

COMMUNITY GROUPS

DESCRIPTION

Working with a variety of community groups is an effective way to encourage discussion of the needs of diverse segments of the community. Community groups include familiar organizations, such as the Lions, Kiwanis Club, Rotary, Parent-Teacher Associations, church-sponsored groups, Boys and Girls Clubs, environmental groups, and Neighborhood Watch groups. Other community groups are less-familiar organizations, such as local homeowner associations, tenant organizations, gardening clubs, arts groups, and beautification committees. While these groups may not focus specifically on environmental or hazardous waste issues, they can provide the site team with early insight into community dynamics. The involvement of community groups can help the site team to reach particular segments of the population and obtain important site-related information.

REQUIRED ACTIVITY?

No.

MAKING IT WORK

WHEN TO USE

Working with community groups is most effective when a broad range of groups are contacted early and kept informed and involved throughout the decision-making process. Involvement of community groups is particularly useful at sites with significant environmental concerns and at sites where there are diverse community perspectives. Reach out to community groups during the community information-gathering phase; this will help you to obtain information about community issues, concerns, needs, and outreach products to include in the *Community Involvement Plan*. Work with community groups before important decisions are made, even if only a few groups are involved.

HOW TO USE

Include research on community groups in each phase of the information-gathering process. For instance, during *Community Interviews*, ask residents to identify community groups and organizations they belong to, and which they consider to be influential in their community. Contact community groups to learn more about their officers and activities and how you can participate in them. Set up a table at a civic association function or make a presentation to the PTA. Then include representatives of key community organizations in *Focus Groups* to gain understanding of stakeholders' views and to gather community input on site activities. Also, use community groups' existing communications vehicles—newsletters, bulletin boards, meetings, and mailing lists—to disseminate information about site activities.

TIPS

- Community groups can be particularly helpful in outreach to low-income and disadvantaged residents who can be hard to reach through traditional community involvement channels.
- Ask where low-income and other disadvantaged residents go for information, and what community groups they trust. Then ask people from these community groups for advice.
- Start early and build partnerships with community organizations. Ask for a meeting to discuss the hazards faced in the community and to explain what EPA is doing.



[See Community Involvement Plans, Tab 7](#)



[See Community Interviews, Tab 5; Focus Groups, Tab 17](#)

Last Updated:
September 2002

COMMUNITY GROUPS

- Be willing to take important information to the people who need it. For example, consider holding a special meeting with disadvantaged and other hard-to-reach groups. This is particularly important at the beginning of the process in order to build trust and encourage active participation when crucial decisions are being made.
- Make a long-term commitment. Don't expect instant acceptance. Be patient and respect each organization's decision-making process. Understand that you will have to build credibility first, and that can take time.
- Use the communications networks the community already trusts. Church groups can be very effective in reaching various groups in the community. Community health clinics, English-As-A-Second-Language programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, senior centers, and Head Start programs are excellent ways to reach disadvantaged and other hard-to-reach stakeholders in many communities.
- Remember, the messenger can be as important as the message. People are more likely to listen to people and groups they already know and trust. A flyer received from a trusted community organization has instant credibility; the same flyer sent through the mail or received from a stranger may not.
- Enlist help from community organizations for translations. If there is a significant foreign-language group in the community, there probably is at least one community-based organization that works on community issues affecting these residents. Contact the group and ask someone to provide input for, review, and help translate your materials.

RELATED TOOLS/RESOURCES IN THE TOOLKIT

- [Communications Strategies, Tab 3](#)
- [Community Interviews, Tab 5](#)
- [Community Involvement Plans, Tab 7](#)
- [Focus Groups, Tab 17](#)
- [Technical Assistance Grants, Tab 41](#)

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUPS

DESCRIPTION

Community Advisory Group (CAG) is a term EPA uses to define a committee, task force, or board comprised of residents affected by a hazardous waste site. CAGs enhance public participation in the cleanup process by providing a public forum where representatives of diverse community interests can discuss their concerns and learn from each other.

Groups similar to CAGs are supported by other agencies. The U.S. *Department of Defense's* (DoD) Restoration Advisory Boards are an expansion of DoD's Technical Review Committee concept. The boards, formed at operating and closing installations and Formerly Used Defense Sites, provide a forum for exchange of information and partnership among citizens, the installation, EPA, and the State. The U.S. *Department of Energy's* (DOE) Site Specific Advisory Boards involve stakeholders at DOE sites more directly in cleanup decisions. The boards provide input and recommendations on environmental restoration, waste management, and technology development activities. Membership in the boards includes interested stakeholders from local governments, Native American tribes, environmental and civic groups, labor organizations, universities, industry, and other interested parties. The *Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's* (ATSDR) Community Assistance Panels provide a mechanism for citizen participation in its public health assessment and consultation programs related to federal and non-federal hazardous waste sites. Panels are comprised of persons living and working near the sites and other interested parties.



[See Federal Agencies, Tab 16](#)

REQUIRED ACTIVITY?

No.

MAKING IT WORK

Since the formation of Community Advisory Groups is encouraged and facilitated by EPA, this section focuses on CAGs.

WHEN TO USE

CAGs may not be appropriate for every Superfund or other hazardous waste site. CAGs are particularly useful at sites with significant environmental justice concerns or diverse community perspectives. By encouraging the formation of a CAG, EPA can empower the community to present and discuss its concerns and views with EPA and other relevant agencies.

Activities involving CAGs are targeted at fulfilling the expectations of Congress and the public for more efficient cleanups and for making future land use decisions that are responsive to community needs. Through these groups, the sponsoring agencies can provide communities with access to the decision-making process that goes beyond traditional community involvement programs.

HOW TO USE

The Agency has developed the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit for EPA Staff*. The *Toolkit* contains information, advice, camera-ready materials, and other tools designed to assist CICs and other EPA personnel in working with CAGs. A similar *Community Advisory Group Toolkit*, designed for use by the community, also has been developed. While the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit for EPA Staff* was designed for use with CAGs, much of the toolkit may be used in other programs and authorities. In addition to *Toolkits*, EPA has issued *Community Advisory Groups: Partners in Decisions at Hazardous Waste Sites*

Last Updated:
September 2002

COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUPS

(EPA 540-R-96-043), which presents case studies and lessons learned in implementing Community Advisory Groups at five sites; and *Superfund Today: Focus on the Community Advisory Group Program* (EPA 540-K-96-005).

Examples

The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* contains materials—including sample mission statements, a guide for developing operating procedures, information on how to incorporate, tips on how to find additional funding, and many other useful items—that CICs can give to the communities interested in forming a Community Advisory Group. The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit for EPA Staff* contains a camera-ready copy of all these materials, so CICs can reproduce them as needed. Electronic copies also are available, offering CICs the opportunity to adapt material to suit the needs of community groups in their Regions.

The *Community Advisory Group Toolkit for EPA Staff* contains several materials, developed specifically for CIC use. These include:

- Overhead transparencies and accompanying script notes for a presentation, called “Community Advisory Group: Your Voice in EPA Decisions,” which explains the Community Advisory Group concept and how a CAG can help citizens participate more fully in the decision-making process.
- “Visioning: A Tool for Community Advisory Groups,” which is a brief explanation of the visioning process and how it may be used by CICs to assist CAGs in resolving site cleanup and sustainable development issues.
- “Helping Community Advisory Groups To Incorporate,” which is a list of appropriate contacts in each state for use by CICs to assist their CAGs in obtaining materials required for incorporation.
- *Guidance for Community Advisory Groups at Superfund Sites* (EPA 540-K-96-001), which contains EPA guidance on CAGs.
- *Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) at Superfund Sites: A Quick Reference Fact Sheet* (EPA 540-F-96-016). A Spanish-language version of this fact sheet, called *Grupos de Consulta de la Comunidad (CAGs) en Sitios del Superfondo* (EPA 540-F-97-031), is also available.

RELATED TOOLS/RESOURCES IN THE TOOLKIT

- [Public Meetings, Tab 32](#)
- [Technical Assistance for Communities, Tab 41](#)

OUTSIDE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Copies of the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit for EPA Staff* may be obtained by contacting CIOC at (703) 603-9929.
- Electronic versions of the *Community Advisory Group Toolkit* and *About the Community Advisory Group Toolkit*, a 16-page guide to the *Toolkit*, are available at www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/cag/resource.htm.