

Chapter 3. GETTING FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

C. TAKING INITIAL ACTION STEPS

Agencies need specific ways to solicit feedback from community people, resolve differences, and integrate the results into a process of planning or project development. Some initial steps include the following:

- ✓ **Determine how and when feedback information will be used.**
Be receptive to feedback and prepare to use it during ongoing staff work in planning and project development. Determine when feedback on specific issues is needed and by whom.
- ✓ **Establish clear channels for feedback to affect agency decision-making.**
Provide a well-defined avenue for information, testimony, and opinions from the public to reach agency decision-makers and policy-setters.
- ✓ **Set up ways to give further information and get comments and questions.**
Establish telephone connections that people routinely can use to obtain information and give feedback, comments, or support. However, because many people prefer methods that are instantaneous and hassle-free, supplement telephone connections with other methods, such as on-line services, that make it easier to give and get information.
- ✓ **Sponsor brief surveys or small groups to preview community viewpoints.**
Investigate a small but representative sample of the community to pinpoint people's preferences quickly. Design the form of the survey to objectively test preferences.
- ✓ **Sponsor focus groups to ascertain community concerns in detail.**
Hold focus groups of representative people to get a broad outline of what people want to see and what concerns agencies might encounter in specific situations. Repeat the technique in more than one location to help determine geographic-based differences in opinion. Use the results to help set up an overall public involvement strategy and specific procedures.
- ✓ **If an impasse is reached, try negotiation or third-party intervention.**
Assess the complexity of the conflict to be resolved and how intently participants are holding to their own positions without compromise. Use a skilled, in-house person to work informally with the parties to reach consensus. If the stalemate holds fast, bring in a mediator or other third-party neutral to assist the group in approaching the issues from other angles, improving their conflict resolution skills, and coming to agreement.
- ✓ **Evaluate the approach with participant advisors.**
Ask participant advisors if a technique is appropriate or rewarding. Meet with community advisors to get a sense of the best methods of getting feedback and comments and resolving conflicts.