TIPS & TRICKS FOR ENGAGING PUBLIC MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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How do we make the most of our Public meetings?

• Public Meeting Types
  – Special outreach
  – Routine planning meetings

• Interviewed
  – SWCD educators
  – Watershed coordinators
  – MS4 supervisors
  – Plan commission members

• Scoured internet for relevant meeting tips

• 4 page tip handout

http://indianawatersheds.ning.com/group/groupprojects2/forum/topics/tips-tricks-for-engaging-public-meeting-participants
The #1 recommendation for encouraging a “good meeting” by interviewees:

• Provide refreshments!
Tip Categories

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Pre-Meeting

- Suitable date and time for the target attendance group
- Have room arranged before meeting attendees begin to arrive.
- Greet meeting attendees as they walk in the door
- Start and end the meeting on time
Room Arrangement

• People tend to feel more comfortable sitting behind tables
  – Arrange tables so that they face each other
  – Arrange rows of chairs in an arc or semi-circle

• Do not use a podium or stand behind a table. Move around as you speak.

• Have a microphone for the meeting facilitator if there will be a large attendance
Room Arrangement

• Have a large flip chart where public concerns and comments can be written for everyone to see.

• Have props on display to help people visualize the topics you are discussing
  - Maps
  - Brochures
  - Macroinvertebrate specimens
  - Jar of water with sediment settled at bottom
Meeting Introductions

• Introductions are very important!
  – Many people don’t like speaking in front of a room of strangers
  – Have everyone state their name an explanation of why they chose to attend the meeting

• Nametags
  – Facilitator: a must if there will be people at the meeting that do not know you
  – Meeting attendees: optional
Ice Breakers

• Try to integrate some fun into the meeting especially at the beginning

• Start with a game of watershed trivia
  – Give a prize to the winner

• Offer a payment bribe
  – Give the first person to speak, “A penny for their thoughts.”

• Give everyone a simple hypothetical situation with a problem to solve
Meeting Language

• Keep your vocabulary simple!
  – For more information on this topic consult: http://waterwordsthatwork.com
  • Less than 50% of the general population can guess the correct definition of watershed out of 4 choices.
  • Only 16% of the general population could guess the correct definition of non-point source pollution out of 4 choices = less than guessing at random

• Empower citizens that they can make a difference for clean water.
  – More important than alienating meeting attendees with big words
  – More important than educating them on technicalities not essential to decision making
Meeting Language

• **Don’t just talk at** meeting attendees, **talk to** them
  
  – Mentally engage attendees by routinely asking them questions
    • Try to get everyone involved don’t let the same person answer each time
  
  – Ask rhetorical questions.
Public Feedback

• Provide comment cards and writing utensils

• Be cautious not to belittle any public comments or concerns. Do not let anyone else belittle someone else’s concerns or comments.

• Microphones
  – Don’t require public use microphone or stand when asking questions or contributing to discussion.
  – As facilitator keep the microphone in your hands
  – Facilitator can repeat public comments into microphone, so all meeting attendees can hear.
Public Feedback

• Offer genuine positive feedback. Do not be generic merely stating, “good comment.” Explain why it is a good comment.

• If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Find the appropriate answer after the meeting.

• Record meeting attendees’ comments/concerns on a flip chart that everyone can see.

• Do not let anyone person dominate the conversation. Politely thank them for their contribution and change the topic.
Public Feedback

• Have someone on your team sitting in the audience ask the first question. A lot of people do not like to be the first to speak out, but will gladly enter a dialogue once it has been started.

• Try to have public meeting attendees brainstorm solutions to the concerns that have been presented.

• If you know that a lot of questions or concerns may arise surrounding one or a couple particular topics, have a representative from an organization that deals with the topic be on hand.
Meeting Attire

• Do not dress to impress
  – Dress cleanly and professionally
  – But, keep it casual if that is what you anticipate from meeting attendees
Meeting Location

• Hold the meeting in a non-threatening place
  – Community center
  – Library
  – Church
  – Senior center

• Try to avoid government buildings
  – May give impression of an authority overseeing the meeting
  – May introduce an element of politics associated with the meeting topic
Meeting Structure

• Varying the structure of meetings
  – Open houses
  – Meetings about hot topics (ex. *E. coli*)
  – Meetings to get feedback
  – Guest speakers
  – Presentations from various stakeholder groups

• Vary meeting times

• Mix up seating arrangement
Post-Meeting

• Generate meeting minutes or notes for distribution to help meeting attendees comprehend the progress made in the meeting
Complete list of Tips & Tricks can be found at:

http://iwatersheds.net