



5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GUIDE

PURPOSE

The foundation of the United States is rooted in democracy. Environmental justice is, in part, based on the idea that, in a democracy, when everyone has an opportunity to participate meaningfully in a process whose procedures and substance they understand, decisions will be informed by this input and therefore any negative impacts should not disproportionately burden any one community.

The purpose of this guide is to provide guidance to communities who want to engage in decision-making in and about their communities. Public participation takes persistence and success may mean a compromise or “moving an inch.” Often, in the policy world, small incremental changes are what will get you to the final goal. Success comes in different forms, but engagement is crucial for even the smallest change to occur.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT:

- **Helps identify problems that can and should be solved and relevant solutions**
- **Leads to informed decision-making and stronger solutions to problems**
- **Adheres to democratic principles**
- **Creates more substantive decisions and outcomes**

CASE STUDY: TOLEDO COMMUNITY WATER COUNCIL

PRE-COVID COMMUNITY
MEETING TOLEDO, OHIO /
FRESHWATER FUTURE

This guide includes examples of public participation like the Toledo Community Water Council (pictured above).

Members of the Toledo Community Water Council organized to respond to rising water rates and the inequity and harm that results when city governments and utilities are not proactive and transparent. They also helped the municipality identify

funding for full lead service line replacement in order to lower the cost burden on residents.

The Council’s collective knowledge and insight have been key to developing the city’s water bill assistance program. Through robust public participation, this group provides oversight and community support to the city of Toledo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PUBLIC COMMENT

Providing public comment is an important way to have people's voices heard on regulations and proposals that may have a significant impact on their lives. Comments provide decision-makers with information to help them make better decisions, improve policies or a proposed project and can provide perspectives that the government may not have contemplated. Not only are comments

a useful tool for government agencies, but they are also often a requirement for policy-making efforts with proposed rules and regulations often requiring a public participation period where communities can engage in the drafting process. This guide provides information on regulations, comment opportunities, and how to write effective comments.

2. LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Legislative advocacy is working with policy makers to gain support for your cause or initiative, for the needs of a specific population, for an organization, or for specific services. YOU, the residents of the community, are the experts on the issues your

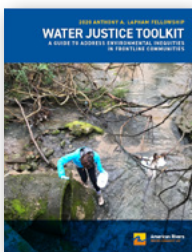
community faces. This guide helps prepare communities to educate legislators and other decision-makers, make clear statements of the issues and clear recommendations. Proactive suggestions are valued and taken more seriously than a mere support/oppose position.

3. EQUITABLE COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

When a proposed plan or policy will impact a community, it is important that all members of the community have an opportunity to be heard. Listening to and considering a diverse set of opinions often helps facilitate implementation processes for projects because people have been heard and ideally the policy makers have incorporated feedback and concerns into revised proposals.

Having good representation and inclusive meetings create a better sense of community, uphold principles of democracy, and ultimately, create better outcomes.

The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), a federal advisory committee, created a model plan to bolster public participation to ensure that decisions affecting human health and the environment embrace environmental justice. This plan was released in February 2000 and has been used to encourage community inclusion and involvement. NEJAC has listed four critical elements for public participation. These elements are to be considered by the decision-making entity and include preparation, participants, logistics, and mechanics.



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