

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

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Summary

This fact sheet discusses what community participation is, what the common issues are, and how to improve participation.

Keywords: community engagement, collecting data, Elders / knowledge keepers, youth, planning team

What is the Purpose of Community Participation?

Community participation should get your community involved in the planning process. This ensures that development aligns with community goals. Input from a wide range of community members is important to make sure everyone has a chance to have their voice heard. Community participation provides the community opportunities to engage in the planning process.

information. At the other end of the spectrum, collaborate and empower, the planning group works closely with the community and other involved groups to collectively make decisions.¹ For more information, see the link in the Further Information section titled "International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) – Spectrum".

What is Community Participation?

Before figuring out how to improve community participation, it is important to understand the definition and different forms. The International Association for Public Participation has adapted five stages of participation in a spectrum: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower (Figure 1). The first stage, inform, has the least amount of participation. As a planning group, it is your responsibility to provide information to the public about what the problem is, and what options/solutions are being considered, and who to contact for more

What are some Common Issues?

To understand how to improve public participation, it is important to understand common issues. There are a number of small issues that can be challenging in the real world. First Nations often find engaging off reserve members, engaging the youth, and organizing effective on reserve participation² difficult. While these issues may seem like a mountain to overcome, know that low levels of community participation is common many First Nation and non-First Nation planning efforts. There are plenty of opportunities and methods to boost community participation.^{3,4}

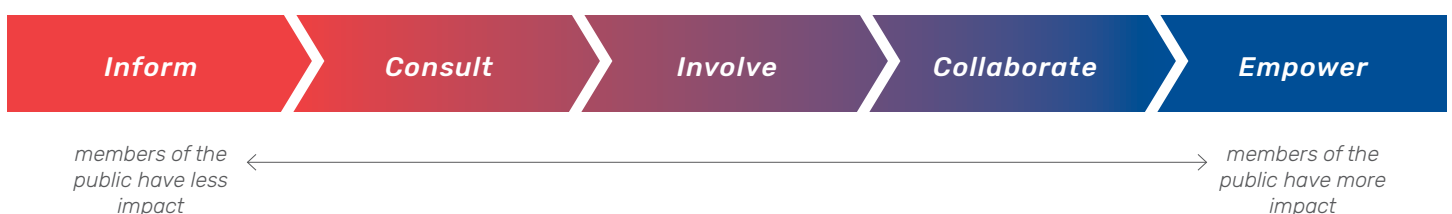


Figure 1 | IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Tips to Get Started¹³

1. “While one branch may be strong, many branches together are stronger.” A small committed group can make a much bigger impact and work more effectively together than any one person can alone.
2. Start with “small steps in the right direction” as opposed to planning for major progress all at once. This will help build trust and support in the community.
3. Expect resistance from the community, but do not be discouraged. People are resistant to change, and need time to accept new ideas. Keep moving forward with your committed group and, like pushing a snowball down a hill, momentum will build slowly with an initial push, but will grow on its own with time.”

How to Improve Community Participation Attendance and Interaction

This fact sheet discusses how to involve people across long distances and how to prepare for in-person community participation, but does not discuss how to conduct community engagement. Below is a guide to improve attendance and interaction in community participation.

Who is Involved?

There are two key groups involved, internal and external. Your internal group lead and organize the planning process (see *Establishing a Planning Team* for more details). This includes members of the planning team and other band departments. These people could be students, teachers, school administrators, Elders, members of Band Council, or family heads.^{5,6}

Your external group is made up of all people and groups you want to inform and engage in the planning process. This group can include members of the First Nation (on and off reserve), provincial and federal government agencies, neighbouring First Nations and municipalities, and other relevant interest groups.⁷

How is the Community Involved?

This question is best answered by you, since you are most familiar with the groups will be involved in the process. However, there are several key questions to ask yourself that can help you come to the answer. First, what level of participation do you want each group to achieve? Which method of participation will work for each group?

What kind of resources do you have to for promote engagement events and communicate with the community? Different First Nations will have different access to skilled team members, technology, and money for public participation. Other key questions to consider for each group are:

- What are the characteristics of the group?
- What is the message you want the group to understand?
- What is the information you want to receive from the group?
- What are the possible issues that may arise from involving this group or that may rise from the interaction with other groups?⁸

You might think through the items listed in Table 1 for each audience or group that is participating.

Table 1 | Group details chart.

Adapted from (Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources. “Communications Strategy Template.” 2008. http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/ccp_training_session_3_-_communication_strategy_template.pdf. p. 3) Used with permission.

Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group or groups you want to share your message with
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current motivations • level of awareness • level of knowledge
Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what you want to change • what you want to audience to know • what perception you want to create • what action you want as a result
Possible Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the main concerns of your audience • how they influence others

Table 2 | Communications chart.

Adapted from (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada / Indigenous Services Canada. "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Third Edition." 2013. Accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf. p. 83.) Used with permission.

Who to share with	What to share	How to share	How often to share	Message	Content creator	Deadline	Status
On-reserve members							
Off-reserve members							
Youth							
Elders							
Staff							
Chief & Council							
Other communities							

Another way to think through community participation is with Table 2. This table is meant to help organize the process by assigning a leader and deadline to every task.

There are a variety of options to promote and conduct public participation. These range from in-person interviews to social media. Make sure each audience fully understands the issue being addressed and why it is important. They should also know why they are being contacted specifically, what it is they are expected to do, how to do it, and the details of where and when if necessary.

Get in Touch With Your Audiences^{14,15}

- **Local Radio Station**
- **Local TV Station**
- **Print:** brochures, posters, letters, surveys, newsletters, reports
- **Word of Mouth:** home visits, open office hours, address at other community events, casual meetings
- **Internet and Social Media:** email, website, blog, on-line survey, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

When Should Community Participation be Promoted?

Depending on what you are working on, you will use different engagement tools at different times. As you work with your First Nation and associated groups, you will gain a better understanding of methods that work well in different situations. However, there are a few basic rules and questions to help you determine your timeline.

First, do not commit yourself too soon. There will be a minimum time for you and your planning team to prepare for the public engagement.⁹ Once this time frame is decided, it will be your minimum time to promote, communicate, and conduct long distance public participation. You will also need time to organize your planning team and develop content for the public participation, whether it is printed material, online material, or other. Again, this step will be determined by the resources available to you. Lastly, when are other community events and gatherings? These other events are great opportunities to spread the word of the project quickly and even to host a public engagement session.^{10,11,12}

Further Reading

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

This organization provides resources and training for public participation leaders.

<http://www.iap2.org/?page=foundations>

The City of Edmonton's Bike Lane Projects is an example of an effective public participation process and has been included below for your reference. While it is a project in a big city, many of the methods used can be applied in a small community.

<http://iap2canada.ca/resources/Documents/Conference/2015%20CORE%20VALUES%20AWARDS/CANADA%20--%20Extending%20the%20Practice%20Honorable%20-%20Edmonton.pdf>

First Nations in BC Knowledge Network

This is a forum where First Nations can exchange information and learn from one another.

<https://fnbc.info/org/comprehensive-community-planning-first-nations-british-columbia?page=1>

Endnotes

- 1 International Association for Public Participation, "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum," *International Association for Public Participation*, 2014, http://cymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/Foundations_Course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum.pdf.
- 2 Rowena Edwards & Helen Reid, "Time of Change: Wulh ni' kwelhs uy yek sos 'o' thu thi Cowichan Tribes Comprehensive Community Planning Challenges," *First Nations in BC Knowledge Network*, 2014, <http://fnbc.info/resource/ccp2014>.
- 3 Lars Christiansen, "The Timing and Aesthetics of Public Engagement: Insights from an Urban Street Transformation Initiative," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 35 no. 4, (2015): 455-470.
- 4 Wendy Sarkissian, Andrea Cook, & Kevin Walsh, *Community Participation in Practice: A Practical Guide* (Murdoch, Australia: Institute for Science and Technology Policy, 1999).
- 5 Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, "Communications Strategy Template," *Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources*, 2008, http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/ccp_training_session_3_-_communication_strategy_template.pdf.
- 6 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia (2nd Ed.)," *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development*, 2013, www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100021966/1100100021970
- 7 CIER, 2008.
- 8 CIER, 2008.
- 9 T. Gibson, "Sooner Done Than Said," in *The Community Participation Handbook: Resources for Public Involvement in the Planning Process*, eds. Wendy Sarkissian, & Donald Perlgut, (Murdoch, Australia: Institute for Science and Technology Policy in association with Impact Press, 1994), p. 38-39.
- 10 Edwards & Reid, 2014.
- 11 CIER, 2008.
- 12 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2013.
- 13 Javier Mignone, Wanda Phillips-Beck and Darrell Phillips, "Moving Towards a Stronger Future: An Aboriginal Resource Guide for Community Development," *Public Safety Canada*, 2015, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/mvng-twrdr-strngr-ftr/mvng-twrdr-strngr-ftr-en.pdf>.
- 14 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2013.
- 15 Nick Wates, *The Community Planning Handbook*, (London, UK: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2000).