

Why is Public Involvement Important?

On the surface, public involvement may appear to be time consuming and costly however, the long term benefits of public involvement to a project exceed the costs. If the public's demand for a decision making role in projects that affect their interests is ignored, hostile crowds, project delays, higher costs, and a poor final product may be the end result. The benefits of public involvement are:

Public involvement improves the quality of planning and decision-making, which reduces the risk of project.

Public involvement improves project problem solving by bringing a diverse range of values and opinions to the problem.

Public involvement provides the developer (government or private sector) with a "license to operate" in a given area, through the development of "partnership" with local communities.

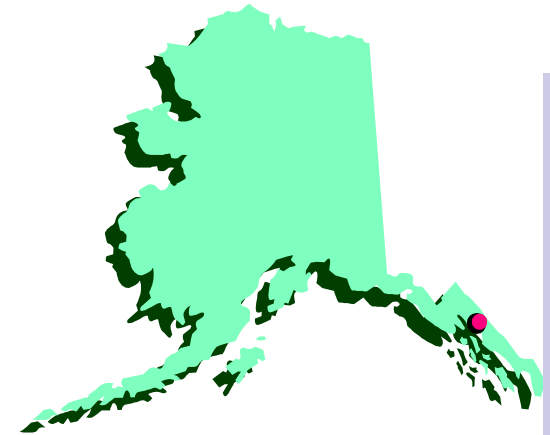
Conflicts between individuals, groups, and organizations undermine sustainable development.

Although public involvement may not eliminate all negative consequences associated with project decision making, a well prepared public involvement program that uses several techniques to reach different segments of the public will reduce the chances of negative consequences.

This pamphlet is a consolidation of the information contained in *Public Involvement in Rural Alaska Construction Projects*, a report prepared by Jeremie Smith and Tania Clucas in partial completion of the requirements of a Master's Degree from the Engineering and Science Management program

Prepared by Jeremie Smith and Tania Clucas
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Engineering and Science Management Program
College of Engineering and Mines
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Construction Projects in Rural Alaska: Strategies and Information for Getting Public Comment

Public Involvement:

Working with the public in Rural Alaska can be a positive experience for all parties involved. By following a few guidelines, it can not be painful.

Ask

When traveling to the Bush, ask, don't tell. Request an opportunity to come and present your information, as you are a guest in the community.

Discuss when it is convenient for them to hear your presentation, so you won't conflict with community events.

Ask who are the influential entities in the area - local government, tribal organizations, native corporations, and other councils and federations. Develop contacts.

Use the local media outlets and community centers to broadcast your initial requests for input.

Translation services may be needed. Work with the local community to make sure that you are communicating to the locals in a language they are comfortable using.

Above all — **Ask what they expect from the proposed project.**

Ask, Listen, Learn, Respond —

Listen

A keystone to effective relationship building is effective listening. When receiving public participation and comments, go in with an open mind and no preconceived ideas on the project goals.

Much of the best input can be gained through informal interactions. Small communities are very tight-knit and outsiders coming in without knowledge of the area tend to be distrusted. Developing relationships and spending time in the area builds confidence that the desire of the project manager is to work for the needs of the people.

If your organization allows, holding informal events such as a barbeque, raffles, or other social activities is a good way to bring down the barriers that a formal setting such as a public hearing creates by its very nature.

Learn

Learn about the culture and the region. Be considerate of local norms and show respect toward traditions.

Find out about local issues.

How people get their information.

Who influences local decisions.

Respond

Once input has been received from the public, and after it has been considered, the final step is to let the stakeholders know how their contributions were used, con-

4 Steps to Success

sidered, and responded to. This is a way to let them know that their efforts were not dismissed, and maintains credibility of the project and the project goals.

Key Points

By actively recruiting the public to participate in the development of projects, there is an increased sense of community ownership and public acceptance.

Communicating through the life of the project with the affected groups maintains trust and congeniality.

Cultural sensitivity is crucial.

Online Information Sources About Alaska Tribal Governments and Native Corporations

Alaska Community Database:
http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_COMDB.htm

Tribal Government Listings:
http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/rlinks/natives/ak_tribalgovt.html

Native Corporations:
http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/rlinks/natives/ak_organizations.html

Local Governments:
http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/rlinks/government/ak_local.html
