



Characteristics of An Effective Stakeholder Participatory Process

Creating opportunities for diverse stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue is often challenging. Stakeholders have different reasons for participating and have varying knowledge about the topics under discussion. A lack of trust in or understanding of the process and each other can also hinder participatory practices. The following characteristics show how to address these challenges and ensure an effective participatory process.

Good relationships and equity between the parties

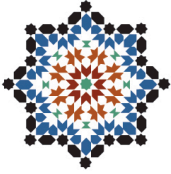
Good relations and equity between participants is evident when members trust each other, communicate effectively and negotiate in good faith. You can foster these characteristics by giving each member an equal voice in decision-making. Establishing a shared group ideology, common understanding of the meeting content, and an agreement on the meeting process maintains group cohesion. In promoting equity members feel satisfied, shared goals are realized while time and resources are used more effectively.

Participant characteristics and agreement

Engaging the affected stakeholders and having different groups proportionally represented demonstrates that you are committed to an inclusive participatory process. Once at the table, participants will need to agree on how they will engage with each other. This may involve establishing ground rules, defining a scope of work, outlining intentions and determining the decision making process. A group leader who is respected by the participants can facilitate member investment, ability to compromise, and collaborative decision-making.

Commitment and support

Collaborations often fail because of insufficient resource and the will to sustain the effort over time. Investment of resources indicates to stakeholders your commitment to the process and to their participation. They are more likely to invest when the resources needed to support participation are available. Especially for community experts and advocates who represent resource-strapped communities or grass roots organizations, participation is often contingent (and rightly so) on your ability to compensate them for lodging and travel.



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Urgency of the Issue

Other important factors are timing of the collaborative effort and relevancy of the issue. Participants will be more willing to put aside their own agendas and work collaboratively if they agree on the importance and urgency of the matter. If agreement exists than more goals are realized, participants are more satisfied, and the process has a greater chance of success.

Focus of Goals

Focusing on shared goals rather than individual goals enhances the relationships between participants. The process of formulating shared goals can help build cohesiveness and investment in the effort. Goals help focus the group strength and can serve as indicators for success.

Representative Status

Participation from stakeholders able to make decisions on behalf of their agency or group is important to the success of your efforts. The process is compromised when parties not involved in the group discussion can overturn or undermine collective decisions. When group decisions are not honored, members lose momentum in and divest from the effort or outcomes.