

# Hanford Advisory Board White Paper

**Topic:** Public Involvement Evaluation

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**Originating Committee:** Public Involvement and Communication (PIC)

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## **Evaluating Hanford Public Involvement: Goals, Activities, and a Framework for Discussion**

As every Hanford Advisory Board (HAB) member knows, the issues associated with the Hanford site are many and complex. A frequent comment at HAB meetings expresses the scope of these issues: participants often state with exasperation “I’m having trouble getting my arms around this.” This comment is heard from technical specialists and non-specialists alike, for no one is expert in all the issues that come together at Hanford. Science, technology, engineering, management and administration, regulation and law, finance, planning, health and safety, and operational knowledge are just some of the dimensions of the Hanford cleanup effort.

Another key aspect of the work at Hanford is the problem of public involvement, the topic of this report. Scope, scale, complexity, and technical barriers make it especially difficult for members of the public to “get their arms around” the issues and participate meaningfully in decision-making. Meaningful public participation is necessary for two reasons. First, there is “the general democratic principle...that those who bear the consequences of decisions should have proportionate shares in making them.”<sup>1</sup> Hanford’s public health, safety, economic, and environmental impacts affect all the residents of the Pacific Northwest, and its budgetary impact is national. A broad public is affected by decisions regarding Hanford, and a broad public must participate in these decisions. Second, there is the practical need for “local knowledge” and regional and community values that only the public can provide. Issues such as cleanup standards, future site uses, and effects on regional and local communities can only be decided with the close involvement of the public. Public involvement is not a mere supplement to the knowledge of technical specialists and managers; rather, it is an absolutely essential ingredient in the decisions they make.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, the federal and state officials who administer and regulate Hanford through the Tri-party Agreement (TPA) must have regular, substantial, sustained, and effective contact with the public. A wide variety of mechanisms have been developed for this purpose, and a great deal of effort and commitment to this goal is evident. Nevertheless, it is important to periodically re-examine these efforts to improve their effectiveness. The stakes at Hanford are high, and public involvement must be proportionately high in both quantity and quality.

In April 2001 the Public Involvement and Communication Committee began a review of the goals, mechanisms, and effectiveness of Hanford public involvement. Our discussions have taken place via a series of committee meetings, conference calls, and electronic mail exchanges involving committee members, representatives of the three TPA agencies, contractor staff, and facilitators. Below, we summarize these discussions for consideration by the HAB. Our goal is to provide a framework for a larger discussion of public involvement by the full Board. We

believe that this larger discussion will be valuable whether or not it leads to further Board action or formal advice to the TPA agencies. The following summary represents consensus reached by the HAB members and alternates who serve on the committee, in consultation with the agency and contractor representatives who participated in our committee discussions.

### **Goals and Evaluation Criteria for Public Involvement**

Our committee discussions have identified ten characteristics of effective public involvement. These characteristics overlap considerably and reinforce each other. They can be understood as broad goals or general principles, and can also serve as starting points for developing criteria to evaluate specific activities.

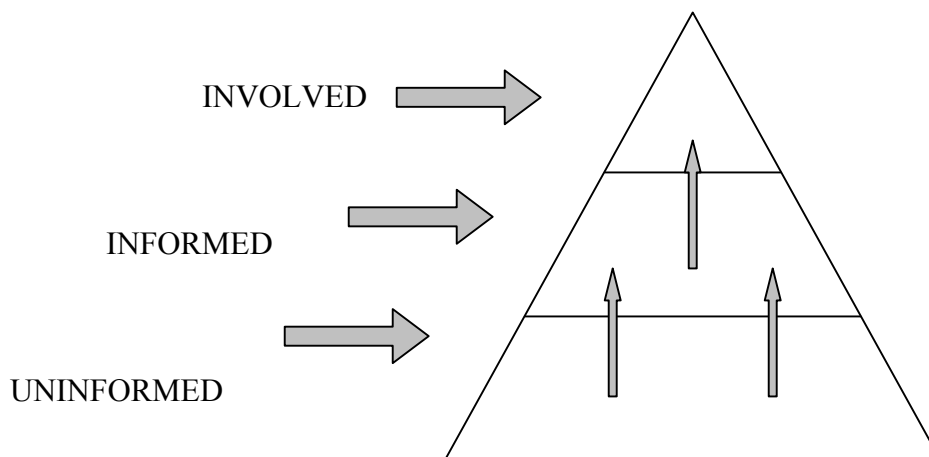
#### **1. Broad and inclusive (Who participates?)**

Public involvement activities should reach out to and engage the broadest possible constituency. Participation should expand beyond “the usual suspects” who already participate. A diversity of viewpoints fosters fresh approaches to issues, the identification of previously unrecognized issues, and opportunities to “reframe” issues productively. It is also a basic prerequisite for fair and democratic decision-making.

Problems in this regard include identifying affected parties and communities, developing and conducting public involvement activities that meet their particular needs, scheduling and promoting these activities appropriately, motivating people to participate by demonstrating the relevance of issues to their own concerns, and putting public input to use in decision processes.

Particular problems exist when issues have highly technical dimensions, as they often do at Hanford. Research conducted for the National Science Foundation indicates that only a small fraction of the public is “involved” in technical issues. A larger fraction is “informed” but not actively involved. The majority of the public is “uninformed.”<sup>3</sup> As illustrated in figure 1, an important challenge is to move people from the uninformed to the informed group, and from the informed group to the involved group.

**Figure 1.**



Our emphasis here on broad and direct participation is not meant to discount the special roles played by “opinion leaders” such as HAB members or by agency personnel, contractor representatives, or technical experts. These closely-involved participants have important contributions to make, and must be allowed to operate effectively within their appropriate domains. However, the work done by these parties must be accompanied by broad and direct participation. Public involvement mechanisms such as the HAB and the Oregon Hanford Waste Board are important forms of “representative democracy,” but must be balanced with mechanisms for “direct democracy.”

## **2. Open and accessible**

Public involvement activities should be open, in the sense that no one is intentionally or unintentionally excluded. This issue extends beyond the “letter of the law” for open meetings and other public involvement activities, which addresses intentional exclusion. Unintentional exclusion can occur in forms such as inconvenient scheduling and location of public meetings, failure to promote public involvement opportunities in a broad and timely manner, announcing opportunities solely in media that have restricted audiences, or relying exclusively on communication technologies that are not available to all affected parties. These failures are not necessarily common in Hanford public involvement, but we should be conscious of their possibility and careful to avoid them.

## **3. Substantive**

Public involvement should address substantive issues, allowing affected parties to understand these issues and genuinely influence outcomes. This goal is especially difficult to achieve when technical issues are at stake. Although expert knowledge is essential in addressing technical issues, experts cannot replace the public in expressing community values and providing local knowledge. Therefore, substantive public participation requires ongoing educational and informational efforts by specialists, to provide members of the public with a working grasp of the technical, legal, and regulatory issues. Specialists and the public should be understood as equal collaborators in this process. Announcements of public involvement opportunities should highlight the relevance of issues to the public, in order to motivate substantive public participation.

## **4. Timely (formative role in decisions)**

Public involvement should come sufficiently early in the decision process to have genuine influence. The “decide, announce, defend” approach, in which the public is presented with a finished or nearly-finished product and can do little more than approve or disapprove, is especially alienating for many members of the public. Public involvement should play a formative role in the definition of problems, the development of solutions, and the establishment of decision criteria. We recognize that the definition of “timely” public involvement depends upon the issues being considered, and that some development of the issues must take place before they can be addressed publicly. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to incorporate public involvement sooner, rather than later, whenever possible.

## **5. Regular (ongoing, understandable process)**

Public involvement should be continuous and ongoing. Although many issues require discrete and specific public involvement, at particular points in time, these should be viewed within a larger framework of regular contact between stakeholders and officials. When public involvement follows regular schedules and patterns, people can participate more easily and more effectively. Additionally, regular public involvement fosters the development of good working relationships between the public and officials. When necessary, public involvement opportunities for specific, transient issues can be added to existing and familiar cycles of ongoing communication.

## **6. Cumulative (“institutional memory”)**

HAB members have often pointed out that the Board serves as Hanford’s institutional memory, preserving knowledge and values beyond the tenures of individual agency or contractor personnel. This principle applies to public involvement more generally, as well. Public concerns and values tend to be stable and consistent over time, and the public involvement process should make use of this fact. By anticipating public concerns, when possible, and by being prepared to address these concerns, the TPA agencies can avoid “re-inventing the wheel” and maintain continuous progress toward goals shared with the public.

## **7. Interactive (genuine dialog; all parties speak, all parties listen)**

Effective public involvement takes place within a framework of genuine dialog. Communication should flow both ways between officials and stakeholders, interactively and recursively. All parties should have opportunities to speak, while the other parties listen carefully and attentively. The roles of “speaker” and “listener” should be shared equally and exchanged frequently. In genuine dialog, the parties are open to changes in how they understand the issues and in the positions they take on the issues, based on what they learn from others. The TPA agencies can support this principle of dialog by responding to public comments (to the degree reasonable); by following-up on suggestions, questions, and expressed concerns; and by demonstrating their commitment to making substantive use of public comments.

## **8. Legally compliant (meets all applicable legal and regulatory requirements)**

Public involvement is driven, in part, by a legal and regulatory framework. Where federal and state laws apply, and when the TPA provides guidelines for public involvement, these standards must be carefully observed.

Cleanup of the Hanford Site falls under several federal and state laws. Each of those laws have specific requirements for public involvement. To the degree feasible, public involvement activities should be designed to satisfy those overlapping requirements so that cleanup can proceed more effectively, with greater public understanding and support.

The major federal laws which apply are the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and the Comprehensive Environmental

Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA, also known as "Superfund"). The corresponding Washington State laws are the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), the Hazardous Waste Management Act (HWMA), and the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA).

Both NEPA and SEPA require the preparation of a Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) when there is likely to be a significant impact. Associated with the EIS are specific requirements for citizen notice and opportunity to comment. Under both CERCLA and MTCA there are requirements to prepare a plan for citizen involvement, with slightly different mandates under each law. In designing public involvement opportunities, awareness of the various requirements will result in coordinated activities. The logical vehicle for this coordination is the Community Relations Plan prepared by the three agencies under the Tri-Party Agreement.

### **9. Reflexive (self-correcting)**

Public involvement should be reflexive; that is, there should be public involvement in how the public involvement process is conducted. Surveys, response cards distributed at public meetings, and other methods should be used to assess public satisfaction and to explore new ways of enhancing and expanding public involvement. Special efforts should be made to encourage alienated and disenfranchised groups to provide advice in this regard.

### **10. Trust-building**

All of the principles described above support the overarching goal of developing relationships of mutual trust among the TPA agencies and Hanford stakeholders. Although the need for trust is often mentioned in discussions among these parties, it is clear that in practice trust is difficult to achieve and to maintain. Nevertheless, it is central to progress in resolving the issues at Hanford. We believe that by striving to honor the principles described here, the agencies and stakeholders can move forward productively to build trust and collaborate more effectively.

### **Existing Mechanisms for Public Involvement**

To begin an inventory of existing mechanisms for public involvement, the three TPA agencies, the Oregon Office of Energy, and Heart of America Northwest each filled out a chart summarizing their activities (see Appendix A). The completed charts, and our committee discussions, demonstrate that a great deal of serious effort and commitment already exists. More than 50 unique activities were identified, with many of these used by a number of the organizations.

The following is a very condensed summary of these activities, grouped by broad categories. In some cases, we provide comments and questions regarding strengths, weaknesses, and other aspects of the activities reported. Although much could be said about each of these activities, our main purpose here is to provide a list of them for review by HAB members. One way to make such a review meaningful would be to evaluate each activity in terms of the ten public involvement principles described above.

## **Audiovisual Media**

Photographs, videotapes, and CD-ROMs serve educational, consciousness-raising, and information distribution goals.

*Comments:* How widely is the availability of these materials promoted? What is the process for requesting or receiving these items? Who is, and who is not, aware of their availability and how to obtain them?

## **Community Outreach**

Speakers bureaus, meetings with civic groups, Earth Day, fairs, expos, exhibits, school outreach, Oregon Community Outreach Initiative, see other listings under “meetings.”

## **Electronic and Interactive Media**

Websites, listserves, direct e-mail access to agency staff and stakeholder groups.

## **Emergency Preparedness Activities**

Interagency coordination takes place, along with some public involvement in individual agency plans.

## **Environmental Impact Statements**

As required by law, with public comment periods.

## **Focus Groups**

Utilized by some agencies, including the Oregon Office of Energy, to sample public opinion on particular Hanford issues.

## **Grants**

Public participation grants, technical assistance grants, etc. Funding sources include DOE, EPA, MOTCA; some grants are administered through the Washington State Department of Ecology and the Oregon Office of Energy.

## **Hanford Advisory Board**

The HAB is a central mechanism for public involvement. It provides a regular and ongoing forum for contact between officials and representatives of the public. Issues are discussed in greater depth than in most other venues. However, it should be noted that the HAB is a form of “representative” or “interest group” democracy, rather than “direct” democracy. The potential exists for HAB members and alternates to become distanced from the general public, and even from their own constituencies, and for the HAB to supplant more direct forms of public

involvement. In this regard, HAB members should be especially conscious of their responsibilities to their own constituencies. Also, the HAB should address its contributions to public involvement explicitly in its annual self-evaluation.

## **Mail**

Stakeholder mailings, individual inquiries/comments and replies.

## **Meetings**

DOE annual budget meetings, agencies provide informational meetings as requested, agencies and public interest groups sponsor meetings/forums/workshops, Oregon Office of Energy and Washington Ecology provide regular stakeholder meetings, agency focus groups, TPA quarterly public involvement planning meetings, HAB, Oregon Hanford Waste Board, expert panel meetings, town halls, roadshows, worker compensation public meetings, Hanford Public Interest Network (HPIN), Tri-cities Caucus.

*Comments:* Meetings, of many kinds, are probably the most utilized of all the public involvement activities. Meetings are attempts at direct democracy, but often provide only limited opportunities for members of the public to engage with issues and decision makers. In many cases, this engagement is brief and comes only after the issues have been framed and a narrow menu of choices has been developed. In the worst cases, meetings provide “hollow participation in which citizens merely make noise in some political ritual” rather than “real influence over outcomes.”<sup>4</sup> As one critic notes,

in most public hearings the agency defines the agenda and establishes the format. The hearing itself provides limited time for citizens to understand the technical or policy issues and to take a substantive part in the discussion. Indeed, the reliance on public hearings as a mainstay of public participation is one of the weaknesses of the administrative process in the United States, in part because of the unequal relationship of citizens to government officials....Public hearings typically do not give citizens a share in decision making. Although they provide mechanisms for public views to come to the attention of administrators, they do not directly engage citizens in the process of making policy choices or cede to citizens any control over the decision process itself.<sup>5</sup>

These criticisms do not necessarily apply to all Hanford public involvement meetings, but they are worth noting as cautionary advice.

## **News Releases**

Agencies and public interest groups provide frequent releases for use by news media.

## **Oregon Hanford Waste Board**

Like the HAB, the Oregon Hanford Waste Board provides a forum for regular and more substantive contact between officials and representatives of the public. Similar concerns apply regarding the balance between direct and participatory democracy.

## **Publications**

Annual reports, fact/focus/information sheets, *Hanford Happenings*, *Hanford Reach*, *Hanford Update*, brochures, reports, pamphlets.

## **Public Comment Periods and Response Documents**

The TPA agencies, together and individually, provide public comment periods as required by law and sometimes when not legally required. Comments are solicited on Environmental impact statements, TPA changes, permits, CERCLA decisions, agency initiatives, budgets, and some additional documents and plans. In many cases, agencies provide response documents following these comment periods.

## **Public facilities**

Public reading room, offsite repositories.

## **Public Involvement Evaluation**

Annual TPA public involvement evaluation, response cards at meetings, surveys, HAB annual self-evaluation. Word-of-mouth provides another form of evaluation, but is not captured very effectively.

## **Public Involvement Plans (including TPA Community Relations Plan)**

The individual agencies have public involvement plans, and together follow the TPA Community Relations Plan (CRP). The CRP is undergoing revision at present, with public comment as part of the revision process, and is intended to serve in part as a “handbook” or “users guide” for members of the public.

## **Site Tours**

Hanford site tours are provided by all the TPA agencies, for a variety of audiences. The Oregon Office of Energy facilitates WIPP site tours for regional officials, responders, and community leaders.



## Telephone Access

The Hanford Hotline provides a point of contact between the TPA agencies and the public. Agency and public interest group staff take calls at their offices. Interest groups operate phone banks to alert members to upcoming issues and public involvement opportunities.

## HAB Discussion and Path Forward

Our committee has identified a set of goals and a wide range of existing activities for Hanford public involvement. However, our discussions have led us to conclude that the committee is neither large enough nor diverse enough to take the next step, evaluating the existing activities in relation to the goals. We believe that it would now be useful for the full HAB to devote some time to such a discussion, beginning during the December 2001 meeting and proceeding as determined by the Board. This discussion might lead to further research by the committee at the Board's request, to further discussion by the Board at future meetings, to formal advice or other Board action, or might reach closure at the December meeting. In any case, the discussion will have value in fostering a more self-aware approach to public involvement. To begin this discussion we offer the following questions:

1. Do the ten principles described above reflect the goals of Hanford public involvement adequately and accurately?
2. What are the HAB's expectations regarding public involvement, in regard to the TPA agencies, stakeholder groups, the Tribes, and other constituencies represented on the Board?
3. What is the HAB's own proper role in public involvement? Possibilities include advising, critiquing, or overseeing the public involvement process (directly or through the Public Involvement and Communication Committee), acting as a surrogate for the public in decision processes, reaching out to HAB constituencies, or collaborating with or assisting other organizations. Once an appropriate role has been identified, how can it best be accomplished?
4. Does the HAB want to be involved further in exploring the issue of public involvement?
5. Based on the committee's work and the Board's discussion, can we identify a path forward toward more effective public involvement?

## Notes

1. Sandra Harding, in D. L. Kleinman (Ed.), Science, Technology, and Democracy (pp. 126-127). State University of New York Press, 2000.
2. Frank Fischer, Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge. Duke University Press, 2000.
3. Jon D. Miller, The American People and Science Policy: The Role of Public Attitudes in the Policy Process. Pergamon Press, 1983.

4. Frank Laird, "Participatory Analysis, Democracy, and Technological Decision Making." Science, Technology, and Human Values, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 341-361, 1993.

5. Daniel J. Fiorino, "Environmental policy and the participation gap." In W. M. Lafferty & J. Meadowcroft (Eds.), Democracy and the environment: Problems and prospects (pp. 194-212). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishers, 1996.

## Appendix A

### Template for Evaluating Public Involvement and Communication Activities

Activity	Current Approach	Strengths	Weaknesses	Possible Changes	Evaluation Criteria