Consensus Building Guide

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

WHAT:

- Tool used to bring people together to deliberate on policy issues, which may be used to influence decision-makers.
- Can include things like study circles, world cafes, opinion polls, issue forums, or mapping.
- Participants help to define the problem/issue and develop solutions.
- Can be combined with focus groups or interviews or other evaluation methods to collect more data.

WHY:

- Enables the evaluator to collect applied data, that can be immediately incorporated into the policy or decision-making process.
- It can be a good tool to build trust, resolve conflict, and build or improve relationships between groups that may not always be included in decisions.
- Measures of success are built into the design and end result- was consensus reached, were the audiences that are most affected included, did everyone participate, etc.

HOW:

✓ Determine the topic and focus of the meeting.	✓ Consider using small study groups to focus on key topics.
✓ Determine format (i.e. web-based, in-person, asynchronous, live).	✓ Consider adding mapping, photos, or other visual tools for participants to engage and to use for data collection on the process.
✓ Identify the participant selection strategy- generally individuals who have concerns, ideas for solutions, or will be directly impacted by the outcome.	✓ Ensure all materials are accessible, including plain and inclusive language, and options for people without internet access.
✓ If applicable, use polling tools, such as MS Forms, Google Forms, Survey Monkey, etc.	✓ Clarify how decisions/results will be shared with participants after the activity ends.

OPTIONS TO EMBED EVALUATION:

Level of Engagement	Key PPCE Activities	Options to Embed Evaluation	Analysis
Consult	• Presentations or exhibitions • Meetings or workshops	• QR code on flyer to track use of the informational materials • Website/social media analytics • Counts of informational materials distributed • Flip charts/virtual white boards • AI assisted notes from meeting • Participant worksheets • Short meeting polls conducted in real-time	• Summary of key themes • Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics • Dashboard of poll results displayed on agency webpage or intranet
Collaborate	• Web-based and asynchronous collaboration platforms • Photo voice	All of the items from Consult plus: • Web analytics • Collaborative document • Pictures/video themes	• Summary of key themes • Journey map/photo montage • Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics
Empower	• Community forums and action planning sessions	All items from previous levels of engagement, plus: • Action plan document	• Completed action plan • Journey map/photo montage • Dashboard of relevant meeting metrics

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES:

Outputs	Outcomes
- Clear understanding of how the agency is defining the problem. - Individuals and communities were clear about their role. - List of individuals who may be affected by the decision. - Identification of "who" has the deciding authority. - Identification of the resources needed to conduct public participation. - Clear understanding of how the information will be used. - Identification of the level of participation. - List of relevant groups/individuals who need to be engaged. - List of relevant groups who are already engaged and can be a resource for the agency. - Any barriers to access were addressed by the agency. - Time spent with individuals. - Understanding how communities/individuals feel about the federal government. - Understanding the reason behind unfavorable or favorable views. - Understanding if there are differences in perception based on demographics.	**Short-term:** - All relevant groups and communities agree on the problem. - Meetings are accessible to all. - All communication material is accessible to all. - Resources are allocated equitably. **Medium and Long-term:** - Buy-in from public and relevant groups. - Agency does not overpromise participants about the influence they have on final decisions. - Agency is better prepared to conduct the participatory process. - Effective public participation process is designed. - Participants are satisfied with the process and outcomes. - The full range of perspectives needed to conduct meaningful public participation is achieved. - Changing perception of federal government. - Participants are fully aware of and understand what is being communicated. - Effective participation by individuals and community members. - Increasing trust in federal institutions. - Barriers to public participation are alleviated. - Participatory process enables people/communities to influence the decisions and actions that affect their lives. - Long-term participation of individuals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Environmental Protection Agency: Public Participation Guide: Tools for Consensus Building and Agreement Seeking](#)
- [National Center on Educational Outcomes: Multi-Attribute Consensus Building Tool](#)