

GLOSSARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TOOLS

This glossary contains brief descriptions of tools and techniques commonly used for community planning and plan implementation in Wisconsin. Resources are cited at the end of the glossary for those interested in learning more about these or other techniques.

| Legend | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Participation Objective: | Awareness, Education, Input, Interaction, Decision-Making |
| Resource Commitment: | \$ minimal, \$\$ moderate, \$\$\$ high |
| Time Commitment: | ⊕ minimal, ⊕⊕ moderate, ⊕⊕⊕ high |
| Scope of Participation: | ♫ small group, ♫♫ large group |

Direct Mail Objectives: Awareness, Education \$\$\$ ⊕ ♫♫

Direct mail is used to provide a specific message to a target audience. A mailing can take many forms including a newsletter, postcard, letter, brochure or other promotional or informational piece. This technique works best when you have a simple message and an easily identifiable audience. It can reach a large number of people and requires little time commitment on the part of citizens. Be creative in crafting and delivering your message as it may be easy to overlook in the large volume of mail received by most people. The primary costs involved with this technique include design, printing and mailing.



Photo: Lake Country, BC, 2010

Mass Media Objectives: Awareness, Education \$ ⊕ ♫♫

Media campaigns involve the use of local radio, newspaper, and television coverage to generate public awareness on issues, to disseminate specific information, and to influence and reflect public views. Media campaigns should consider the various forms of media available in a community, assess their coverage and credibility, and seek coverage suitable to the task at hand. Some of the more common uses of media include press releases, letters to the editor, media interviews, and public interest stories.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2007

Internet Technologies

Objectives: Awareness, Education, Input



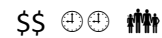
A variety of internet technologies are available to enhance the ability of citizens to participate in local issues. Some of the more common techniques include virtual bulletin boards, web postings of the latest drafts of documents, an email listserv of people interested in the process, and an email address or website where citizens can send comments. If well-timed and well-designed, these techniques can help to keep the public informed about a planning project. They work best to provide resources to the public for review at their own pace and on their own time. Depending on the availability and use of computers, these techniques can reach a moderate to large number of people. However, they are unlikely to reach populations that are uncomfortable with or do not have access to computers.



Photo: Michael Forster Rothbart, UW-Madison, 2003

Exhibits and Displays

Objectives: Awareness, Education



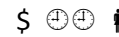
Exhibits and displays can be used to inform the public and stimulate people that might not otherwise participate. They can be set up in publically accessible spaces (i.e. shopping mall, town hall), at community events (i.e. county fair, sporting event), or within the context of other public participation events (i.e. workshop, open house). Exhibits and displays are most effective when staffed by a knowledgeable person able to answer questions or supplemented with a hand-out containing background information and contact information. Displays can often be reused multiple times, thereby reducing costs.



Photo: Michael Forster Rothbart, UW-Madison, 2005

Field Trip

Objectives: Education, Awareness



Also known as a site visit or walk-through, a field trip is an organized, instructional tour of one or more sites by local officials, staff, consultants, residents and other stakeholders. Sites may be selected to illustrate specific project conditions, design concepts, or local issues and concerns. Observational analysis may be used to record the main features of the site, both successful and unsuccessful. Visual documentation, such as photographs, annotated sketches, and plans can provide an instrument for ongoing discussion and monitoring. Field trips are an excellent tool for developing a common understanding of an issue and initiating group discussion, particularly when followed by a meeting or workshop.



Photo: Stephanie Judge, UW-Madison, 2000

Visual Simulation

Objectives: Education, Awareness, Input

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Visual simulation techniques are used to present information in clear and easily understood formats such as maps, pictures and displays. The results can be simple or complex and include interactive maps and graphs, artist's drawings, photo-simulations, three-dimensional renderings, and animations such as walk-throughs, drive-throughs and fly-throughs. Visualization techniques can be used to simulate proposed changes to an existing situation or to analyze the effects of a range of future planning scenarios. Visualization techniques can take advantage of common hardware and software or utilize more advanced techniques such as GIS, CAD, photogrammetry, and specialized planning applications. The use of visual simulation can serve to inform, educate and interest the public in local planning decisions. It can also stimulate discussion and help citizens make more informed decisions.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2007

Educational Programs

Objectives: Education, Awareness

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Educational programs are conducted to improve public understanding of an issue, to present technical information in an easily understood format, and to improve communication between citizens and decision-makers. Education may be conducted formally through seminars, workshops or lectures, or less formally through simulation games, brown-bag lunches, publications or audiovisual materials. When held in concert with other public participation techniques, education can help citizens feel less intimidated and more likely to express their views, especially when they differ from those of professionals or other participants.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2009

Public Meeting

Objectives: Input, Interaction, Education

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The term *public meeting* is used as an umbrella descriptor for all types of meetings, including town-hall style discussions, educational forums, open houses, workshops and public hearings. Public meetings can be used to disseminate information, provide a setting for public discussion, and get feedback from the community. Meetings may differ in terms of size, composition, audience, format or purpose. In general, they should follow a set agenda and be facilitated or chaired by a designated person. Minutes should be kept to record discussion items and decisions.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2007



**Take a Closer Look:
Wisconsin’s Open Meeting Law**

In Wisconsin, all meetings of government bodies, including the plan commission are subject to the Open Meetings Law. The law requires that meetings are open and accessible to the public and that advance notice of meetings is provided. The notice should cite the time, date, place and subject matter of the meeting in sufficient detail to apprise members of the public of the content of the meeting. The notice should be posted in at least 3 public places at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. It must also be provided to the official newspaper and to news media that have requested it. In some cases, additional timing or publication requirements may apply. For more information on Wisconsin’s Open Meetings Law, please refer to Chapter 2.

Public Hearing

Objective: Input



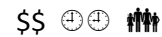
A public hearing is a specific type of meeting usually conducted in response to a statutory, ordinance or administrative requirement. The primary purpose of a public hearing is to provide the public with an opportunity to provide input on a pending application, petition or policy proposal. A public hearing is usually conducted in a much more formal manner than other public meetings. It must incorporate a public comment period during which participants may submit oral or written testimony. All proceedings become part of a public record that is available for review. To make the most out of public hearings, it can be helpful to hold a public informational session prior to the hearing, present a summary of the issue at the beginning of the hearing, allow time for questions and answers, and provide a break so that participants can absorb the information presented at the hearing and reflect on their reactions prior to providing input.



Photo: Bryce Richter, UW-Madison, 2011

Open House

Objectives: Awareness, Education, Input



An open house provides an informal meeting setting for citizens to interact with local planning officials and learn about an issue or proposal. An open house is usually held for an extended period of time with an open invitation for citizens to drop by at their convenience. A common element of many open houses is a series of educational or informational displays. Displays should be staffed by people who are knowledgeable about the issue and able to answer questions. Citizens may be able to provide feedback directly to staff or through another mechanism such as a comment card or survey. If well-advertised and held in a central location, an open house has the potential to reach a moderate to large number of people.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2008

Workshop / Charrette

Objectives: Input, Interaction, Education

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A workshop is an interactive meeting format in which participants work in small groups to perform an assigned task. Workshops may be open to all community members or limited to invited participants from key stakeholder groups. Simple tasks may require only one workshop, while large, complex or controversial tasks may justify a series of workshops. The ultimate goal may be the development of a shared vision, analysis of alternative scenarios, generation of design concepts, or completion of other community planning tasks.



Photo: International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

Workshops often require a significant time commitment from participants and facilitators, but usually result in tangible work products. A charrette is an intensive multi-day workshop that focuses on producing a community design solution.



Take a Closer Look: Fostering Community Dialogue

Meetings, workshops and educational programs often incorporate a number of small and large group processes. Following are some techniques that can be used on their own or within one of these settings to foster community dialogue and deliberation.

World Café

A World Café enable groups of people to participate together in evolving rounds of dialogue with three or four others while remaining part of a single, larger, connected conversation. Small, intimate conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas and discover new insights into questions or issues that really matter to them.

www.theworldcafe.com/tools.html

Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology is a self-organizing practice that invites people to describe topics they are passionate about and participate in activities or discussions based on those topics. This technique encourages participants to learn from one another, fosters leadership, and inspires creativity.

www.openspaceworld.org

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions. It encourages participants to discover the best aspects of their communities, dream about what could be, and design a desired future. <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>

Study Circle

Study Circles consist of small groups of people that agree to meet several times to explore a topic of interest, address community issues, or work together on a public problem. Study circles bring together people of differing incomes, races, ages and political viewpoints to effect social, political or policy change. www.cpn.org/tools/manuals/Community/studycircles1.html

Opinion Survey

Objective: Input

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A survey is systematic tool for determining the views and opinions of community members on a particular topic. If given to a large enough sample size, the results are considered indicative of the larger community. A survey may take the form of a written questionnaire or structured interview and may be administered in person, by phone, or by electronic media. It can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In some instances, it can also be used to generate interest and involvement in a project. Costs will vary based on the media chosen and the ability of in-house staff to design, administer, tabulate and present the results. While surveys provide an objective basis for planning and future action, they may overlook important citizen concerns unknown to those designing the survey.



Photo: Jeff Miller, UW-Madison, 2007

Focus Group

Objective: Input

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Focus groups are conducted with small groups of participants that are selected either randomly or to represent a particular segment of a community. Participants are presented with ideas or proposals, after which they are asked for their reactions to what they have heard. Focus groups are very useful for uncovering issues and concerns, understanding the values, beliefs and attitudes that underlie positions, testing degrees of difference or consensus, and identifying the language that people use to talk about an issue. Because focus groups do not have statistical validity they are not helpful in predicting the number of people in the larger community that will take a particular position. Focus group selection and facilitation requires a trained facilitator.



Photo: Vernon Research Group

Citizen Advisory Committee

Objective: Input, Interaction

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A citizen advisory committee is a small group of people (usually less than twenty-five) selected to represent various interests, points of view, or expertise in a community. Advisory committees are often charged with helping to update a comprehensive plan, review significant policy proposals, or study issues in-depth. They bring time, energy, expertise and perspective that may not be available elsewhere. They can also help to provide a degree of political insulation for elected and appointed officials. Serving on a committee takes a considerable amount of time. Therefore, local

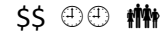


Photo: Ozaukee County Comprehensive Plan Citizen Advisory Committee

officials should be careful to make the best use of members' time and to absolve the committee once its purpose has been fulfilled. Advisory committees work best when the government is genuinely willing to partner with citizens in the planning process.

Referendum

Objectives: Input, Decision-Making



A referendum is a form of direct democracy in which citizens provide a vote for or against a particular decision. There are two types of referenda: With a binding referendum, citizens make policy decisions by a simple majority vote without the advice or consent of the local government. With an advisory referendum, citizens advise the governing body on a policy decision, but the governing body makes the final decision. A referendum works best when the government faces an “either-or” decision. Highly complex or technical issues are better served by other methods. Given the high-profile nature of a referendum, it has the potential to engage a relatively large number of participants.

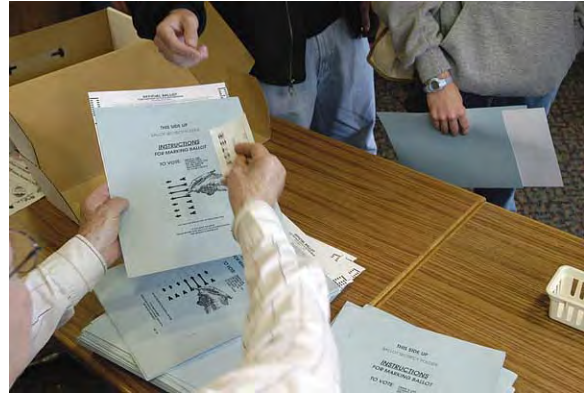


Photo: Michael Forster Rothbart, UW-Madison, 2004

References and Additional Resources

- International Association for Public Participation: www.iap2.org. Provides practitioner tools including a public participation spectrum and toolbox.
- Community Toolbox. National Park Service, Northeast Region Philadelphia Office: www.nps.gov/nero/rtcatoolbox/index_comtoolbox.htm. Provides an index of public participation tools organized by function.
- Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making. 1996. U.S. Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm. Provides an index of public participation tools organized by function.
- CommunityPlanning.Net: www.communityplanning.net/methods/methods.php. Provides a toolbox of public participation methods, helpful forms and checklists, and other resources.