

Preparing an Information Session

Purpose

In preparing an information publication, a first step is to identify the purpose for which the information publication may be used in your agency.

Typical roles played by an information publication include:

- Informing the public of an issue
- Notifying the public about an upcoming event
- Soliciting feedback from the public
- Other purpose

Issues

What issues(s) will the Information Publication address? Is an information publication appropriate for this issue? Keep in mind that:

- Information publications contribute to reducing miscommunication and public mistrust of hidden agendas.
- Information publications can improve how residents view their role in the process, thereby increasing their level of participation.
- While the tool is one of the best means of sharing information, it provides limited opportunities for public feedback.
- Costs can be significant if a publisher is contracted to produce the publication.

Select a Target Audience

In selecting the audience, consider the following groups:

- All members of the public
- Residents in a specific geographic area affected by a particular proposal
- Special interest groups affected by a particular proposal
- Groups or communities traditionally underserved by planning

Consider preparing a list of communities or organizations to be provided with the information publication:

Prepare the publication's content

An information publication typically includes the following content:

- Description of background issue
- Information disaggregated by gender, race, age, income, status, etc.
- Language used is sensitive to and inclusive of women and marginalized communities
- Language is clear
- Rationale for involving the public in the consultation process

- Description of the participatory process
- Identification of planned events, dates and times
- Status report on the progress of a participatory process
- Up-date on important decisions and milestones in the process
- Contact information for the municipality.

Select a Format

The particular format will depend on the purpose, issue, audience and content, and will also be defined by time and budget constraints:

- Community or city newspaper article or insert
- Municipal / Department Newsletter
- Brochure
- Press release or bulletin
- Electronic format
- Other format: _____

Consider encouraging public feedback as part of the publication through one of several methods:

- Insert comment sheets or a survey that readers can tear out of the publication
- Dedicated phone lines advertised in the publication
- Social media links or website for additional engagement

Timing

Select a date for disseminating the publication

In selecting a date, consider the following:

- The release date is best if it coincides with key events occurring in the process.
- Where a publication is also being used to advertise a consultative event, it should allow for sufficient time to prepare the public.
- Ensure that feedback also goes to the language-specific groups if they were consulted.
- Allow for more time if planning translation into other languages.

Possible dates and times:

Establish the overall time frame

In preparing a work plan, keep in mind the following steps. Consider providing an estimate of days or weeks next to each step:

- Initial preparatory work
- Preparing written material
- Publishing time
- Translation time
- Distribution
- Follow-up activities

Time frame and deadlines:

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Follow-up Activities

Consider several options where a publication has provided opportunities for feedback:

- Ensure completed questionnaires are received from the public
- Record the public's comments and suggestions
- Identify the comments on the basis of demographics, i.e. by the specific comments made by residents of different income levels or communities
- Include the comments of the different populations in the next information publication

Prepare a Budget

Consider the following costs:

- Publication costs for a newsletter
- Advertisements in the media if in-kind contributions cannot be secured
- Translation costs
- Mailings to selected participants
- Return postage for attached response cards or questionnaires
- Contracting a publishing house
- Additional part-time or full-time staff

List expected costs:

Identify Funding

Consider a range of mechanisms for funding these costs:

- Departmental funding
- Municipal funding outside department
- In-kind contributions (volunteer time, facility space)
- Sponsorship/cash donations
- Funding from senior levels of government
- International sources of funding
- Other: _____