

# Basic Principles of Public Participation and the USEPA Toolkit

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# What is Public Participation?

**Public Participation** is any process that obtains and considers public input in making a decision or taking an action.



# Public Participation and Public Relations are not the same

- **Public Relations** does not include the opportunity for the public to influence the decision or outcome
- **Public Participation** must include the opportunity for the public to influence the decision or outcome

# Sometimes, Public Relations is the Correct Approach

- When our goal is limited to informing the public, such as in public awareness campaigns, but there is no room for them to affect the decision
- Or when our goal is to change public behavior, such as in social marketing activities

# Sometimes, Public Participation is the Correct Approach

- It is public participation as long as there is a **real opportunity for public input to influence the decision or outcome**
- Public participation can be very simple or quite complex, and it is almost never the same from project to project

# Why Should We Do Public Participation? For Better, More Sustainable Decisions

- Decision-makers tap into the collective wisdom of the public and have better information to base decision
- Decisions take into account the needs of the full range of stakeholder interests
- Stakeholders better understand decisions and often become invested in them

# Elements of Effective Decisions

## PROCEDURAL SATISFACTION

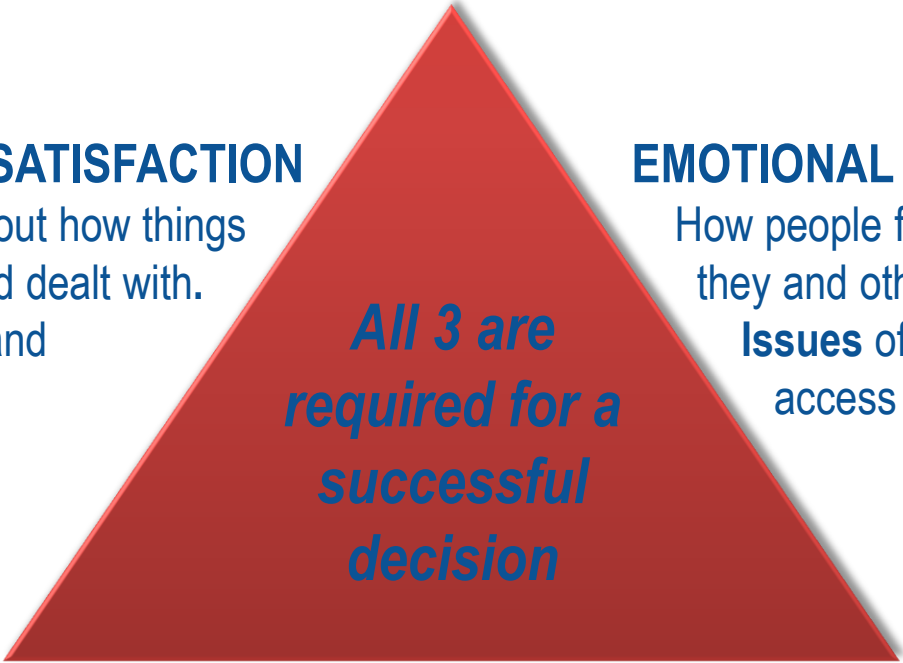
How people feel about how things are talked about and dealt with.

**Issues** of fairness and transparency.

## EMOTIONAL SATISFACTION

How people feel about how they and other are treated.

**Issues** of respect and access to decision-making.



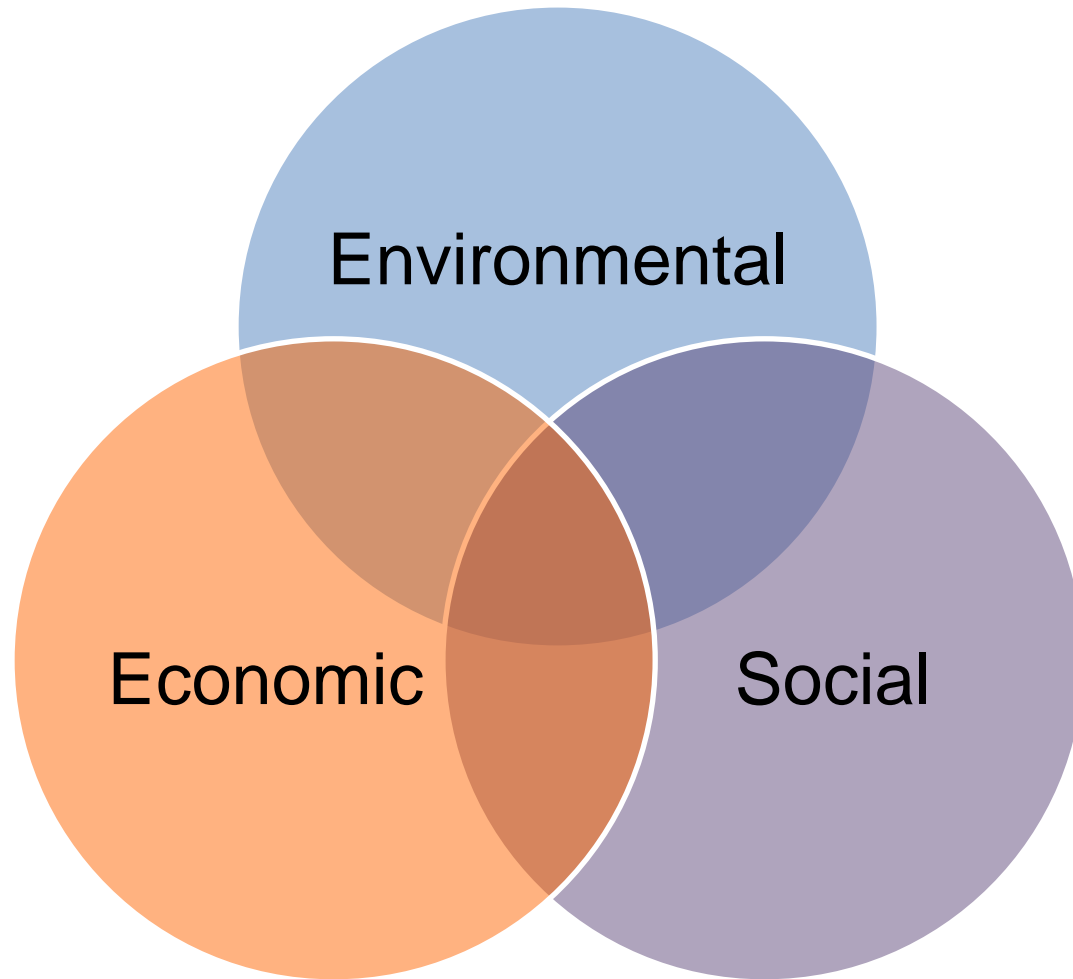
*All 3 are  
required for a  
successful  
decision*

## SUBSTANTIVE SATISFACTION

How well things are explained, questions answered, topics discussed, and input considered.

**Issues** of values, needs, interests.

# UN Model of Sustainability





# Public Participation also Builds Community Capacity

- Stakeholders and communities learn how to solve problems and address issues constructively
- Communities improve their behaviors, knowledge, and communication with each other

**Tell me, I forget.**

**Show me, I remember.**

**Involve me, I understand.**

– Ancient Proverb

# Best Practices in the Toolkit: Keys to a Successful Process

1. Clarify the goals for and level of public participation
2. Identify where public input can influence the decision
3. Develop and share meaningful information
4. Engage a broad range of stakeholder interests
5. Design a comprehensive participation process
6. Ensure sponsor commitment

# 1. Clarify the goals for and level of public participation

- Why do we hope to gain from public participation?
- Is there a real opportunity for the public to influence the decision or outcome?



# 1. Clarify the goals for and level of public participation

- Identify the appropriate level of public participation, based on:
  - Degree to which public input can make a difference
  - Public desire to participate
  - Our willingness to engage the public
  - Available resources
  - Available time
  - Consequences of **not** engaging the public

# Public Participation Spectrum

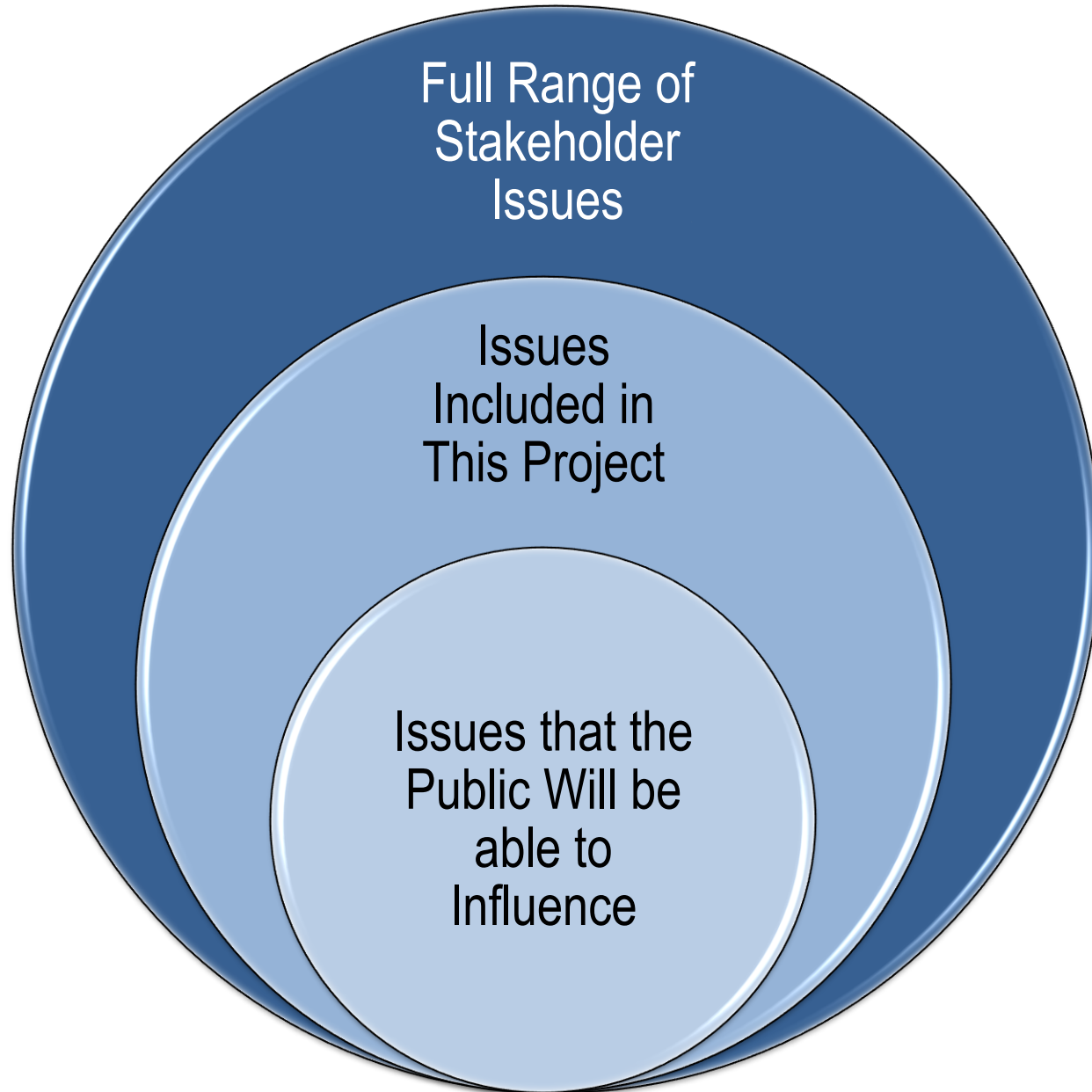
# Levels of Public Participation

- Higher is not necessarily better
- Select the level that best fits the circumstances
- OK to stay at “inform” as long as expectations are clear

## 2. Identify where public input can influence the decision

- Identify specific points where public input is important and possible
- Public input early in the process is often most effective
- Ask very specific questions that help to focus public input
- Do not ask the public for input to things they are unable to influence, or after decisions are made





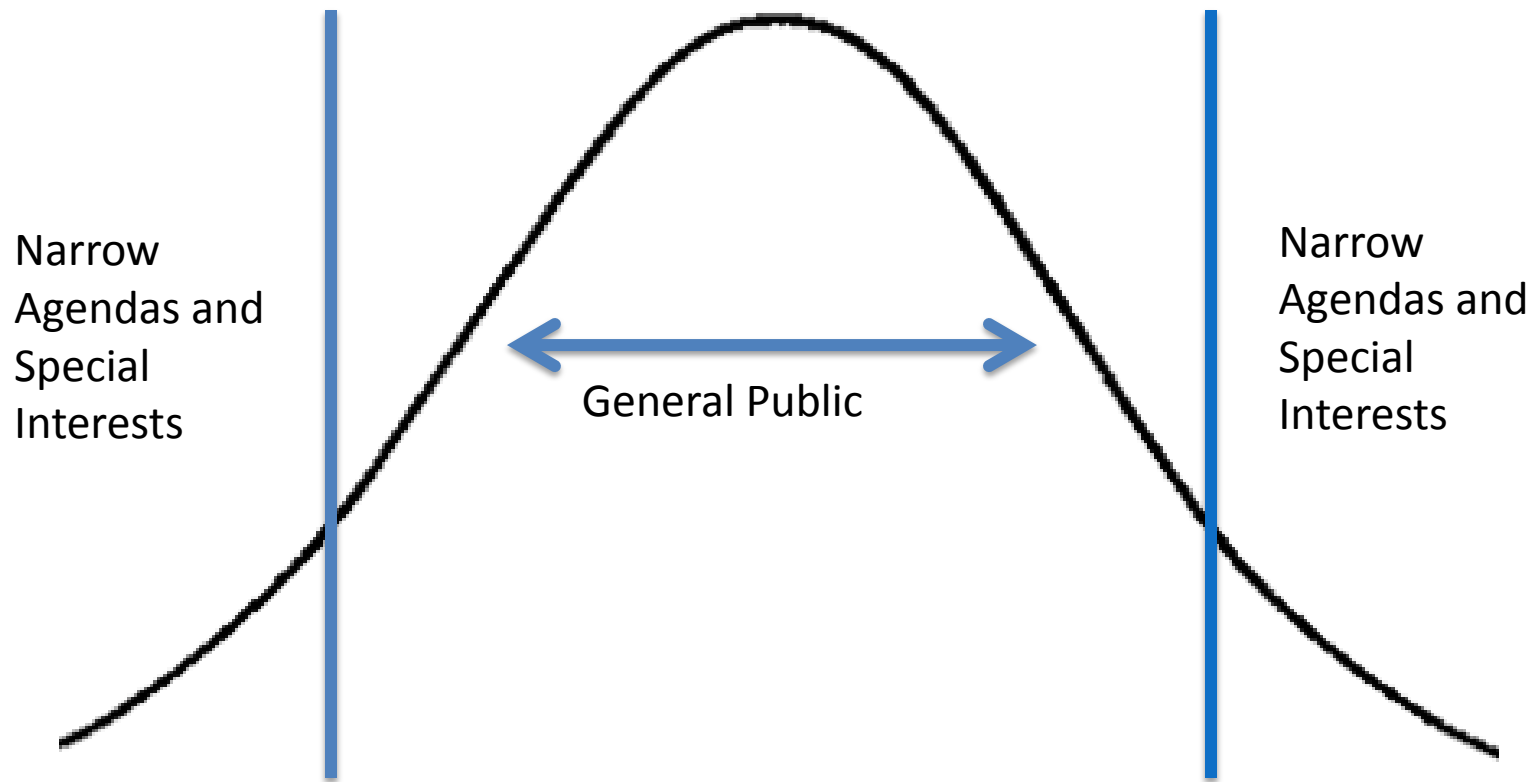
### 3. Develop and share meaningful information

- Make sure the public has the information it needs to provide meaningful input
- In general, stakeholders and decision makers should be looking at the same set of facts for input to be useful
- Make information accessible and understandable to the public

## 4. Engage a broad range of stakeholder interests

- Be careful not to limit your interaction to the loudest voices
- Identify the range of voices that should be involved in the process and reach out to all of them
- Foster relationships with key stakeholders
- Help stakeholders interact with each other

# Identify Full Range of Interests



## 5. Design a comprehensive participation process

- Start early and think about public participation continuously
- Match up public participation activities with your overall decision process
- Do not rely on single events or limited meetings



# 6. Ensure sponsor commitment

- Willingness to consider input at places and at level promised
- Make sufficient resources available
  - Money
  - Time
  - Manpower
- Transparency of information appropriate to the level of participation
- Relationship-building with stakeholders

# USEPA Public Participation Toolkit

- Developed by USEPA to support environmental agencies and staff
- Uses text and video
- Provides an overview of best practices
- Provides assistance in planning and conducting effective public participation
- Introduces key public participation skills and behaviors
- Provides case studies, tools, and links to additional resources on the web

# Toolkit Home Page

**Introduction to  
Public  
Participation**

**Situation  
Assessment**

**Selecting the  
Right Level**

**Planning**

**Skills**

**Key Skills,  
Knowledge,  
and Behaviors**

**Skills Matrix**

**Tools**

**Tools to  
Inform**

**Tools for Input**

**Tools for  
Agreement**

**Resources**

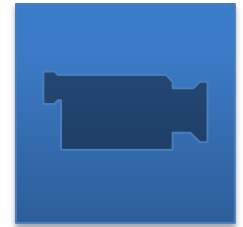
**Case Studies**

**Links**

**Glossary**



# What is Public Participation?



- Definition
- Benefits
- Best practices
- Sponsor responsibilities





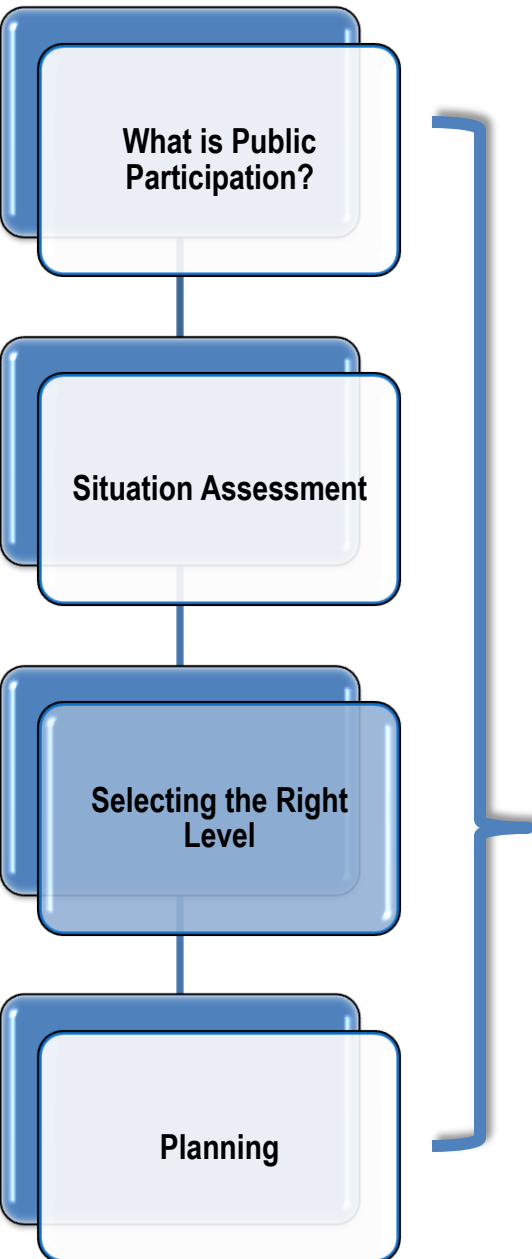
# Situation Assessment

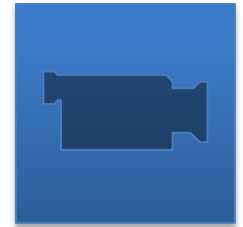
- What is it
- Why do it
- How to do it
- What to do with the results
- Links



# Selecting Level

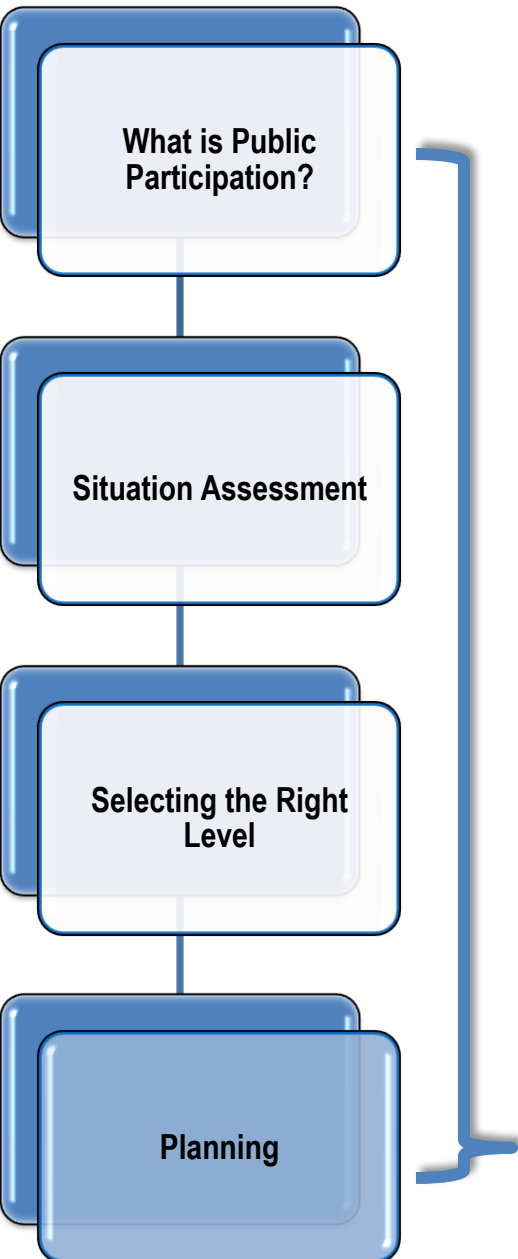
- Introduction to Spectrum
- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Empower





# Planning Steps

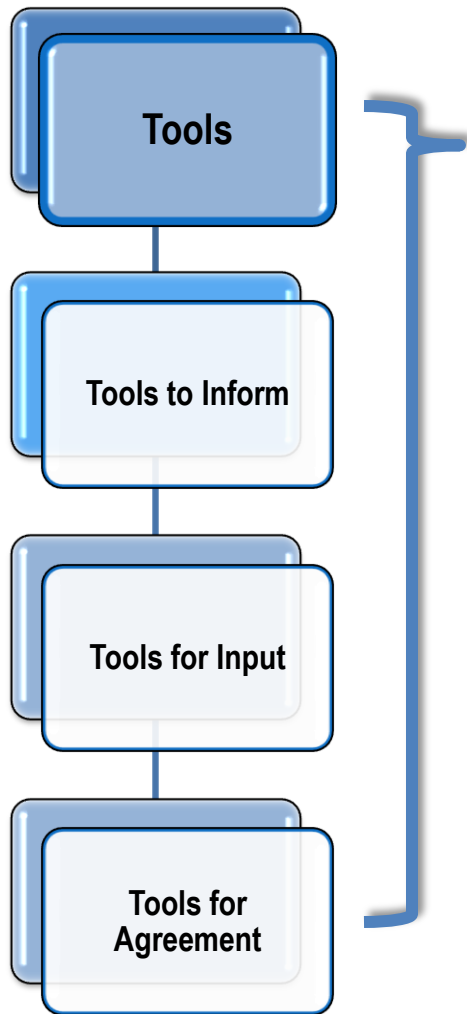
1. Organize for Participation
2. Identify and Get to Know Your Stakeholders
3. Pick an Appropriate Level of Public Participation
4. Integrate Public Participation Into the Decision Process
5. Match Public Participation to Objectives Throughout



# Skills, Knowledge, Behaviors

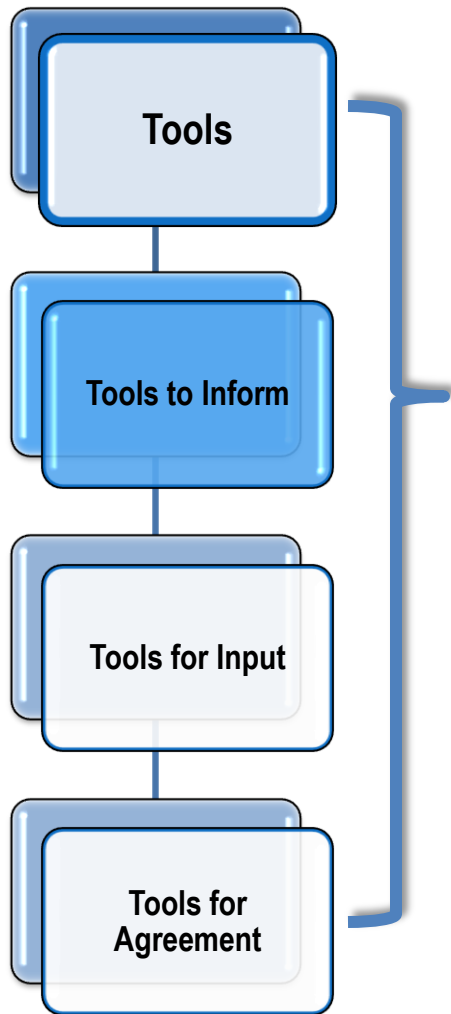


- Public Participation Principles
- Public Participation Behaviors
- Project Management
- Communications
- Facilitation



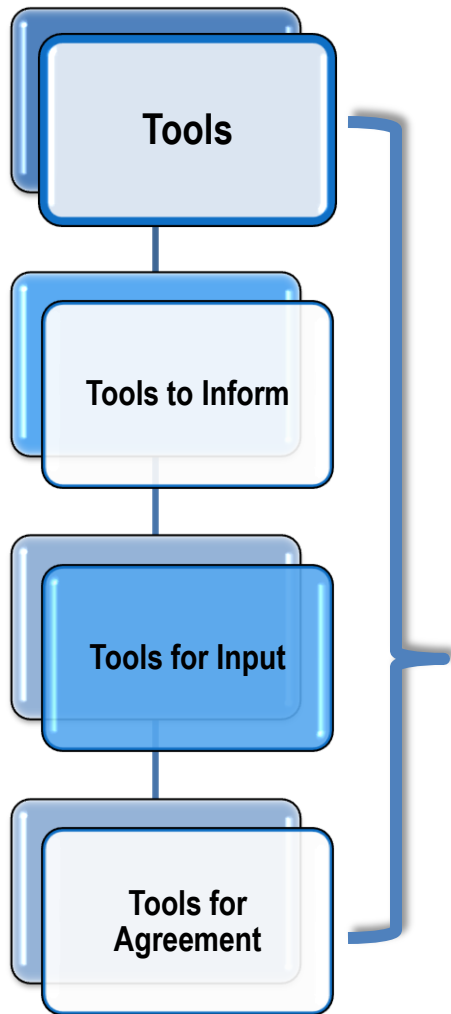
# Tool Sheet Topics

- Tool Description
- Potential Uses
- Challenges to Consider
- Principles for Successful Planning
- Resources Needed
- Cost
- Group Size
- Relevant Participation Levels
- Links



# Tools to Inform

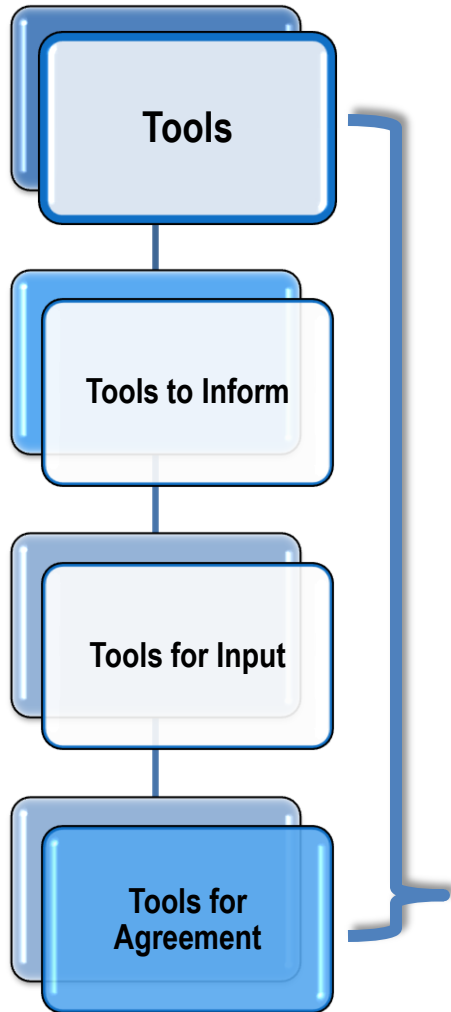
- Briefings
- Fact Sheets, Newsletters, Bulletins
- Information Hotline
- Information Repositories
- Information Kiosks
- Press and media
- Public Meetings
- Web sites



# Tools for Input

- Appreciative Inquiry Processes
- Charrettes
- Computer-Assisted Processes
- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Study Circles
- Public Meetings/ Hearings
- Public Workshops
- World Café

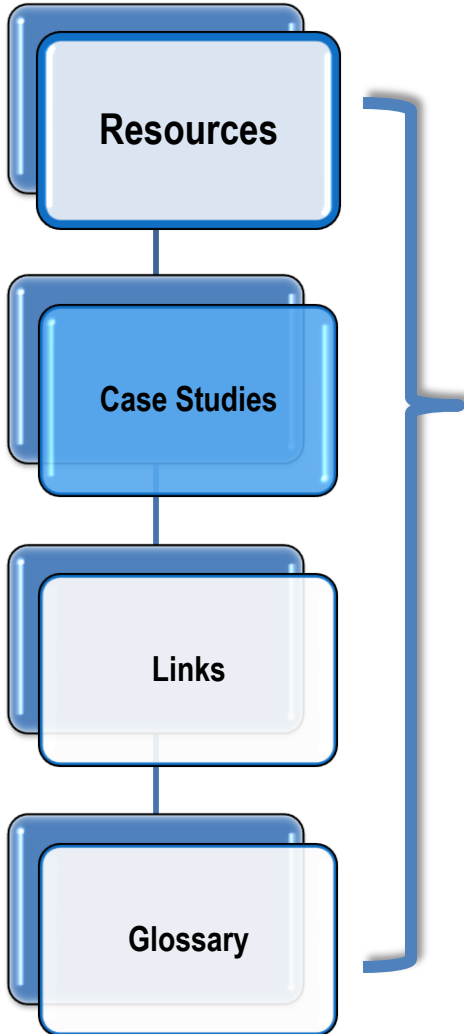




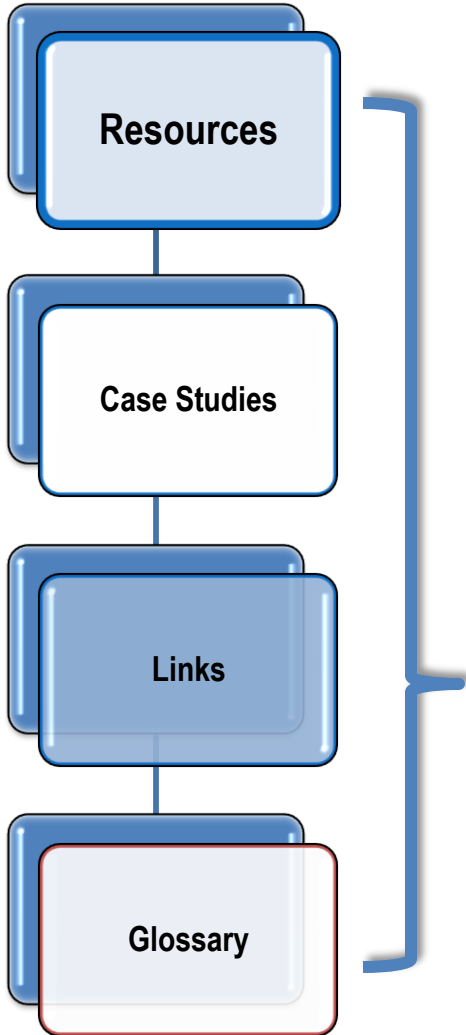
# Tools for Agreement

- Consensus workshops
- Advisory boards and similar groups
- Electronic Democracy
- Citizen Juries

# Case Study Format



- Project Name and Sponsoring Agencies
- Background
- Public Participation Goal and Level
- Public Participation Approach
- Result/Outcome
- Specific Public Participation Tools and Techniques Used
- Lessons Learned
- Links



# Links

- Reports
- Cases
- Tools
- Resources
- Other sites

# Activity 1: Using the USEPA Toolkit

- **Objective:** use the Toolkit to identify several key components of a possible public participation project
- Work in **groups of 3-4** and use your copy of the Toolkit as a reference
- **Case Study:** identify a project or challenge for which public input could be important to your overall success
  - Pick a project or challenge that can be easily described
  - Make sure the public has an identifiable opportunity to influence the outcome of the decision
  - Describe the project to your entire group so everyone can understand the scope

# Task 1. Situation Assessment

- Using the Toolkit, discuss the case study to identify:
  - What opportunities exist for public input to the decision?
  - What are the constraints and limitations of the agency in working with the public?
  - What key stakeholder groups and perspectives need to be involved?
- Where to Look in the Toolkit:
  - Situation Assessment, Planning Steps 1 and 2

# Task 2. Level of Participation

- Identify the appropriate level of public participation for this project:
  - Select the level that best fits the expectations for public participation on this project
  - What kinds of messages would you use in your promise to the public to help establish clear expectations?
- Where to Look in the Toolkit:
  - Selecting the Right Level, Planning Step 3

# Task 3. Plan an Activity

- Select an activity to communicate an important part of the project to the public:
  - Identify an important communication objective of the project
  - Look for an appropriate tool to engage the public
  - Discuss how you would apply that tool to this situation and the key messages you would seek to communicate
- Where to Look in the Toolkit:
  - Tools to Inform the Public

# Presentation

- Select 1-2 members of your group to give a 3-5 minute presentation on your case study and approach to public participation. You will make this presentation to all of the workshop participants.
- Include the following information in your presentation:
  - Description of your case study project or program
  - Opportunities and constraints for public input on your project/program
  - Range of stakeholders you will need to engage
  - Expected level of public participation
  - Key messages you want to communicate to the public