on the outside of the city hall, facing the busiest city street. Everyone who passed through town saw the sign, and many commented on it favorably when they came to the meeting.



Lucenec, Slovakia

Some of the deputies elected for the constituency of Rubanisko (a residential district with 10,000 population) organized a public meeting on a carefully selected date, directly at the residential district. The mayor and competent experts from the town hall were invited to this meeting. Invitations were distributed widely through regional newspapers and leaflets were distributed to mail boxes.

Within this meeting the deputies were expecting comments from citizens to submitted urban development plans for this borough. They also wanted to get information on how to utilize the non-residential premises (serving for business purposes) recently released and being in the ownership of the city. The mayor and the management of the town all answered concrete questions of citizens. There was also a feedback to this process.

3. Citizen opinion/ attitude survey

Definition/Purpose

This technique is used to gather factual information about citizens' attitudes and opinions, usually regarding the quality and financing of local government services.



An opinion survey can include the general population or a specific group of users. It may cover all municipal services or just one service, such as the use and condition of parks and open space. The results are used to determine citizens' priorities for services, evaluate existing services, and investigate the citizens' willingness to support tax or fee increases.

Process

Developing a quality citizen attitude survey usually requires the assistance of a private consulting firm with public opinion survey experience. City staff can assist the process by developing suggested questions for the survey, but the consulting firm usually prepares the questionnaire, conducts the survey, and evaluates the results. The survey can be conducted by telephone, in person, or by mail. The more personal the survey (getting answers to the questions in person versus by mail), the more expensive, but hopefully, the more accurate.

Advantages/Disadvantages

A scientifically conducted survey, based on a representative sample of the entire community, has the advantage of recording the answers of all the residents, not just the voter, the politically active or the influential. By conducting a survey on a recurring basis (every two to three years) using similar questions, local officials can determine any changes in public opinion and whether actions taken in the interim have been effective in influencing public opinion.

One City's Experience with a Citizen Opinion Survey

In 1993, a major metropolitan city in Eastern Europe faced two issues related to citizen participation: advertised meetings resulted in little turnout, and many of the government programs offered by the previous system bore no relationship to customer demand. The solution was to design and conduct an opinion survey to determine citizen interest. In January, 1994, the city contacted 287 households by telephone. The survey focused on the 14 largest programs and asked about: (1) satisfaction with service provided, (2) desire for increases or decreases in service levels, and (3) willingness to pay more taxes or charges for program increases. The intent was to establish a link between service level and customer demand. The survey also asked the public's opinion on the priorities of programs and some of the more politically difficult issues in the budget.

The survey revealed some interesting insights into public opinion and provided objective information about citizens' opinion of city services. For example:

- The program with the highest community satisfaction was culture (77 percent) followed by primary education (72 percent) and central heating (60 percent). The lowest scoring programs were streets (19 percent) and financial assistance to the poor (25 percent) and water and sewer (34 percent).
- Sixty four percent supported service increases in water and sewer; 58 percent in solid waste, 57 percent in streets, and 54 percent in parks. However, only in primary education, water and sewer, and parks were the majority of supporters willing to pay more.
- Eighty percent supported the city's top priorities of streets, housing and schools.
- On issues that were politically difficult, 81 percent believed that the city should contract out programs to reduce costs, and 97 percent believed that utility rates should be based on actual use, rather than everyone paying the same rate.

4. Focus group meeting

Definition/Purpose

A focus group is a meeting of selected citizens. It is designed to gauge the probable response of one or more large groups to a local government proposal or initiative.

Process

A focus group is usually facilitated by a consultant. Approximately ten people are selected for each group. They represent a cross-section of the community. The group is asked questions in an objective manner about the proposal or initiative. The individual's and group's responses are either recorded by audio tape or with extensive written notes so the information can be analyzed later. The same interview process is repeated three or four times with different groups to gather comparative information.

Advantages/Disadvantages

They provide a detailed understanding of people's concerns and values by bringing together people who represent different perspectives. Focus groups tend to be less expensive than an opinion survey and less time consuming than a full fledged opinion survey. They also are spontaneous in that participants may volunteer information that you might not have thought to ask in an opinion survey.

They are not effective for providing information to the general public. They are not designed to build consensus or make decisions. They are not scientific, and it is difficult to quantify the results. The findings point you in the right direction, but it is wise to use the feedback as a guideline for further research. The success of focus groups often depends on the availability of outside expertise.



Tact and Consideration with Citizens

The focus group was planned to discuss city taxes, a contentious issue in that community, and the citizens were there in large numbers. Most people accepted their table assignments when they were handed numbered name tags, but one of the more aggressive citizens complained: "I want to sit with several of my neighbors who feel exactly like I do." "I understand," said the staff organizer, firmly, but with a smile; "but we want to give everyone a chance to speak with people who might not agree with them. You may even convince someone to consider your point of view." The complainer reluctantly sat down where she was told. Later, after a particularly lively and creative discussion, she admitted to the focus group facilitator that the "opposition" did not look nearly as fierce face to face.

5. Ad hoc and advisory committees/task forces

Definition/Purpose

An advisory committee is a group of citizens appointed to provide continuing advice on issue(s) to the council. A task force is a group of citizens appointed to work on a specific objective or problem. It exists only for the time necessary to complete the task. A task force may also be a sub-committee to a larger advisory group and is limited in size so that it can be an effective working body. In both cases, the selection of members is critical. Membership must be broad enough yet not too large, and must be representative.

Advisory committees are good for organizing and coordinating input from a wide range of people. They are especially useful for developing consensus for action on complex issues that touch upon many facets of the community.

Process

Expectations of the role of the committee or task force must be clear to all parties. Putting these expectations in writing is an excellent way to guide the committee or task force in their assignment as well as to terminate it when the job is complete.

Advisory committees and ad hoc task forces are effective in focusing attention on an important issue for a short period of time. They are useful in organizing input from a wide range of people and developing consensus for action on complex issues that touch upon many facets of the community. They are disbanded when the work is complete. However, without clear guidelines, specific tasks and limits, they can assume a life unto themselves.



6. Standing boards and commissions

Definition/Purpose

In most Slovak local governments, the term “board” refers to the town or municipal board which consists of council members appointed by the council to serve as an advisory body to the mayor.



To ensure a broad representation on policy and geographical issues, councils often select council committee chairpersons plus some representatives from geographical districts to serve on boards. Boards and commissions provide control, management and maintenance of a specific function.

Process

A board or commission is established by state law or local ordinance and stipulates how the body is constituted, the qualifications of the members, and the duties of the board or commission. Board and commission members serve at the pleasure of council for a term specified by law but typically have the same term as the council.



In the Slovak Republic, most city councils have established permanent standing committees to deal with complex policy development or planning issues over a longer period of time. Advisory committees may consist of elected representatives, part elected representatives and part citizens, or all citizens depending upon local law and practice.

Examples

In Lucenec, the council has established 15 permanent committees, each consisting of five elected representatives and four citizens. Each committee advises the city council in a specific functional area.



Advantages/Disadvantages

They are effective for providing citizen oversight of specific local government activities. Citizens bring specialized expertise into local government and gain experience for future leadership roles.

Boards and commissions are not effective in providing information to the general public or developing consensus outside their area of responsibility. They can become so narrowly focused on a single function that they lose sight of larger, city-wide issues.



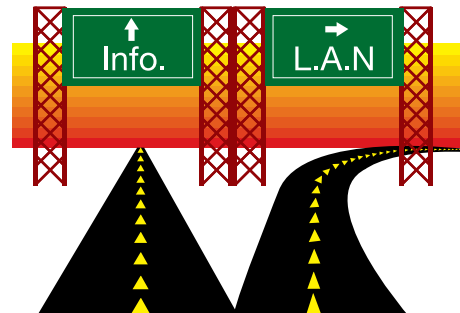
Lucenec, Slovakia

The council has established 15 permanent committees (economic, entrepreneurial, trade and tourism, agricultural, forestry and water management, environment, transport and local communications, housing, public order, construction, education and youth, culture, sports, board of health), consisting of five elected representatives and four citizens. Each committee advises the city council in a specific functional area.

Advisory committees and ad hoc task force are effective in focusing attention on important issues for a short time period. They are useful in organizing and coordinating input from a wide range of people and for developing consensus for action on complex issues that touch upon many facets of the community.

7. Technology application (Cable TV, Internet)

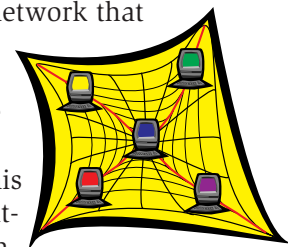
Traditional communication has been one-way and relies upon the media—newspaper, radio and television—to keep the citizen informed on local government issues. Recent advances in technology, such as Cable TV and the Internet, have given cities new communication tools.



Definition/Purpose

Cable TV provides an alternative to “over the air” broadcasts of radio and television. It uses a coaxial cable to send multi-channel TV programming to homes, apartments or offices throughout a defined service area.

The Internet is a network that allows computers from all over the world to exchange messages and electronic files. This network of computers has now grown to include thousands of computers in public and private agencies.



Cable TV and the Internet can be used by a local government to enhance citizen participation in three different ways:

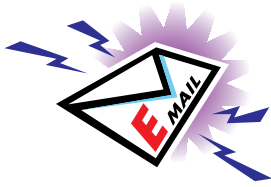
Information dissemination—Internet: and Cable TV: An electronic bulletin board can provide information on council agendas, recreation schedules, cultural event schedules, bus route and schedules, instructions how to get a business license, etc.

- A local government access channel on Cable TV provides:

- A public bulletin board that informs the public in advance of scheduled public meetings for the city council, boards and commissions, and council committees. It can be updated immediately for last minute schedule changes.
- Job announcements.
- Other activities scheduled at city hall.
- Coverage of council meetings from beginning to end as well as rebroadcasts at times convenient for citizens.
- Programs with reports about council proceedings, hosted “talk shows” or discussions with the mayor or members of the council and press commentaries.
- Viewer call-in programs through which viewers can directly question government officials about issues and policies.

Public relations—Ease of getting information puts your municipal government in a more favorable light.

Communication to/from citizens—Internet: Electronic mail (email) is an alternative to telephone, fax or regular mail. It can be the way citizens access local government in the future to report service problems, have an inspection performed or apply for a license.



The World Wide Web can also replace traditional telephone, fax and mail services. It can be a way for council members to establish a home page that can be accessed by constituents to keep abreast of district activities. It can also be used by the city to inform the public about city activities or by citizens to access city documents or applications without having to come to city hall.

Process

Cable TV operates as a subscription service in which citizens pay a monthly

fee for services. In the U.S., private cable companies obtain permission from the municipality to provide this service in the city and to use the street right-of-way for their cable. In exchange, the city is **compensated** for the use of right-of-way and may require that one or more public access channels be provided for local government use.

Access to the Internet is made through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). The ISP connection is made via local telephone for a monthly service charge. The subscriber is responsible for providing all equipment needed to access the Internet including personal computer, modem, software and peripheral equipment. Anyone paying the required fees and having the required equipment can access the Internet and World Wide Web.

The Internet is a wide-open entity that is by design loosely controlled. Issues to be examined include: security, corrupt or virus-infecting data, and who will manage the content on the city’s Internet site. These are basic issues that local government should address in an Internet use policy. Local officials interested in accessing the Internet or putting their local government on the Internet should refer to the guidelines included in *Appendix C*.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Cable TV is a cost effective tool for informing the public; however, not every household subscribes to cable TV, limiting its effectiveness to reach and communicate to all citizens. The cost of subscribing to cable TV may also be a disadvantage.

Internet: As more and more use is made of the Internet for disseminating information, local government will save valuable staff time and paper costs. It provides the ability to market the community to relocating businesses or vacationing tourists.

8. Community association/board

Definition/Purpose

A group of citizens organized around a common interest in an issue(s) related to a specific geographical area, such as zoning, land use, or neighborhood planning. It provides a forum for discussing problems and exchanging ideas between city staff and association members. The association has been successfully used to administer neighborhood projects and service delivery contracts.

Process

Neighborhood associations may be a legal entity or informally organized. Membership is open to all residents, property owners, business licensees and representatives of not-for-profit organizations in that area. Each association elects a board of officers to lead the organization annually and to represent the interests of the association to outside groups. Committees within the association are established to focus on specific issues such as planning, traffic or economic development.

Council can establish an office in city hall for coordinating and communicating with neighborhood associations. The following is a suggested list of basic functions for such an office:

- Notify interested persons of meetings, hearings, elections and other events.
- Provide for the sharing of information and maintain a list of reports,

studies, data sources and other available materials.

- Provide referral services to individuals, neighborhood associations, and others.
- Keep an up-to-date list of neighborhood associations and their principal officers.
- Assist neighborhood volunteers in coordinating projects on behalf of neighborhood “live-ability.”
- Encourage individuals to work with existing neighborhood associations where possible.
- Assist in reproducing and mailing newsletters and other printed matter when supplied by a neighborhood association.
- Act as a liaison while neighborhood associations and municipal agencies work out processes for municipal involvement.
- Assist in contracts with other municipal agencies on behalf of neighborhood associations or other interested individuals.
- Assist in educational efforts related to citizen participation in municipal government.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Neighborhood associations tend to lack permanence. They often are created in response to a single issue, in which residents mobilize to address the issue, and then disband when the problem is solved or interest subsides. To promote the long-term continuance of neighborhood associations, local officials should provide support in terms of staff and resources.

Educating Commissioners

The finance staff was frustrated because one group of commission members was critical of them for not being visionary enough to spend more on facilities while another group wanted them to take a more conservative approach. Finally staff members brought both factions together, challenging them to come up with a spending plan that the majority could accept. After a staff presentation about the current situation, commissioners were divided into groups of eight people each and given the amount of money the city had to spend in “play money.” Each group was then asked to agree on reasonable allocations that they thought would meet the community’s needs. This gaming approach brought the groups face-to-face with the reality of having only a finite amount of money to spend, and commissioners began to understand the trade-offs that finance staff members had to make. The commission’s final consensus reflected everyone’s heightened perception.

9. Community office

Definition/Purpose

This is a variation of the neighborhood board/association described above, but it is typically funded and operated by the city. It can provide one or a group of services depending upon needs. Services typically include: neighborhood services, health care, social assistance, and aid to pensioners. It extends municipal services into a geographical district or neighborhood of the city, and brings local government to the citizen rather than the citizen traveling to a city hall.

Process

Local government officials determine which services can best be provided by community based offices. They should consider the benefits and costs of decentralizing an activity from both city and citizen viewpoints. Operational funding is provided through the annual budget.

Advantages/Disadvantages

It is more accessible to the public and fosters close rapport and improved communication with citizens. The office becomes a part of a community and creates an increased level of trust toward government. After a neighborhood office is established in a community, involving citizens in citizen participation activities is much easier.

The office workers tend to focus on issues within their geographical area and may overlook city-wide issues and needs. Decentralizing some services may increase costs for people and resources.

10. Ombudsman

Definition/Purpose

An ombudsman is a nonpartisan public official who investigates people's complaints about government officials or agencies. The scope of work varies by city, but usually involves complaints of unjust or harsh treatment on matters such as housing, taxation, voting, or old age pension payments.

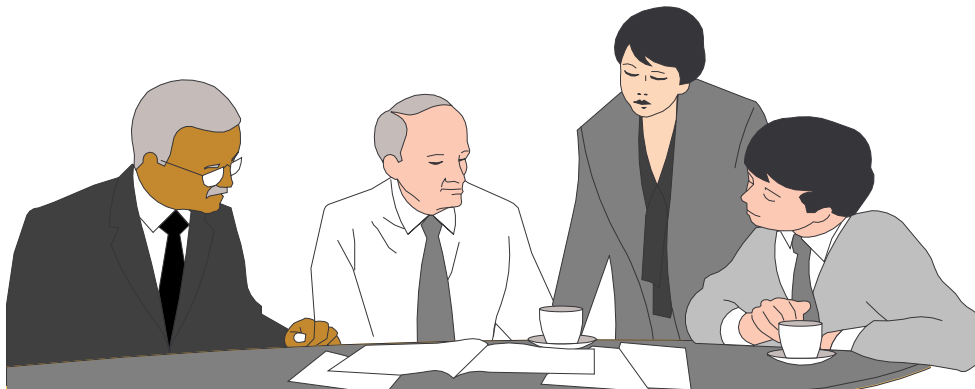
Process

Local government elected officials determine the need for an office of ombudsman in accordance with state or local law. If there is a need, they generally establish its duties and responsibilities by ordinance. An ombudsman is appointed following local personnel policies.

After investigating a complaint, the ombudsman may dismiss it or may seek correction of the problem by persuasion, publicity or occasionally by recommending prosecution.

Advantages/Disadvantages

An ombudsman meets the citizens' need for impartial and informal handling of complaints. The program is designed to improve government's response to citizens' concerns in a fair and impartial fashion. It is particularly effective in helping citizens deal with the complexities of bureaucracy in large cities.



11. Open door program (accessibility)

Definition/Purpose

It encourages citizens to visit city hall or a community office at any time on a walk-in basis.



Process



Currently, Slovak municipal governments designate the hours each day that citizens can visit city hall to conduct business, i.e., pay bills, resolve problems, obtain licenses and permits. For example, one city hall sets hours for the public as follows:

Monday, 800–1600;

Tuesday, 800–1200;

Wednesday, 800–1700;

Thursday, council meeting or advisory commission meetings only; and

Friday, 800–1500.

Establishing regular hours of operation for city hall shows that city hall and staff are accessible and open to citizen issues and concerns.

Advantages/Disadvantages

An open door program facilitates communication with citizens. Opening city facilities to the public on all days that employees work may increase costs, but will generate far greater intangible benefits due to the perception that government is open, there to serve, and available to hear concerns and issues.

12. Public information

Definition/Purpose

Publication information is provided in the form of press releases, interviews, pamphlets, etc. There may be a public information department responsible for this function. Public information keeps citizens informed of the activities of the city.

Process

Local government officials who decide to use the public information staff to support citizen participation activities must insure that the staff is seen as objective and a credible source of information.

Advantages/Disadvantages

A strong and effective public information program creates a positive environment. Well-informed citizens are able to participate more intelligently, have a better understanding of program issues and impacts of various actions and a historical perspective to the program being initiated.

Citizens have been known to criticize the public information staff for not supplying objective information, believing that the public information staff acted as a marketing organization for the city. When this happens the public information efforts undermine the citizen participation program.

13. Education programs and popular reporting

Definition/Purpose

Direct education programs are those in which city officials or staff present a program directly to the public, in person; for example, a talk with school children about local government activities. Indirect education programs still provide public information, but use printed material to convey the message instead of a person. Popular reports are designed to communicate—simple and straight forward—avoiding complex terms and bureaucratic jargon.

Direct education programs provide personal contact with the citizen. Indirect education program provide information. Popular reports are an easy-to-use method for providing important financial and operating information to citizens.

Process

Typical educational materials include pamphlets, newsletters, publications and reports. Some of the more innovative local governments have attempted to demystify financial reporting for annual budgets and end-of-year accounting reporting. The current expression for this practice is “popular reporting.”

Advantages/Disadvantages

A direct education program provides an opportunity to present information, interact with the audience, ask and answer questions, respond immediately to concerns and issues, and put a “human face” on what otherwise might seem like a faceless bureaucracy.

Citizens like popular reporting because it summarizes information, uses charts and graphs to display complex ideas, and is easy to read. Documents such as the *Budget in Brief* and *Annual Performance Report* convey a lot of information in a 20-25 page booklet. The booklets are widely disseminated

to the general public and often used in citizen education and citizen participation programs. The Slovak city of Lucenec prepares a *Budget in Brief* and an *Annual Performance Report* for citizens interested in how the city’s finances are being managed. Copies of these excellent documents may be obtained by contacting the director of finance for that city.



Increasing Attendance at Public Meetings

A city in a growing urban area was having trouble getting citizens to attend a series of meetings titled “Contemporary Urban Issues.” When city officials published a notice announcing a “Summit Meeting to Solve Our Pressing Community Problems,” attendance doubled.

Lucenec, Slovakia

Some of the deputies of the city council have been regularly taking part on the lessons of humanities at the primary schools, grades 7 and 8. They lead the whole lesson, they speak about organization of local government, rights and obligations of deputies, democracy, etc. They answer the questions asked by the pupils, they make notes of their ideas.

Pupils are invited to the session of the city council. Therefore it is not exceptional that the sessions are attended by 60-70 pupils from primary schools.



14. Citizen service request office (complaints, suggestions and information)

Definition/Purpose

A citizen service request office is a centralized clearinghouse established to receive and respond to citizen requests for assistance or information. It provides a single point of contact, thus simplifying contacting city hall from the citizen's point of view. No longer does the citizen have to know who to contact or which department to call to be able to get information or have a service request handled.

Process

These requests generally come to the office by mail, telephone or in person. The office is designed to:

- provide the information, or if a service request, record the request, route it to the proper department for action, and when it is completed, notify the citizen of the action taken
- help council and citizens get action on requests for information and service
- improve responsiveness of local government to the council
- coordinate the municipal service response effort of the local government
- provide an internal communication network available to all city departments.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Centralizing information and service requests permits the city to track the requests and ensure that they are acted upon within a specified time frame. The result builds credibility with the citizen that local government actually works for them.

Establishing a citizen's request office can be costly and a major disadvantage; however if a local government decides to create such a department, consider using resources that are already doing this type of work within the organization. Anyone whose current job consists of dealing with customer information and service requests more than 60% of the time is a potential resource to staff a central agency.

Example of Citizen Participation in Liptovsky Hradok



Citizen participation is encouraged and often takes place in the conduct of government within the City of Liptovsky Hradok. An example of this can be demonstrated in the development of the city's strategic plan through the year 2000.

The plan was drafted by the mayor and other city staff and made available to the public for comment and input. The plan was published in the local newsletter, copies were available at city hall and directly mailed to the business and educational community. A public hearing was held and well attended. At the conclusion of the 20 day public comment period, all comments received were considered and appropriate input incorporated.

Contact: Julius Medvdei, Mayor

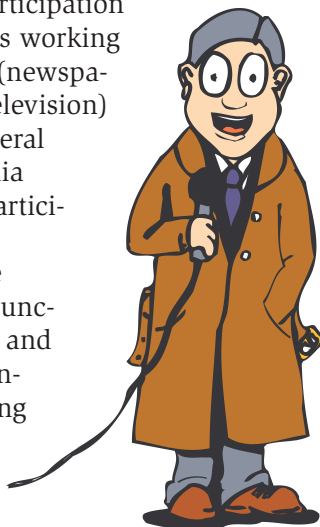
Address: City hall, Liptovsky Hradok, Slovakia

Phone: 0844.20.21.40

15. Media relations

Definition/Purpose

Every citizen participation program requires working with the media (newspaper, radio and television) to reach the general public. The media assists citizen participation at the beginning of the process by announcing the program and inviting public involvement; during the middle, by reporting the progress of the initiative; and finally at the end, by reporting its results and implementation.



Process

Sometimes, local officials have to encourage the media to cover citizen participation programs. Two commonly used methods are press releases and press conferences. These help the media gather the important facts with minimal effort.

Radio and television may be the major avenues by which citizens hear the news, but the opportunity to get your message across is much smaller, 30 to 60 seconds, and the competition for air time is much greater. Local government radio and television coverage depends upon the extent to which it is current and newsworthy. Any news releases for radio or television must take these conditions into account. Therefore,

brevity is critical and the story line must be short, to the point, and easily understood.

Here are some suggestions for establishing a good working relationship with the media:

- Be honest and straight forward in responding to questions; honesty is the best policy.
- Avoid “no comment” responses—it sounds evasive.
- Return phone calls promptly; reporters usually have deadlines they are attempting to meet.
- Do not speculate or answer hypothetical questions.
- If you do not have a factual answer to a question, apologize, and say that you do not have it readily available, but you will get the information for them. Depending on their deadline, they may or may not need it.
- Do not downplay controversial items (the media thrives on controversy); if you do, you lose credibility.
- If the media catches you off guard regarding an event that has just occurred, say you just heard about it and will have a response after you have had an opportunity to study it. Get the answer out quickly.
- If you choose to establish a personal relationship with the media, remember that you cannot dictate how a story will be reported.
- If you disagree with the way a story has been covered, address the issue with the reporter in private or ignore it altogether. Do not complain to the newspaper editor or the radio or television news director.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Establishing a media relations program can be an effective way to positively promote local government activities. Using the media relations office as a central point of contact for all media improves press relations and enhances the media's access to information.

When accurate and timely information is provided to the public the image of local government is improved. Local government officials should be cautious, however, not to overmarket the city to the point that the office is viewed as a propaganda tool.

Getting media attention

A local government in a heavily populated urban area embarked on an ambitious program of sponsoring community meetings about the pressing issues of growth and transportation. After failing to interest the newspaper editor in printing articles of any size or depth, the city produced and paid for its own six-page, four-color supplement, which was inserted in the Sunday edition of the paper. It was read by 250,000 people, and the city council saw the fruits of its labors and investment rewarded. This single, ambitious effort increased interest and attendance at the public meetings. As a by-product, the project finally attracted free media attention; reporters realized that these issues did concern a broad range of citizens in the community.

Note: Seven of the examples (non-Slovak) used in this compendium were adapted from Elaine Cogan, Successful Public Meetings, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992.

Glossary

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	any process through which citizens influence public decisions that affect their lives and the lives of other citizens
GOAL	a general purpose statement describing what a local government functional unit would like to accomplish in the future
STAKEHOLDERS	concerned individuals and/or groups that are directly affected by specific governmental issues or decisions

APPENDIX A

Steps for Planning and Implementing a Citizen Participation Process

Planning

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Identify the key issues</p> | Determine the decision making process for the program |
| <p>2. Define the objective; relate it to overall organizational goals</p> | Determine objectives for each stage of citizen participation |
| <p>3. Seek organizational commitment from local officials to a participating approach within city hall</p> | Design citizen participation opportunities with techniques |
| <p>4. Consult with others at city hall</p> <p>Coordinate other departments', agencies', and/or affected governments' involvement</p> <p>Determine need for a facilitator</p> <p>Review schedules and availability of key persons</p> <p>Determine program requirements (personnel and financial resources)</p> <p>Determine information requirements</p> | Establish monitoring and evaluation efforts |
| <p>5. Identify key persons, departments or organizations that will be affected</p> <p>Develop a profile of the community</p> <p>Identify persons, agencies, etc., by name</p> <p>Clarify issues</p> <p>Develop contacts and rapport</p> <p>Interview community leaders</p> | <p>7. Meet with key persons affected by the process or program</p> <p>Confirm issues and options</p> <p>Confirm objectives for each step of citizen participation</p> <p>Confirm selection of facilitator, if applicable</p> <p>See advice on the overall design of the programs and techniques used in each stage</p> |
| <p>6. Draft Participation Program</p> <p>Circulate information, issues, and options</p> | <p>8. Finalize program design</p> <p>Finalize program requirements (personnel and financial resources)</p> <p>Finalize information requirements</p> <p>Finalize monitoring and evaluation efforts</p> <p>Finalize schedules and work assignments</p> |
| | <p>9. Consult with key persons and other public agencies on final design as applicable</p> <p>Analyze results</p> <p>Make changes as needed</p> <p>Revise the draft</p> <p>Determine additional decision making processes as needed</p> |

Program Development

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>6. Draft Participation Program</p> <p>Circulate information, issues, and options</p> | <p>9. Consult with key persons and other public agencies on final design as applicable</p> <p>Analyze results</p> <p>Make changes as needed</p> <p>Revise the draft</p> <p>Determine additional decision making processes as needed</p> |
|--|--|

Program Approval

10. Obtain a decision on final program design and schedule

Publicize the decision with the rationale

Emphasize accountability

Program Implementation

11. Involve participants in implementation and evaluation

Evaluation

12. Evaluate the program

Seek comment from key persons and others on the consultative part of the program

Evaluate the results of the participation program; did it achieve the objectives?

Document the evaluation for use the next time a participation process is planned

APPENDIX B

Checklist for Preparing and Conducting a Successful Town Hall Meeting

Pre-meeting Planning

- ___ Has a meeting space been located and reserved?
- ___ Has the meeting space been checked and arrangements made for keys, seating set-up and clean-up?
- ___ Does the meeting space have adequate lighting? Can the room be darkened?
- ___ Are audio visual equipment, microphone and extension cords available at the meeting space? If not, who will provide?
- ___ Is location accessible by bus transport? Is there ample parking for autos?
- ___ Are participant handouts prepared: agenda, information sheets, feedback forms?
- ___ Is sign in or registration form prepared? Are there adequate pens and paper?
- ___ Are name tags needed?
- ___ Are signs posted to direct participants to the correct building/meeting room?
- ___ Are refreshments being provided: coffee, tea, mineral water?
- ___ Are flip charts, easels, markers and paper available in the meeting room?
- ___ Have facilitators, note takers and presenters been assigned?
- ___ Do other local officials who plan to attend know their roles?

Meeting Notice

- ___ Has a mailing list been developed? Updated?
- ___ Has the public notice for sign boards and advertisement in newspaper been posted/published? Is the wording of the objective consistent?
- ___ Has the news media been contacted? Press release written?
- ___ Have key community persons, council members and departments been personally contacted regarding the meeting?

At the Meeting

- ___ Are seats placed in a circular arrangement to encourage discussion among the participants? Don't use the stage.
- ___ Are there too many chairs? People tend to sit in the back. Avoid a front table—use chairs only.
- ___ Identify water closets (WC) and smoking areas.
- ___ Clarify the role of the facilitator, if used.
- ___ Review the rules of the meeting and attempt to get buy-in.
- ___ Ensure that the participants understand and accept the objective of the meeting.
- ___ Start on time and finish on time. Advise participants at the beginning of the meeting how long the meeting will last and expected time to adjourn.

- Make sure flip charts and other audio visual aids can be seen by the participants in the room.
- Keep presentation as short as possible (15 minutes maximum).
- Provide maps, clear instructions and signs to break-out rooms for small group discussions, if needed.
- Ensure that participants complete and turn in meeting evaluation forms.
- Make sure that participants leave the meeting knowing what has been accomplished and what will happen next.

After the Meeting

- Transcribe flip charts and meeting notes.
- Add names from registration to mailing list.
- Review the evaluation forms and summarize them.
- Make copies of notes or summaries of the meeting available as soon as possible.

APPENDIX C

Basic Steps for Local Governments to Access the Internet

Note: The following information was obtained from an ICMA publication, MIS Report, *Local Government and the Internet*, September, 1996. This chronology represents only a general guide to the steps that a local government needs to take to access the Internet. You should read the report in its entirety prior to embarking on creating a Web site for your local government.

1. Subscribe to an Internet service provider (ISP) through a dial-up modern connection so that you can learn about the Internet.
2. Define your community's objective for using the Internet.
3. Identify staff who will be involved in the project. Responsibilities might be divided into technical matters (getting connected) and content matters (collection, formatting, and maintenance of information).
4. Identify potential partners with whom you might collaborate and share costs.
5. Determine funding and/or establish a budget for use of the Internet.
6. Identify information that should be put on the local government's World Wide Web site and decide which information should go on first, which second, etc. Draw a diagram of the information hierarchy.
7. Discuss options for staff connectivity and Web site services with several providers.
8. Discuss Web site design with service providers and Web design contractors.
9. Decide whether to provide staff with fast networked access to the Internet or rely on a few dial-up accounts (this will primarily be a financial decision).
10. Solicit bids for the services you want, preferably through a detailed request for proposals. Address staff connections, server hosting or installation and set-up and site design. You may divide these responsibilities among two or more vendors.
11. Select a vendor or vendors and register your domain name with InterNIC.
12. Before giving employees access to the Internet, develop an acceptable use policy and training for employees.
13. Develop a procedure for employees to publish information on-line, remembering to provide for quality checks, coordination and maintenance of information.

